

LASER REBOUND AT BRITANNIA YACHT CLUB

It's a breezy Wednesday night in September, the days are getting shorter and the water colder but there are still 20 plus boats on the line for the extended fall racing series at Britannia Yacht Club (BYC). Since the early days of the Laser, BYC has been home to Olympians, World Champions, including Al Clark and Andy Roy and current rising stars such as Justin Norton.

Many Laser sailors have asked how the Britannia Yacht Club (BYC) in Ottawa, Ontario Canada grew its Laser Masters fleet to as many as 26 boats on the line for its Wednesday night racing in just four short years. BYC's history with the Laser goes back to the days when BYC member Bruce Kirby designed the boat and asked all his buddies at the club to buy the little car topper for \$ 450.00. During the heydays of the 1980's and 90's the fleet was strong. However, fleet numbers dwindled until only a hardy few remained. Bill Fuller was one of those hardy few. He never stopped racing around the beer cans and was a huge supporter and facilitator of the fleet's resurgence.

In 2014, Chris Klotz, after a 25-year hiatus from the boat, decided to head to Kingston for the Laser North Americans in his old 'cottage' Laser. The first thing Chris noticed was the Monday Mount Gay Rum night did not exist anymore. What's up with that? The event turned out to be a harrowing one for Chris, not least because his old tub almost sank! Undeterred and full of renewed enthusiasm he came back to BYC, bought a new boat, and started racing with Bill in a tiny fleet that often included just themselves and a few juniors. They were then joined by John Brooman, who heard through Bruce Kirby's nephew, Dave Brown, that his old racing foe Chris was back in the boat and decided to join in the fun the following year. Chris and John attended Junior Club together in the mid 80's and raced Lasers in Silver Sail.

With the Laser World Championships in Kingston on the horizon and noticing some interest from old and new Laser sailors in the area, club management was approached and a one-time incentive was struck that offered Laser Master sailors the opportunity to keep their boat at the club and join in the racing and camaraderie for a vastly reduced fee. Word spread amongst the sailing community and things started to sprout. Sailors started joining the fleet including members from different clubs in the area (helped by the reciprocal sailing arrangement between the clubs).

One of the guys decided a dedicated Facebook group was needed to promote the fleet and to allow sailors to instantly communicate with one another. This has grown to be one of the most active Laser pages on Facebook, with plenty of non-BYC members also following all the buzz. You can check it out yourself – search for the “Ottawa Laser Sailors/Masters” group. We share ideas and if anyone is going for a sail, they post it online, giving others an opportunity to join. There are presently 90 members of the group!

The resurgence has led to great racing every Wednesday night, where the rules allow for as many races as we can fit in before the light fades. We focus on short, snappy races of 20-30 minutes to keep the fleet tight and the racing close. With 25+ Lasers on a typically short line it's always competitive but always with a friendly and supporting spirit. Success of those at the back is as celebrated as those at the front as we meet for beer and food after the racing, overlooking the Lac Lac Deschênes sunset.

To add some cache to the Laser class at BYC Chris came up with an amazing idea for a new type of regatta. He donated a beautiful crystal glass and called it the 'Britannia Cup' where competitors race for cash and the cup. With everyone's busy schedules it was thought that a Friday evening and possibly a Saturday morning regatta would provide for some great racing, encourage many to come out, while keeping the weekend free for family. With an early gun at 4:30pm the intention is to run 6-8 short races. Competitors put \$30 in the Britannia Cup, which is then split amongst the top five finishers on a sliding scale. To encourage the juniors their entry is free (subject to revision as they are rapidly becoming faster than the "old 'n' bolds"!)

We held the first Britannia Cup in 2016 and Justin Norton, a club member and Canadian Olympic team hopeful took the inaugural honours. There are no SI's and gentlemen's racing rules apply. A keg awaits the thirsty sailors as they land at the dock and everyone de rigs and puts on their finest Blue Blazer for an informal presentation at the flag pole which is followed by the Champions dinner. The Britannia Cup has proven to be a brilliant addition to regatta fun. We are planning to host the Britannia Cup in 2018 on the Friday night before the Masters Inlands Championship's (formerly known as the No-Coast championships) being hosted at BYC on June 9-10, 2018 and everyone is welcome!

Many non-Laser sailing members now come down to the club on Wednesdays just to watch the Lasers fleet action, which is usually close to shore and to soak up the atmosphere. The club and the sailors are thrilled with the resurgence at Britannia and we look to host more regattas in the coming years. The success of this effort came down to a few key sailors asking the cooperation of the club management to get creative and help start something new/old and exciting. Britannia looks forward to hosting all Laser sailors for many years to come.

Team BYC