

The duckboat is alive and doing well, thank you

Scratch another name off the endangered boat list. The duckboat of Barnegat Bay, a sprightly single-sailed 12-footer popular in years past as a youth trainer by clubs on the bay, has made a strong comeback.

"Everybody here has sailed a duckboat," Peter Kellogg said, as he viewed the assembled crowd of sailors and the flock of little boats a week ago Friday at the Mantoloking Yacht Club. It was the "Duckboat Worlds," a tongue-in-cheek description of the annual bay championship for the little boats. Of course they exist nowhere else, so by default it was the world championship.

The flock totaled 52 boats, many restored to gleaming perfection. Thanks to Kellogg, a stockbroker with a love for the bay's boating heritage, \$5,000 was on the line for charity for entrants deemed to be in Bristol, or tip-top, condition. The money went to a charity chosen by the entrant, or, in the case of youngsters, to the junior sailing programs of their respective clubs.

For the junior entrants, Kellogg supplied duckboats for the youngsters to restore. The results were impressive, resulting in entrants such as the Island Heights Yacht Club's "King Quacker," on the floorboards of which were the handprints and



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names of the some dozen youngsters who worked on the boats.

There were the Beach Ducks, a team of teenage boys from Point Pleasant Beach High School, who proudly bore the name of their team on their red shirts and used the proceeds to fund their surf club. The Ocean Gate Yacht Club juniors flew their duck and crossbones flag. The duck had an eyepatch.

The duckboats were popular from the 50's through about 1990, when they were supplanted by the Optimist Dinghy as the youth trainer of choice. Since then, more and more of the little boats languished in garages and sheds and under tarps. This year's pot of gold put hands busily to work sanding, scraping, painting and caulking, and produced a lot of winners. The disbursement totaled \$178,600.

The duckboat is a derivative of the Barnegat Bay sneakbox, a shallow-draft skimming-kind-of boat developed in the 19th century to carry bird hunters over the bay shallows. They are of unique planked construction. The duckboat version carries a single Marconi-rigged sail, rather than the gaff rig of the traditional sneakbox.

Judges for the event were Bob O'Brien, boat curator at the Toms River Seaport; Runyon Colie, a veteran Barnegat Bay sailor, and Ted Beaton, retired from Beatons, a boatyard that had built many of the duckboats.

Criteria included watertight integrity, varnish work, floorboards and bilges, overall fit and finish and how the boat names were affixed.

"Many of the kids never came in contact with a wooden boat before," O'Brien said. "Now they can appreciate the way it was, when everybody had a wooden boat. It was a very different summer experience for the kids."

Part of the fun of Barnegat Bay sailboat racing is that it is for all ages.

Connie Pilling began sailing a duckboat when her children did, and the 74-year-old skipper is still at it. She finished 17th overall in the day's racing.

"I'm too old to sail them, but I do it anyway," she said.

Leigh Kempton, 14, this year's national Optimist champion, sailed with Sarah Mease, 13. How did a duckboat compare with an Optimist, she was asked.

"It's a little different to sail, a lot slower," she said. However, she and Sarah sailed fast enough to win the junior division.

Overall racing winner was Russell Lucas of the Bay Head Yacht Club.

Regatta roundup

Thomas Tullo of the Toms River Yacht Club won the New Jersey State Optimist Championship Monday and Tuesday at the Surf City Yacht Club. He was followed by teammates Pat Curran, second, and Todd Hawkins, thirds. The racers saw one day of light wind and one day of medium. Competitors came from as far away as Ireland and Bermuda.

Brent Barbehenn of Moorestown won six out of seven races to take the Jet 14 National Championship last weekend at the Severn Sailing Association in Annapolis. Barbehenn sailed with his daughter, Tara, 12.

The Atlantic Highlands Yacht Club hosts its annual Blue Water Regatta Saturday and Sunday, part of the New Jersey Ocean Racing Conference for racing-cruising boats. J/24 crews will also race at the regatta as part of their Garden State Parkway Series.

The Toms River Rotary Club holds its annual Sail fest Saturday, which will include racing for A-cats and racing-cruising boats out of the Island Heights Yacht Club. Racing begins at noon and can be viewed along River Avenue in Island Heights. The event includes craft and food vendors available into the evening.

The Hunterdon Sailing Club will host the Millard Fillmore Regatta for Force Five sailors Sept. 17. The Force Five is a 14-foot single-sail, single-handed dinghy.

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