

Entries being accepted for 39th biennial Annapolis-to-Newport Race

There was once a time when the Annapolis-to-Newport Race was solely the domain of hardened offshore skippers with boats designed specifically for the purpose.

That has changed over the last four iterations as organizers with host Annapolis Yacht Club made a conscious effort to attract a broader range of sailboats. An effort that began in advance of the 2015 Annapolis-to-Newport Race has led owners who would never previously have considered the event to enter and finish.

“Beginning in 2015, the club made a real effort to reinvigorate the race and involve folks who were not the usual suspects for offshore racing,” Annapolis-to-Newport chairman Jim Praley said. “We have done a lot of things to bring in new folks and have refined those initiatives over time. It has succeeded in attracting a much more diverse fleet of raceboats. “We’re very pleased with the number of cruising-oriented boats that are now entering.”

Entries are now being accepted for the 39th biennial Annapolis-to-Newport Race, which will begin June 2-3 on the Chesapeake Bay. In its ongoing campaign to make the renowned distance race more inviting, Annapolis Yacht Club has added a new class — ORC Racer-Cruiser.

This new class is designed for boats that do not fit into the ORC Cruiser class, but do not want to race in either of the other ORC classes. Attachment A to the Notice of Race has a thorough explanation of the three ORC categories.

John White, chairman of the AYC Sailing Committee, said the primary factors that determine eligibility for the new ORC Racer-Cruiser class are sail inventory and hull volume. For instance, all boats are allowed just two headsails with a sail area greater than 90 percent. Spinnaker staysails and headsails set flying are not permitted.

“Clearly, there is a much broader range of boat owners now willing to undertake the Annapolis-to-Newport Race than there was 15 to 20 years ago,” White said. “I think the ORC rule being what it is has allowed the race committee to fairly handicap a wider range of boats. This race is just much more inviting now.”

ORC Racer-Cruiser proved the ideal landing spot for Alliance, a J/122 owned by Eric Irwin and Mary Martin of Mystic, Connecticut. This will be the first A2N for the New York Yacht Club members and Irwin said simplicity is the watchword.

“Code spinnakers and staysails make crew development and training more complicated for a Corinthian crew that only sails together periodically,” said Irwin, noting that Alliance placed fifth in a class consisting mostly of J/120s and J/122s for the 2022 Newport-to-Bermuda Race.

“When we saw the Racer-Cruiser, it was a natural fit for our program as we focus on keeping things simple.”

Alliance is among two dozen boats that have already registered for Annapolis-to-Newport 2023. Praley, now in his fourth stint as chairman, is hopeful the final numbers will be similar to 2021 when 82 boats in eight classes competed.

Praley will be among the competitors as he and his namesake son have entered the J/120 Shinnecock for the eighth time. “Annapolis-to-Newport is one of the most iconic and classic offshore distance races in America. It offers a unique combination of inshore and offshore elements that make it both interesting and challenging,” Praley said.

One of the wisest decisions organizers made was to implement a two-day starting format. Starting the slower classes on Friday and the higher performance boats on Saturday has succeeded in ensuring the entire fleet arrives in Newport in plenty of time to attend the prize-giving ceremony, being held the following Wednesday evening.

Slated to start Friday, June 2 are the ORC Cruiser, ORC Racer-Cruiser, ORC Double-Handed and PHRF classes along with ORC boats with an APH of 525 or higher. Scheduled to start Saturday are ORC boats with an APH of 524.9 or lower.

Doug and Amy Stryker are seeking to become the first owners to complete the Annapolis-to-Newport Race aboard a J/105 one-design. Doug Stryker has entered Mayhem in Block Island Race Week and figured the race would serve as a means of doing the delivery.

“I’ve got to get the boat to Block Island, so I started wondering wWhat it would take to get this boat ready to do the Annapolis-to-Newport Race,” said Stryker, whose team will also compete in the New York Yacht Club Annual Regatta in Newport and the J/105 North American Championships out of Rye, New York.

Stryker reviewed all the safety requirements for A2N to determine what upgrades would be needed to get Mayhem in compliance. The J/105 was on the edge in terms of qualifying from a stability standpoint and Stryker worked with the AYC Sailing Committee to modify the boat to meet requirements.

“We’ve updated all the electronics on the boat and figured out what additional sails we will need,” said Stryker, who has been humbled by the generosity of fellow J/105 owners wanting to assist the campaign.

Tenacious owner Carl Gitchell is allowing Mayhem to use his life raft, while another owner is lending an Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) that is required.

Most importantly, Stryker has lined up a strong crew featuring a pair of veteran offshore racers in Oakcliff Sailing alum Mike Komar and Quantum professional Billy Martin. Jesse McKnight, a regular member of the Mayhem crew, will also be aboard.

“If I didn’t have this group of sailors, there’s no way I would consider doing this race,” Stryker said. “We feel confident we have a good skill set among the crew and are really looking forward to doing this great race..”

For the fifth time, race headquarters will be located at Newport Yachting Center where the majority of boats are berthed. This marina reserves off-season rates for A2N competitors and will begin accepting reservations on February 8. A highlight for competitors after a long, grueling voyage has been the dockside greeting by members of the event’s Hospitality Committee headed by Bob and Cindi Gibson.

“Newport Yachting Center has been a great partner of Annapolis-Newport and we’ve had no problem filling slips,” Praley said.

Organizers are also pleased to announce that the popular Competitors Party traditionally held at AYC the Thursday evening prior to the A2N starts will return after not being held in 2021 due to the pandemic. Each entry will receive two passes to the outbound party being held in the Skipjack with additional passes available for purchase.

Annapolis Yacht Club will be conducting a series of seminars designed to prepare participants for the 475-nautical mile passage. Experts in a wide range of fields such as provisioning, electronics, safety and navigation will dispense information and advice. Announcements about seminar topics and dates will be forthcoming.

