



LITTLE BIG

WITH JUST 31 BOATS IN THE FLEET, THE OFFSHORE POWERBOAT ASSOCIATION P...

In some of the best action during the Offshore Powerboat Association World Championships in Orange Beach, Ala., *Pirate Racing* and *Typhoon* raced deck to deck in the Super Vee Light class.



WORLD'S

PROVED THAT BIGGER ISN'T NECESSARILY BETTER AT ITS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS.

BY MATT TRULIO | PHOTOS BY JAMIE RUSSELL



Asked why the Offshore Powerboat Association (OPA) circuit currently stands as the most legitimate series in domestic offshore racing, Ed “Smitty” Smith had to take a moment before responding. Smith, who was leaning on a trailer and savoring the title he’d just claimed in the Super Vee class with his 38-foot Fountain *Wazzup* at the 2010 OPA World Championships in Orange Beach, Ala., needed to swap his hard-core offshore racer hat for his OPA president hat.

“In one way, I think we were successful, and in another, I wonder if it’s just because everyone else has kind of failed,” said Smith, who along with his throttleman (and son) Anthony “Stix” Smith bested Louis

“The Rigger” Giancontieri and Eric Vohrer in *Strictly Business*—a 35-foot Fountain—for the class title. “I wonder if we’re doing the right thing or if everybody else just isn’t doing as good. I’m the guy who’s never happy with anything. I always want to take one step further up the ladder. The fear is that once you get to the top of the ladder that you don’t want to go over the other side.

“I think the biggest asset we have is our team members, who are so easy to work with,” Smith continued. “As long as they keep doing their thing, the series keeps moving along—all I’m doing is guiding it. Our initial goal was to stay in the Northeast and do our own thing. I think the fact that we’ve done the right thing for our »

Above: Brothers Robert and Jim Anselmo had no problem putting together two strong performances in *Bull on the Beach* to win the Class 3 OPA world championship. Below: Led by the bright *GEICO Caveman* Cigarette pace boat, a fleet of race teams prepares for the start of the action in the Gulf of Mexico off the Alabama coast.



teams is why more teams are moving over, and we're going to spread out a bit."

That the Super Vee class had just two entries was emblematic of the 2010 OPA Worlds, at least in the "marquee" classes. Likewise, Super Cat Light was limited to two entries—*Team AMSOIL* and *Infinity*, a pair of Skater 368 catamarans with twin

MAN, WERE THEY RUNNING GOOD—THIS IS THEIR FIRST SEASON OUT IN THE OCEAN



In *Miss GEICO*, a 50-foot Mystic, driver Marc Granet and throttleman Scott Begovich ran unopposed in the Extreme class but still managed to put on a great show for the fans.

HP525EFI engines from Mercury Racing. Had Jimmy Winters and Vinny Rifice not stepped up a class in *Talk 'N Trash*, the Super Cat class also would have been limited to the two Spirit of Qatar Team entries. As for the turbine-powered *Miss GEICO* catamaran in the Extreme class, it ran solo—as it had all year.

Why was there a relatively small turnout for an organization that has 80 registered teams and drew 50 of them to its St. Clair, Mich., event in August? Well, there were several reasons, most notably attrition—OPA raced almost every other weekend this season and that took its toll on the fleet—and the still-sketchy economy.

A lot of OPA members simply couldn't afford the expense of the better part of a week in Orange Beach. Last but not least, the event was canceled and then put back on the schedule thanks to the devastating oil spill earlier in the year, and that made budgeting and planning tough on the teams.

While the truth is that the "big boats" will always capture offshore racing's limelight, OPA's foundation is small-boat "Production" classes filled with old-school, race-till-you-sink competition. That, too, was reflected in the turnout for the Orange Beach event. Though less than half of the Super Vee Light (SVL) fleet—a victim of politics and infighting—showed up for the event, there were still four entries in the class. The other production-based classes reflected similar numbers, with each having at least four entries.

As for the action, it wasn't even close to lacking in either the Friday or Sunday races—like other race organizations, OPA uses a two-race format to determine its world champions. OK, well, almost all of its world champions. This year, the SVL competitors decided to use Friday's race as

an "exhibition" event and make Sunday's race a winner-take-all slugfest.

