

## The Northwest sailing clan gathers at the Whidbey Island Race Week for camaraderie, fun and racing

**I**t's 8 a.m., the second day of race week. From Tent City, a block or so away from the race headquarters, a few bleary-eyed sailors eye the heavens and gaze off at the glassy surface of Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island. The aroma of coffee permeates the air, mingling with other breakfast smells and slowly, the camp comes to life. Someone has already made a trip to the race headquarters and brought back a copy of the daily paper, the "Whidbey Island Race Week '05 News." Positions are mulled over, tactics recalled and bruises, to both egos and bodies, commiserated over.

**D**ay one of the 23rd Annual Whidbey Island Race Week had proved to be a gear-busting day, getting the five days of racing underway with a bang. At cocktail hour, weary crews straggled to the evening party, sore and bruised, but not too tired to party.

Despite the serious racing that all the contestants expect from race week, they also expect to party hard, keeping the famous "Summer Camp for Adults" alive and well. Since its inception 23 years ago, race week has earned the reputation of being a fun-filled, party week that nevertheless provides exciting and very competitive racing. Many of the sailors can count 15 or more consecutive years attending, and a few, like Don Wills, have never missed a year.

According to Bob Ross of Northwest Marine Productions, the organization that took over from original sponsor *Yachting* magazine, race week is far more than just another regatta. "People make lifelong connections here," he said. "They come to sail, but the camaraderie may be even more important."

Walking the docks at Oak Harbor Marina, the camaraderie is evident everywhere. The good-natured bantering transcends age groups and boat types, with young Melges 24 crews giving back as good as they get to a distinctly graying crowd sailing a variety of cruiser-racers.

One of the cruising-racer crowd, Wills is familiar to almost everyone there. His bright red Peterson 40 *Shoot the Moon* has consistently taken first place honors in her class. And family and friends always make up the



Story and photography  
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# Summer Camp for Grown-ups



Everyone gets into the spirit, above. The fleet jockies at the start, top, in the typically light breeze. Racers pack Oak Harbor Marina on Whidbey Island, left.

crew. Wills raised his three children, Jesse, Lauren and Andrew on boats and claims that Andrew was the first child conceived during the first race week. Young Andrew turned 21 this year and proudly wore his blue wristband, allowing him, for the first time, to drink legally with his Dad.

“We have so much fun here,” Lauren, 26, said. “Even though we’ve been coming to race week our entire lives, we still consider it our summer vacation. This is where we can have quality time with the family.” Andrew agreed, saying, “There was never any pressure on us,” that even though he and his Dad sometimes “butt heads,” he still loves the time spent with the family.

The Wills carry the family atmosphere to their camp, or the “Moon Lounge,” which is surprisingly set up on the dock. Oak Harbor Marina has an interesting setup. The outer pier has alcoves, each with a picnic table and space for a tent, so there is plenty of sleeping space for all the crew. *Shoot the Moon* took full advantage of the space, setting up the blender, the coffee maker and all the other accoutrements necessary for comfortable camping.

All styles of camping are evident in Tent City, where tents and RVs muster together

to form laagers around the campfires. Jim “Daubie” Daubenberger and the crew of *Amicus*, an Olson 911, are comfortable ensconced in a camper van and several tents. An accomplished musician, Daubie often serenades the groups in camp while the rest of the crew does the cooking and clean-up.

Although it seems that everybody knows everybody else, each year there are race week virgins, sailing it for the very first time. Christa Haynes and Kerry Billingham of Seattle joined the group this year. Both “grew up on boats” and race competitively. “This is awesome,” they said. “We’ll definitely be back next year.” Two other young ladies, sailing in the regatta for the first time, were also enthusiastic about it. Gabrielle La Porte and Delphine Meunier, an exchange student from France, both just 17 years old, said they discovered big boat sailing as crew aboard *Surfer Girl*, an Olson 30. Although Delphine would like to attend next year, logistics probably won’t allow that. But Gabrielle is already planning for it.

Every evening, at 6 p.m., RHQ comes alive when the bars open and the bands strike up. Captain Morgan Rum is a longtime sponsor of race week, and every night the liba-

tion's mascot is there in full regalia, providing sustenance for the racers. The live music is provided by a variety of local talent and their music, ranging from rock 'n roll to jazz, has everyone, including the kids, out dancing on the lawn.

With the Pacific Northwest being so famous for its seafood, the race organizers and the host yacht clubs, Oak Harbor Yacht Club and Corinthian Yacht Club, always put on good spreads, the most famous being the Penn Cove mussel night. Penn Cove produces some of the tastiest mussels available and they come out on enormous platters during the Tuesday bash.

