

Cowes-based *Sojana* smashes yachting record

For Peter Harrison's powerful Farr 115 ketch, *Sojana*, day two of Antigua Sailing

Week will most certainly be a day to remember as the handsome, blue boat shattered the record for the Yachting World Round the Island Race.



Credit: Ted Martin / Photofantasy
Antigua

Peter Harrison's Farr 115 ketch, *Sojana*, slashed the Yachting World Round the Island Race record

On a day created for the extraordinary experience of racing sailboats in perfect conditions around tropical islands, 140 boats in 15 dedicated classes hoisted sail in the azure waters off Antigua on day two of the 42nd running of Antigua Sailing Week. It proved to be day of exceptional competition, countless memorable scenes, and a new race record.

The Division A fleets set off on the eagerly anticipated 50 nautical mile Yachting World Around the Island Race; the Performance Cruising classes negotiated a 34 nautical mile race to Fort James, setting forth on an easterly, clockwise direction; while the Cruising divisions, Bareboats and Multihulls also charted a course to Fort James, on a 17 nautical mile contest that took them westward to their finish line.

With Virgin Island Olympic medalist and America's Cup veteran Peter Holmberg at the helm of *Sojana*, Peter Harrison's yacht broke the previous record for the Yachting World Round the Island Race set by Tom Hill's R/P 75, *Titan XII* in 2005. *Sojana's* time of four hours, 37 minutes, and five seconds easily surpassed *Titan's* previous mark of five hours, four minutes, and 45 seconds and earned Harrison and his crew the coveted Yachting World Trophy.

The early morning light was ideal as the Performance Cruiser 1 class, with 20 entries, the regatta's largest, crossed tacks on close-hauled boards while working their way upwind on inshore maneuvers to escape the effects of a foul current. The image of the powerful boats, perfectly trimmed, against the sheer cliffs and bluffs was absolutely amazing. As many of the flat-out race boats have chosen to race in Performance Cruiser 1, opting to forgo the offshore contest to Redondo Island later in the week, the division is not only the biggest, it's also the most competitive.

Soon after their start, spectators were treated to the visage of Harrison's grand *Sojana*, leaning into the easterly breeze and swapping tacks with her competition. With Holmberg's legendary touch on the wheel, while still driving her like a *J/24*, *Sojana* pulled off a remarkable early move, tacking close to shore, ducking the TP 52, *Rio*, and then crossing the hard charging Rogers 46, *Yeoman XXXII*. From there, it was clear sailing and a record setting performance.

In Racing 4, both Club Swan 42s, *Long Echo* and *Interlodge*, got tremendous starts, with American sail maker and tactician Geoff Ewenson making his considerable presence felt on the latter 42 footer. For the second day in a row, Antiguan Hugh Bailey on the First 456, *Hugo B*, again nailed the start, then legged out to an early lead in Cruising 2, climbing to weather and out-pointing the entire class.

For the four classes of Bareboat entrants, for which Sunday, 26 April served as the opening day of competition, sailing was also close and exciting. Resplendent in their orange crew shirts, the nifty crew aboard the well-named Moorings 50, *Nifty*, soared off the Bareboat 2 starting line, as did Dufour 455, *Sea You Later*, in Bareboat 1.

And in the Racing Multihull class, famed British sailor Tony Bullimore joined the festivities on his 100 foot catamaran *Spirit of Antigua*, though it appeared Bullimore and his crew was still getting adjusted to the scene. "We're going to start," he radioed to the race committee after the starting gun fired and the big cat hovered several boat lengths from the line. "We're not sure when but we are going to start!"

Across the board, there was a host of worthy winners on day two of competition. Despite their record-setting ways, *Sojana* was displaced from the winner's circle in the Racing/Ocean Series division by the Farr-designed Cookson 50, *Lee Overlay Partners*, the former *Chieftain* which is well known on both sides of the Atlantic and throughout the Caribbean.

In Racing 1, Charles Dunstone's TP 52, *Rio*, also familiar as the formerly named *Stay Calm*, recorded its second straight first place finish. The same could be said for three other skippers, who also nailed a race-winning bullet for the second day in a row, Jamie Dobbs's J/122, *Lost Horizon*, in Racing 4; Martin Jacobson and Nick Burns's Swan 44, *Crescendo*, in Performance Cruiser 2; and Richard Burbidge's Swan 43, *Pavlova II*, in Performance Cruiser 3. Wrapping up the Performance Cruisers, Clive Llewellyn's Grand Soleil 50, *Mad IV*, took top honors in PC 1. In the tight Cruising 1 division, Ulrich Rohde's Swan 53, *Dragon Fly Plus*, which was forced to retire on Saturday, 25 April earned a strong measure of redemption with a win on day two. In Cruising 2, New Orleans native Burt Keenan, a longtime stalwart in US racing circles, found the reaching conditions much to his liking and scored a victory aboard his sweet Frers 48 cat-ketch, *Acadia*. Tony Bullimore's *Spirit of Antigua* was unchallenged in the Multihull Racing class, and Larry Pollock's Flint 54, *Running Cloud*, was also a winner for the second consecutive day in Cruising Multihull. So, too, was the Dragon, *Compass Point*, amongst the one-design Dragons.

The Bareboat winners on Sunday were the Dufour 455, *KH+P Girl* in Bareboat 1, the aforementioned *Nifty* in Bareboat 2, the Sunsail 473, *Rossi*, in Bareboat 3, and the Dufour 385, *KH+P Sun King* in Bareboat 4.