"They're really a tight group, and they like to do things and make decisions as a class," said OPA representative Ron Polli.

"We just wanted to put on a show on Friday—we were running hard and it was great for the fans to see tight racing," said Randy Schleuss, owner/throttleman of the SVL boat *Typhoon Racing*. "The other thing was that the *Pirate Racing* boat wasn't going to be able to start Friday because of mechanical problems. Because we're all sportsmen, as a class we wanted them to be part of the world championship, and if they didn't start Friday and the race counted, they would have been completely out of it. We all wanted them to race. They put in the effort to get here just like everyone else."

In another example of the fine sportsmanship that is part and parcel of OPA's SVL class (and OPA itself), making Friday's race an exhibition event also cut a break to *Team Octane*, which showed up in Orange Beach with a broken fuel pump.

"It took us a while to figure out what was wrong, but once we did, Bob Teague (throttleman for the *Team AMSOIL* entry) helped us out with an extra fuel pump," >>



With his son Anthony at the wheel, Ed Smith of Brick, N.J., throttled his *Wazzup Fountain* to two wins to earn a Super Vee world championship.

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Owner and driver Bob Mazikowski teamed up with throttleman Travis Lofland to finish second in the Super Vee Light class in the *Time Bandit Phantom*.

said Shelly Sutton, who drives the *Team Octane Phantom* with her husband, Lance, on the throttles.

The class did—as its members were planning—put on a show on Friday that was topped only by its show on Sunday. In front of a 60-plus-boat spectator fleet and thousands of viewers on the beach and hotel balconies, the SVL racers stayed close through all eight of its six-mile laps. But as it had on Friday, *Typhoon* prevailed over *Time Bandit*, which finished second, and *Team Octane*, which took third.

“We got pinched in the first turn, and *Time Bandit* had us for the first lap and a half,” said Schleuss, who drives like a man possessed. “But on the outside leg, we had about a mile an hour or more on them, so we were able reel them in and pass them.

“I was really impressed with Shelly and Lance,” he added. “Man, were they running good—this is their first season out in the ocean.”

Lance Sutton said he and his wife had a ball all season long.

“Two weeks ago we weren’t even going to be able to make it (to Orange Beach), but our sponsor, Performance Boat Brokerage, stepped up and said, ‘You guys are going to the world championships,’” said Lance Sutton, whose home water is Missouri’s Lake of the Ozarks.

Having a lot less fun were Chris Reindl and Nick Osterbrook in *Reindl One Design II* running in Class 6, which proved to be the most wild and wooly class of the weekend. The canopied “bat boat” proved surprisingly strong in Friday’s race, until it

spun hard heading into the fourth turn and got tangled up with the *Cotner Trailers* entry. That left Reindl and Osterbrook dazed and confused—and heavily bruised—and the *Cotner Trailers* boat missing a hefty chunk of its running surface.

“Half a lap later, we felt water on our feet so we brought it in and beached it on the ramp,” said Peter Smith, who drives *Cotner Trailers*. “The damage was pretty bad, but it’s not a total—just a good winter project. We’ll get it ready for next year.”

Gamers to say the least, Reindl and Osterbrook taped the shattered snout of their boat back together and headed out for Sunday’s race, but were soon forced out with a mechanical issue. Mechanical issues also knocked out Friday’s winner, *Wazzup II*, driven by the OPA president’s

other son, Nicholas "Boomer" Smith—yes, most of these guys have nicknames—and throttled by his older brother, Anthony.

That left the door open for the *Akula* Baja piloted by Ben Buffa and his navigator, Adam Rodgers, who traveled out from Michigan for the event. *Akula* won on Friday, and to celebrate, did several donuts around the Turn 4 buoy. Problem was, the course was still hot, meaning boats were still racing on it. Disqualification was not out of the question.

"We're big fans of settling the racing on the water rather than the parking lot," said Ed Smith. "In a normal scenario, I probably would have enforced a penalty, but being that it's the Worlds and the guys put a lot of effort into being here, I used some better judgment, which I normally don't do, and waited until the next day.

"I sat the boy down and had a little talk with him," Smith added, then laughed. "I told him we would tie him to a post and whip him if he ever did anything like that again."

