

The Ghost comes back to life

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BBYRA

OCEAN GATE — It was the worst kind of start for Ghost yesterday afternoon. About three minutes before its race, the A Cat, along with seven other in her fleet, sat in a line along a windy Barnegat Bay, crowded into a football field of width. The race was unlike all others, a start at anchor, something Bill Fortenbaugh and company, navigating Ghost, had never done before.

Fortenbaugh, a professor of Greek philosophy at Rutgers, learned an important lesson in those minutes before the race. He noticed that all the other boats had tied their back stays to their side stays so when the mainsail was hoisted, the stays wouldn't get in the way. By then, though, it was too late for Ghost in this Barnegat Bay Yacht Racing Association event.

When her mainsail rose, it was caught in the backstays. So the crew lowered it and raised it, then had to lower and raise it again before getting under way.

"We were all calm and didn't yell at each other," crew member Bev Vienckowski said.

As three other vessels surged ahead, Ghost finally got up to speed. Unlike the lead boat, the Mary Ann, which was reefed, Ghost took the wind full on, soon overtaking everyone on the second upwind leg to win the race and the Beck Crabbe Memorial Trophy.

Standing on dock of the Ocean Gate Yacht Club afterward, Fortenbaugh explained that the Mary Ann's decision to reef may have cost her the race.

"It was a poor decision," he said. "There wasn't enough wind."

Fortenbaugh's "select weapon" yesterday was in the form of Rich Miller of Seaside Park, a bear of a man who lifted the anchor.

"You need someone big," Fortenbaugh said. "A 250-pounder."

But Ed Vienckowski, Bev's husband and another crew member, credited Fortenbaugh's deft sailing skills for pulling off the win.

"He sailed a great race, despite our efforts (at the start)," Ed Vienckowski said. "It was pretty windy at the start, and we're glad we didn't put a reef in."

And not only for potential loss of speed. How about loss of crew. Bev Vienckowski said as she gazed at another A Cat, Tamwock, she saw the crew untying the reef line.

"I saw this yellow life jacket climbing along the boom and the next thing I saw was a yellow jacket in the water," Vienckowski said. However, she added, Tamwock's crew quickly scooped the person back on board.

Ghost had her measure of misfortune in the season opener. High winds and rough seas capsized the newly-

built boat; it took several other vessels to tow her to safety and then finally right her. Amazingly, there was no damage, and Ghost has performed at the top of her class since; she is now in first place for the season.

Yesterday's race of starting at anchor stems back to 1941, when Lotus of the Island Heights Yacht Club won the competition. Yesterday, Lotus, which still competes with owner Steven Brick of Island Heights Yacht Club, finished third. The tradition was started in memory of Beck Crabbe, a long-time BBYRA sailor.

At the awards ceremony, Fortenbaugh, an animated and talkative man, held the trophy, a glass-encased wooden replica of the Bat, another competitive A Cat. It was Beck Crabbe's family who built the Bat, now owned by Michael Frankovich and Robert Lostrum of the Island Heights Yacht Club.

And what lesson did the professor learn yesterday? "Next year," he said, laughing, "we practice."

■ Other trophy winners include Laura Dunn, Bay Head Yacht Club, the Helen Drexel Yohn Trophy for Blue Jays; and Bob Adams, Bay Head Yacht Club, the Marshall Trophy for Sanderlings.