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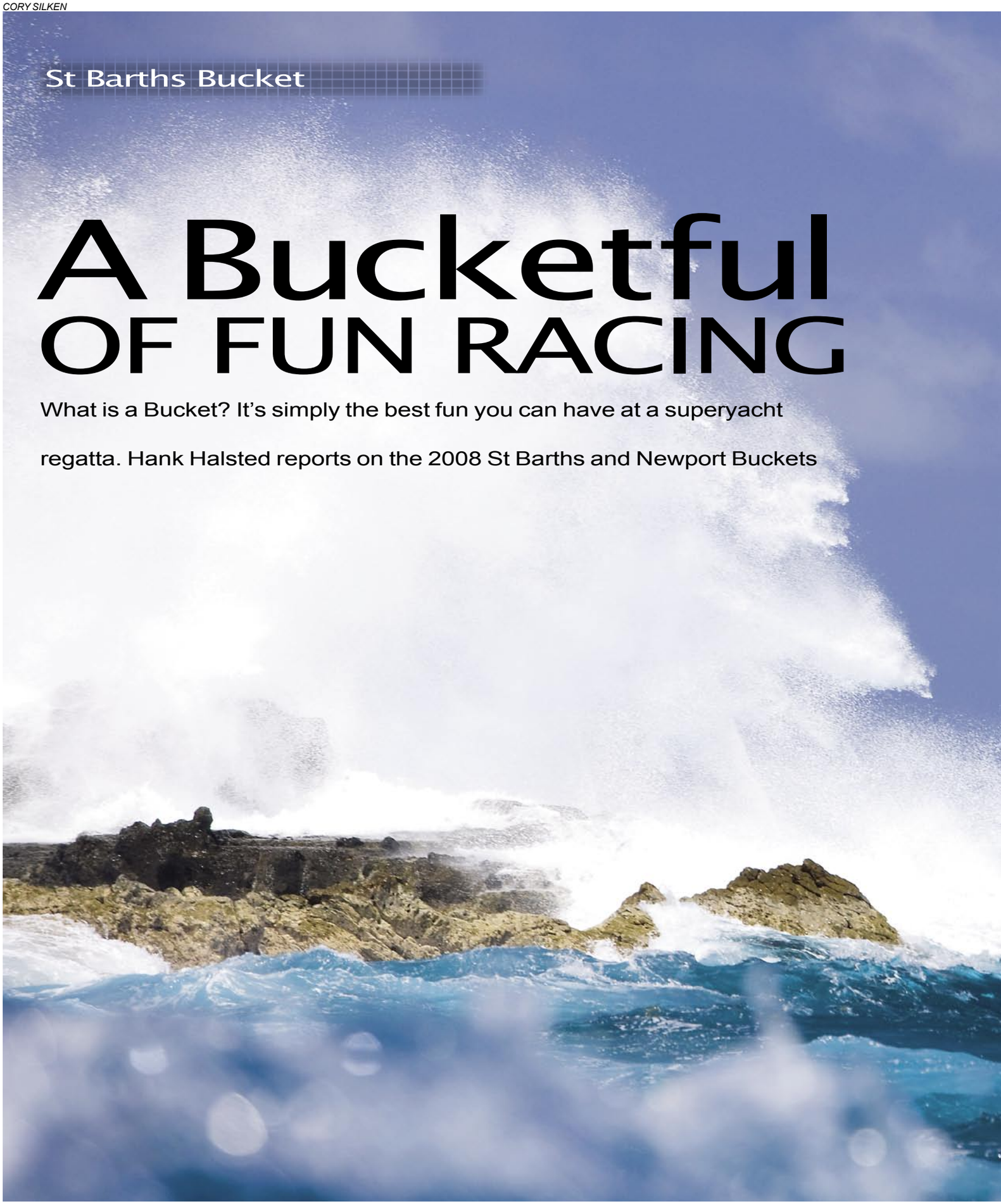

St Barths Bucket

A Bucketful OF FUN RACING

What is a Bucket? It's simply the best fun you can have at a superyacht regatta. Hank Halsted reports on the 2008 St Barths and Newport Buckets

BY ALL MEASURES, THE 2008 ST BARTHS BUCKET was the best yet. With the tradewinds serving up 18-20-knot breezes each day, the island offering up its many pleasures each night and the fleet of 27 superyachts delivering 600+ owners and crew, the stage was set for a truly magnificent regatta. Add to the mix a surprise concert by Jimmy Buffett and the Coral Reefer Band on Saturday night and the closest racing any Bucket event has witnessed and you've got the makings of the perfect storm of a party.

