

Three Decades of Delicious Sailing (and never enough...)

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30 years of Classic Regattas in Antigua...that's a lot of sail changes, a lot of salt, a lot of sailing, and of course, quite a lot of fun. I've only done the past 25 so I don't think I qualify as an old-timer...yet. But I have a cocktail of stories from these years, so come, gather round with a glass of rum and reminisce with me...

Everyone knows we have a prevailing wind direction, but we don't always have the same strength...a few years ago, it blew a proper hoolie the entire regatta with terrifying start lines, huge waves crashing on to pounding foredecks, lee rails buried under exploding quarter waves, skipper's wrestling with the helm and sea water everywhere.

Four boats were dismasted, sails were torn but no one was hurt.

How hard to believe then that in 1992, doldrum-conditions had the yachts ghosting across the start line...only to drift back across it...then, in a quiet, almost imperceptible puff, we sailed over the line once again... Crew swam to cool down and I remember there was even a diving competition. It was that year, that *Guide Me*, a 40' 1911 engineless Looe Lugger from Cornwall, England entranced the other boats in these

air-less races and gave her the nickname *The Jesus Boat*.

Jono, at the helm, coming up to a rounding mark, with his slim figure and long hair, seeing that someone had just lit a cigarette; paused before calling the tack, stood on and the fiddler on the foredeck played until she drifted past the mark, and while the rest of us, wallowing in the glassy waters, watched the Jesus Boat dipped her lug and drift past us as though with a wind all of her own...

By contrast, the docks after racing are always a gale of activity. There's very serious rum-drinking at the stems of the Carriacou Sloops; families of musicians playing in cockpits as you wander along the dock and children doing acrobats in the rigging; swathes of sailcloth cascading on the quay whilst a bronzed, blonde mother repairs torn sails on her sewing machine; jumping into a pick-up to drive into the rainforest to collect bamboo to pole out the jib or the delicious feeling of a bucket of fresh water on one's head after a hard-day's salty racing and watching the J-Class crew polish their bronze dorades next to you.

Who could forget the image of Kenny Coombs – calm, focused, Figurehead of the Regatta, silver-haired and smiling, tilting his head towards the wind feeling the 55m regal *Elena* pick up her skirts in the stiff breeze; especially when the back drop might be a J Class or two (or three) sailing politely in the lee of an 7.5m 1947 Folkboat.

In 1996 it was natural that the Spirit of Tradition class was born for the new yachts built in the tradition of these old Classics in today's yards with modern materials. *Ranger*, W-Class and the Spirit Yachts all now race with their own kind and a fast and competitive fleet it is too.

Somewhat older, to great excitement, Michael "Scrim" Strzalkowski's legendary Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter *Marguerite T* celebrated her 100th Anniversary in 1991. She was older than the 40m Brigantine *Eye of the Wind* who spent 50 years running cargo in the Baltic and drifting for herring in Iceland and sailed our Antiguan waters in 1993. A mere nipper, compared to the 1856 32m Gaff Schooner *Isla Ebusitana*. Built in Valencia, she once ran cargos of dynamite between Ibiza and Spain in the Spanish Civil War. In 1993, when she raced in Classics, she was the oldest ship still in operation under sail in the world at the time, and magical it was to have her here.

And how can we celebrate these 30 years of Classic Regatta without mentioning Woodstock Boatbuilders, a long-time Sponsor, who have not only worked on many of these pedigree Classics but also restored the 1930 6M *Nada* that had lain derelict in English Harbour for many years. She went on to win, not only the hearts, but every one of her races at Classics.

Ancient or new, gleaming or rough (boats and skippers), it is these both that make Antigua's Classic Regatta the sailor's favourite and will, I believe, for many more years to come.

OPPOSITE TOP: Doldrum start in 1992

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: **Whitehawk**

TOP LEFT: **Velsheda**

TOP RIGHT: **Guide Me**

BELOW: **Gaia**

