

Semper Fi, Polyphonic perfect in Clearwater Challenge races

By DORAN CUSHING

© St. Petersburg Times, published October 30, 2000

In a mixed field of 47 full-blown racers, racer/cruisers and true cruising boats, Ray Mannix's Semper Fi and Jeff Grossman's Polyphonic were the only boats to post perfect records for the two-day Clearwater Challenge sailed in the Gulf of Mexico over the weekend.

The J/29 Semper Fi took top honors in the spinnaker fleet in Saturday's 27.2-mile distance race, then followed with two wins Sunday in two shorter windward/leeward races to capture top honors in the spinnaker B division.

Another J/29, Nancy's J, skippered by Jay Tyson, finished second in the B division, with Ken Friedman's J/27 Instant Karma placing third.

In the true cruising class, which sailed a 14.6-mile course Saturday and a two-lap, 6-mile triangle course Sunday, Grossman's Skye 51 Polyphonic led the competition to the finish both days.

Despite those flawless performances, the tougher competition may have been at the top of the Spinnaker A division as two of the fastest boats in the region battled on each leg of the three races.

Gordon Schiff's Mumm 36 The Wall didn't win the battle, as Joe Blouin's One-Design 35 Storyville edged it to the finish three times. But Schiff's team won the war, using a 9-second-per-mile handicap to take overall honors for the division.

"It was the most fun sailing I've had around here in a long time," jib trimmer Tim Stodola of The Wall said. "The boats were never far apart, even during the distance race. Both boats have great crew on them.

"We were faster upwind and they were faster downwind, so it was just great racing."

The Wall won both races Sunday. Combined with a third-place finish Saturday, Schiff's team ended the series five points ahead of Storyville. Frank McCarthy's Melges 24 Gang of Four finished with 10 points, tied with Storyville, but dropped to third in the division on a tiebreaker.

Susan Tibbits' Hooks Kelly 34 Grand Illusion finished the non-spinnaker C division two-race series tied with Richard Neal's Soverel 26 Back Off, but Grand Illusion won Sunday's race, winning the tiebreaker and taking top honors in C division for the weekend.

In non-spinnaker D division, Ken Wilus posted a 2-1 record with his Fun 23 Cakewalk for a one-point win over Edward Luscinkas' Lindenburg 22 Some Fun. Luscinkas won the Navigator Trophy for the largest winning margin among the fleet during Saturday's distance race.