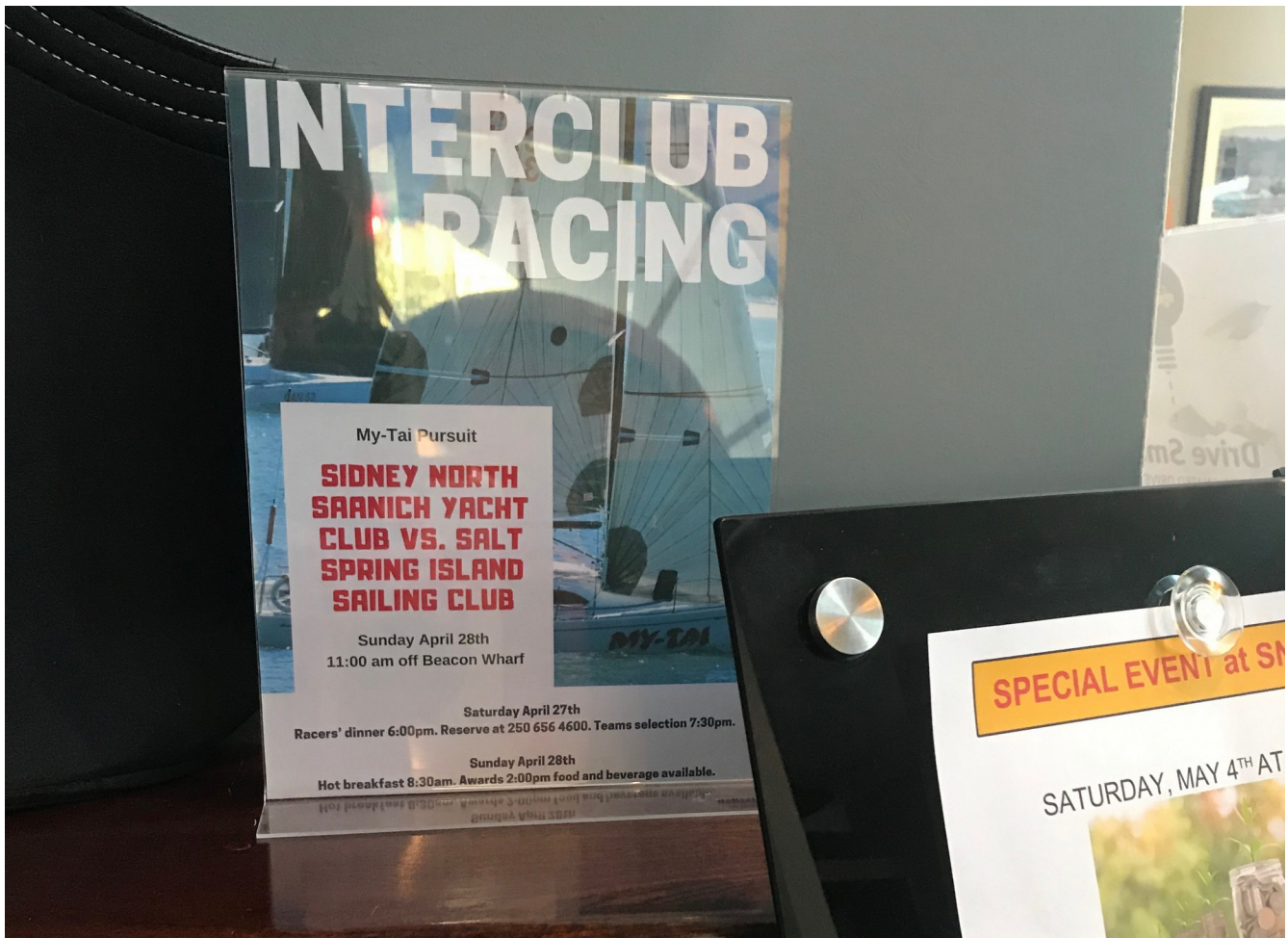


SNSYC Interclub Race, April 28, 2019

This weekend's friendly joust between Sidney North Saanich and Saltspring Sailing Clubs was a challenge in many more ways than anticipated. The plan was for SISC to race down Saturday, have dinner with the SNSYC sailors Saturday night and breakfast Sunday morning, then join the SNSYC sailors in a race in their local waters.



