

NSHOF Annual Classic Wooden Sailboat Race

by Dan McGrath

The 2nd Annual Classic Wooden Sailboat Race is sponsored by the National Sailing Hall of Fame in Annapolis. This event took place on September 18th of this year. It was Elf's second entry in this race. See last winter's Helm for a description of last year's race. The first race drew seventeen yachts and Elf had placed fifteenth. This year's race drew twenty-one entries. Of these sixteen started and thirteen finished. We hoped to significantly improve our performance over last year.

The course was a bit different this year having the base leg marked with racing buoys instead of the existing navigation aids used last year. The southern point of the course was still the red #6 lateral buoy. With the wind coming out of the east north-east at 5-13 knots this made for a very fast course. The course was a run down the base leg, a long port tack to buoy #6, and a reach back to the base leg. Without the need for beating to windward this course was very favorable to Elf. Even though we were slower on the tack than some of our competitors Elf more than made up the loss on the reach and the run.

The fact that some of our crew were now seasoned racers aboard Elf worked in our favor. Myself, Mike Cabler, Pete Mullaly, Kevin Garber, Carly Sargent, Rich Savini and, of course Captain Rick Carrion all had crewed on Elf in previous races. The other members of were all experienced sailors and many had sailed on Elf before: Neal Carter, Russell Levi, Carl Pergler, Kathy Higdon, Dan Brest, and Steve Valihura.

Since this race is a pursuit style where each yacht has a different starting time based on their handicap it's difficult to determine, during the race, exactly how everyone is faring against each other. So I'll just skip to the results and then present you with a few of the highlights that made an impression on me. The yachts ranged in size from the 10' Accorn Morgain to the 60' Blue Nose Schooner Martha White. They were divided into two groups, Dayboats and Cruising Class. This is how they finished with their times:

Dayboats:

1. Samurai (Comet) 12:42:52
2. Bull (Sandbagger) 12:48:11
3. Bear (Sandbagger) 12:48:18
4. Morgaine (Acorn) 13:09:46
5. Roca Liden (Snipe) DNF

Cruising Class:

1. Honalee (Rozinante) 12:42:12
2. Elf (30-Rater) 12:44:05
3. Nightshade (Diddikai) 12:48:03
4. Lacerta (Concordia) 12:48:05
5. Raider (NY32) 12:53:57
6. Windalier (S&S 56) 13:01:18
7. Martha White (Bluenose Schooner) 13:01:41
8. Witchcraft (Crowninshield Cutter) 13:06:42

9. H-Boat (H-28) 13:39:29
10. Chesapeake (Bugeye) DNF
11. 210 (DNF)

You will notice that Elf placed second in the Cruising Class. **SECOND!** An amazing feat! We found this out on the dock after the race. Despite the fact that Captain Rick always says “It’s all good. It doesn’t matter which place you come in. It’s all about having fun.” he was beaming with joy and pride in the accomplishment of his crew and Elf.

We were almost out to the Bay as we made ourselves ready for the start, hoisting sails and making sure each crewmember was in position. This wind was light when we left the dock at The Annapolis Yacht Club but was picking up as we headed down to the start. Somehow we had lost our sailing directions which created a bit of a panic as we were rapidly approaching starting line but we did not know exactly what our assigned start time it was. We had a bit of a problem with that last year and took a costly penalty which the captain did not want to repeat. Fortunately we were able to have the committee boat give us a copy and we found out we were in just about the right position for a very good start and we crossed the starting line within seconds of our gun.

In general we were passing or gaining on most of the other yachts when on the downwind leg and on the reach but were definitely slower on the tack. The lack of a need to beat to windward was good for Elf by enabling us to make it to the end of the second leg without losing too much ground. One exception was Windalier who caught us on the reach on the second time around the course. You would have to ask her captain Thad Bench why she didn’t finish higher than she did but I would speculate she got a late start. The wind conditions were perfect for her and Thad had a big grin on his face as he passed us by. This all made for some exciting racing as most of the big yachts were taking turns passing each other as they sailed around the course.

A new entry this year was the yacht Witchcraft, a sort of sister ship to Elf as result of the fact that she too was built by Lawley Boat Works. I remember representing the Guild at the annual meetings of the Lawley Boat Owners Association in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. One of the items on each year’s agenda was a presentation of the progress being made by those in the process of restoring a Lawley boat. Paul Itzel was always there with a scrap book of photos documenting his work on Witchcraft going back to the ‘70s. The idea of a restored Witchcraft creeping up to a restored Elf, just feet from each other on port tacks as they raced to the next mark, was little more than a gleam in the eyes of Paul and Rick at the time. Yet here I was. It was like a dream. There was Paul, sitting in the fore deck, as the gleaming Witchcraft came along side. A couple of elegant ladies were sitting just forward of the mast. We were close enough to have a conversation without shouting. Carly called over “Pardon me. Do you have any Gray Poupon?”

Now the restored Elf has a racing record. She’s entered four regattas and competed in six races with a steady improvement in her result. A core crew of experienced Elf racers is forming and I’m sure we can look forward to further glories next year. We may even come in first sometime soon but even if we don’t “It’s all good. It doesn’t matter which place you come in. It’s all about having fun.”