



Irie, a TP52 skippered by Greg Alden, set the elapsed time record for the Down the Bay Race in 2013. Irie, shown with a passing freighter as backdrop, completed the 120-nautical mile course in 7 hours, 2 minutes and 32 seconds to smash a mark that had stood since 1974.

Annapolis J/105 fleet takes on Down the Bay Race challenge

J/105 Fleet 3, based in Annapolis, is the largest in the world with 35 boats. It is also one of the most competitive with syndicates such as Bat IV, DogHouse, Good Trade, Inigo, Mirage, Mayhem, Patriot, Tenacious and WarBride all capable of winning any given regatta.

It is an extremely deep and talented class loaded with veteran sailors who are not afraid to take on new challenges. Fleet 3 leadership keeps things interesting by switching up the season schedule from time to time so the class isn't always competing in the same events.

This year, J/105 Fleet 3 is adding the 74th edition of the Down the Bay Race for the Virginia Cruising Cup to the calendar. Fleet 3 schedule coordinator David Scheidt said a large contingent of owners liked the idea of doing the 120-nautical mile overnight race, which starts May 24 and is hosted by Hampton Yacht Club with support from Storm Trysail Club.

“Down the Bay is a Chesapeake Bay classic and we had a very solid representation of owners that wanted to do it. They're always willing to try something new and different,” said Scheidt, who has enjoyed plenty of success as skipper of Smoke 'n Oakum.

Scheidt expects 10 to 12 boats to enter the Down the Bay Race and said those owners are committed to staying in Hampton to do Southern Bay Race Week the following weekend. Both events will count toward the Chesapeake Bay Yacht Racing Association High Point standings for the J/105 class.

This will be the 22nd Down the Bay Race for Scheidt, who has previously competed as crew member aboard a variety of boats. He liked the run from Annapolis to Hampton to a 5K as opposed to a marathon like the Annapolis-to-Newport Race.

“I like that you get to sail in a different part of the Chesapeake Bay and conditions change when you get south of Point Lookout,” Scheidt said. “It’s a challenging race that requires you to think more strategically than a typical point-to-point race.”

Organizers are also pleased to announce that Safe Harbor Bluewater has come aboard as a sponsor of the Down the Bay Race. Located in the heart of the Hampton Roads region of the Chesapeake Bay, Safe Harbor Bluewater is an award-winning state-of-the-art yacht service and repair facility equipped with a host of amenities, including a pool and courtesy bikes.

Safe Harbor Bluewater offers wet slips and transient slips and features a fuel dock with high-speed pumps. There is a wide array of marine services such as painting/refinishing, rigging and derigging, canvas shop, fiberglass, carpentry, mechanical, welding and restoration/repair.

There is a Ship’s Store filled with boat supplies, ice, cold drinks and snacks. Bluewater Yacht Sales is the on-site brokerage making it easy and convenient to buy or sell a boat. Customers can enjoy lunch, dinner or cocktails at Surf Rider Bluewater, the waterside restaurant.

The Virginia Cruising Cup Race was held annually from 1934 through 1999 except during the World War II years (1942-45) and built a sterling reputation among sailors all over the Chesapeake Bay. Known to lower bay sailors as “Down the Bay” and to upper bay sailors as “The Hampton Race,” the event drew 130 to 150 boats at its peak.

Following a 10-year hiatus, the event was revived in 2009 when Hampton Yacht Club joined with the Storm Trysail Club Chesapeake Station to hold it earlier on Memorial Day weekend to allow boats to participate in Southern Bay Race Week. Down the Bay has seen increased participation every year since, with organizers encouraged that last year’s race attracted 31 boats in six classes.

Boats can compete under either the PHRF or ORC rating rules. Starts are also being offered for the Chesapeake Short-handed Sailing Society (CHESSS) and Chesapeake Multihull Association (CMA) along with double-handed entries.

Any one-design class that can muster at least five entries will get its own separate start. This year’s inclusion of J/105 Fleet 3 marks the first one-design start in Down the Bay since 2010 when the J/35 class participated. Skipper Maury Niebur and his team aboard Bump in the Night

won a gybing duel with Maggie to capture class honors by a mere 38 seconds. David Scheidt was aboard Maggie that year as crew for his father and namesake.

Hampton Yacht Club presents three important perpetual trophies for this race. The Robert M. Ravin Memorial Trophy is awarded to the monohull that is first to finish. The Hampton Yacht Club Special Award is presented to the monohull racing under ORC that posts the fastest corrected time. Lastly, the Virginia Cruising Cup goes to the monohull racing under PHRF that posts the fastest corrected time.

A relatively new and popular element of the event is the Welcome Party hosted by Storm Trysail Club at Severn Sailing Association on Thursday evening. As always, Hampton Yacht Club will conduct a first-class Awards Ceremony and Dinner on Saturday evening.

Hampton Yacht Club provides all boats with free dockage for two nights and beer is available from the time sailors arrive to when they leave.

David McConaughy of Hampton Yacht Club is serving as event chairman for the eighth time in 2024. McConaughy captured class honors in Down the Bay twice aboard his J/30 USA90. He has crewed for friends in another eight editions of the race.

McConaughy described Down the Bay as a “proper distance race that requires plenty of advanced logistics and setting up watches. He believes the true challenge of this 120-nautical mile passage centers around the fact each section of the Chesapeake Bay has its own unique identity with variable wind and current issues that must be accounted for.

Skippers, tacticians and navigators must reassess conditions at various points in the race and also consider what will happen when their boat passes the Potomac River and the York River or enters Hampton Roads.

Most participants enjoy the challenge of night racing as it is not something they do very often and McConaughy believes firmly that Down the Bay is won between sunset and sunrise.

Down the Bay starts near Thomas Point Light off Annapolis and takes the fleet past such landmarks of the Chesapeake Bay as Cove Point, Cedar Point, Point no Point, Point Lookout, Smith Point Light, Windmill Point, Stingray Point, Wolf Trap Light and Thimble Shoals before finishing at Old Point Comfort off Hampton.

Irie, a TP52 skippered by Greg Alden, smashed the Down the Bay Race elapsed time record in 2013 by finishing in 7 hours, 2 minutes and 32 seconds. That was more than four hours faster than the previous mark established way back in 1974 by Running Tide, a Sparkman & Stephens 60-footer owned by Al Van Metre.

Conditions were ideal for a record run with winds ranging from 20-25 knots out of the northwest. Irie, which was able to sail downwind with an asymmetrical spinnaker or reach using

an oversized jib, recorded an average speed of 17-plus knots. Afterward, Alden called it “the ride of a lifetime, an epic trip and the most fun I’ve ever had on a sailboat.”

To register for Down the Bay, visit: <https://yachtscoring.com/emenue.cfm?eid=16412>

For further information about the event, contact David McConaughy at 757-870-4475 or dfmcconaughy@gmail.com.