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A Bucket Full o' Fun



This year the 14th St Barths Bucket promised to be the best ever, defying the credit crunch with the biggest fleet to date of 34 yachts. With this in mind I was sent in the call of duty to cover the regatta, encompassing three days of racing, to represent *The Yacht Report*, a sponsor of the event. It's a tough job but someone's gotta do it!

THIS WAS MY FIRST VISIT TO THE CARIBBEAN AND SO AS WELL AS BEING KEEN TO SEE the Bucket fleet I was also looking forward to seeing for myself one of the favoured destinations of so many owners; neither disappointed. We, somewhat bravely, had opted to travel to St Barths from St Maarten by ferry (nicknamed the ‘Vomit Comet’ by locals!), which afforded a great view of the yachts out at anchor as we approached the Island. The mighty *Maltese Falcon* cut a striking figure against the sky, whilst others including Wally’s *Saudade* bobbed like yacht eye candy on the harbour waters. Motoryachts such as *Chevy Toy* and *Miss Sydney* lurked in the far-side dock, in stark comparison to their swan-like sailing sisters.

On the evening of our arrival we walked up the docks admiring the fairly unique sight of around 20 or so of the fleet already *in situ*, lighting up the turquoise waters, accompanied by that gentle creaking sound that only sailing yachts can make. Like a row of beautiful cousins – the old and the new – they made an awe-inspiring picture with *Baracuda*, *Ganesh*, *Unfurled*, *Windcrest* and *Adix* in the ranks, to name a few. We caught up with some of the crew of *Windrose*, winners of the 2008 Bucket, that evening to see whether they fancied their chances in 2009. With a stringent handicap system in place they said it would be a tough call but they were certainly going into battle to defend their title.

The three days that followed certainly lived up to the directive of Bucket participants, which is to both win the race and win the party, with three fantastic courses to race (and what a setting to be racing in) as well as a strong social calendar with events such as the yacht hop, sadly hampered somewhat by bad weather, the owners cocktail party, the Bucket Bash and then the Awards ceremony on the final evening. With wonderful weather and consistent 15–22 knot trade winds conditions could not have been more ideal.



On Day One during the “Around the Island Race” I joined the friendly crew of the record-breaking *Leopard 3*, who provided me with a speedy and thrilling seat round the Island. The race was won by Royal Huisman’s *Meteor*, with a time of 2 hours and 34 minutes, with *Shamoun* and *Ganesh* coming in at second and third. For Day Two’s “The Wiggley Course”, I was on board the beautiful Pendennis restoration *Adela*, which provided a different, but equally speedy, view of the race which was eventually won by *Paraiso* with a time of 2 hours and 7 minutes, followed by *Perseus* and *Adela*, mere seconds apart from each other in the finish. On Day Three for “The Other Way Round” Race I sailed on the Holland Jachtbouw-built *Sapphire*, with her tight-knit and welcoming crew.

The final race of the Bucket was won by *Windcrest*, with a time of 2 hours 25 minutes, followed by *Virago* and *Adela*. A mastermind of a handicap system was in place over the event [as addressed in Issue 96 of *The Yacht Report*], honed day-by-day so that in the final race some excruciatingly close finishes were in place, with the finish horn ringing out in very quick succession, a testament to how accurate Jim Teeters’ “wizardly” rating system really is. The overall event was won by *Meteor*, followed by *Windcrest* and *Adela*.

Attending the Bucket prompted me to think about the role a regatta like this has in a world so gravely affected by the economy. Whilst it was incredibly refreshing to attend an event where it was finally possible for the first time in a long while to forget about the dark clouds the recession has inevitably cast over our everyday lives, it also made me raise the question of why so many yachts attended this year, with the biggest fleet ever.

With the percentage breakdown of the Global Fleet heavily in favour of the motoryachts, it is easy to sometimes overlook the sailing yachts that make an event like this so special, as they noiselessly power through water, sails taut against the sky. The exhilaration of sailing on one of these beautiful and mighty yachts with 34 very dedicated crews made for a real sense of



community and atmosphere that pervaded the entire event. The owners I met were truly passionate people who really loved their yachts, fully participating in the race by both helming and crewing; in comparison, some superyacht owners see their yachts more as a demonstration of wealth than as a passion.

Halsted emphasised that “the friendly Bucket regatta remains primarily focused on fun, something the organisers will never compromise on.” In addition there is also the enjoyment factor of the actual sailing and I think it is this that allows the Bucket to transcend the economy; owners came to the Regatta to really use their yachts.

Perhaps it is this passion for sailing that has had a strong influence on why the Bucket had a full fleet, with just one drop out. Indeed it was oversubscribed with many yachts clamouring in the weeks preceding for a place in the line up. When I asked Hank Halsted, Bucket Organiser, whether organisers had seen any impact on the Bucket as a result of the economy his response was “an unequivocal no”.

One owner told me that he had come simply to enjoy himself sailing his yacht with a group of friends, whilst another said that they didn’t mind about winning, they just didn’t want to lose! For although some might consider it a crime to be seen to own such a symbol of wealth in these difficult times, if the owners are to hold on to these assets it would surely be even more wasteful to not be at least using such a floating expense? In continuing to race and use the yachts, the crew and the ‘rock star’ race crew of these yachts still have their jobs, the Island still plays host to the Bucket, what must be one of the largest gathering of wealth of the year for St Barths, and so, in its own way, the Bucket contributes to the economy *(not to mention keeping yard workers and others in employment who don’t even attend, yet are all part of the global team that bring these yachts to the race course – Ed)*.



That is not to say that there isn't some impact being seen on the way things were being done at this year's Bucket. Some yachts racing were sharing crew with other yachts rather than hiring racing crew. For example, *Mariette of 1915* was moored off the Island, with a skeleton crew manning her, whilst her crew joined the crew of *Windrose* to race. There were also whispers of yachts that have been mothballed and their crew laid off. It seems that the crew, if not the owners, are all too aware that times are tough out there for crew. The owner of one yacht in attendance made it adamantly clear that he wanted no coverage at all of his presence at the Bucket as he did not want it to be public knowledge that he was attending such a sunny, lavish event in such gloomy economic times. The ghosts of the economy are certainly present, but St Barths Bucket seems to provide very few dark corners for them to lurk in.

What the event did do, for me certainly, was to reinforce all that is good about our industry and how it works; the enjoyment of all involved and the celebration of these wonderful yachts and their builders shouted about why our industry is here. Whilst we all accepted some time ago that superyachts could never be completely recession proof I think that

the superyachting industry will be able to tread water until the choppy waters subside and we can swim in calmer waters again. The St Barths Bucket is best summed up by the captain of *Sapphire* who, as we entered the final leg of the third race, surrounded by 30-odd other yachts, their spinnakers billowing, turned and thanked the owner of *Sapphire* and said: "This is why we are here. This is why we do what we do."

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