And then there are the parties after the nightly party, which can stretch far into the night. For some, like the crew of *Amicus*, it

more than 10 years. Some sailors even forgo the nightly get-together and head out to the golf course or into the town of Oak Harbor to go tickle a few pins at the bowling alley.

And then there are the pranks and water balloon fights that erupt during slow races, despite Point 8 in the program stating, "Please no water balloons or funnelators." On Friday morning, crews became aware of certain name changes to their boats: *Corvo* became *Porno*, *Rocket Science* became *Not Rocket Science*. One morning, the leading boats found their decks strewn with bananas, supposedly to create bad luck. Yes, some people never do grow up.

But despite the fun and games that pervade this event, sailing is still the most important aspect of it. According to Gary Stuntz, who



**Tent city, top, is located on private property a short distance from the marina. Race week is a place to renew friendships, above.**

can mean a crab feast. "We set traps on the way out to the start," skipper Derek Reijnen explained. "Then we pull them up on the way back in, and we usually have enough for dinner." For other crews it can mean dinner in town at one of many local restaurants that gear up for the onslaught of sailors each year. But Tent Camp residents cannot expect to turn in early for a good sleep, there is just too much going on.

Race week is famous for more than just the nightly parties. That's just the start. For the very energetic, and those who didn't partake of too much of the Captain's libations, there is the Whitey Lewis Volley Ball Tournament that has been an annual event for

has only missed two years in the last 15, "It's great racing, duking it out right to the end." He says the top 30 percent give it their all, but then he acknowledges that, "Winning isn't everything. Once again, the friendships and long-term relationships that have developed over the years are just as important as performance on the race course."

As for Don Wills, who says all the most important events in his life have happened during race week, this year was no exception. On Thursday night, his girlfriend of seven-and-a-half years, Teresa Thompson proposed to him. And he accepted.

Chalk that one up to another successful Whidbey Island Race Week. □

## Great Pacific Northwest sailboat races

### The Duck Dodge

Fun races sailed on Seattle, Washington's Lake Union, the Duck Dodge started in 1974. It's now a series of races sailed every Tuesday night, starting May 16 in 2006. Classes for boats of every size—fast, half-fast, slower and dingy, as they are known in Duck Dodge terms—are offered each week. While there are results, the sailors don't get excessively caught up in the standings, spending more time worrying about having a good time. There are rules, of course, but in keeping with the light-hearted spirit of the races, the biggest rule is "Don't hit anybody." Hitting another boat, or person for that matter, would indeed put a damper on the real attraction—the post-race party. Each race ends in a giant flotilla where camaraderie is at its best and fun is what it is all about.

For more on the Duck Dodge, visit the Web site [www.duckdodge.org](http://www.duckdodge.org).

### Whidbey Island Race Week

PHRF and one-design classes race for a week of intense competition followed by legendary parties in this well-known regatta. Many sailors camp for the week, leading this to be known as "summer camp for grown-ups." The next Whidbey Island Race Week is July 16 to 21. For more information, visit the race Web site at [www.whidbey.net/raceweek](http://www.whidbey.net/raceweek).

### Vic-Maui

This long-distance race was first sailed in 1965 and it has become the premiere distance race in the Pacific Northwest. Sailed in even-numbered years, the race starts in Victoria, British Columbia, and follows a 2,308-nautical-mile course to Maui, Hawaii. Navigators and tacticians test their mettle by determining their course based on the location of the Pacific High. Call it right, and you are a hero. Get it wrong and a lot of angry faces are looking down the rail at you for a very long race.

The race attracts plenty of skilled sailors and some of the highest-tech racing boats in the world.

The race starts July 3. For more on the Vic-Maui, go to [www.vicmaui.org](http://www.vicmaui.org) on the Web.

### Swiftsure International Yacht Race

More than 200 sailboats typically gather for Victoria, British Columbia's annual event that is a "must" on many Pacific Northwest sailors' schedules. The Swiftsure is comprised of six races sailed on four different courses, ensuring that there is a race for every kind of sailor.

The original course known as the Swiftsure Lightship Classic takes sailors 140 nautical miles from Cadboro Bay around the former location of the Lightship on Swiftsure Bank at the entrance of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Another course known as the Juan de Fuca Race sails the 78 nautical miles to Clallam Bay, 15 miles west of Port Angeles and back. In 1988 the 103-nautical-mile-long Cape Flattery race was added. A classics division for boats in which the first of its class was launched before 1975 sails in the Classics Race.

Plenty of onshore activities still surround this race that will be held May 26 to 29. For more on the race, visit [www.swiftsure.org](http://www.swiftsure.org).