

Screwball 2008 musings....

The Annual Screwball Regatta marks the finale of the local racing season for the Fireball fleet. Over the years, this sad reality has encouraged participation, has allowed certain traditions to develop, and has generally proven to be a highlight of the Quebec Fireball racing program. This year, we seemed to get a lot of things just right. Eleven PCYC boats were joined by three more from Ottawa. To add a little mayhem to the course, we were also graced by the presence of eleven Lasers in their last event of 2008.

One of the themes discussed at length was the issue of global warming. Screwball heralds the end of summer and is notorious for providing wild and cold conditions. As advertised, Sunday was pretty chilly and breezy. The conclusion was that we found no evidence of global warming on our part of the lake. We did find one resourceful sailor warming up in a sleeping bag by her boat in the morning before heading out to sail. Who knows how long she had been there? More on the evening before shortly...

A second emerging theme of the event is its international flavor. In 2007, three Americans and two Brits joined us. They must have been scared off this year because they didn't show, but we had one visitor from Germany, and one competitor who has just returned from years of living in France. Anna Troetschler and Etienne Portelance seemed to fit right in with the group.

The Race Committee, headed by Don McDonough, did an excellent job, coordinating the two fleets through seven races throughout the weekend. We sailed in a variety of conditions, and the racing was challenging and fair. Screwball provided moments of glory for many of the teams racing. Paula Stone and crew David Johnston put together one of their finest upwind legs ever. Jason Magder and Stephanie Whittaker were surprisingly fast in the right conditions. Others would sail extraordinarily fast, and then capsize in quite spectacular fashion. One of the more impressive displays was the first race win by Pierre Carpentier and Tom Bird. Unfortunately Pierre subsequently remembered that he had partied a little too hard the night before. Pierre's hangover and their results got a little worse with each passing race. More about partying soon...

The Fireball fleet has long been held hostage by the Crew's Union. At the end of the racing on Sunday, this group awards prizes to all, highlighting some of the funnier things that have occurred during the regatta and the season. Andrew McCrae, Tom Bird, and Tom Egli ably represented the Crew's Union this year. No one really knows why Andrew, a helm, is allowed to do this, but this remains one of life's unanswered questions. Even the Race Committee earned prizes. The prizes and the explanations were fun, and it was clear from the smiles on the faces of every competitor that we had all had a really good time. And talking about a really good time....

On Saturday evening the Club had a fantastic dinner. The cuisine was Greek, and the food was great. The wine flowed freely. Entertainment was graciously provided by John McGuinness as Master of Ceremonies and leader of the band, Donald Slessor and Stephanie Whittaker. John is an old hand at this sort of thing, and his comfort with his guitar and the microphone was pretty obvious. Donald sings very well and has been honing his guitar skills since Christmas, when his family decided he needed a new toy. Stephanie was drafted to be PCYC and the Fireball fleet's poet in residence. The results were impressive. The attendees were educated on the history of Malcolm Van Haeften's boat in rhyme and to music. Who knew that Malcolm owned a boat once named "Doggy Style"? Cats Paw sounds so innocent. It is amazing what can be done with a paint brush and an editor. The musical highlight of the night was the first ever public rendition of Stephanie's creation:

GNS Tuesday Sung to the tune of Hotel California

On a GNS Tuesday, cool wind in my hair,
Sweet smell of the fish breath, rising up through the air,
Up ahead in the distance, we saw Joe round the mark,
I knew we couldn't catch up to him,
So we three bought a Shark.

There he stood in the boat yard,
With his Tilley hat on,
I'm not sailing in Cat's Paw boys, not without John,
So he went to the Etchells, and he sailed in that fleet,
There were voices on the dinghy dock,
I thought I heard them bleat,

Welcome to the Fireball fleet on Tuesday,
Such a lovely place, such a lovely race,
We're rounding the marks in the Fireball fleet on Tuesdays,
At this time of year, you will find us here.

His spinnaker's never twisted,
He drives a Mercedes Benz,
He's got a boat with a funny name,
Named for him by his friends,
He gets out on the race course and he tosses his smoke,
Chiding voices on the downward leg,
"You'll make the poor fish choke."

So I said to the R.C., I don't mean to whine,
But we haven't had collisions like this since 1969,
And still those Etchells are calling from far away,
"Send us Malcolm from the Fireball fleet,"
We didn't know what to say....

except...

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Martinis on the jib leads,
Pink jib sheets are nice,
Andrew's just a prisoner here, of his own device,
There he is in the sail shed, day after day,
Always measuring and sanding,
Well away from the fray.

Next thing I remember, I was
towing the commodore,
Eric's boat had just been smashed like other Fireballs before,
Relax, said Joe Jospe,
We are programmed to receive,
Race an Etchells any time you like,
But you can never leave.

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(Respectfully (NOT!) written and submitted by Stephanie Whittaker)

And the partying continued until some of us remembered that we had one more day of racing ahead. Screwball 2008 was a terrific event and a fine finale for the season. Have a great winter and we hope to see everyone out on the water in their brand new Fireballs in 2009.

Joe Jospe