



RaceWeekNEWS



Arne K. Larssen / regatta.nu

Over the Top

By Bill Wagner & Rebecca Burg

Acura Key West 2008 came in roaring like a lion! A storm front hit the southernmost point of the United States in the wee hours of Sunday morning and lingered. When Monday dawned and the largest winter regatta in North America was due to begin, a fierce northeaster was delivering consistent winds ranging 25-30 knots and routinely gusting higher.

Event chairman Peter Craig huddled with his four principal race officers and the decision was made to postpone sending the 262-boat fleet out for two hours. Because the Corsair 28 class has a maximum wind range of 22 knots for racing, regatta organizers and

skippers agreed to keep the lightweight trimarans on the beach. While some of the Corsair 28 owners were anxious to test themselves in extreme conditions, common sense prevailed.

"If you're out in survival conditions, it just makes it too difficult to compete. No one wanted to break gear on the first day," said class veteran Bob Harkrider of Augusta, GA, who placed second at this regatta last year.

Premiere Racing sent out two committee boats first thing in the morning to take wind readings and gauge the sea conditions. They were recording waves at 6-8 feet and Harkrider said the spirited, high-performance

Far from dampened! The remnants of the weekend cold front left lumpy seas and marginal conditions for the first race of Acura Key West 2008, presented by Nautica. Helena Karhuneu from Finland onboard Arne Larssen's Melges 24 *Regatta.nu* is clearly enjoying the fun ride. The Scandinavian-based crew are racing for the first time in Key West and are clearly thrilled with the surfing conditions.

Corsairs spend all their energy preventing disastrous knockdowns in such a sea state.

"In those types of conditions, safety becomes a serious concern," he said.

Just after 11 a.m., Craig and company sent the remainder of the fleet to the four racing circles with the pronouncement that no racing would begin until 1 p.m. By noon, the Division 1 signal boat was reading regular puffs above 28 knots, exceeding the upper end of the wind range dictated by the Melges 32 class so those 27 boats were sent back to shore.

Regatta officials had hoped the wind would stabilize at a reasonable level in order to hold one race for the

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Tuesday is Sperry Top-Sider Day





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remaining 10 classes, but all four principal race officers reported conditions that were clearly "on the edge" and the decision was made to abandon all racing without beginning a starting sequence.

"These are the toughest days for our race committee because we recognize that people have spent considerable time, effort and resources to come to Key West. We want to do our utmost to give them five full days of racing," Craig said.

"However, on the first day of a five-day regatta, we do not want to push the envelope. We want to err on the side of caution. All four of our principal race officers are extremely experienced and in their collective opinion, the conditions today were just too severe for the majority of the fleet."

Craig admitted the decision may have been different if it was Thursday and one day of the regatta had already been lost due to lack of wind or too much wind. "Certainly, the fact this is Monday was a major factor. You don't want all sorts of boats breaking equipment when they still have four more days of racing to go," said Craig, adding that rough seas were also a "significant consideration."

Forecasts call for winds to decrease to the high teens on Tuesday morning then ultimately drop to 8-10 knots by the afternoon. Craig said Premiere Racing

will "work very hard" to complete two or three races on Tuesday.

"We announce this as a 10-race series, but we will not sacrifice quality for quantity," he said. "If we get in eight or nine quality races that are a mixture of heavy, medium and light air, I think most of the sailors will be satisfied."

One would expect the professional sailors in the Farr 40 class to be most disappointed about the cancellation

of racing on Monday, but the majority understood and agreed with the decision.

"I'd say the wind was definitely in the upper limit of what we can race in. There's a difference between sailing and racing. When you have 25 boats rounding marks in

tight quarters, things can get pretty hairy in 30 knots of breeze," said Chris Larson, tactician for Alex Roepers on *Plenty*. "Considering this was the first day of the first regatta of the year and all the teams are still shaking out the cobwebs, it was the right move."

Roepers is a new owner in the highly-competitive class, having made his debut at the 10th Anniversary Regatta off Miami in December. He also races a Swan 45 and is making the adjustment from helming with a wheel to a tiller.

"This was still a good day for us. Our owner had never been out in these types of conditions in this boat and

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"Certainly, the fact this is Monday was a major factor. You don't want all sorts of boats breaking equipment when they still have four more days of racing to go."