But it was a case of the best laid plans of mice and men. All week we had been looking at the weather forecast, and it never varied. We could expect strong NW winds in the morning of 10-20 knots with gusts to 28 or so.

Seven boats had said they would venture forth with 4 being single handed. It was with a little trepidation that I (Tony) went to the docks early and sure enough between the 10 knot lulls came the 25-30 knot blasts. We have all sailed in 25 knots but usually because that is what occurred after a lower wind start and we were, well, already out there. Venturing out (even getting out from) from the dock in 25-30 knots is a different matter. I am always braver with crew aboard to assist.

I had already reefed the main at the dock and the jib was the headsail of choice. As long as the autohelm behaved I could get forward if need to untangle a headsail hoist or takedown. That is as long

as there is plenty of water. But if things begin to go wrong in that kind of wind; they can go very wrong, very fast.

When FCR Greg arrived, we looked at each other, wondering if we should postpone. When we heard Oasis couldn't get off his dock due to the wind, discretion won out over valour, and the planned 11:00 start was delayed to 13.00. At 12.30, we delayed our departure again to 15:00. By this time we were down from 7 to 5 boats. Ron Turner, FCR SNSYC, graciously postponed dinner from 18:00 to 19:00. Ron also advised us the wind was supposed to begin dropping at 16:00. So at 15:30, after the wind briefly shifted to the north, and Oasis could get off his dock, the 3 remaining boats decided to set sail.

Greg decided to forego a singlehanded run and kindly accepted an invitation to come aboard Radiant Heat (Greg was thankful to be asked -ed) for the trip to Sidney. Meanwhile, First Draft, who was cruising in the Penders, and was to join us for dinner in Sidney, reported she could not get off the dock in Poet's Cove.

With Greg aboard, Radiant Heat finally left for Sidney about 16:40 and in a lull up went the reefed main and we bore off down the harbour at a steady 6 knots or so. A little later we had the jib up with Greg's assist on the foredeck. Leaving the confines of Ganges, the wind again picked up to 20-25 knots, and we were doing 6-8 knots wing on wing first on port and then on starboard, and back again as we gybed out to, and past, the Channel Islands. The wind and current both flowing from north to south flattened the sea, making it a fast passage.



Shingebiss and Oasis left closer to 17:00. We all made short work of a 2 hour sail and motored in to our dock. We all made it just in time for the 7 pm dinner.

A good dinner was enjoyed, followed by a briefing of what to expect in terms of the next day's race. We were given a very cordial warm welcome and thanked for persevering in the face of the adverse weather. After the skippers meeting, the bar was open and lots of socializing took place. A good time was had by all. Wandering back to the boat after the bar closed, I found Oasis hosting a gathering with their usual generous hospitality. All were recounting the events of the day. Some telling exploits of days of yore in their previous existences before SS sailing. An enjoyable gathering it was.

This was to be a team race where the 20 plus boats would be divided up into teams of 3 or 4, the finish order of the first 3 participants in each team would be summed up. The team with the least points would win the team event. This was also SNSYC's annual My-Tai race. The My-Tai trophy would go to the winning boat. The race was named after SNSYC's most winningest boat – My-Tai – after she left their club. But My-Tai has been bought by Dallas Ross and brought back into SNSYC, and she would be on starting line Sunday morning.

It was to be a pursuit race with the first boat starting at 11:00 adjacent to the Beacon Rd pier. Sunday AM was a bright sunny day with vestiges of a breeze but a little more wind out past the Tsehum Harbour breakwater where flags indicated 6 knots or so. At breakfast we were given our final instructions and team ribbons.

The set course was about 8.5 nautical miles triangle: from the start off the Beaton Rd Pier, south to the big barge moored at the entrance to Cordova channel, back north to a mark near the light on Sidney Spit, and then then back across to the Beacon Rd Pier. With the breeze it would be a beam to broad reach to the first mark, a beat to the next, and a beam reach to the finish.

Shingebiss watched First Draft, Radiant Heat, and Oasis House hoist their spinnakers as they crossed the starting line. Shingebiss was second from last to start, four minutes ahead of the infamous, and daunting, My-Tai. We elected not use our spinnaker as it can be a challenge for its new, unseasoned crew (me). Shingebiss is swift, but could not make time on the rest of the fleet flying only her genoa. Nor could we sail as low as them. Soon, My-Tai, with her six person crew, flying a asymmetric that appeared to be made out of parachute silk, streaked by us. Arriving at the first mark, we were well above it. We had to gybe around it in a dying breeze. We watched as everyone else made a clean rounding from their favoured position below the mark. We were near dead last as we finally struggled around the first mark.