The fleet represented the full spectrum of superyacht design, from three magnificent Perini Navis, the Huisman 148ft/45m ketch *Hyperion*, the rocketship *Gliss*, through Holland Jachtbouw's 148ft/45m schooner *Windrose* to the classic 1931 William Fife 119ft/36m schooner *Altair*.

Friday's race was a great counter-clockwise romp around the island in a perfect 18-knot easterly tradewind. *Gliss* ran away with the race, finishing a full five minutes ahead of the fleet, followed by the 130ft/40m Palmer Johnson ketch *Kaori* and, two minutes later, the perfectly sailed Perini 151ft/46m *Antara*. That night the Open House lived up to its billing as the best night of the Bucket.

Saturday brought slightly more breeze and great racing on the 'Wiggly Course' around and between the islands to the north and east of St Barths. The 125ft/38m S&S ketch *Freedom* owned the day, beating *Windrose* over the line by just over a minute. *Kaori* again finished strongly in 3rd place. Once again, this was Bucket sailing at its best.

Saturday night was a big one in town, focused around the closely guarded conspiracy between Jimmy Buffett and the Bucket Race Committee to put on a full Buffett concert at Saturday night's Bucket Bash. The quid pro quo was a fundraiser for FEMUR, the St Barths non-profit medical foundation, to buy a CT scan machine for the local hospital.

Among the items auctioned were a Buffett-autographed, framed photograph of the fleet in Gustavia and several sets

The Perini ketch *Antara* weathers the rocky St Barths shoreline as the Caribbean serves up a hefty dose of tradewind for the annual gathering in Gustavia

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of tickets to Jimmy's concerts in Boston and Paris. The Bucket Committee went out on a limb in auctioning a 'Bucket Regatta Get Out of Jail Free Card', which entitled the bearer to three minutes off his start time in any Bucket Regatta. Lastly, Jimmy gave the shirt off his back, autographed, to the highest donor! The US$100,000 requisite benchmark was doubled at the end of the day.

Sunday dawned with plenty of breeze to blow out the cobwebs. The 'Wrong Way Around' race was launched into a 20-knot easterly for another great romp, which served up some powerful shifty puffs on the last leg, shredding a few spinnakers.

Finishes were the tightest ever in Bucket history, leaving the race committee wishing for a video camera as yachts crossed the line overlapped. Between 1st and 10th place was less than two and a half minutes! *Windrose*, which had cashed in their 'Get Out of Jail Free' credit, did not need the three minutes to win the Bucket Regatta overall. Second place was won by *Rebecca* and 3rd *Gliss*.

In 2007 everyone asked: "How can it get better than this?" Well, in 2008 it happened, primarily because all the 600+ participants in the Bucket regatta are masters of having a good time, simply messing around in boats.

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Opposite: at 76ft/23m *Wild Horses* might be regarded as a touch small for a superyacht, but she certainly looked the part with her crew lined up on the rail. Above: classic sight of Gustavia, St Barths by night with the town buzzing, bigger yachts at anchor in the bay and the fleet open for partying stern-to. Left: the Vitters-built *Mystere* skirting the rocks. Below left: the J Class *Ranger* won the Polished Performance Award. Left: *Gliss* won the first race...

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Above: how's that for a tightly packed and varied fleet of superyachts! *Ranger* to weather, *Antara* in front and *Altair* on the horizon. Left: trawling superyacht style takes a lot of crew and energy to effect a recovery. Bottom left: *Gliss* leads the fleet with Mike Slade's *ICAP Leopard* trying to squeeze in on the inside line. Below: *Altair* again – she certainly covered the miles this year...

