



A hot one-design championship with 97 boats, half of them sailed by couples, that produces gracious winners, no sore losers, and only one protest. What kind of class is this, anyway?

T Story by Tom Linskey; photographs by Guy Gurney

Thirty seconds to the starting gun, and the fleet is sheeted in, hiked out, gone. It looks as if all 97 boats are over the line early. Another general recall, but no matter. The time limit for starting the final, seventh, race of the 1995 JY15 North Americans, sailed off Stonington, Connecticut, on Long Island Sound, at the end of September, has passed. The Wadawanuck Yacht Club race committee signals the end of the series, and Paul Foerster, a 1992 Olympic silver medalist, has added another title to his winning record.

Which is fine for Foerster, you might say, but so what? He would tell you that while winning was good, the

fact that he raced with Carrie, his crew who is also his wife, made it great. You'd get much the same story from the 54 other couples teams, six of whom filled the top-10 spots, as well as the father-and-son teams, the over-55 teams, the woman-skipper teams, and the brother-sister teams. And, yes, even the guy teams—remember those?—enjoyed themselves, win or lose. As every sailor in the JY15 class will tell you, if you're not having fun, you're doing it wrong.

All of which could lead you to an assumption that is both right and wrong: that the JY15, a 1,900-boat, 78-fleet, strict one-design class designed by J Boats designer Rodney



Johnstone, is a mom-and-pop class with “fun” racing. Mom and pop, sure, and the atmosphere is fun, on the water and off. But the racing is the real, undiluted, pure one-design thing. “It’s fierce racing, but it’s not cutthroat racing,” say Gil Samuelson and his wife, Chris, who started Georgia’s first JY fleet at the Augusta Sailing Club. “You don’t have to bend the rules to win.”

And that’s the secret. This unwritten “class code” of keep-it-friendly competition is both the attraction and the backbone of the JY class. JY family values, if you will.

THE FIRST DAY’S TWO RACES ARE breezy, the water bumpy, the fleet jumpy. Plenty of capsizes and

720-degree penalty turns. Of the eventual series challengers to the flying Foersters—Tim Hotchkiss, a local sailor with a collegiate racing background; Paul-Jon Patin, a former Sunfish world champ; Cutter Smith, a JY specialist; and Karl Knauss, a sailing coach for the U.S. Coast Guard Academy—none are going as fast as Mike Keegan (crewed by Steve Neidhardt) and the Foersters.

Keegan’s rig-tuning settings, however, turn out to be, well, wrong. “Everyone’s telling me I’ve got the tuning backwards,” says Keegan, a thirtysomething ex-collegiate racer. Keegan’s got his mast raked forward and his shroud tension middlish, just the opposite of the class’s aft-raked, tight-tension prevailing wisdom. “It’s

Caught in weekend traffic: At the windward mark, husband-wife, father-son, brother-sister, and guy teams come together

more important to ease the jib, because the boat has a small centerboard that’s easy to stall, and to find a lane right off the starting line so you can avoid the ‘pinching lanes’ on the course,” Keegan offers.

The JY15 is so simple and its class rules are so strict that the boats are as even in speed as is humanly possible. This is a boat that will teach you, or reacquaint you (in case you’re rusty), with the importance of the basic sail-trimming and steering skills that will result in boatspeed.

The North Americans was the Foersters’ fifth JY regatta together; at



It's a blast: Chris and Trice Bouzaid (above) and Paul and Carrie Foerster (right) share wedding vows, hiking straps

270 pounds of all-up crew weight (the JY's competitive weight range, from 260 to 320 pounds, is unusually wide), they were among the lightest teams in this windy regatta. "We didn't think we'd have a chance in



heavy air," says Paul, "but upwind, we just eased the sheets."

Foerster's comment is echoed by all the top sailors. Overpowered? Simple. Let out the sails. Easing the sheets, and particularly the jib, in gusts lets the JY jump forward instead of being knocked over. The lesson, of course, is applicable to lots of other dinghy and keelboat classes, but only in a strict one-design are the boat-speed lessons so clear cut.

Thus the two best JY sailtrim tips are: Bypass the mainsheet cleat and hold the mainsheet in your hand. Rig (class legal) 2:1 jibsheet, which allow the crew to hand-hold and play the jib in heavy air and gusty conditions.

The fastest steering techniques are likewise simple but subtle. Upwind, foot off slightly to build speed and increase the efficiency of the centerboard and rudder, and the boat will hold its height (make less leeway). Downwind, use crew weight to minimize rudder movement and its resultant drag; heel to windward to help

the boat bear off, heel to leeward to help it head up.

After the races, after dinner and a raffle of sailing goodies in the tent on the lawn of the Wadawanuck Yacht Club, the top sailors stand up and share their rig-tuning secrets. But they're all, it seems, tuning their rigs a little bit differently and going about the same speed. Which is puzzling, but the absence of mysterious tuning secrets is good news for new entrants into the class. "The boat is so straightforward, it's easy to get into and get up to speed," says Paul-Jon Patin. Patin and crew Felicity Ryan, who typify the level of teamwork at the top of the class, have been racing together for three years. "What it really takes is two people with the same goal, some hard work, and some humility. There are a lot of good sailors in the class."

Good ones, and enthusiastic ones, none of them more charged-up than company president, class sparkplug, and fun-promoter David Eck. Eck's hands-on mission—at regattas he bounces between lifting boats off trailers, helping new sailors tune their rigging, and dispensing parts and advice—is to make JY sailors happy. "What most class associations don't realize is that the top-ten sailors are always going to come back for the next regatta. It's the people in the rear of the fleet who need a reason to keep supporting the class."

