

Ida Lewis Distance Race - Winners announced

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'Titan Winner Photo: Robbie Benjamin - Ida Lewis Distance Race'

Tom Hill's (San Juan, Puerto Rico) Titan 15, a new 75-foot Reichel-Pugh design that was launched this year at New England Boatworks in Rhode Island, handily won the IRC Division at this weekend's fifth Ida Lewis Distance Race, which started and ended off Newport, R.I., where host Ida Lewis Yacht Club makes its home.

Starting at 3 p.m. on Friday with a fleet of 39 others (divided into classes for IRC, PHRF, PHRF Double-Handed and PHRF Cruising Spinnaker), Titan 15 finished its 150-mile course at 4:42 a.m. on Saturday, covering the distance in just over 13 hours and 42 minutes. (Hill also won the inaugural Ida Lewis Distance Race in 2004.)

Though Titan's time was the fastest ever logged in this race, it did not qualify as a record, since Race Officials had shortened both of the traditional courses used for this event to insure that Hurricane Bill, stalking northward in the Atlantic Ocean, wouldn't find a vulnerable fleet on which to pounce if it veered from its predicted course on Sunday. The IRC boats, which normally sail the 177 nm 'Montauk' course, instead sailed the 150 nm 'Block Island' course typically reserved for the PHRF boats, while The PHRF boats sailed a newly published 'Buzzards Bay Tower' course that was just over 103 nm long.

'It was a hell of a race,' said Hill, explaining that Titan was 'screaming' both upwind and downwind in the predominately 16-20 knots of wind. 'The conditions made for the best sailing we've had since putting the boat in the water.'

Mechanical failures dashed any hope for the regatta's two larger boats -- George David's (Hartford, Conn.) 90-foot sloop Rambler and Irvine Laidlaw's (Monaco) 82' Wally yacht Highland Fling—to upstage it. Rambler's running backstay broke 25 miles into the race, and when the boat crash-tacked to save the mast from falling, the clew ring pulled out of the mainsail. Only minutes before, Highland Fling's jib cunningham had broken, causing the sail to blow out of the headfoil. A second jib was set, only to have the same thing happen again. While Rambler managed repairs (two crewmen successfully changed out the runner while hoisted near the top of the 130-foot rig), Highland Fling was forced to retire. 'It's hard to win a race with no jib,' said Highland Fling's captain Xavier Mecoy, who had explained in an earlier interview that this was the boat's shakedown race and the crew wasn't sure what to expect.

'We literally had had only 15 sailing hours on the boat,' said Mike Toppa, Highland Fling's mainsail trimmer for this event. 'There were sails we hadn't even seen yet, but we learned and accomplished a lot.' For the record, Highland Fling smoked upwind before the mishap, and Tom Hill said he was disappointed he didn't get to pace against the boat going downwind. 'She is 25 tons and we're 16 so maybe we would have been faster, but maybe not,' said Hill.

Rambler wound up second, correcting out at a bit less than two hours behind Titan, while Ron

O'Hanley's (Boston, Mass.) Cookson 40 Privateer took third.

The PHRF class's scratch boat Cutlass, a Class 40 owned by Nick Halmos and Alex Mehran (both of Newport, R.I.) knocked out their 103-nm mile race in just under 14 hours and 20 minutes. 'Upwind is where our boat's performance is the worst, and three out of four of the legs were reaching and running,' said Mehran, who with Halmos recently won the Bermuda One-Two race both in class and overall.

According to Jonathan Green (Wakefield, Mass.), another class winner from the Bermuda One-Two, winning the Ida Lewis Distance Race's PHRF Double-Handed class in his Beneteau 351 Jeroboam wasn't as hard as he expected it to be, because the conditions were straightforward. 'What was really great was that it was a fun race. The course they chose to send us on was a blast. You had to choose which way to round Block Island and it had upwind and downwind legs that were tons of fun.'

Winning PHRF Cruising Spinnaker class was Frank Savage's (Jamestown, R.I.) Lolita, which completed the course in 16 hours and change.

The race is a qualifier for the 2009 New England Lighthouse Series (PHRF); the Northern and Double-Handed Ocean Racing Trophies (IRC); and the US-IRC Gulf Stream Series.

Each boat is greeted at their finish—which is sighted off the deck of the Ida Lewis Yacht Club clubhouse -- by a crew of volunteers, powering alongside in one of the club's committee boats and bearing a congratulatory bottle of champagne. It was from the yacht club's home on Lime Rock that the heroine Ida Lewis, the female keeper of the Lime Rock Lighthouse in the early 1800s, famously rowed her lifeboat to wherever a sailor was in need. Legend has it that, in daring rescues, she saved 18 lives, each represented by a single star on the Ida Lewis Yacht Club burgee.

2009 Ida Lewis Distance Race - Final Results

Place, Yacht Name, Type, Owner/Skipper, Hometown, Results, Total Points

Class 1 - IRC (IRC - 10 Boats)

1. Titan 15, RP Custom 75, Tom Hill, San Juan, Puerto Rico, USA - 1, ; 1
2. Rambler, Water Ballasted Sloop 90, George David, Hartford, CT, USA - 2, ; 2
3. Privateer, Cookson 50, Ron O'Hanley, Boston, MA, USA - 3, ; 3

Class 2 - PHRF (PHRF - 17 Boats)

1. Cutlass, Class 40, Nick/Alex Halmos- Mehran, Newport, RI, USA - 1, ; 1
2. Jest, Rodger Martin 32, Anson Stookey / Phip Hallowell, Middletown, RI, USA - 2, ; 2
3. TRUE, J 42, Howard Hodgson, Ipswich, MA, USA - 3, ; 3

Class 3 - PHRF - Double Handed (PHRF - 6 Boats)

1. Jeroboam, Beneteau 351, Jonathan Green, Wakefield, MA, USA - 1, ; 1
2. Paladin, J 35, Jason Richter, Mt Sinai, NY, USA - 2, ; 2
3. Ceol Mor, J 42, James Wilson, Washington, DC, USA - 3, ; 3

Class 4 - PHRF - Cruising Spinnaker (PHRF - 7 Boats)

1. Lolita, Swan 56.4, Frank Savage, Jamestown, RI, USA - 1, ; 1
2. Vixen, Swan 44, John Wayt, Jamestown, RI, USA - 2, ; 2
3. Perseverance, Swan 56, Tom Puett, Atlanta, GA, USA - 3, ; 3

For more information, go to www.ildistancerace.org

Primary sponsors for the Ida Lewis Distance Race are New England Boatworks and North Sails. Other sponsors are Dockwise Yacht Transport, Mac Designs, Media Pro Int'l, Narragansett Beer, the Rhode Island State Yachting Committee, Sea Gear Uniforms and Vineyard Vines.



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