Credit: Ted Martin

Hugh Bailey's First 456, *Hugo B*

Tenacious conditions and terrific sailing dominated day three action in Antigua Sailing Week. Hovering astern of the race-committee boat for the Division A fleets just prior to the starting sequences was none other than the distinctive and disturbing sight of a Portuguese man-of-war. Anyone who encounters one will never forget the image. A sail-like crest above and long stinging tentacles below cap the purplish bladder of the dangerous jellyfish.

Moments later, the gun sounded to start the 12 boat Racing 4 division in what would prove to be the race of the day amongst all 15 classes. And the lasting impression of that man-of-war proved to be a fitting symbol of what laid ahead, for the top boats in Racing 4 were nothing if not rugged, determined, resilient, and tenacious.

For the third consecutive day of competition, racers were greeted by staunch easterly trades packing a serious wallop with consistent breeze in the high teens and more than an occasional gust into the 20 knot range. For the Division B fleets of racers, the Performance Cruisers, Cruisers, Bareboats, Dragons and Multihulls, the 17 nautical mile contest from Fort James to Falmouth Harbour was a proverbial walk in the park compared to what awaited the Division A fleets. Yes, there was a longish upwind beat to the finish in the race's latter stages, but the first half of the race was primarily a two-sail reach along the island's protected, leeward flank. The Division A fleet, on the other hand, faced a long and difficult thrash to windward, negotiating marks off Shirley Heights and Willoughby Bay, followed by yet another tough beat to a seaward mark off Hudson Bay. After three days of strong easterlies, the waters off the south coast were flecked with white caps and punctuated by gnarly, square waves.

From the go, the top boats in Racing 4 handled the conditions with strong tactics and solid seamanship. There was also a pair of 'races within the race', with the two Club Swan 42s, Austin Fragomen's *Interlodge* and Barry Sampson's *Long Echo*, and the two J/Boats, Jamie Dobbs's *J/122, Lost Horizons* and Rick Wesslund and Mike Caldwell's *J/120, El Ocaso*, essentially locked into a tack-by-tack match race over much of the 25 nautical mile course. Both *Interlodge* and *Long Echo* executed near-perfect starts to lead the fleet upwind, with *Lost Horizons* and *El Ocaso* in close company. The two Swans enjoyed a starboard-tack, neck-and-neck drag race to the sheer cliffs near English Harbour before *Long Echo* blinked first and tacked, allowing *Interlodge* to take the early lead. For the large part, the seaway was a tossed, miserable mess right up to and past the iconic peak of Shirley Heights, though the race track smoothed out somewhat to the next mark off Willoughby Bay. It was proving to be a windward test not for the feint of heart.

Once around the Willoughby buoy, a long offshore board took the fleet out to what essentially was the top mark, where the Racing 4 fleet was finally rewarded with some very welcome downwind work. The two Swans, *Interlodge* and *Long Echo*, rounded first and second and immediately hoisted big asymmetric kites.

They were followed in short order by two Racing 1 competitors, Charles Dunstone's TP 52, *Rio*, and David Aisher's Rogers 46, *Yeoman XXXII*. *Rio*, whose very able crew includes a platoon of sailors from *Team Origin*, the currently sidelined British America's Cup squad, as well as *Duran Duran* front-man Simon LeBon, was especially impressive, hoisting their big chute in no-time-flat and instantly shooting down the racecourse at double-digit boat speeds.

The J/Boats, led by *Lost Horizons* with *El Ocaso* a mere five boat lengths astern, rounded next, and soon, they too were launched under spinnaker for another lap of the course.

When all was said and done, however, it was Jamie Dobbs's extremely well sailed *Lost Horizons* atop the Racing 4 leader board for the third straight day. Dunstone's *Rio* also recorded its third consecutive victory to take strong command of Racing 1.

In Division B, there was a long list of repeat winners across the board. In Performance Cruising 1, Clive Llewellyn's Grand Soleil 50, *Mad IV*, took its second bullet in three races. In Performance Cruiser 1 and 2, respectively, a pair of Swans, Martin Jacobson and Nick Burns's Swan 44, *Crescendo*, in PC 1 and Richard Burbidge's Swan 43, *Pavlova II*, in PC 2, both retained their solid leads after winning their classes for the third straight day.

The Cruising 1 class was won by David Yeolly's Oyster 72, *Spirit of Montpelier*, and in Cruising 2, order was restored to the universe when Hugh Bailey's First 456, *Hugo B*, earned the victory for the second time in three starts. The top Cruising Multihull was Ron Webb's Seawind 1000XL, *Cover Shot*, pushing aside the big trimaran, *Running Cloud*, that had won the first two races. For the third day in a row, the top Dragon was *Compass Point*.

The Bareboat winners on Monday were the Dufour 455, *KLH+P Sea You Later* in Bareboat 1; the Moorings 515, *Nifty*, in Bareboat 2; the Sunsail 473, *Rossi*, in Bareboat 3; and the Dufour 40, *Fantasque*, in Bareboat 4.

With both Division A and Division B slated to sail a pair of races on Tuesday, 28 April, day four of Antigua Sailing Week will offer the top boats an opportunity to solidify their leads and would-be contenders a grand chance to climb up the standings.

For complete information, news, photographs, video, entry lists and much more, visit the Antigua Sailing Week website shown below.

Resources: