

The Buckets turn 25

Next year marks the 25th anniversary of the Bucket superyacht regattas. Paralleling the rapid growth of the supersail category, the Buckets have given owners who once may only have considered cruising in their large yachts the chance to participate in friendly competition against their peers with handicaps and special racing rules. The Yacht Report Group extends its congratulations to the organisers and owners who have helped sustain the growth of the events and the growth of superyacht racing in general.

BUCKET REGATTAS | 25TH ANNIVERSARY



ORIGINS & EVOLUTION

The first Bucket regatta was organised in Nantucket, Massachusetts, in August 1986 by Roger Janes, captain of the 82ft Huisman ketch *Volodor*; Peter Goldstein, owner-captain of the 65ft Derecktor sloop *Flying Goose*; and John Clyde Smith, captain of the 92ft Bill Garden-designed sloop *Mandalay*, to coincide with *Mandalay* owner Nelson Doubleday's birthday celebrations. During an evening that evolved into a rather torrid 'rum squall,' debate raged as to what each yacht and crew could accomplish, and the stage was set for bragging rights. 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 seventh.

Between 1986 and 2001, the Nantucket Bucket flourished, becoming a premier superyacht regatta. The events provided the owners and crews of the world's largest sailing yachts the opportunity to sail to peak performance in a safe venue, in the spirit of wholesome competition. The concept of pursuit racing was brought to life by the Bucket, with each yacht assigned its own start time on a clear starting line for safety, and the start time calibrated to induce the yacht's speed handicap. Consequently, the first yacht to cross the finish line wins.

Following the announcement that 2001 was to be the last Nantucket Bucket, the founders passed the torch to the present Bucket Race Committee: Ian Craddock, Timothy

Laughridge and Hank Halsted. The summer venue was shifted in 2002, to Newport, Rhode Island, where the event has since been well hosted by the Newport Shipyard.

The first St Barths Bucket was sailed in 1995 with a fleet of four yachts: *Sariyah*, the 131ft S&S ketch; Taylor's 108ft Ron Holland ketch *Gleam*, Doubleday's 130ft Palmer Johnson ketch *Mandalay*; and *Parlay*, the Alden-designed 127ft ketch. As with the Nantucket Bucket, the St Barths Bucket concept was encouraged and fully supported by Taylor and Doubleday. The original organisers, Tim Laughridge, John Clyde-Smith, Ian Craddock and Mike Frierbend, arranged a mostly informal event for the first few years, in which fishing was a big part of the first races around St Barths. >>

Bucket regattas MD reflects on the growth of events



Hank Halsted is a Newport, Rhode Island-based yacht broker and a yacht captain and offshore sailor of formidable experience. Over the past decade or so, he has come to be known as the public face of the Bucket Regattas. Managing Director of the events since 2002, he has marshalled their growth through sponsorship and, with handicapping guru Jim Teeters, has overseen the institution and evolution of the Superyacht Protocol – the (COLREGS-) modified RRS based rules that govern separation and right of way in the Bucket fleets. Kenny Wooton spent some time with Halsted recently discussing the Buckets and their upcoming 25th anniversary.

What has been your greatest accomplishment as Managing Director of the Bucket Regattas? Keeping us in the black while maintaining the non-commercial integrity of the event! Until 2002, we had always been supported by the generosity of owners like Nelson Doubleday, Tom Taylor and the owner

of *Sariyah*, who were always there to pick up any financial shortfall. In the late 1990s, Peter Goldstein shouldered the load in Nantucket, but since 2002, we have been flying without a safety net. We ran on scary-thin margins from 2002 through 2004. Then we got a reasonable sponsorship programme underway in 2005 to upgrade the event.

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The regattas, particularly St Barths, have grown beyond our wildest expectations and with growth comes huge cash requirements. Buying a cappuccino in St Barths has a sting to it, but entertaining 1,200 owners, guests and crew for four nights is a Wall Street enterprise. Maintaining the balance with the mandate to keep the Buckets as far from commercialism as possible has been tough, but rewarding.

At the 2007 Ft Lauderdale boat show, I was spirited into the back room of the Huisman booth by the directors of Royal Huisman Shipyard, Perini Navi Yachts, Alloy Yachts, Holland Jachtbouw and Vitters Shipyard. They asked me a question I wasn't smart enough to dream of: "What will it take to keep the Bucket Regattas from becoming just another commercial venue?"