– Peter Craig

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DIVISION 3 (continued)

Class	Pl.	Boat Name	Entrant	SERIES TOTALS										Total		
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
		Savasana	Brian Keane													
		Ja 2	Joe Colling													
		Vmax	Malcolm Geffer													
		Rum at Six	Worth Harris													
		Rock & Roll	Bernard Girod													
		Windczar	Richard Lehmann													
		Not Mine	Buddy Rego													
		Tenacious	Edward Palm													
		Sea Shadow	William Riker													
		Linda	Robert Butler													
J/80		#11	Ron Landmann													
		Rumor	John Storck, Jr													
		Andiamo	Timothy McCarron													
		Stacked Deck	John Gehrig													
		Jammy Dodger	Neil Martin													
		Team Dog Party	Terry McKenna													
		Blind Faith	Alan McNab													
		USA 176	Geoffrey Pierini													
		Angry Chameleon	Kristen Robinson													
		Spank Me	Robert Limoggio													
		Avet	Curt Johnson													
		USA 352	Blake Fleetwood													
		Relentless	Al Minella													
		Painkiller Jane	Magnus Tyreman													
		Emotionl Rescue	Jon Morris													
		Veloce	Brian Louthier													
		Lucky Frog	Benjamin Schwartz													
		Lifted	Kerry Klingler													
		USA 1004	Bill Lockwood													

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with a tiller," Larson said. "It was quite challenging, but Alex was able to gain some valuable experience. We were planing at 14 knots with the main and small jib. We sailed upwind and downwind, did a couple tacks and a couple spinnaker sets then called it a day."

Dave Ullman, four-time winner in the Melges 24 class, said there could have been carnage in the 46-boat fleet had Division 3 PRO Dave Brennan decided to race.

"It was absolutely the right decision. The wind was well over the top and there's no reason to go out there and drop rigs or break up equipment," Ullman said.

Working the foredeck of the J/105, *Flame*, C.C. was bundled in multiple layers of clothing. "It was a good call by the race committee," C.C. said. *Flame*, James Doane's Naples, FL entry is a Key West veteran and second place winner in J/105 class in 2005.

John Storck is confident in his J/80, *Rumor*, and in his team. *Rumor*, from Huntington, NY practiced during Sunday's strong winds and was undaunted by the possibility of sailing in Monday's conditions. "The J/80s are sturdy, strong and well built boats," Storck added. Sizing up their rivals at the docks, *Rumor* plans to keep *Lifted*, last year's Key West victor, on their toes. *Lifted*, Kerry Klingler's Larchmont, NY entry regularly races with *Rumor* in their home state. Klingler will not give up his title without a good fight. His goal for this week? "To win again." *Veloce*, Brian Louthier's veteran entry from Madison, WI was also in good spirits despite the weather. "Good or bad, it sure beats shoveling snow!" Louthier enthused.

Earlier in the morning, the Corsair 28R class called it off before leaving the docks. The nine trimarans preferred not to risk breaking crucial gear in the first race of the series. Cliff Farrah, the US national amateur title winner at Key West 2007, returns with his Destin, FL entry, *Strategery 3*. Farrah speculates on the competition. "One of the toughest boats may be Tom Reese on *Flight Simulator*." Another tough entry with a historically high scoreboard is none other than Bob Harkrider's *Bad Boys*, from Augusta, GA. "We've got a wide open class," Harkrider said, ready for Tuesday's action. "We'll just have to see how it pans out." Richard

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Bokkerink, from Enschede, NED, is also eager to race in the only place where he can compete in the one design trimaran class. "The level is high, so it is good competition," Bokkerink noted.

The four PHRF classes in Division 4 did head out to sea, armed and ready for today's race. The decision to cancel was not an easy one. "The pinline boat wind readings varied from 0-25 depending on whether it was from the crest of the wave to the trough of the wave," said Wayne Bretsch, PRO, Division 4. The marks had been set and the race boats were checking in, but the questionable conditions did not improve. Safety was the largest concern, along with fair racing.

"I'm responsible for your lives and I'm not currently looking forward to risking them," Robert Hibdon informed his team on the SR-33, *Temptress*. Hibdon, from Charleston, SC, was hedging as to whether the race committee would abandon when he learned of the official cancellation. In the PHRF-4 class 2006, *Temptress* won the class by 1 point. With an experienced crew of friends and Charleston sailmaker, Henry McCray, this Key West veteran will be a key player in this year's game.

"We were happy to get out there and see what it was like."

– True Blue crewmember

Returning to the docks, Rick Wieters team on J/92S *True Blue* from Jenkins Island, SC were pleased to have preserved their gear. The crew was busy tending to the J/92S, adjusting, tuning and preparing for Tuesday. "We were happy to get out there and see what it was like," said one busy crewmember. "And it was too much." A boat to contend with in the PHRF-4 class, *True Blue's* team includes a Navy F/A-18 pilot.

Jack Cavalier's crew on *Creola*, a C&C 37R from Tampa, FL shared similar sentiments. "It was prudent," noted *Creola* crewman, Colin Bortolotto. "They made the best decision by canceling the race," said Jim Hightower of *Hot Ticket*, from Houston, Texas. "We're looking forward to tomorrow." Waiting one more day only increased the suspense for the PHRF-5 class. Ira Perry's Annapolis entry, *Seefest*, reflected on his team's goals. "Have a great time and sail against the best," Perry said. While he's raced in Key West before, it's his first time racing his J/29.

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2. The favored gate mark for the leader is the mark that is farthest upwind. For everyone else, it is the least crowded mark.
3. Find the starting line including both ends and the middle. Start on the line where the others are not.
4. Overcompensate for current as others under compensate for a clear sailing lane into the mark.
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