Finally rounding the mark, Shingebiss came into her own. Gyle carefully trimmed her sails, and then left them well enough alone. A lesson for this skipper who usually can't leave his sails unbothered. Shingebiss quickly took a bone in her teeth and started tracking down the eighteen or so boats ahead of us. We remained on the Sidney shore which had a nice steady breeze of 6-8 knots. Approaching the ferry dock, the wind Gods presented us with a nice lift, allowing us to sneak by it, and then the Beacon Rd. Pier, saving us having to tack out of the wind line.

Meanwhile, First Draft and Radiant Heat opted to tack towards James Island and take a more direct line to the second mark. Radiant Heat reports, "We opted to tack, and then tack ahead, thereby heading directly to the second mark. We had good breeze for awhile, and were feeling confident as the lead boats were a mere 200 yard away, just before the breeze failed us, leaving us in a contrary current. Crawling toward the second mark, we watched in frustration as the boats ahead of us got a short puff that took them around the mark, leaving us well behind."

Meanwhile, on board Shingebiss, we told ourselves we were going 'Oasis hunting'. We were trailing Oasis down the Sidney shore, slowly making up some distance on her, but much too far away to catch her. But Bob, on board Oasis, reading his instruments, saw he was making a negative VMG, so decided to tack out into the channel, before tacking again on a more direct line towards the second mark. It was a fateful decision as the wind was less and the current more where he ended up. And when we got our lift outside the ferry dock, the Oasis hunt was over: she was 'in the bag'.

Watching the current push down the crab traps along the way, and seeing the breeze begin to falter, we knew we had to get well beyond the second mark before tacking towards it. We delayed, and delayed some more before finally tacking. The Skipper's patience paid off for as soon we tacked, the wind all but died, and we struggled to make the mark. We resorted to pointing well above the mark to counter the strong current pushing us down below it. Up went the drifter, down again, up again, this time set as a pseudo-asymmetric. We finally made the mark with two other boats closing with us. Shingebiss, being the fastest, slowly drew ahead of the inside boat. We had to turn tight to avoid the second boat sailing down towards the mark from the direction of Sidney spit. With the current pushing us hard towards the mark, and next to do wind or momentum, and little sea-room, our skipper skillfully manoeuvred us around a rapidly closing mark, with only feet to spare.

Once around, we set for a beam reach in a fitful breeze, and Shingebiss again showed her colours. She tracked down boat after boat, finally taking the lead. But behind us, the boats who were stuck along Sidney Spit finally made the mark, and spinnakers began to pop up across the fleet, including My-Tai's. It was a phalanx of boats chasing us down but Shingebiss held them off. Out of the midst of the colourful fleet, My-Tai emerged, quickly outpacing everyone. We could hear her coming, bone in her teeth, asymmetric set hard for the beam reach. She quickly passed us, taking the lead, crossing the line first. Shingebiss a proud second.

The race organizers extended the time limit for the race by 30 minutes, allowing several more boats to finish, including Oasis. Who acquitted herself very well in trying conditions. But no wonder, with Bob and Ray on hand, there was 169 years of life experience aboard. They understand patience, consistency, and a steady hand often win out. Besides, when things got a bit frustrating, Heather was aboard to add some levity and valued sailing skills. Although she did bring the average age down to only about 73 or so.

Radiant Heat, with her 155 flying, having finally made the mark, was slowly losing ground to the leaders under spinnaker, and decided to call it a day. As did First Draft, who had to get back to Salt Spring for a 4 AM shift on the ferries.

We returned to the awards ceremony and saw My-Tai get her trophy. Shingebiss's performance was noted. And each salt Spring boat was gifted a bottle of rum for making it to the race. Gyle, representing Shingebiss, was also awarded a draw prize. Shingebiss, Radiant Heat, and First Draft motored home Sunday. Oasis stayed overnight, returning home Monday morning.



The excellent organization, graciousness, and thoughtfulness of our hosts and the SNSYC racers was evident everywhere. SISC will have a challenge in living up to the standard set by SNSYC when we host them September 22 for the return event in this two race series.