The message took. "We made a mistake not knowing what was going on and doing little donuts," said Buffa, who took the Class 6 championship with another win on

Sunday. "We were trying to put on a show for the folks, but we made a mistake."

Putting on a show is probably the best description of what happened in the Super Cat, Super Cat Light and Extreme classes on both days. Despite a game effort by *Talk 'N Trash*, both Spirit of Qatar Team boats basically raced one another, with famed throttleman Steve Curtis and Sheik Hassan bin Jabor Al-Thani taking top honors in *Spirit of Qatar 96*. *Team AMSOIL* dusted—or perhaps misted—*Infinity* on Friday and Sunday. And *Miss GEICO* toyed with them all. Entertaining for sure, but far from close, competitive racing.

But that didn't mean the racers in those classes found no value in the event.

"It's a shame we didn't have as many people in the class as we did during the season, but we had a great time," Curtis said. "This was really a setup year for us. We had some good racing in different conditions, and the OPA organization has been really hospitable."

Curtis said he's unsure of the Qatar Marine Sports Federation's future plans for the team at this point. He also said that running the OPA season gave him and his teammates a much-needed breather from

the politics—a recurring theme in offshore racing—of UIM (Union Internationale Motonautique) Class 1 competition.

"The UIM has been in meetings and we're going to see if they can sort it out so that it's run by UIM rather than a nation," Curtis added. "If it's run by UIM again, we'll go back. It wasn't being run properly. It was disorganized and it was dangerous."

Like Curtis, *Miss GEICO* driver Marc Granet said he would have preferred to have some competition. Lacking that, he said his goal with throttleman Scott Begovich was to put on a show.

"That's what we've done all year," Granet said. "We take it very seriously. And the fans here, like our fans have been all year, are so appreciative. This is really for the fans."

For Teague, owner of the *Team AMSOIL* catamaran—AMSOIL not only sponsors his boat but stepped up as the title sponsor for the event—the venue itself was especially compelling.

"I think this should be the location for the world championships, period," Teague said. "It's a nice area, the people are nice and it's not overly expensive. It just has a good feel compared to dumping money in other places." »



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Bob Teague and Paul Whittier earned another OPA Super Cat Light championship in the *Team AMSOIL Skater*.

That sentiment seemed to be shared by almost everyone who raced at the 2010 OPA World Championships in Orange Beach. OPA president Smith said the event “definitely” will be on the organization’s schedule for 2011.

According to Smith, it’s also likely that OPA will reduce its event schedule next year so that there are three to four weeks between the last race of the season and the world championships.

“I think the organization had a great year,” he said. “We had our ups and downs, but even in a tough economy the teams made it happen. We would have liked to have had a few more participants here, but I think we had a good turnout given all the conditions.

“Going into next year, we’re using the television program that GEICO has put together, which will be airing in the next couple of months, to sell sponsorships,” he continued. “I have some pretty good sponsorships in line for next year. The biggest ticket is that I need to get the prize money up into six digits. That will help bring teams here, and help them to be able to afford what we’re doing.” **PB**

OPA WORLD CHAMPIONS

EXTREME: *Miss GEICO*, Marc Granet (D), Scott Begovich (T)

SUPER CAT: *Spirit of Qatar 96*, Sheik Hassan bin Jabor Al-Thani (D), Steve Curtis (T)

SUPER CAT LIGHT: *Team AMSOIL*, Paul Whittier (D), Bob Teague (T)

SUPER VEE: *Wazzup*, Anthony Smith (D), Ed Smith (T)

SUPER VEE LIGHT: *Typhoon*, Colby Lawrence (D), Randy Schleuss (T)

CLASS 1: *Lightning Jacks*, Josh Wall (D), John Wooley (T)

CLASS 3: *Bull on the Beach*, Robert Anselmo (D), James Anselmo (T)

CLASS 4: *Formula Racing*, Trent Weyant (D), Devin Weyant (T)

CLASS 5: *Adrenaline Rush*, Doug Grimaldi (D), Jake Jenkins (T)

CLASS 6: *Akula*, Adam Rodgers (D), Ben Buffa (T)



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