

# It's a breeze for Brilliant

By **DAVE TRANCHIDA**  
Day Sports Writer

**Block Island** — With conditions good enough to please schooner captains and high-tech racers alike, Off Soundings Club Fleet cruised to the finish line Saturday with ample wind and smiles all around.

What had started under gray skies with little breeze finished with clear weather and at least 15 knots of wind.

The wind built to a point that allowed the Mystic Seaport Museum's 62-foot schooner "Brilliant" to go from luffing along the beach at one point to outdistancing the entire fleet near the finish of the round-the-island course.

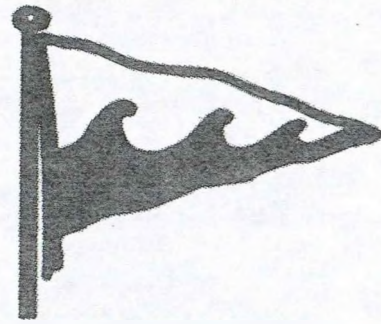
"Brilliant" crossed the line second overall in the 125-boat fleet and first in her class.

"It was marvelous sailing," said "Brilliant" captain George Moffett, adding that the conditions and course made up for Friday's "miserable" conditions that forced his crew to battle with the vessel's 3,000 square feet of sail through several tacks. Conditions Saturday were exactly what Moffett had described Friday while explaining how the ship sails most efficiently.

"We need the wind on the beam or just forward of the beam and about 12 to 20 knots. That's when we're most efficient and spinnakers are as efficient," Moffett said Friday. Saturday he explained "Brilliant's" winning performance using those same terms, but with a smile.

"Brilliant" also was able to use upper level winds not available to other boats since her mainmast is

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80 feet tall.

By corrected time, "Brilliant" was rated 3rd Saturday and finished 11th overall for the two days in Class A1, which is for the older, classic boats.

At the other end of the class structure is C1, where all the "hot boats" battle it out with rigs, using the latest technology.

Mark Wolfman of Waterford, owner of "Wolfpack," a C&C 37, said he was pleased with conditions.

"The conditions were fantastic. It was variable enough for everybody to be challenged. There were a lot of windshifts."

Wolfman said his boat needs moderate to heavy winds to sail efficiently and that as the wind picked later in the race, he started doing some real sailing.

"On the downwind legs, we were

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## Weather helps make Off Soundings a success

From F3

really flying," he said.

This was Wolfman's fourth Off Soundings race and he spoke highly of the event in relation to other races he sails throughout the year.

"This is one of the better run races. They do a good job administering it. It's run the way anyone participating in it would want it to be run," he said.

Adrienne Loweth of Noank, part owner of Brer Rabbit III, with her father Walter Strang of Groton, called this series one of the more fun races in her many years of Off

Soundings adventures.

"You really can't appreciate this kind of weather until you've been out here in a cold rain when it's blowing stink," she said, using the family's slang term for high wind.

"We were really sailing and the class was together so you could see how you were doing," she said.

Her husband, Bill, called the conditions "Typical Block Island. Variable and constantly changing. We had a little bit of everything today."

Following are the final results of the two-day Off Soundings race, with top three finishers in each class:

■ **Class A1:** 1. Dolphin, John Lockwood; 2. Nepenthe, Robert Read; 3. Irresistable, James Slimmon Jr.

■ **Class A2:** 1. Bamboo, Peter McFadden; 2. Legacy, John Read; 3. Charmer, Will Pease.

■ **Class B:** 1. Savili, Edward Dieckerhoff; 2. Shenanigan, Bob Rhorer; 3. Cygnus, George Carlson.

■ **Class C1:** 1. Split Decision; 2. Settler, James Rich Jr.; 3. White Fire, Joseph Bardenheier.

■ **Class C2:** 1. Tomahawk, Allen and A.J. Wasley; 2. Lindy, David Dickerson; 3. Dirty Harry, John

Lavin.

■ **Class C3:** 1. Bonecrusher, B Powell; 2. Fireballer, Donald a Robert Kern; 3. Spirit, Norm Peck.

■ **Class C4:** 1. Elan, Gra Brandon; 2. Wavewalker; Celebration, John Baird.

■ **Class C5:** 1. Gnat, Kevin Farar; 2. Phoenix, Toby Doyle; 3. C' la Vie, Thomas Doyle.

■ **Class CR1:** 1. Vib, James Barrett Jr.; 2. Arrow, Bruce Lockwood; 3. Serenity, Cal Brouwer.

■ **Class CR2:** 1. Menantial, William Schmidt; 2. Deliverance, W. Webster; 3. Exorcist, Wayne Morse

# Fog lifts right on schedule for Off Soundings fleet

## Some 120 boats make for Block Island

By DAVID TRANCHIDA  
Scholastic Sports Editor

**Block Island** — It was perfect sailing weather. Enough stress to fill an entire day dissipated by 10 a.m. Friday when the fog gave way to clear skies and a meager wind that built all day, making for great racing.

