

Premiere Racing Key West Race Week 2010

The 2010 version of Premiere Racing's Key West Race Week is history. I just finished a 23 hour drive back from Key West to Rhode Island. After that trip, security delays at the airport won't seem so tiresome anymore. Key West participation was down significantly this year, not surprising in the worst economic times in the last 60 years. What weren't lacking were good competition, great sailing weather, expert organization, and the annual reunion of sailors from all over the country. We didn't get any big breeze, but it was an excellent test in winds from 6 to 20 kts: conditions most of sail in most of the time. I have been coming to KWRW since the original one, and this is the first time we ever had boats competing on the Stock Island course. It is a long way from....., well, from anywhere! The early week northerlies blew off the island, and there seemed to be a persistent left side advantage on the beats. Whether it was shift, or pressure; getting left early paid dividends in the northerly. There were times the right paid off for part of a beat, but for the most part, the ability to get left early with clear air was important.

Two new Summit 35's were making their first course racing starts ever. Charlie Milligan and Tom Roache's Act One (A-1) had won the Palm Beach Race in December, but were otherwise untested. Mariner's Cove (MC) is hull #2 and was under charter to David Dwyer and Anthony O'Leary from Ireland. MC was fresh from the Edgewater Boats shop. They did a nice job getting the boat race ready. They had to, there was no time for a shake down. She was launched the Tuesday before race week, and her crew sailed her for the first time Friday. She was set up very close to A-1: conventional spinnaker pole, tiller, North 3DL sails, one vmg A-kite and two symmetrical runners. The two boats came out 22 kilos apart weighed in IRC condition. Even the electronics were the same: NKE. They were as close to equal as any good one design class.

The S-35 is designed as a good all around boat, with an emphasis on IRC racing. A lot of people asked why they raced PHRF instead of IRC. There were several reasons. Frankly we looked at the size range in IRC 2 where they would have been the smallest boats by at least 5 feet. The Summit 40's would have been tough to beat under any condition, not to mention the J-122's, who would always have the size advantage upwind. The rest of the class was even larger, so finding clear air up wind would be nearly impossible. There were a lot of "one way beats", so ultimately size did matter in keeping clear air on the favored side of the course. The Summit 35's would have struggled to find a lane toward the favored side among the larger IRC 2 boats.

More importantly, MC was right out of the factory. She was weighed and measured out of water for IRC, but with trucking issues and abysmal weather in Key West, we just couldn't get her rigged and pull off proper flotations to get an IRC certificate in time. Eric Battinger at US Sailing and Jim Miller, the local measurer (thank you both) went out of their way to make it happen, but we ran out of time. Both A-1 and MC wanted to race against each other, so the choice was made to race PHRF One. A-1 had a rating of 60 in her home waters, but the Key West rating consortium chose to lower that by 6 sec/mile. PHRF does a good job of protecting existing fleets against new racing designs, and they tend to be very conservative first time out, as they should. I guess we should have been flattered that they rated the 35's 6 sec/mile faster than the Narragansett Bay rating and 15 sec/mile faster than the larger J-109. We weren't. But that is PHRF, and you pay your money and take your chances. One note here, Summit Yachts didn't have any say in where the boats raced. We happen to agree with the choices for this event, but the owner's and charterer's controlled their own boats. How else should it be? At any rate, the 35's showed they are a great boat under either system as we shall see.

PHRF One had nine boats in the 30 – 40 foot range. The J-120 El Ocaso was KWRW Overall Boat of the Week previously, so we knew she would be well sailed. The Mumm 30 is always a tough boat, and Rhumb Punch had Tom Weaver and an experienced crew. The boat we were most concerned about was Stark Raving Mad, Jim Madden's J-125 from southern California. I am not sure how old the boat is, but it looked better than boat show new. It sparkled. Unfortunately for us,

with Jim driving, Gary Weissman calling the shots, and Ben Mitchell, her looks weren't the only thing that sparkled. They were going the right way almost every minute, and they were always going there in a hurry. PHRF whining aside, they sailed the boat well all week and deserved to win. They were always able to sail their own race, often more than 5+ minutes ahead boat for boat with no one around them. They didn't have to mix it up with larger higher rating boats like the 35's did, and very importantly, they were first into the fresher breeze under the island in the northerlies. There is nothing like being able to get upwind to the new breeze first in a larger boat. This has little to do with rating systems, but it has a lot to do with relative size/speed. There was almost a minute a mile rating difference between the J-125 and the S-35's. That isn't great racing under any rule.

"Back in the pack", the two 35's started the week in light air, and learning the boat. As the week went on, particularly in a bit of breeze, the 35's were clearly faster than the other boats in the class (not counting the J-125 of course). In the light stuff the Mumm 30 and 1D35 could, and did, play the shifts to finish ahead boat for boat on occasion; but in the same patch of water, boat for boat, the 35's always seemed quicker, even in the light stuff. In 10 kts plus they were clearly quicker. Mills' IRC designs are powerful boats by nature and you expect them to go well upwind in a breeze. What was great to see was the pace boat for boat downwind against the lighter and more powered up 1D35 and Mumm 30. Once again we saw that, short of planning or surfing conditions: lots of sail area, low wetted surface, and slippery hull shape control pace downwind. The S35's were very quick downwind in the light, and gave up nothing to the downwind flyers in 16 kts and lump.

