

Screwball 2007 » a textual recap....

By Stephanie Whittaker

It was a dark and stormy morning. Suddenly a shot rang out.

And so began the 2007 Screwball Regatta at the Pointe-Claire Yacht Club on Sept. 15.

This was a Screwball like no other, attracting a record 19 boats. There were more sailors than in years past and some had traveled from as far afield as England, Florida, Ohio and Ottawa.

The fleet set out Saturday morning for a series of four races under a menacing sky.

A nasty squall swept across the lake during the first race and several boats headed ashore in search of cover. Thankfully, the pelting rainfall was brief and the races resumed.

The northwest winds of about 15 knots, gusting to 30 during the squall, made the whole day feel like one long survival exercise. There was much capsizing and swimming. The only boats that managed to stay upright were those sailed by Olivier Blanc and Dave Johnston and Joe Jospe and Tom Egli.

There were a few drop-outs as a result of the inclement weather. Katrina Egli and Nancy Atkins called it quits after two races. They were sailing as a team for the first time and it marked a return to racing for Katrina after a 10-year absence. Others who headed for shore earlier than expected on Saturday were Kerianne Boulva and Robert Gallant, Ian Ward and Julian Tsaing, Graham Shaefer and Phil Prosser and Jason Magder, whose chilled-to-the-bone crew-mate (me) whined: "Enough with swimming already. Let's sit out race two over a cup of hot apple-cinnamon-zinger-nutmeg-mint tea and go back out for races three and four." Unfortunately, we also sat out races three and four.

It was looking good for Joe and Tom, who placed first in races one through three. And then, during race four, disaster struck. Their jib halyard unraveled, snapped and caused their mast to snap off, sending the trapezing Tom into an unplanned swim.

Grant Lamont and Peter Kelly were now in first place and the investigation into what had gone wrong began.

Back on shore, the CSI team was called into action. "What could make a mast on a two-year-old boat snap like a piece of rusty rebar in a Quebec overpass?" queried Structural Engineer Egli.

Fortunately, Saturday's chaos failed to dampen the merriment that took place later that evening. After a superb Greek buffet, DeeJay John McGuinness presided over an evening of merry-making and Greek dancing, minus the smashing of plates.

There was also an impromptu and utterly discordant performance of the new Pointe Claire Fireball fleet anthem, Levy's Mutineers, penned by song meister, Donald "I Write The Songs" Slessor. All that can be said about that performance is that none of the singers should consider quitting their day jobs if they hope to keep earning a living.

Sunday's weather was sunny and warm. Joe and Tom left their ailing boat ashore and borrowed Andrew McCrae's. Alas, Andrew was AWOL all weekend because of illness.

As the fleet prepared to leave the yard, Joe spotted Pat Crump holding a pair of pliers and asked him if he'd snipped the ill-fated jib halyard. Pat kept mum but cracked a diabolical grin.

Despite the warm sun, clear sky and all the happy little butterflies fluttering above the lake, something dark and sinister was lurking below the surface of the water (cue theme music from Jaws). That dark and sinister thing was long, green, sinewy and really scary. And faster than you could say "hey, how come we're moving so slowly?" it would wrap its long, green, sinewy thingees around your rudder and centreboard and make you feel as if you were sailing in molasses.

Known to generations of sailors on Lake St. Louis as "weeds," the long, green, sinewy stuff proved not only to be scary but also a major irritant, as it is at all Screwball regattas.

The remaining three races in the regatta were characterized by relatively steady winds of between two and five knots and a wonderful absence of swimming.

Katrina and Nancy created a new use for footwear as they used their boots to bail out Bruiser, which was taking on a bit too much water for their liking. They were heard between races trying to find a bailer, any bailer, anywhere.

A spot of bother occurred at the windward mark during the last race while Joe and Tom were rounding it concurrently with Eric Owston and Phil Lawee, resulting in a protest, a wrist-slap by the race committee and disqualification of Joe and Tom.

Pat Crump and his crew, Andrew Davies, placed first in all three Sunday races and won Screwball 2007.

Debbie Kirkby placed second after hearing from her crew, Robert Levy, about the discomforts of crewing, in particular the less-than-comfortable trapeze harness.

And Grant Lamont and Peter Kelly walked away with third prize and seemed really surprised to have won it.

It must be noted, also, that the Sisterhood was well represented at this year's Screwball regatta by six boating babes.

The day concluded with the usual prize-giving. Andrew, unable to leave his hospital bed to do the honours, sent an attractive cardboard cut-out of himself decked out in a fetching hospital gown and Peter Kelly spoke on his behalf. Andrew's presence was much missed but felt, nonetheless.

Screwball 2007 then ended in merriment, a strong sense of camaraderie and an agreement to "do it all again next year, same time, same place."