Dense fog delayed the start of the 59th Annual Off Soundings Club's Spring Racing Series and tested the navigational abilities of every skipper and crew in the fleet. Only 15 of 143 registered boats failed to make the starting line off Watch Hill bound for Block Island.

Visibility at 8 a.m. was estimated at 20 yards, and following the channel to the mouth of the river was low, eerie process, punctuated by blasts from air horns by "lookouts" on the bow of each boat.

More than once, out of the wall of gray, one boat would come upon another, bow to bow, as skippers circled near the mouth of the river trying to locate buoys and check their bearings.

But by 9:45 a.m., conditions improved and one by one, boats appeared yards from one another as the sun burned off the covering of fog that left some wondering how many would make the start.

A large contingent got a head start by leaving from Stonington Harbor, and by 10 a.m., the scheduled start for the race, those catching up from other ports could see a sizeable fleet reuniting near the committee boat, awaiting course instructions.

"Everybody always seems to make it, but you always wonder and when you get there, it's kind of like, 'Wow, I'm glad everyone made it,'" said Val Fast of Groton, aboard Looney Tunes.

"Fog is always stressful, but it's just something you have to deal with," said George Moffett, captain of the Mystic Seaport Museum's 62-foot schooner Brilliant.

Moffett has had his share of foggy sailing, including a trip from Nova Scotia to Nantucket during which he didn't see another boat for three days.

Most boats now have electronic navigational aides, as does Brilliant, but they still require plotting a course.

For some on the trip down the Mystic River, the foghorn from the well-equipped committee boat Nor'easter gave some measure of comfort, knowing she was just yards away and surely on course, though she was out of sight.

At 1:50 p.m., the fog lifted, a mild breeze from the west en-

couraged the fleet and race committee chairman Wes Maxwell of Noank gave clearance for racing to begin.

"It was about four knots at the start, but then it picked up. Thank God it did, because it bailed us out," Maxwell said.

But the wind was low to build and it made for a long day for the classes sailing the long course to Nebraska Shoal before heading to the island.

Moffett, aboard Brilliant, called the conditions "miserable" for his crew, which had to contend with constant tacking for a good deal of the race on a vessel requiring much more work than modern boats.

"We just need to have a lot of things happen at once," he said, explaining that racing a schooner built for comfort and ocean crossings and not speed is a unique task.

But even smaller, modern boats had to plot the right course to get the most out of the wind. David Kelly of Niantic, aboard Mast Transit II admitted, his course wasn't the best.

When Kelly and crew did not play the current right in the light air, they lost time to the rest of their class.

Following are the top three finishers in each class after the first day of racing with protests filed in classes C1 and C5.

■ **Class A1:** 1. Excellence, Linwood Mather; 2. Irresistable, James Slimmon Jr; 3. Dolphin, John Lockwood.

■ **Class A2:** 1. Bamboo, Peter McFadden; 2. Legacy, John Read; 3. Charmer, Will Pease.

■ **Class B:** 1. Savili, Edward Dieckerhoff; 2. Shenanigan, Bob Rhorer; 3. Just Friends, Ed Purcell.

■ **Class C1:** 1. Ubiquitous, Patrick Keane; 2. Set-tler, James Rich Jr.; 3. Split Decision.

■ **Class C2:** 1. Tomahawk, Allen and A.J. Wasley; 2. Dirty Harry, John Lavin; 3. Hawk, Paul and Carol Connor.

■ **Class C3:** 1. Fireball, Donald and Robert Kern; 2. Boncrusher, Bos Powell; 3. Spirit, Norm Peck.

■ **Class C4:** 1. Elan, Grant Brandon; 2. Celebration, John Baird; 3. Our Tern, Jack Washburn.

■ **Class C5:** 1. Gnat, Kevin Farrar; 2. Phoenix, Toby Doyle; 3. Witchcraft, Irv Rich.

■ **Class CR1:** 1. Vib, James Barrett Jr.; 2. Arrow, Bruce Lockwood; 3. Serenity, Cal Brouwer.

■ **Class CR2:** 1. Menantial, William Schmidt; 2. Rusty Nail, William Fisher; 3. Exorcist, Wayne Morse.

# THEY'RE OFF



Robert Patterson/The Day

*The Reveille, skippered by John Orzech, got off to a good start in the Class A-2 division as Off Soundings racing began Friday morning off Watch Hill, R.I. Racing continues today. Story, additional photo, on Page F3.*

# LOCAL

## OFF SOUNDINGS/Day One



Robert Patterson/The Day

Boats maneuver in preparation for the Class A1 start off Watch Hill. All but 15 of the 143 registered boats made it to the starting line.

# LOCAL

## Racing's serious, it's the state of affairs that's informal

By DAVID TRANCHIDA  
Day Sports Writer

There's tradition, there's camaraderie, there's cocktailing. It all sounds so civilized and genteel. But it's the pride derived from winning that draws them year after year.

