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2015 Annapolis-to-Newport Race Delivers Wide Range of Conditions Carina is overall winner in IRC, Swift is overall winner in PHRF

ANNAPOLIS, MD (June 9, 2015) – Part of what makes the Annapolis-to-Newport Race so unique is the fact it combines inshore and offshore elements that tend to provide a wide range of conditions. That was certainly the case during the 35th biennial edition, which featured everything from maddening light air to frightening squalls.

Dragon, the Class 40 entry skippered by Michael Hennessy, experienced both in a matter of minutes. Having spent most of Saturday drifting along in becalmed conditions, Hennessy and double-handed teammate Kyle Hubely suddenly found themselves in the midst of a severe storm.

Hennessey had just gone below to sleep when he was awoken by Hubely, who had spotted a squall that looked ominous. Both sailors barely had time to get on deck before the fast-moving system suddenly struck with scary results.

“All of Saturday was extremely light and we spent seven hours going nowhere. Then came the transition... and boy did it come with a vengeance. A thin line of clouds turned into something far more sinister,” said Hennessy, who estimates Dragon was 20 miles off Chincoteague Island following a slow departure from the Chesapeake Bay.

Dragon was knocked down and held down for 15 minutes by sustained winds of 50-60 knots that gusted to 80 at one point. Hennessy and Hubely held on as the keel pulled completely out of the water, the sails flogged and the mast repeatedly was driven into the ocean. The dodger ripped off from the cabin and blew away while the computer containing all the weather and routing information was swept overboard.

“I am absolutely shocked that our rig stayed in the boat,” Hennessy said. “The whole scene was horrifically fascinating to watch. I have never been in weather like that and I don’t ever want to again. Bottom line, it could have been so much worse!”

Dragon made virtually no progress for the next three hours as Hennessy and Hubely assessed the damage and sorted things out. What most certainly saved a dismasting was their quick decision to get the Code Zero spinnaker rolled in and the solent rolled out.

Oakcliff Racing-Bo Dream, another Class 40 skippered by Hobie Ponting, got caught in the same squall and did not escape unharmed. Dawn Riley, executive director of Oakcliff Sailing, reported that Bo Dream was forced to retire due to mast damage. The J/122 Dolphin and the J/111 Bad Cat also sustained damage during the squall and retired.

Fortunately, the rest of the 2015 Annapolis-to-Newport fleet didn't experience anything as harrowing as that – although the Thursday starters did have to beat into strong winds and heavy seas for an extended stretch in the Atlantic Ocean.

Pursuit, a custom-designed 48-footer skippered by Norman Dawley, was first to finish – crossing the line off Castle Hill Lighthouse at 5:01 p.m. on Sunday with an elapsed time of 3 days, 4 hours, 56 minutes and 46 seconds.

“To be the first boat to finish a classic race like Annapolis-to-Newport is very exciting for our entire crew,” Dawley told *The Capital* newspaper. “It was cold and rainy and bumpy. I give full credit to my crew for working hard the whole way no matter the conditions.”

Dawley, a resident of Lusby, MD., said his team sailed under No. 3 genoa and reefed main for hundreds of miles during the offshore passage.

“We were beating into 18 to 25 knot winds almost the whole way. It was rough and we got banged around quite a bit,” Dawley said.

This year's Annapolis-to-Newport Race was different than any previous edition as organizers implemented a new starting format. The smaller, slower boats started at 11 a.m. on Thursday while the bigger, faster boats started at the same time on Friday. That idea worked out well as the entire fleet was finished by Tuesday morning.

Lucky, a Reichel-Pugh 63 owned by Bryon Ehrhart of Chicago, posted the fastest elapsed time – completing the 475-nautical mile course in 2 days, 10 hours, 4 minutes and 56 seconds. Volvo Ocean Race veteran Ian “Soapy” Moore served as navigator aboard Lucky, which used the Annapolis-to-Newport Race as a shakedown for the upcoming Rolex Transatlantic Race.

“The boss is very happy. This boat was built for the Sydney-Hobart Race so it's made to go upwind, which is predominantly what we had in the ocean,” Lucky boat captain William Finlay said. “Bryon is a very accomplished sailor and a very good leader and we have a very strong core team.”

This RP 63 won the 2012 Sydney-Hobart Race for previous owner Stephen Ainsworth when it was named Loki. Annapolis-to-Newport was only the second event for Ehrhart, who took delivery in December, 2014 and debuted Lucky at the St. Barth's Bucket Regatta.

“The designer and builder (McConaghy Boats) just got the numbers right with this boat. It performs extremely well in all points of sail and has been very successful,” Finlay said.

Decision, a speedy Carkeek 40 skippered by Stephen Murray of New Orleans, wound up winning IRC 1 class with a corrected time of 3 days, 14 hours, 57 minutes and 51 seconds. Lucky corrected to fourth in IRC 1, which was comprised of the seven fastest boats in the fleet.

Chessie Racing, an 82-foot Swan owned by George Collins of Fisher Island, FL, was the only boat that finished ahead of an IRC 1 entry. Chessie crossed the line ahead of the TP52 Corsair and the Ker 50 Temptation-Oakcliff, but wound up sixth out of six finishers in PHRF 1 on corrected time.

Carina, the renowned McCurdy and Rhodes-designed 48-footer captained by current New York Yacht Club commodore Rives Potts, was the overall winner in IRC. Carina came surfing across the line under spinnaker at around 5 p.m. on Monday with Potts expertly controlling the boat as it rolled around in big waves at the mouth of the Narragansett Bay.

Carina, a three-time winner of the Newport-to-Bermuda Race, posted a corrected time of 3:09:37:03 to take first in IRC 2 by more than 3 ½ hours over runner-up Music (Swan 53, James Blakemore).

Swift, one of the Naval Academy's 44-foot sloops, was the overall winner in PHRF with a corrected time of 3:10:23:35. Midshipman Kyle Briggs skippered Swift, which won PHRF 2 and PHRF Overall by a mere minute and a half over NANUQ (Sabre 426, Glenn Doncaster).

"Winning a class in the Annapolis-to-Newport Race is a huge accomplishment and our crew is just so happy and so proud," Briggs said. "We spend so much time practicing and taking care of the boat. It's really nice to see all that hard work pay off."

Other class winners were as follows: Visit Brussels (Michael Kleinjans) in Class 40; AKELA III (Swan 43, Roel Hoekstra) in Offshore Rating Rule; Saykadoo (J/120, Stephen McManus) in PHRF 1; That's Ridiculous (Beneteau First 36.7, Francis Nilsen) in PHRF Double-Handed; Sea Dacha (Dufour 410, Eric Kessler) in Performance Cruising 1; Testing Life (Tartan 46, Brian Mulhall) in Performance Cruising 2 and Alaris (Block Island 40, Mike Cranfield/Nick Iliff) in Classic/Corinthian.

All place-winners will receive their trophies while several special awards will be handed out during Tuesday night's Annapolis-to-Newport Prize-giving Ceremony at the New York Yacht Club Harbour Court.

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