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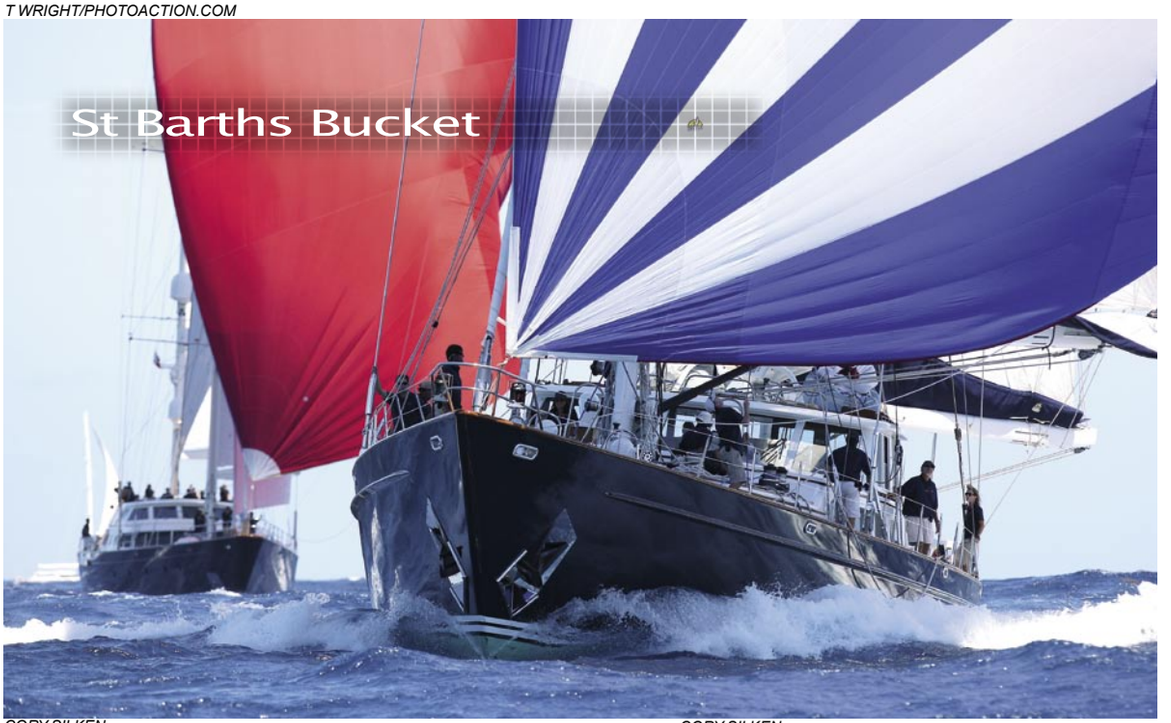

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Left: the real heavyweights! *Antara* astern and the 124ft/38m S&S-designed *Axia* in the foreground. Below: winning the party is an essential part of Bucket ethos and the crew of *Rebecca* (below right) certainly got into the swing of it. Not only that, but the big Frers ketch also managed to take 2nd overall in the regatta. Below left: Jimmy Buffet and his Coral Reefer Band got the party going at the Saturday night Bucket Bash and fundraiser

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Behind the Bucket

The first Bucket regatta was organised in Nantucket, Massachusetts, in August 1986 when a group of owners became embroiled in a rum-soaked debate about the prowess of their yachts and crew. The following day, seven yachts sailed the first Nantucket Bucket, a 15-mile course in Nantucket Sound. Recollections are hazy as to exactly which yacht won, but records clearly indicate that no yacht finished worse than 7th!

Between 1986 and 2001, the Nantucket Bucket flourished in the spirit of wholesome competition. The concept of pursuit racing was introduced, with each yacht assigned its own start time for safety.

In 2002 the summer venue was shifted to Newport, RI, where the event has since been hosted by the Newport Shipyard. The first St Barths Bucket was sailed in 1995 with a fleet of four yachts: *Sariyah*, the 131ft/40m S&S ketch, Tom Taylor's 108ft/33m Ron Holland ketch *Gleam*, Nelson Doulbleday's 130ft/39m ketch *Mandalay* and *Parlay*, the Alden-designed 127ft/38m ketch. Fishing was a big part of the first races – *Gleam* was the usual winner in that department. One year they tried a LeMans start. With the fleet at anchor, the fastest crewmember was required to down a daquiri on the beach, sprint to his yacht and be brought aboard before weighing anchor. This was a fun idea, but not repeated due to an assortment of 'safety issues'...

Within a decade, the St Barths Bucket expanded beyond all expectations. With a limit of 30 yachts required by the local authorities, the Bucket has been just about full every year since 2005.

As the Bucket regattas have evolved, the organisers have kept a tight focus on the original, non-commercial flavour of the event. Sponsorship is exclusively from the marine industry – the major shipyards, Perini Navi, Royal Huisman, Alloy Yachts, Holland Jachtbouw and Vitters Shipyard, have been particularly generous in this respect.

The primary reason for the success of the Buckets is that they are more about wholesome fun than winning. The stated goal is to 'win the party'. The omnipresent, over-riding conundrum for the race committee is to convince the most competitive owners that winning isn't important!

Next event
26-29 March 2009

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