



2006 Saturna Island Regatta

Conditions looked good at the start of the eighth annual Saturna Island Regatta. A modest northerly wind, blue sky, and a dozen boats were maneuvering around the committee boat *Ann Elizabeth*, waiting for the 5 minute preparatory signal. Starting committee, Gentleman Jim Campbell with shotgun in hand, and Captain Nan Campbell holding the vessel in position, was ready to send the fleet off with a proper blast from a carefully prepared blank shell. Regatta Commodore Blagborne jogged his *Marie Rose* close by, observing the fleet as they lined up for the starting line. Only he heard that the quiet “click” of the starting gun was right on time. Scrambling for the alternative foghorn to replace the missing blast resulted in a signal at some undetermined interlude and several more to follow. The result was another charming fleet start in which most skippers claimed they crossed the line close to a signal. One exception was John Robertson’s *Shearwater*, recovering from her latest grounding and still dragging a clump of sea weed, sailed back and forth while he and crew Bill Sheffield peered over the side. Commodore Blagborne claims he held *Marie Rose* back politely to see most boats got away safely, Nancy says he just made a lousy start.

The fleet moved briskly up the windward leg led by the two scratch boats, Ron Drane and Donna Stein’s big *Miracle* and Brian Haley’s slightly bigger *Nika 11*. The greater part of the fleet held the starboard tack well out into the building flood tide. The big cruising boats *Friend*, *Solla Solew*, and *Madawaska* were locked in a tight race with competitive excitement coursing through the veins of skippers Nevar Makofa, Michel Bourassa and David Reece-Thomas. The smaller boats were hanging in there with James White’s gaff rigged *Sunrip* and Robb Zuk’s little gaff catboat *Fir Cat* chasing Michael McKenzies pretty Folkboat *Reverie*. Surprisingly, Rick Bjorndahl’s heavy wood ketch *Stormbird* was also right in the thick of things. In previous races, her progress was noted as “stately” or “handsomely” but seldom “quickly”. It seems Rick had not only careened his ship on the beach and cleaned the bottom, but had lucked into a very experienced crew who had the knack of getting the old girl moving.

Keen skipper Drane on *Miracle* immediately hoisted his spinnaker on rounding the windward mark in the lead, opening himself up to a charge of “bullying” since many of the rearward boats had no such flying sails. Second boat *Nika 11* did not take up this challenge as crew Patti Faber preferred sunbathing in the gentle downwind leg and skipper Haley is admittedly easily distracted by bikinis, especially when Patti is wearing them. Third around the mark was chubby little *Marie Rose*, closely followed by Team

Haley's *Marbella*. (Brian had entered both of his yachts, this one cleverly single-handed by friend Doug Collins.) Both had benefited from an inshore tack out of the tide.

The wind turned fickle on the third reaching leg and the lead boats moved into very light tricky winds. The main fleet began to catch up and sail around them. The leeward mark was a classic bunch-up in very light zephyrs and lots of conversation. *Shearwater* re-appeared for a brief moment of glory having come from behind to lead the fleet. When a light northerly finally filled in at the mark, the fleet was quickly away for a tricky beat to the finish against a heavy tide. *Shearwater* declined the opportunity and remained behind, perhaps content with fifteen minutes of fame.

In the meantime, sea-lawyers James White and crew David Dyer aboard little *Sunrip*, well in the rear, were pouring over the famously ambiguous race instructions. Noting that the smaller boats were "...allowed to skip the last mark" (a device introduced to get the all-important post-race Unbelievable Claims and Excuses Meeting underway sooner), they made a bee-line for the finish and crossed minutes ahead of *Marie Rose*, the first boat to finish the whole course. They were gambling that the Commodore would be shortening the course to one lap in the light airs, legitimizing their shortcut. They might have got away with it if it hadn't been the Commodore they were robbing of first-to-finish honours, who immediately sympathized with the other Division One boats slogging around the whole course...bad luck.

Last years Division One winner, Tony Green's *Quetzal* was once again speedy, almost crossing third, followed by the rest of the fleet in close quarters, including the charging *Stormbird*.

With his *Marie Rose* leading on the first lap, the Commodore immediately cancelled the second lap and all crews retired to Robyn and Larry Pages dock to argue about the distribution of prizes. S.I.R.R. rules allow each skipper an opportunity to explain why, regardless of finishing position, their vessel actually won the race. This debate, fraught with clever, self-serving observations by competing crews and the fickle authority of the Commodore, is easily the most difficult part of the race.

As usual, the results were summed up when the wine was finally exhausted. It is clear that unofficial, but generous sponsorship by Saturna Island Family Vineyard, is the only reason participants tolerate the hardship of racing under S.I.R.R. authority.

Rick Bjorndahl staggered off with two trophies for *Stormbird's* unprecedented competitive behavior. The big old wooden ketch looked great holding off all the newer fiberglass boats as she struggled to finish against the strong tide and received both the Division One Great Race Trophy and the Shore's Jewellers Trophy for Best Overall Race. (The Commodore's prejudices towards vessels made of noble renewable materials rather than coagulated residue of non-renewable petroleum products is an undeniable factor at S.I.R.R.)

Seeking to impress his granddaughter, who was crewing on board, the Commodore awarded the Division Two Great Race trophy to his own *Marie Rose* and also nominated eight year old Sumara Stroshein for the Cutty Sark Trophy for Best Crew. His compelling description of her dedicated effort whistling up winds, tacking the jib and obeying her captain silenced the fleet who resigned themselves to nepotism as yet another S.I.R.R. racing hazard.

The O.G.Y.C. (Oh God You're Classy!) trophy was awarded to the little gaff rigged catboat *Fir Cat*, the smallest boat in the fleet. She and her crew Robb Zuk and Jill Isley are from Pender Island, thus preserving our status as an international event.

Finally, the dreaded Flotsam Award for Dubious Racing was unanimously awarded to the skipper of *Miracle*. The trouble began when captain Ron Drane first showed up wearing special leather sailing gloves, then there was the imported racing crew, then the yo-yo style spinnaker technique (furious raising and lowering while sailing into a windless parking lot), and when he finally resorted to a mast mounted megaphone to harass the fleet after finishing, even members of his own crew supported the nomination. Undaunted, he swears he will be back to redeem all next year.

And so hopefully, will the rest of the fine fleet be returning for sunshine, more wind, more wine and the formidable challenges of yacht racing under SIRR rules.