

The Contenders go to the Ottawa Skiff Grand Prix



Having not done enough to offend anyone in 2007, the Contender fleet was once again invited to the Nepean Sailing Club for the 2008 Ottawa Skiff Grand Prix, which attracts 50+ skiffs of several exciting classes (I14s, 29ers, 49ers, International Canoes, Moths, etc.). Last year, the races were run in light winds, so to shake things up, we got the kind of breeze that resulted in most of us getting our asses handed back to us on platters. From Toronto, Roger Martin, Rick Needham, Frank Whittington, Joshua Chiddy, and myself headed up to the nation's capital, where we were joined by Tom Janidlo (who will eventually stop messing around with his 505). Roger was there to defend his title having won the single-handed division in 2007. Most of us were generously taken in by Allan Crespi (who thank god had working air conditioning).

The forecast for Saturday was supposed to be 10-15 km/h, but instead we got SW 15 knots (with 25+ knot gusts). Seeing the lake turn black with a busy constellation of whitecaps was interesting. Several boats didn't bother to wait to get to the racecourse to commence the dumpage, and so crash boats were busy trying to get everyone's masts pointing the right way (a couple became permanently detached from their boats). Of the single-handers, only four or five actually raced, and the rest of the fleets didn't fare so well either. The RC abandoned the racing after running two, and by 2 p.m. everyone was into the orange whips, moose milk, and panty removers while the wind continued to scream through the rigging at NSC.

Sunday started out breezy, but when the first race started, the wind dropped. But then it changed its mind and came back for the second and all subsequent races (with a bit less of Saturday's ferocity). This time most people stayed out to play, and four races were run (five for the double-handers). Crews of all classes were still practising their righting technique and the crash boats were still kept busy, but breakage was less of an issue.

A sampling of the carnage over the weekend:

- Two snapped masts (an I14 and Stealth - which subsequently went for a ride down the Ottawa rapids);
- One broken International Canoe seat;
- Roger was nearly impaled in the head by an I14 bowsprit (he was rounding the leeward mark and came up on port with a port tack I14 bearing down on him - both avoided at the last minute by dumping spectacularly);
- One Contender sailor (moi) didn't listen to a local who told her about a rocky shoal and how to avoid it - luckily there wasn't significant damage to my centreboard;
- Josh lost a tiller extension mid-race (but made a mighty attempt to dive for it);
- One I14 crew's initiation night ended in the hospital.

All in all we had a great time, Roger defended his title (and kept his head), and next year will no doubt be good fun (with hopefully a tiny bit less wind). Thanks to everyone (and especially the rescue boats) at NSC who made this a great event!

Steph