We also found that the crossover range between the A-kite and the symmetrical was lower than we thought. In 2 runs in 8 kts of breeze, MC was noticeably faster than A-1 when she flew her A1 and MC used her S2. We need a lot more boat for boat testing to say for sure, but the S-35 likes to go very deep on the run, even in the light and lump. A-kites on sprits do not pay off at Key West. In one race, A-1 and MC raced themselves off to the wrong side of the course and the J-120 rounded the weather mark just in front. MC put 54 seconds on the J-120 downwind in a 1.4 mile leg! She simply sailed the same speed and much, much deeper. It was like reading an old Ockam manual about boat speed vs. VMG. In non-surfing conditions, VMG rules.

Well into race 6, A-1 was in third, just behind MC downwind, when she hooked a crab trap and stopped for 3-4 minutes. That was the race and the series for her. She scored an eight, and that proved enough to keep her out of third for the week. MC finished a very strong second to a much bigger boat in big boat conditions. All of the top four boats were well prepared and well sailed. Stark Raving Mad was the best prepared, best sailed, and a deserving winner.

As I said earlier, the owners of A-1 and MC chose to race PHRF, and there are no complaints about the outcome, especially against the Stark Raving Mad team. But what would the results be if the same class had been scored IRC? I have attached a spreadsheet with the same boats re-scored under IRC using actual boat ratings or if those were unavailable, IRC ratings from sister ships. The results are interesting. First the results are much closer, only 24 points separate the first five boats in IRC instead of 39 points in PHRF. The difference between first and third is 5 points under IRC vs. 21 under PHRF. SRM still wins four of ten races under IRC, but now the Summit 35's win the remaining six races.

Scored under IRC: the Summit 35's finish first and second. Mariner's Cove would narrowly beat Act One with Stark Raving Mad a close third. The results are very encouraging considering this was virtually the first races for the 35's. The crews on both boats were very pleased with the layout and handling. Aside from a new head foil issue and the need to bleed the hydraulic backstays, there were no equipment issues of any kind. It is obvious that as the crews become more experienced, they will find another gear. Great job to the crews of both Mariner's Cove and Act One.

In IRC 2, two Summit 40's, Jim Hightower's, Hot Ticket and Mike Williamson's, White Heat were in a class with a custom Mills 43, Cool Breeze, two NYYC 42's, two J-122's, and Jim Bishops new J-44 Gold Digger. This class had similar size boats, good teams, and good racing. David Murphy's J-122, Pugwash, with Larry Leonard and an experienced crew, has been very successful. They

started the week leading after two light air races. White Heat recently won her class at the Storm Trysail Club IRC East Coast Championships, and they were in second after the first day. Hot Ticket is back for her second Key West, and she showed huge improvement starting the week in a solid third, and winning the 6th race outright. Whether it was the aftermath of their famous "Texas Party" now a Key West tradition, or the shifty light air at the end of the week; that was Hot Tickets' highpoint. She had two bad races back to back which put her out of the running for the week. She finished fifth, but her crew has gained a lot of confidence in their program.

Pugwash couldn't sustain her early week success, and the custom Mills 43 Cool Breeze got stronger as the week went on. Cool Breeze finished second and Pugwash slipped to third ahead of the NYYC 42, Vitesse. White Heat just got stronger, and did not have to start the last race to win the series. She did the final race, came in third, and had a convincing nine point win for the week. White Heat replaced the retractable sprit with a conventional pole, and that paid dividends at Key West. She is off to the Caribbean for the winter and then to the UK for the summer. Owner Mike Williamson is trying to form an American Commodore's Cup team. We wish him the best.

For the second year in a row, the Summit 40 dominated this rating band. Last year Mills' boats finished with three of the top four. This year they slipped a bit to three in the top five! The boats continue to finish at the front of major international events.

All the top boats are well prepared, well maintained, and operated. Aggressive campaigns like White Heat need a top notch boat captain. They had one in Jeremy Small. Jeremy has a wife and baby at home, and White Heat's upcoming international travel schedule would have meant too much time away. Key West was his last event with the boat, and he will be missed. Jeremy helped us last year with boat shows, and we hope we can bring him out of "retirement" to be part of the Summit team during next season's shows. We all wish him well in his new – non sailboat racing – job.

Thanks go to Peter Craig and his team for another superb event. There are a lot of great sailing events in this country, but none combine the perfect timing (It snowed for 4 straight days in Rhode Island before I left for KW), fantastic sailing conditions, expert organization, and international flavor of Premiere Racing Key West Race Week. Despite a tough economy, it remains a destination event for any serious sailor.

Thanks to you and everyone who worked so hard at Edgewater Boats to get the new Summit 35's on the water. They are great boats!

Barry Carroll
Summit Yachts
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