



SAIL!

Event Draws Nation's Best Skippers to DeGray Lake

Original article from The Arkadelphian.com by Joel Phelps and re-printed here with permission.




Joel Phelps
Founder & Editor

arkadelphian
CONNECTED TO
YOUR COMMUNITY **com**

 arkadelphian.com

 Arkadelphian

 (501) 304-2134

 P.O. Box 13
Arkadelphia, AR 71923

IRON MOUNTAIN MARINA — The nation's cream of the crop in sailboat enthusiasts convened this week at DeGray Lake for a highly anticipated racing event spanning six days of fun.

The Catalina 22 National Regatta attracted sailors from a number of different states, as far west as Vancouver, Washington, and as far east as Pensacola, Florida. Each morning the captains and their mates would undock at the Iron Mountain Marina and motor to the lake's main channel for the races. Motorists passing along the Highway 7 dike caught a glimpse of some colorful action as the vessels zig-zagged the course.

“ This is a really big deal in the sailing world.”

— Harriott Boddie, Shreveport, Louisiana

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Aboard one of the four or so house-barges whose captain is tasked with setting buoys for the course, *The Arkadelphia* had the pleasure of watching the action up close. On the surface, sailboating is a fascinating subculture of jovial hobbyists who have mastered an unusual lexicon of jargon, yet those in the know are eager to explain their hobby and the race (or at least try) to those willing to soak it in.

Sailboat racing is a gentleman's sport, but one that these racers take seriously enough to travel across the country to compete in regattas. Its rules can be confusing for the uninitiated; factor in terms like spinnaker, jib and healing, and sailboat racing can be downright mind-boggling.

What the Catalina 22 Regatta really entails, however, is camaraderie among a group of people who have two things in common: a love for water sports and an admiration for a particular style of a 22-foot-long sailboat. "We're all friends," said Chuck Atkinson, an Arkadelphia resident who's been racing for the past six years. "I've made friends with people all across the United States."

This year's national event registered 26 sailboats. Nearly 100 people, most of them from out of state, were involved in organizing and racing. The Iron Mountain Yacht Club has been host to several regional events that draw in sailors from neighboring states for the Hog Wild Regatta. "This [national regatta] is a really big deal in the sailing world," said Harriott Boddie, who drove in from Shreveport, Louisiana, to work event hospitality. Boddie owns a sailboat and knows how to sail, and laughs as she admits she knows "next to nothing" about the complexity of racing.

For 50 years the Catalina 22 nationals have been held at popular aquatic destinations throughout the U.S. The 2023 national event, which happened ahead of the Memorial Day holiday, was the first national regatta to be held at DeGray Lake.

Among the several who vacationed at the lake this week were the Weist family from Wisconsin. Their teen-aged son, Eric Weist, is an aspiring photographer whose work was recently published on the cover of a sailing magazine. The young Weist is also a wizard of sailing know-how and terminology.

Another sailor, Mike Lindstrom, drove in from the Houston, Texas, area. Lindstrom races every opportunity he gets: "Just about every weekend," he said, tinkering with his sails' pulley system ahead of Thursday morning's races. He said DeGray presents a unique challenge for sailing, as the rolling foothills surrounding the lake often create variables in wind direction.

The course is set so that sailors face the wind at the starting point. Wind is the ultimate factor in how long each race takes to complete: a good wind could propel the vessels along the course in as little as 20 minutes, while poor wind conditions could stretch a race out to a couple of hours.

As the racers maneuver their vessels just inches past the "windward buoy" situated at the midway turning point of the race, each crew (typically consisting of a captain and two mates) works swiftly to adjust the sails for the course back to the start. It looks physically challenging, but the retired Atkinson assures it isn't. "You're pulling ropes and lines and working the wind," he said, "but it's not terribly difficult."

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

At the end of each day of racing, the sailors would dock their boats and eagerly await the results. Scoring is akin to other sports like golf, where participants aim for the lowest score. Sailors who finish in first place get 1 point; the farther down the line the racer is, the more points he racks up. Atkinson, the Arkadelphia sailor, would go on to finish 12th overall in the Gold Fleet, his best score of 9 coming in the sixth round.

The top winner, Keith Bennett, was presented the “perpetual trophy” which recognizes winners dating to 1973. The winner doesn’t take the trophy home, and there is no big monetary gain from winning the nationals: “It’s all for bragging rights,” chuckled Atkinson as he chatted with fellow sailors at the marina following hours spent on the water.



National regatta winners Keith Bennett and Doug Thome hold the trophy at a banquet held Thursday at DeGray Lake Resort State Park. | Photo courtesy of Eric Weist / Weist Photography

“The number one rule in sailboat racing,” explained another, “is don’t hit another boat.” There would be a few occasions during this week’s races when boats would bump into each other — one even bumped the “committee” tug boat, where the officiant views the race. Penalties for bad behavior in sail racing include stopping the course to sail in a circle once or twice. However, it’s not frowned upon to “steal wind” from another, a process wherein one sailor positions his sails in front of another vessel to block wind and slow his opponent’s course.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

After a day on the water, the racers ate at local restaurants and lodged at local inns. The man responsible for organizing the whole thing, Magnolia veterinarian and IMYC member Ron Nash, said the national regatta is a boon to the local tourism economy. Hosting an event like the national Catalina 22 offers “recognition” to the area. “Arkansas has a lot to offer,” he said. “There’s gorgeous scenery here, great fishing and hunting, all those things, and we need to be proud of it.”

Photographs by Eric Weist



WEIST PHOTOGRAPHY

Eric Weist of Weist Photography was the official photographer of the 2023 Catalina 22 National Championship Regatta. Eric has made available his gallery of hundreds of high quality photographs that are accessible from the Catalina 22 National Sailing Association website. You are encouraged to view the pictures and order prints directly from Weist Photography. Eric crewed on “Lake Shark” (#14267) in the Silver Fleet.

Mark your calendars!

2024 Catalina 22 National Championship Regatta

June 8 to 13

Hosted by the North Star Sail Club and Catalina 22 Fleet 130

Anchor Bay / Lake St. Clair, Michigan