It's Off Soundings — a state of mind that unfolds on Block Island Sound and lasts a glorious or harrowing or monotonous two days. It's battling weather and tides on Block Island Sound, sailing against folks you've competed against for decades.

Friday, beginning at 10 a.m. off Watch Hill, a fleet of 143 boats in 10 classes will begin fighting for position at the starting line of the 59th Annual Spring Series.

At five-minute intervals, each class of anywhere from 11 to 17 boats will employ strategy, technology and luck to beat everyone else to Block Island via a course that runs for several miles along the Rhode Island coast before "turning right" for Block.

For those who have participated for de-

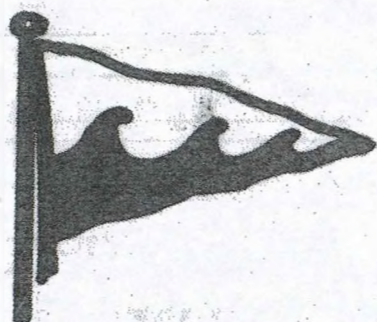
cadec, the allure has remained the same despite advances in marine technology and changes in lifestyles and in the sport itself.

"It's a class act and we've tried to keep it a class act," said Off Soundings Club historian Bill Ames of Mystic.

That was his summation of what he referred to as a "paper club" that has remained vibrant because of its informal approach. It is not a yacht club and there is no building members call their own. It exists officially on paper only.

Off Soundings was started in 1933 by four landlocked sailors from Springfield, Mass. — Edward Southworth, E. Standish Bradford, Sanford Lawton and John L.

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Blake — who did their sailing off Essex. It's constitution limits membership to those who own sailboats and enjoy sailing. No power-boaters need apply.

Other than that, there are the basic rules of racing and protests are frowned upon. Protests do come up, however, and the 74-year-old Ames attributes them to "these young people brought up as sea lawyers." Protests, he laments, "just screw up everything, but I guess it's a sign of the times."

To those who have raced in Off Soundings through the years, like Ames and former club treasurer Walter Strang of Groton, the informal approach does not

translate to informal sailing.

"You race because you want to win," Strang said, explaining the race's lure for him for a quarter century.

Strang has subjected his family to a number of windy, rainy race days and only once turned and headed for home.

"It's absolutely notorious for having awful, awful weather. Rain, high winds, fog," Strang said. "There was only one time, when we busted something, and headed for the barn."

At 72, Strang is still in the cockpit of Brer Rabbit III, the third boat he's owned and sailed in Off Soundings since 1970.

Now, however, he hands the helm over to son David and son-in-law and part owner of the boat, Bill Loweth of Noank. David skippers the boat and Loweth heads up the crew, trimming sails and plotting strategy with wife Adrienne, who learned from her father the nuances of racing.

#### A wide variety

The Strangs are typical of the crews in Off Soundings. Many boats are made up of family and friends, but all able sailors.

Even a state-of-the-art boat like Sedona, a Nelson Marek 43 built with America's Cup technology was sailed last year by owner Len Hubbard of Providence, his wife and son and friends of the family.

That such a high-tech boat is on the same course as the Strang's older and slower Brer Rabbit III and the Mystic Seaport's wooden classic, Brilliant, is another unique attraction to the series.

"We've had enough people in it to have like boats race with those of their own ilk," Ames said. "There's a lot of controversy, but we do the best we can."

With more than 100 boats, each class has enough to make the class race interesting, Ames said. And that's where the informality has become key to the club's success.

When it all started there were two classes: cruisers and racers. The cruisers were the yawls and ketches, boats with a lot of sail area for speed, but also a cabin for comfort. The racers were sleek, open cockpit boats built solely for racing, not a bit of comfort.

See **UNIQUE** page B5

## Unique race

From B3

The advent of fiberglass, making boats less labor intensive, and the design combination of cruiser and racer, yielded a huge growth in sailing, making it affordable and practical.

And Off Soundings accommodated the new breeds, which now make up the majority of the fleet.

#### Penalty system

But the accommodating approach to change and informal nature of the club are not nearly as unique as the club's penalty formula, which keeps everyone in the race from year to year.

The penalty system assesses a class winner a 10 percent increase in its rating for the next two years. A second-place boat picks up a five percent penalty and third-place earns three percent. All of which means the successful boats need to race even better in ensuing years if they are to win by adjusted times. They may be first over the line, but their penalty gives the rest of the fleet a chance to beat them.

"The whole idea of Off Soundings was to give everybody a good shot at it," said Strang.

And to anyone who says the racing is secondary to the socializing, Ames gets his dander up and retorts: "They're just as wrong as they can get. They're probably really bad sailors if they say that. The racing is really serious."

And besides, he says of the post-race party where the results are laid, "no one's gotten jailed. There's fights. It's a class act."