That meeting sparked the formation of 'The Magnificent Five' sponsorship group. They listened to our requirements and agreed to pick up basically half of our sponsorship needs, which allowed us to focus on cultivating the best possible group of superyacht industry sponsors to fulfil our additional needs.

Another process that feels pretty good is to be near the core of the creation of the Superyacht Protocol, the safety requirements for what have basically evolved into ships on the racecourse. There are a lot of smart guys fully focused on this process and I'm really glad to have a level of input.

Share with us the highest high and lowest low of the past 25 years.

There are too many highlights to pick one only. However, it sure felt good in 2008 when Melanie Smith conspired with Jimmy Buffett to swap a fund-raising concert to benefit the St Barths Hospital's purchase of a much-needed MRI machine. Like many things Bucket, we worked out the details on the fly. But at our fund-raising auction, the Bucket owners shocked us all with their generosity in contributing over \$200,000 in just over 20 minutes. The auction items, included a framed Bucket photograph

BUCKET REGATTAS | 25TH ANNIVERSARY



signed by Jimmy, two backstage tickets to his Paris concert, the very shirt off his back in which he performed then autographed, and the most contentious item, a 'Get Of Jail Free' card, which entitled the donor to three minutes off his start time, the day of his choosing. Jimmy upheld his end of the bargain in spades. He and the Coral Reefer Band left the crowd at this semi-private concert, in bliss.

Another highest high came at this year's Newport Bucket after we challenged the race committee to 'think out of the box' and come up with a course that wasn't just another triangle off Newport. Realising the numerous fish traps obscuring the Newport Mansion District shoreline had been removed after 40 years, we set a turning mark a quarter of a mile from shore. I watched the pros jump on the logistics: Jim Teeters and Don Behrens from Premiere Racing figuring time, speed, distance, weather, ratings, course description and all related elements, Whitey Russell on the radio with his on-water team to set the marks, and there was nothing for me to do!

Then I went to the dock to find Lisa O'Connell and Holly Paterson on top of all the details: the yachts underway, photographers in the right boats, committee underway to set marks, tent being moved to the evening location – and there was nothing for me to do. Great moment! What a team!

The concept of lowest lows in relation to the Bucket Regattas is somewhat anathema. However, one that does stand out was last year in Newport, when we had 'borrowed' the 295ft Huisman yacht *Athena* from her most generous owner, as our committee boat. The day before the event, multi-task juggling as one does in running this circus, I was backing my truck while emailing and drinking coffee when I heard a 'clunk.' I looked out the window and there was a brand new BMW 1100 motorcycle lying on its side, leaking fuel on the newly-smashed mirror and turn signal. When we up righted the wreck, we checked the parking slip to learn that it belonged to the owner of *Athena*. Not good.

You used to do a lot of driving in the Buckets. Do you still? What turns you on about it?

I've been really fortunate to be selected as helmsman in a good number of the Bucket and Superyacht Cup events. There's no thrill on the planet as electrifying as driving a superyacht to full potential in close quarters at roundings,

out, all for viable reasons: two blown main engines, an expired cruising permit and, unfortunately, one captain had a death in his family. The lion's share of the attrition was out of our hands.

The dates of the regatta may have had an effect on the numbers as well. We changed the date from July to early September, primarily because

The sport of superyacht racing has grown exponentially: more and more yachts have 'Bucket Racer' attributes in addition to their global cruising capabilities.

crossings and finishes. At every instant, there's a lot at stake in an extremely complex matrix of crew capabilities, rigging loads, hydrodynamic capabilities of the yacht and unimaginable inertia. Keeping all parts in line while squeezing peak performance on a kinetic field of obstructions certainly brings you truly alive.

What has been your favourite Bucket yacht to skipper?

Over the years, I've had the pleasure of sailing a number of spectacular yachts, but at the end of the day, my favourite was probably the Langan Design 131ft Alloy Yachts classic ketch *Victoria Of Strathearn*. I began sailing with the owners in 1992, driving the 'little' 92ft C&N *Victoria* until the new boat was launched in 2002. A 131ft yacht with a spade rudder and cable steering, she found an elegant balance on all points of sail. We ran this masterpiece with basically the same afterguard and core crew, so for the most part, we all knew her capabilities in every situation and she was always well sailed. What a lucky guy I am. There's nothing as fun as driving superyachts.

The Newport Bucket fleet seemed a tad shallow this year. Why was that and what does it mean to the long-term health of that event?

