

Sports & Recreation

Superyachts compete in first VI event

By **TODD VANSICKLE**
tvansickle@bvibeacon.com

Caribbean Superyacht Regatta and Rendezvous organiser Tony Harris, CEO of Boat International Media, was watching the start of a race on Friday afternoon near Necker Island on a small motorboat.

"As far as courses go, it doesn't get any better than this," he said to two other people who were on board.

It was the inaugural event, which was staged at the North Sound Yacht Club and Oil Nut Bay beach club in Virgin Gorda.

Twelve motor-yachts and 10 sailboats participated in the three-day event. All of the boats had to be at least 24 metres to qualify for the regatta. Some sailboats had as many as 20 to 30 race crewmembers.

Yacht Club Costa Smeralda organised the racing events.

"They are the best in the world," Mr. Harris said. "They have run more world championship sailing events than any other team in the world."

He added that the race organisers made a lot of preparations prior to the event to set courses throughout the territory. A total 12 courses were created to give organisers "plenty of options" depending on weather conditions. Racing took place around islands throughout the territory. One race was held each day, and lasted about four to five hours.



Photo: TODD VANSICKLE

Superyachts see page 38

Superyacht *Twizzle* starts a race on Friday during the Caribbean Superyacht Regatta and Rendezvous in North Sound.



The right solutions to help
grow your business.

Just ask.

bvi.scotiabank.com/smallbusiness

Small Business Banking



Superyachts: 22 participate in first event

Continued from page 40

"As it happens, we have had near perfect weather," Mr. Harris said. "It has been a dream for us and makes it very easy for the race committee."

Despite the event being in its first year, Mr. Harris said the regatta attracted "the very best superyachts in the world."

Twizzle, Zafira, Lady B and *Kokomo* were among the top competitors. Most of the new yachts were competing against each other for the first time.

"It's fantastic to see and very exciting for the owners to see how their new boats are going to rate against each other," Mr. Harris said.

The boats are handicapped by the internationally recognised IRC system, which determines starting positions in a pursuit format. Either the fastest boat starts first or last, the rest of the fleet then starts in two-minute intervals.

After the start, spectators in motor-yachts or inflatable ribs followed the action, including North Sound resident Sir Richard Branson, who owns *Mosquito* and Necker islands.

"It's three days of racing, and three days of cruising and activities for the motor-yacht owners," Mr. Harris said.

The organiser said the event was unique, because "nobody has ever did a regatta and rendezvous together." Despite hosting events around the world, the Caribbean proved to be a challenge.

"It is pretty complex, because we have two sets of events going on simultaneously for the sailboat owners and the motor-yacht owners," Mr. Harris said.

On Friday, as sailboats headed to the starting line near Necker Island, motor-yacht guests dressed as pirates and participated in a "treasure hunt" activity, which took place on various islands and finished at Oil Nut Bay.

A Caribbean event has been in the making for the past four years. It came to fruition when Mr. Harris met David Johnson, the venue owner.

"All of our events are high quality," Mr. Harris said. "We aim to be the very best in our field. The



Photo: TODD VANSICKLE

Crewmembers prepare for a race, that would take them around Virgin Gorda on Friday afternoon.

first thing we start with is the location. What we look for is: Beautiful cruising grounds; and here with the natural topography of the islands. In my opinion, it is the finest cruising in the whole Caribbean."

Mr. Harris and his wife have been coming to the Virgin Islands for the past 17 years. He has competed in the BVI Spring Regatta a couple of times and was part of a winning crew.

"I think we were Sunsails first bareboat customer in the BVI," Mr. Harris said. "We know the area really well."

Other areas the organiser takes into account are protected waters, beautiful scenery and safety and security.

"The BVI offers all these things," Mr. Harris said.

A superyacht is classified as being 24-metres in length, is privately owned and has a professional crew, according to Mr. Harris.

The winner of the event will have their names placed on a cup that will remain at the NSYC. The cup was crafted by the Queen's silversmith, Garrards — the same creators of the America's Cup.

"The boats will compete for it every year," Mr. Harris said.

Virgin Islands resident Mark Stephenson competed aboard the 138-foot winning superyacht.

"Racing on *Hanuman* in the inaugural BVI Superyacht Regatta was unlike anything I've previously experienced," Mr. Stephenson said. "I've raced on other bigger boats, but none that came close to the sailing power of this J-Class, which is really a true superyacht and an exquisitely crafted museum piece."

He added that the experience was enriched with the opportunity to sail with the professional Puma Racing team, which has won multiple Volvo Ocean Races as well as several America's Cup Challenges. The team was led by the well-known skipper Ken Reid.

"I really learned a lot from them over the course of four days," Mr. Stephenson said.

He said that each crewmember had specific tasks to perform, along with several group efforts on the hoists and sail drops, which often involved as many as 15 people on the foredeck.

"It was nearly half of the crew, to handle these massive sails," he said.

Mr. Stephenson will now travel to St. Thomas this weekend to compete in the Rolex Regatta aboard *INTAC*. Two weeks ago the team won the Heineken Regatta in St. Maarten. The team will also compete in the BVI Spring Regatta.

Aiyana captain, Ross Munson, steered his crew to a second place finish in the regatta. It was the second race the 7-month-old, 82-foot sailboat had competed in and the captain was impressed with the location and the event.

"The breeze was pretty light this week, so the big boats don't always like the light air," Mr. Munson said. "But it worked for us, because we are a slightly smaller boat."

He particularly liked the around-the-island courses, where he seen a couple of whales.

"It was close competition," Mr. Munson said. "For a lot of these big boats the challenge is just getting them around the race track. There is so much engineering; they are so complex with computer systems. Not only do you have the race sailors on-board, but you also have the technical team to keep them

running. This is the cream of the crop of superyachts."

The 16-member crew was heading to St. Thomas to compete in the Rolex Regatta and would be returning to the VI the following week to compete in the BVI Spring Regatta.

"We are hoping to come back next year," Mr. Munson said.

Another VI resident to compete in the event was former Olympic sailor, Dr. Robin Tattersall. He was racing aboard the 100-foot yacht, *Zafiro*. He found his way aboard after attending the opening party, where he ran into a friend, who was racing with *Zafiro* and said they were short-handed. With Dr. Tattersall, the boat only had about seven crewmembers.

"That's not that many for a boat that size," Dr. Tattersall said.

The VI sailor served as the tactician.

He thinks the territory will benefit greatly by hosting the annual event. He added that 40 boats are expected to compete in this weekend's St. Barth Bucket Regatta, which doesn't have a superyacht club, unlike the VI.

"It's a tremendous feather in the (VI's) cap," Dr. Tattersall said. "To think that you have the Aga Khan's yacht club now here. It's going to put this place on the map in that sense."

He hopes to compete in this weekend's regatta in St. Barth on the same boat. He expects the racing to be interesting. In some ways it will be a re-match between two classics that have been replicated. *Hanuman*, the superyacht regatta winner, is a replica of *Endeavor II*, which is one of the last J Boat challengers in the America's Cup before the war in 1937. It lost to *Ranger*, which has a replica that will also be in St. Barth.

"They will be literally reenacting for the first time what happened in 1937," Dr. Tattersall said.

The award ceremony was Saturday, followed by a full moon party at Oil Nut Bay, where partygoers dressed in all white and were treated to fireworks.

"This is just the start," Mr. Harris said. "We are pretty sure this will be the smallest event we will do here. It is going to grow and grow."