

September 25 2007

Small Kids Racing a Big Boat.

When the three proud owners of a Catalina 30, Russell Houlston, Bill Woodruff, and Jeff Klausner, first purchased their boat, if they had been told that within seven months their children aged 6 to 10 would participate in sailboat racing against adults in a recognized beer can series, they would have disbelieved on several different levels.

The end of the concept would have occurred because:

The wives and mothers would give the "over my dead body/what were you thinking" speech.

A self administered sanity test would have scored a 'fail'.

The kids knew it was dangerous and would weigh the consequences, concluding: "yeah, Dad, what WERE you thinking"?

So none of the owners thought about it when they looked at an ad for a boat on the other side of the continent and said to themselves, "let's get *that* one".

The Catalina 30 Mk 3 called 'Huge' is a new addition to the West Coast and its owners rushed it straight from its storage place in Savannah Ga. into a one design Catalina 30 Division for the Friday Night Series at South Beach Yacht Club. Again, what were they thinking?

South Beach has created a separate division for Catalina 30s because there are so many who enter the Friday Night Series. 'Huge' battled it out with nine other Catalina 30s, finally coming second in the second half and third over all after a continuous string of East Coast cruising gear failures. By the end of the series the owners had replaced most of the hardware on deck.

Bill Woodruff typically woke up on Saturday mornings being pestered for a detailed report on the races including the times and the boat names and their point standings and he was searched thoroughly for trophies as well, by his 6 year old son David.

Eventually David talked his father into letting him come on board during a race and despite some serious racing drama and close quarters duels he enjoyed himself immensely.

Due to the competitive nature of the division this was a less than optimal situation for the other partners who were distracted by having to watch out for a little one while dueling with 10,000 lbs monsters separated by less than a foot of water, so the partners decided to introduce all their offspring to racing in a separate series, where they could focus on safety first, winning second, and in which the kids could participate as real crew.

The venue selected was the Monday Night Madness Series at the Bay View Boat Club. At the outset the partners felt the title of the series was most appropriate for the task they faced: arranging for very small kids to race a very big boat.

The on board rules were:

Adults would handle the start or any maneuvers close to other boats.

Adults would handle the main sail.

Adults would handle the buoy roundings.

Adults would take over when winds were over about 18-20 knots.

The rest of the racing was handled by children ranging in age from 6 to 10. This included sheeting in the jib during tacks, grinding and the helm.

The result was three first places and a second and a win for the series over all.

The children learned how to handle the helm very quickly. Their second turn at the helm was always a significant improvement over their first. Having experienced teaching adults to steer the helm, it is very clear children have the advantage of not having prior experience driving a car.

They not only had to overcome the forces on the helm, but also a steering position problem. For any of them to see out of the boat they had to stand on the bench straddling an open transom, and lean forwards to reach the wheel. This position was awkward and allowed very little leverage when the helm became heavy. In a couple of incidents the adults only became aware that the helm was heavy when we lost our helmsman completely, as he or she was pitched across the cockpit! Fortunately this was accompanied by much laughter and very little blood.

Also, sheeting in the jib on a 30 foot sailboat is a task the partners, expecting it to be impossible, were fully prepared to assist in but were physically prevented from doing so by determined youngsters not interested in giving up their positions.

Through perseverance and team work and the usual catcalling from the adults, associated the world over with watching others grind, the kids managed to achieve an upwind shape most of the legs of the races (but not all).

Of course, for the adults who had gone through the Friday Night Series, the pace of bringing in the sheet was almost torturous to watch. This torture was mitigated by howling laughter as one child asked (while the jib was still barely beyond luffing and almost half way to the next mark) something along the lines of "Daddy when we win the trophy who will get to take it home?"

The lack of upwind shape appears to have been compensated for in the zig zag course(s!) made by the junior helmsmen. The guideline used to decide on an intervention to correct steering was: if it fell out of a 60 degree zone, an adult would restore some sense of direction. Surprisingly enough, very few interventions were needed.

Finally when the kids went into the Bay View Boat Club they were treated as celebrated champions by all. Sportsmanship flows even faster than the beer in that hallowed place. The main rival who was tied for the series at the beginning of the last race, 'Chimay' suffered a setback with an over early recall and yet the Captain,

David Broadbear and his mate Howard were both warmly praising the efforts of their junior adversaries. As clubs go, the Bay View Boat Club is a San Francisco gem.

The partners are stunned by the success of their little people and plan to be back at the Bay View Boat Club for the Spring Series with now seasoned big boat kids.

Participants included: Foster Houlston (9), David Woodruff (6), Henry Klausner (9), Teddy Klausner (6), Jack Lugliani (6), Gretchen Mendel (10), Shae Kober (6), Cameron Burns (6), John Safipour (8) Harrold Pigman(7) and Sophie Pigman (10).

Notes for next time:

1. No Oreos (for the children) before the racing is over.
2. No chips or chocolate till child is standing on dock.
3. Train children to open (beer) bottles and hand them to adults.
4. Adults to have one beer each to steady the nerves BEFORE the race.
5. Children will not use the head.....(long story, don't ask!)

Huge has its own website which you can visit for more pictures at www.hugeracing.com

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