We approached this year's Newport Bucket with an average 16 yachts on the roster, but the week before the event, six yachts were forced to drop

we'd sailed three of the previous five Newport Buckets is zero-visibility fog. For next year, which also celebrates the 25th, we'll move the date to the last weekend in August, which should combine the best of all potential weather and calendar opportunities.

You limited the number of sponsors for the Bucket Regattas. Will that continue in 2011?

We have been extremely lucky with regard to sponsorship. Last year, with the support of the 'Magnificent Five' superyacht builders, we were able to streamline our additional sponsorships to only 15 superyacht service companies, each at the same subscription level and the same benefits. Last year, we turned down five generous potential sponsors to avoid diluting the loyal support we receive from the Bucket Sponsorship Group. For 2011, as we celebrate the 25th anniversary, our cash flow needs may dictate an increase in the number or cost of sponsorships, but we will carefully forecast our needs before putting out a request.

You've talked about having to limit the fleet at St Barths. Will you? What's the magic number? Will you reach that in 2011?

Last year, we entertained a fleet of 39 superyachts, and at that number, I think we've found our sweet spot. With a maximum of 40 yachts, we can do a great job on all levels: dockage, shoreside events and on-water management. I would never

BUCKET REGATTAS | 25TH ANNIVERSARY



recommend overreaching in this regard. What we do, we'll do right. The St Barths Bucket brings sharp focus to the fact that these are invitational events, and over the years we have had increasing interest from new yachts that would like to join the fleet. This year, we have an initial 'interest list' of over 55 yachts. Our invitations are based on a matrix of the yacht's affiliation with the regatta over the years. There are a great number of owners who have been huge supporters of the event – not financially, but who consistently perpetuate the programme, adding to the fun and spirit of the event. Also in play is the size of the yacht, sponsorship affiliations and the crew's understanding that the Bucket Regattas are primarily about camaraderie and sharing the exhilaration of sailing these magnificent yachts in a competitive, yet Corinthian manner.

Are there any owners who've made all the STB Buckets? Any loyal owners you'd like to acknowledge?

I don't think anyone has done all the Buckets, but we sure have had consistent support from loyal owners since day one. Nelson Doubleday is a true patron, and along with Peter Goldstein and Tom Taylor, they really created a magic event in Nantucket. Tommy did most all of the events, north and south, while he was alive. Jason and Leigh Taylor have continued as banner supporters at all the events, bringing the best left-field fun imaginable at every turn. Hap Fauth has sailed *Whisper* in most of the Buckets since 2002, bringing forward his own left field of fun, along with great country and western entertainment, 'green flash' parties, shirts and drinks, and always a creative theme. He has also kept our rating committee on its toes. Peter DeSavary has been with us since the event gained momentum, originally as a competitor and sponsor. He got the

spirit of the event in an instant and has supported our *joie de vivre* at every turn. Hasso Plattner showed up aboard the rocket ship *Visione* in 2005, loaded for bear and looking for serious competition. He quickly realised that the Buckets are not about that, and immediately grabbed hold of the fun factor and drove it forward. In many of our minds, he was the winner of last year's Bucket because he didn't only import the band for Saturday night, he got up and played spirited guitar with them. George and Cathy Sakellaris dove into the Bucket several years ago and ever since, bringing the fun level to a pinnacle. At last year's Bucket they were the pirates, literally putting Jack Sparrow to shame, even better than their 2009 performance as the Spartan Centurions in full battle dress.

The event wouldn't be what it is without the synergy of their enthusiasm.

Anything you'd like to add on the occasion of this important anniversary?

As we launch into the 25th, we have a lot to be grateful for and a lot of challenges. The sport of superyacht racing has grown exponentially: more and more yachts have 'Bucket Racer' attributes in addition to their global cruising capabilities. The demand for more and better regatta venues is absolutely on the incline.

There is already a lot of pressure for the superyacht events to become serious racing venues, compromising a level of the (group) *joie de vivre* in favour of hard-core competition. Without a doubt, this is an issue that will nip at our heels, and we must pay attention. But for the present and near future, we will focus on providing the best on-water and event management possible. Maintaining the balance for absolute safety on the racecourse while encouraging robust Corinthian competition is a good place to start. Bucket thinking has always been decidedly 'out of the box'. As long as I'm around, I sure hope that remains a core concept.

Images by Billy Black

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