



The magnificent fightback

After the hurricanes few thought that organisers would even run most of their 2018 regattas, let alone so successfully. Sailors and locals worked together to rebuild, because when you love something, you fight for it

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In late 2017 hearts sank for millions of people who know and love sail in the Caribbean as they watched the desperate news roll in hour after hour. Three major hurricanes tore an ugly path of destruction through the Leeward Islands during September and October. Two of them, Hurricanes *Irma* and *Maria*, both reached the highest measurable wind rates, revolving up to a level of Category 5 in strength. Those who observed the satellite meteorology were shocked to see the deeply-distressing images of three major hurricanes progressing in a merciless line through the Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. The sight of the tiny islands of Barbuda and St. Barts, clearly identifiable and visible in the eye of these monstrous systems, was genuinely heartbreaking.

Warm and reliable breeze, gin-clear seas and a vibe that's always relaxing.
That's why so many competitive sailors – of every level of experience – return to the Caribbean circuits year after year... This is the glorious 42m Frers ketch *Rebecca* gliding past Necker Island at the top of Virgin Gorda in the BVI

Considering how much catastrophic damage and devastation was caused to the civil and marine infrastructure in some areas, and considering how this destruction occurred only a matter of weeks before the opening of the Caribbean sailing season, one was left in little doubt that the CSA (Caribbean Sailing Association) regatta year would be somewhat different in 2018, to say the least. How could the various regatta organisers even hope to arrange racing in the face of such overwhelming logistical challenges? The season was different and in a number of ways. Some events were indeed cancelled and there can be no doubt that a number of vessels chose to follow a different agenda during the 2018 season, excluding their usual Caribbean participation.

However given the monumental odds against, few would have believed early in 2018 that there would be such a supreme effort made to rebuild the infrastructure so quickly in the many islands affected. With notable exceptions (eg the RORC Caribbean 600), the numbers of entrants were down in many regattas as expected – and the massive devastation across the British and US Virgin Islands meant that being ready in time was an impossible task for the organisers of sailing events around those islands, forcing some of them to cancel. But, astoundingly, the majority of the events did go ahead as planned.

The early Caribbean regattas all took place in the unaffected islands of Barbados, Grenada and Antigua as usual. In Barbados the newly-formatted Barbados Sailing Week

delivered an excellent mix of coastal races including the Mount Gay Round Barbados Race, from which the series originated, and the Ocean Passage to Antigua, back in time for the Super Yacht Challenge. This was quickly followed by Grenada Sailing Week, allowing for the vaguely northerly sail for the many race charter and Caribbean boats that form the heart of this regatta. The fleet is a tight 50 boats, which means the event retains a warm, friendly sailor-centric spirit and a wonderfully authentic old-time West Indian feeling to the occasion.

History progressed the appetite for certain types of regattas in the Caribbean that one could seriously consider of note in an international sense. Participating numbers were as low as 30 entrants. Thirty years ago there were only seven events and 20 years ago probably only nine or 10 that would qualify as international in stature, but with participating entrants as high as 250 boats. Today with 13 recognised events and a wide cross section of international offerings including two world class offshore races, there has never been more choice or diversity for those who love racing among these islands. The CSA can take enormous credit for being an organisation that is associated with an international and unified programme that is quite simply unmatched anywhere else in the world.

Antigua Sailing Week is now half a century old and many will still recall the schooner races up and down the islands. But Antigua Sailing Week remains the founding father of the Caribbean regattas – and the

elements of that are what we still see today in most if not all of the Caribbean programmes. A competitive edge out on the course, but always plenty of fun in the sun when the racing's done. Over the years, new events have grown (and then shrunk) and other new events have been established, some of which have then either gradually disappeared, completely changed in structure or moved to another venue such as the first Nauter's Swan event originally held in Antigua in early 1980s – now sailed in the BVI.

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In 2018 the variety of vessels participating at Antigua Sailing Week was as broad and diverse as it could possibly be in any regatta of some 120 boats. Many of the class splits between boats in the two divisions were hard choices but the organisers managed to satisfy most competitors – addressing many requests and making class and rating changes almost up to the last minute before the start of racing. As an example of their success, in one class there was a 40-year-old Bruce Farr IOR design battling for line and handicap honours against a two-year-old JPK 1080 and a new Sunfast 3600. Many of their races were won or lost



The Farr 65 *Spirit of Isis* crosses ahead of the Swan 51 *Northern Child* at the start of the day's racing during Antigua Sailing Week. Chartering means that many more sailors can get the chance to experience racing in the Caribbean (once you're hooked, it seems pretty certain that you're really hooked...) destination parties, a layday and a party at the end of the regatta that are not part of the racing programme. So boats can cruise to and moor at those events if they so choose – it's proved to be a very successful format.

Herein lies a significant equation that has to be addressed by all Caribbean regatta organisers. How do they adapt to the changing needs of the regatta format? How do they accommodate any new aspirations, including those of owners who now bring vessels with professional crews, while still satisfying participants of long standing who are perfectly happy with the existing formats? After various changes and some undeniably lean years, the race committee and the organisers at the 2018 Antigua Sailing Week have shown a beacon of light in the way a regatta should be run in the Caribbean – and they proved the CSA rule to be a singularly-useful tool in their endeavour.

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Antigua 360 Race
www.antigua360.com

Hosted by the Admiral's Inn and Antigua Rigging in association with National Parks Antigua, the seventh edition of the Superyacht Challenge Antigua is now a well-established superyacht event. Up to 15 superyachts (80ft and over) enjoy a celebration of sailing solely for the pleasure of owners, their guests and crew. The magnificent fleet enjoy four days of spectacular racing, governed by the ORCsy Handicap Rule with daily pursuit races along the stunning south coast of Antigua.

The Prize Giving Party will be held at the historic Admiral's Inn, Nelson's Dockyard.

The racing is very competitive but dedicated to pure fun afloat and ashore, where all participants enjoy a relaxed party atmosphere, free from commercial endorsements.

Early entry encouraged.

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