



Second Annapolis-to-Newport Race seminar set for January 14

Sail inventory, rigging take center stage in ongoing “What to Expect” series

Having the proper sails onboard and making sure the rig is structurally sound are two of the most important keys to success in offshore racing. Owners that do not pay close attention to those two crucial factors compromise their chances of winning before ever leaving the dock.

Participants in the 2017 Annapolis-to-Newport Race can learn from the experts how to make sail inventory and rig preparation an advantage going into the 475-nautical mile voyage during the second seminar being offered by organizers. “What to Expect: Sails and Rigging” will be held on Saturday, January 14 (10 a.m.-noon) at the Annapolis Yacht Club, located at 12 Dock Street.

Veteran sailmakers Alan Drew and Jeff Todd will take turns discussing what sails are needed for an offshore distance race while providing tips about how to make repairs while out to sea. Renowned rigger Steve Madden will deliver a presentation on the need to carefully check the mast, halyards and shrouds before heading out into the open ocean.

“In our ongoing effort to educate our constituency, we are pleased to have three of the foremost professionals in the fields of sailing and rigging leading our next seminar,” said James Praley, chairman of the 36th biennial Annapolis-to-Newport Race. “Alan Drew, Jeff Todd and Steve Madden will provide valuable information and insights that will help sailors navigate the process of preparing for this classic offshore event.”

Drew has worked in the sailmaking industry for 23 years, forging his reputation while with the UK and Doyle lofts. He has spent the past nine years as the head sailmaker and rigger for Naval Academy sailing, comprised of the basic training, intercollegiate dinghy and offshore programs.

Drew has been a tremendous asset to the Navy Varsity Offshore Sailing Team (VOST), which annually competes in events such as Annapolis-to-Newport and Newport-to-Bermuda among many others. He beamed with pride when one of the Navy crews returned from delivering a boat from Bermuda and he found a main that had been repaired to perfection.

“It was a big tear, about five feet across the sail. The midshipmen had meticulously stitched the sail for an entire day and did an amazing job,” Drew said. “I should never have removed the stitching because it was a work of art. It showed they had learned their lessons with regard to sail repair.”

Drew has completed a slew of offshore races over the last two decades, including Annapolis-to-Newport, Newport-to-Bermuda, Marblehead-to-Halifax and Chicago-to-Mackinac many times over. He will speak specifically to sail inventory during the “What to Expect” seminar.

“I’ll talk about what type of sails you need for this type of race and how to protect the sails that you have,” Drew said. “A lot of folks don’t understand the importance of managing your sail inventory. I’m a big proponent of not pushing sails. You don’t want to blow up your medium genoa going down the bay then discover that you really need it offshore. There is a strategy to how to make the best use of your sails during a distance race of this nature.”

Drew will review those sails that are absolutely necessary, such as a storm jib and a storm trysail. He will provide recommendation on the number and types of spinnakers to carry. The part-time consultant for the North Sails is an experienced lecturer, having given dozens of similar presentations on this topic over the years.

“I have a little bag I bring with me whenever I go offshore. I’ve had skippers pick it up and say ‘My goodness, this bag weighs 15 pounds!’ I tell them that bag is worth more than any crew member,” Drew said.

Drew was referring to his trusty repair kit, which contains everything necessary to repair a sail. He will bring that treasure bag to the seminar and talk about every item contained within.

Nobody knows more about sail repair than Todd, the highly-respected service manager for North Sails-Chesapeake. Todd, who has been a sailmaker for nearly three decades, has completed seven Annapolis-to-Newport Races, including the 2015 edition aboard the J/120 Windborn.

“I can’t imagine two other people in all of Annapolis who know as much as Jeff and I when it comes to sail design and sail repair,” Drew said.

Todd also never leaves the dock without a repair kit that includes the latest technology in flexible glues, sticky tapes and adhesives. He noted that a large percentage of repairs during an offshore passage such as Annapolis-to-Newport involve the luff tape of genoas and torn spinnakers.

“I’ll bring some of the supplies needed to perform onboard sail repair to the seminar and do a demonstration,” Todd said. “We have sticky cloth that is very effective for patching small holes in sails. It’s not real hard to hand-stitch a slide back on the luff. Given time, you can pretty much fix anything.”

Madden got into the rigging business way back in 1982 while living in his native South Africa. The Durban native moved to Annapolis 17 years ago and has been a staple on the local sailing scene ever since. He currently heads up M Rigging, which performs all manner of rigging for M Yacht Services while also offering his 35 years worth of expertise in a wide range of other areas of the marine industry.

Madden has sailed countless offshore miles over the years, dating back to his days in South Africa when he routinely did the Mauritius-to-Durban Race and the renowned Vasco de Gama Ocean Race from Durban to Port Elizabeth. Since relocating to the United States, Madden has indulged in most of the great offshore races along the East Coast, including Annapolis-to-Newport and Annapolis-to-Bermuda. He was a regular crew member aboard Sjambok, the series of big boats owned by countryman Michael Brennan.

Madden recently delivered a boat from Annapolis to the British Virgin Islands and annually makes at least one 8-10 day trip offshore to remain sharp. He would never undertake such a voyage without performing a complete inspection of the entire rigging system.

“We prepare a lot of big cruising boats to go down to the islands and that is right at the top of the list,” Madden said. “I physically conduct the inspections myself. I go to the top of rig then come down slowly, look closely at everything.”

For many years now, Madden has spoken at seminars for the Salty Dog Rally for cruising sailors. He always discusses the importance of rig tension while providing a checklist of things to look out for during passage-making.

“I would strongly recommend that any boat going offshore have undergone a rig inspection within the last year,” Madden said.

Madden will review the most common occurrences of rig breakdowns and talk about the type of tools and materials to bring aboard for repairs. It never hurts to carry a spare halyard as Madden said he’s been hoisted up the mast a few times during races to run a new halyard.

“I can think of quite a few examples of things that can go wrong, but are not catastrophic. A crew just needs to be prepared to make the necessary repairs,” Madden said.

Space for the seminar is limited, to reserve a spot contact the Front Desk of The Annapolis Yacht Club, 410-263- 9279.

An early entry discount for the Annapolis-to-Newport Race will continue until January 15, 2017. Interested skippers can find the Notice of Race and entry forms at the following link: <http://www.yachtscoring.com/emenu.cfm?eid=2982>