To keep everyone coming back, the class association is careful to schedule social events into the regattas and to keep a lid on the competitiveness of the collegiate, one-design dinghy, and keelboat hotshots who enter the class. Chronic screamers and win-at-all-cost types are encouraged to reassess their priorities. In one case, to the relief of class members, David Eck offered to buy one hard-nose's boat back, cash. Hard-nose got the message.

The JY's easy-to-sail, off-the-shelf appeal attracts a large number of family and novice sailors, as well as 40-ish sailors who want to get back into sailing but don't have the time (not with a job, kids, and a house) to devote to tricking out a boat to make it competitive. The class also pulls in sailors who have been just plain turned off by other forms of racing. "After five years of sailing keelboats and dealing with PHRF ratings, I was about to give up on the sport alto-

JY15 Specs



LOA	15'
Beam	5'10"
Weight	325 lbs
Sail area	135 sq ft
Crew	2
Construction	thermoformed plastic, foam, fiberglass
Designer	Rodney Johnstone

Contact JY Sailboats, 5 Colton Road, East Lyme, CT 06333; tel. 860-739-3033, fax 860-739-2905; or JY15 Class Association, Gary Orkney (president), 132 Water Street, Stonington, CT 06378; tel. 860-535-0407, fax 860-535-4819.

gether," says Maryland sailor Charlie Eck. "But this is fun, this makes me feel like a kid again."

STILL, RACING IN A 97-BOAT FLEET (OR a 10-boat fleet) can be stressful, no matter how friendly the skippers of those starboard-tack boats whose bows you're trying to nip in front of. And sometimes, doing it with a family member or loved one can overload more than your scoresheet. Should a husband race with his wife? Should a wife race with her husband?

"We're still married, even though we've been racing together for five years," report John Shanholt and Gail Kern, whose commitment carried them to a creditable fifteenth overall. "My crew and I—we're not married, but we've been together for four years—we've been ready to throw it all in several times," another skipper confesses. "Sometimes I think it'd be easier to race the boat with someone who isn't my significant other. But then we wouldn't work things out, work through our problems."

This was the second JY regatta that my wife, Harriet, and I sailed together. We both had our moments, from moaning and groaning (Harriet, hiking) to peevish snapping (me, after a bad start) to growling "Never again" (both of us, but never in unison) to jubilation, hugs, and a kiss (we won the fourth race). And yes, we will race together again.

Most JY relationships seem to survive the competitive fires, even flourish. The father-and-son teams (most of the boys are 11-ish) are heartening and work to replenish class stocks; son learns starting foibles and tactical failings of baby-boomer father, son takes over helm, son kicks dad off boat. Or, gets his own boat. The Orkneys, father Gary and son Garreth, 16, race each other regularly; this time, dad (seventh) beat prodigy (thirteenth).

Fiftysomething sailors vie for the Masters (over 55) trophy and other rewards. "It's great fun, until you screw up," Chris Bouzaid, former sailmaker and ocean racer turned bluewater cruiser and JY racer, tells the video crew taping the regatta. Bouzaid, who sails with his wife, Trice, explains, "We were carrying out a compulsory weed cleaning near the weather mark and we flipped, went from third to thirtieth. Now we've got to clean the weeds off the top of the mast." The camera pans

up, gets a shot of the seaweed trailing from Bouzaid's Windex wind indicator.

Other Masters race to share the experience with their siblings, like Rodney Johnstone and sister Bobette McCracken (a team whose years of experience add up to something like 117, but that's not for publication), or as a way of introducing young sailors to competition (Tucker Bragdon, a longtime Stonington dinghy-racing advocate, has sailed with over 100 kid-crews).

THE LAST FOUR RACES OF THE CHAMPIONSHIP are sailed in very shifty, 10- to 18-knot winds that skitter off the Connecticut shore and onto the water in unpredictable puffs, streaks, lines, and lulls. Classic heads-up, tack-on-the-puffs stuff, perfect for the eminently roll-tackable JYs. Paul and

off the starting line clean, away from the crowds at the ends, and in a lane with room to sail fast. Keep your head out of the boat. Sail toward, and sail in, the most wind velocity. Stay with the fleet. Stay out of rules situations and tangles with other boats. Don't take flyers that could wipe out your series (the top five boats sailed with such consistency that, even if they'd counted their throwout race, they would have held the same finishing position). And, of course, never give up. The winners' formula, like the boat, is simple.

And the 92 JY teams who finished out of the money, did they have fun? Really? John Niewenhaus and Audrey Wilson have been sailing JYs together for four years. Back in their Sag Harbor, New York, fleet they get 30 boats out for Saturday frostbite races, 15 boats on the line for the Sunday



Carrie Foerster put the series away with a couple more bullets, faltering only once with a capsized on a breezy beat (they recovered to eleventh, their throwout).

The scramble for second place becomes incredibly close. Going into the last race, Tim Hotchkiss (with switch-crews P.J. Schaffer and Hannah Swett), Paul-Jon Patin, and Cutter Smith (crewed by Dave Robison) are within one point of each other. The three trade tacks around the course, and going into the finish line Hotchkiss slips away from Patin and nails a final windshift to take second in the race and series. Patin is third, Smith fourth, and Karl Knauss fifth overall (see results in Sailing News).

The top five boats, by their example, gave an eloquent demonstration of how to sail a big-fleet regatta: Get

Don't look back, 96 boats may be gaining: author Linskey and wife Harriet in first

summer series. They've relegated their racing keelboat to cruising boat; instead of one race and a dozen different boats and ratings, they get six races and 30 identical boats.

This is their third North American championship together, and they wound up forty-first, which was disappointing, because they've done a lot better. But what matters more than results, they say, and what most JY sailors value, are the friends they spend time with at regattas and the activity in their home fleet. That and the quality of the racing. "It's true racing," John says. "All the boats are equal. It's just skill. Period."

