

RS K6 – International Regatta – New York

Seven UK crews, seventeen US K6's to race, breeze between ten and twenty five knots, twenty degree sunshine, fifteen races in three days, a rugby world cup final, and all within sight of the Manhattan sky line...quite a cocktail.

The American Yacht Club chose the K6 as it's new one design dinghy class after a rigorous selection process. You'd expect rigour from a club that has a long history of America's Cup involvement among its members, and has a string of the 2007 launched New York Yacht Club Swan 42's sitting on it's mooring trots. The rigour paid off with seventeen new boats in a season, and real pedigree in the fleet – super-yacht designer Bill Tripp (who penned the achingly gorgeous 143ft Wally 'Esence' amongst others) and Drake Sparkman (son of Drake Sparkman Snr from the legendary S&S design partnership) are both owners.



If people needed any extra incentive to make the trip, Jim Wilson (AYC fleet captain) all but guaranteed decent UK interest by having the three day event coincide with two dollars to the pound AND half term. Even the airlines played game, with Zoom offering return flights for just over £100.

Proceedings kicked-off on the Thursday with 'cocktails at 6.30pm' and a chance to meet the US fleet and AYC flag officers. The AYC is a seriously impressive club: manicured lawns; seven tennis courts; a swimming pool; enough boat models and pictures to warrant museum status; and a building that would feel right at home on a world ranking golf course. Other than the boats, there was surprisingly little that reminded you of Queen Mary...

Friday dawned overcast but warm, and a decent 15 knot breeze blowing. To get as much learning out of the event as possible and make things more animated at the bar afterwards, the first day's racing involved swapping UK / US crews. It had the desired effect, and despite the obvious language obstacles ("you say booeey, we say bouy"...), the racing on the water was tight. Race Officer Glenn Morrison and his team laid the perfect windward / leeward course and true to his promise, made sure there was precious little 'snack time' on the water, with six one lap races in quick succession. If you were one of the Brits who'd watched two films on the flight over rather than catching some zeds, you were starting to feel 'in trouble' by the end of race three (or at least in need of shopping, as Georgie Smith suggested). But doing 15 knots downhill in perfect control with a relative 'stranger' either on the helm or on the kite ensured there were big smiles all around as the fleet came back ashore.

Saturday saw brilliant blue skies, a drop more wind and crews repatriated. Glenn again managed six one lap races back-to-back, which made starting bang on the line critical. There were the inevitable OCS's, but rather than waiting until getting ashore to find out, boats had VHF for Glenn to politely ask them to restart. What the UK boats were perhaps learning most was just how shifty Long Island Sound can be. From the southwest, the gusts hit the water from above and scatter out in a fan shape, and in very specific bands. The good news was that if you'd started poorly, there were several chances up and particularly downwind to make amends. What was noticeable however, now that 'points meant prizes', was that there as a decidedly more 'take no prisoners' attitudes at the windward and leeward marks. However, a combination of beer and the Rugby World Cup final on the big screen ashore ensured that the 'special relationship' between UK and the US lived on. The entertainment was rounded-off Saturday evening with a Mount Gay sponsored bar and a talk from America Cup Race Officer in chief, Peter Reggio – what he doesn't know or think about the Cup is not worth knowing.

Sunday was warm, sunny and a lot less breeze. Glenn squeezed in three very shifty races before getting the fleet ashore for a 14.00 prize giving with AYC Commodore Mike Bruno, and cars back to JFK for the overnight flight home. The racing had been much tighter than some had predicted: three points separated the first three boats after nine races, five boats had recorded bullets, and there were two UK and two US crews in the top four boats. In the end, top of the pile were David Hitchcock and Ian Nicholson (HISC), the UK National K6 Champions who looked remarkably relaxed for two blokes who had wives and teenage kids loose in New York with their credit cards. Very close runners-up were Ian Robson and Sandy Johnson (Aldeburgh YC) who pipped Stu Saffer and Jim Wilson (American YC, and blistering downwind speed) by one point for the second place.

Net a very special cocktail, that leaves the inevitable headache of how on earth to host the return leg next year....!

- 1st David Hitchcock, Ian Nicholson (HISC)
- 2nd Ian Robson, Sandy Johnson (Aldeburgh YC)
- 3rd Stu Saffer, Jim Wilson (American YC)
- 4th Don Dowd, Andy Giglia (American YC)
- 5th Fraser Elms, Georgie Smith (HISC)
- 6th Peter Kirkby, Richard Barker (Queen Mary SC)
- 7th Jonathan Calascione, Alex Locke (Queen Mary SC)
- 8th Bill Tripp, Drake Sparkman (American YC)
- 9th Doug McKeige, Tom Gosch (American YC)
- 10th Marshall Saffer, Scott Florio (American YC)



Well, you wouldn't want to get your feet wet...



Left hand side looks like it's going to pay...



David and Ian find Big Macs pay off...



"We only hike for spectators and photographs..."



K6's and a hazy Manhattan sky line



Georgie to Fraser.....
"can we go shopping yet?"



AYC fleet Captain Jim Wilson
and Stu Saffer show how it's
done downwind... (with
Manhattan in the background)



...and then how to take a bullet



Terry and Drake Sparkman
(Vice Commodore AYC)



David and Ian feeling
underdressed in the company of
AYC Commodore Mike Bruno



A happy crew, with Photographer in Chief, Paul Young



'Supersize' glass ware