



PRESS RELEASE

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Boston Skipper Bruce Chafee Leads Reichel-Pugh 42 Rikki to Convincing Victory on Elapsed Time in the 39th Biennial Annapolis-to-Newport Race



Photo by Will Keyworth/Annapolis Yacht Club

Rikki, a Reichel-Pugh 42 skippered by Boston resident Bruce Chafee, captured line honors for the 2023 Annapolis-to-Newport Race. Rikki finished the race at 6:42 Tuesday morning.

Annapolis, MD (June 5, 2023) — The 2019 Annapolis-to-Newport Race marked the maiden voyage for Rikki, a Reichel-Pugh 42 that Bruce Chafee bought that year.

Rikki placed last among five finishers in ORC 1A class because “we took a wrong turn” after rounding the Chesapeake Bay Light, Chafee said. Chafee and crew enjoyed significantly more success in their second appearance in the classic offshore event and will likely end up walking away from Wednesday evening’s prize-giving ceremony with a boatload of hardware.

Chafee and crew sailed brilliantly in a tough, grueling edition of the Annapolis-to-Newport Race, capturing line honors, and likely earning the overall victory on corrected time as well. Rikki crossed the finish line at the Castle Hill Lighthouse at the mouth of the Narragansett Bay at 6:42 Tuesday morning to easily earn the elapsed time victory. Cookie Monster, the second boat across the line finished almost eight hours later.

The Salona 380 owned by Eastport Yacht Club member Stephen Hale got the horn from the Annapolis Yacht Club race committee at 2:40 in the afternoon. By then, Rikki had been hauled out of the water and Chafee was resting comfortably at his apartment in Boston. “It feels great. My team and I are ecstatic. Everyone did a super job and we’re all very happy about it,” Chafee said when contacted by phone. “We sailors have the expression that someone pulled a horizon job and I guess we really did because we did not see any boat over the horizon.”

Chafee was still learning how to sail the Reichel-Pugh 42 and training a new crew when he competed in the 2019 Annapolis-to-Newport Race. His team has logged a lot of miles since then, flashing their improvement by placing fourth in class for the 2022 Newport-to-Bermuda Race. This across-the-board dominance of the 39th biennial Annapolis-to-Newport Race was a strong statement that Chafee and the Rikki crew have truly arrived.

“The Rikki program has come really far since that first race in 2019,” Chafee said. “Just the way we equip the boat, know the boat and race the boat. My crew, who are all young dinghy sailors, has really jelled into a fantastic offshore racing team.” This 2023 Annapolis-to-Newport Race was one of the most challenging in recent memory because of extremely rough conditions in the Atlantic Ocean. Those boats that elected to cross over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel were confronted with winds that held steady from 20 to 30 knots and 10- to 12-foot seas.

Making matters worse was that the wind was on the nose, meaning boats were beating into the steep waves, making for a slow slog up the coast toward Newport. It was a much different story for the 120-nautical mile Chesapeake Bay portion of the race, which primarily featured downwind conditions in light winds ranging from 6 to 8 knots.

An easterly breeze that filled in Saturday night built to 18 knots and made the final third of the bay passage more enjoyable. “In the bay we had super-fun, downwind strategy sailing. We enjoyed going shift to shift and puff to puff,” Chafee said. “My navigator knew something was brewing from the east, so we went to that side of the bay. This boat is a good reacher so that helped us to zoom out to the mouth of the Chesapeake.”

A fleet of 59 boats in nine classes started the Annapolis-to-Newport Race and 27 of them elected to retire rather than risk damage or breakdown during the ocean passage. Most skippers sailed far down the bay hoping the forecast might change then dropped out after realizing the conditions would indeed be dangerous. Chafee said it was certainly game on as soon as Rikki rounded the Chesapeake Bay light at 10 p.m.

Saturday night and turned left. Winds had already built to 20 knots and the waves were short and steep. It was a pounding upwind beat that lasted more than 24 hours and took a toll on



the crew. “We knew the party would really get started out in the ocean,” he said. “We got out there and it was quite a brutal night. It was dark, windy, and rocky; Our boat is ruggedly built, and I guess my young crew is also.”



Photo by Will Keyworth/Annapolis Yacht Club

Skipper Bruce Chafee said the Rikki program has “come a long way” since competing in the 2019 Annapolis-to-Newport Race.

Navigator Matthew Sullivan called for a course that kept Rikki west of the rhumb line and close to the Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware coastlines. Chafee said Sullivan went to stay closer to shore to position the boat for a high-pressure system that was forecast to arrive Monday.

That proved to be the brilliant move that enabled Rikki to steadily sail away from the rest of the fleet. While close to shore, crew members were able to pull up the Yellow Brick tracking system on their cell phones and Rikki was not the lead boat upon approach to Delaware Bay. Sullivan’s move enabled the RP 42 to get through the transition zone faster than other boats and Rikki was reaching at high speeds while the rest of the fleet was still slowly beating.

“We went offshore for a while and when we got back within cell phone range, I called up the race tracker again and had to do a double take,” Chafee said. “I gave the crew the good news that the next closest boat was 30 miles behind and it was a huge morale boost.”

Chafee, who works in the bio-pharmaceutical field, said he will need to carefully review the tracking system to figure out exactly where Rikki made such huge gains, but has a good idea of what happened. “I expect the big move was the way we positioned ourselves near Delaware Bay,” he said. “We got through the squirrely dead zone air from the high pressure and the good pressure from the wrong angle farther offshore. We found good breeze from the proper angle that enabled us to reach fast.”

Yellow Brick tracking has Rikki finishing first overall in the entire fleet on corrected time. Chafee was not counting his chickens before they hatched and was waiting until all boats were in port before celebrating. “We hope it works out. We certainly put quite a bit of distance on the rest of the fleet, so we’ll see if it holds up. It will be really gratifying if it does. That would be quite an impressive performance,” he said.

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Contact:

Linda Ambrose

AYC Harborside Director

Email: info@annapolisnewportrace.com

www.annapolisnewportrace.com