

BY STUART STREULI

2006 Gulf Stream Series Review

Right Down to the Wire

2007 Gulf Stream Series

The Notice of Series and entry information is available at www.us-irc.org

FORT LAUDERDALE TO KEY WEST RACE	
Jan. 10	www.keywestrace.org
ACURA KEY WEST RACE WEEK	
Jan. 15 to 19	www.premiere-racing.com
MONTEGO BAY RACE	
Feb. 16	www.montegobayrace.com
ST. MAARTEN HEINEKEN REGATTA	
March 2 to 4	www.heinekenregatta.com
ACURA MIAMI GRAND PRIX	
March 8-11 2007	www.premiere-racing.com
INTERNATIONAL ROLEX REGATTA, ST THOMAS	
March 23 to 25	www.rolexcupregatta.com
THE BVI SPRING REGATTA	
March 26 - April 1	www.bvispringregatta.org
CHARLESTON RACE WEEK	
April 12 to 15	www.charlestonraceweek.com
AMERICAN YC SPRING SERIES	
April 28 to 29 & May 5 to 6	www.americanyc.com
STANFORD ANTIGUA SAILING WEEK	
April 29 to May 4	www.sailingweek.com
STORM TRYSAIL CLUB BLOCK ISLAND RACE	
May 25	www.stormtrysail.org
ANNAPOLIS TO NEWPORT RACE	
June 1	www.annapolisyc.org
NEW YORK YC'S 153RD ANNUAL REGATTA	
June 8 to 10	www.nyyc.org
STORM TRYSAIL CLUB'S BLOCK ISLAND RACE WEEK	
June 17 to 22	www.stormtrysail.org
MARBLEHEAD TO HALIFAX OCEAN RACE	
July 8	www.marbleheadtohalifax.com
STAMFORD YC VINEYARD RACE	
Aug. 31	www.stamfordyc.com
STORM TRYSAIL CLUB'S IRC EAST COAST CHAMPIONSHIP	
Nov. 2 to 4	www.stormtrysail.org

Jim Swartz's *Money Penny* crosses Nick Lykiardopoulos' *Aera* at Acura Key West Race Week.

The 2006 Gulf Stream Series didn't leap off the starting line. Only one of the 10 boats that registered for the inaugural six-month, nine-regatta series sailed in the first event, the Fort Lauderdale to Key West Race in January 2006. Fortunately, when it comes to endurance events of this ilk, it's the same for

the series as it is for the competitors. How you start pales in importance to how you finish.

A half year later, the six boats that would sail enough events to qualify for the overall 2006 GSS standings converged on Newport, R.I., for the final three events of the series.

Since two of these regattas, the New York YC Annual Regatta in Newport, R.I., and the Royal Bermuda YC's Anniversary Regatta, were required to qualify for the series title, the race for the championship was still wide open.

But before unveiling how the series ended, it's worth revisiting

the beginning. Tapio Saavalainen's Grand Soleil 37 *Kalevala II*, of Annapolis, Md., kicked off the 2006 Gulf Stream Series by sailing in the annual race from Fort Lauderdale to Key West. Saavalainen's team produced a respectable finish, third in a fleet of 10. But being the only GSS boat in the fleet sad-

dled the team with a big score, a full point.

In the 2006 GSS scoring system, a boat's total course length sailed for an individual regatta was divided by its total corrected time, producing a corrected average speed. This was used to rank each boat for the regatta. Each rank

was divided by the total number of GSS boats entered in a particular event to produce a score for the regatta. For example, finishing first of four GSS boats in an event produced a .25-point score.

After an inauspicious start, things ramped up quickly for the GSS with eight boats, in three

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Tapio Saavalainen's Kalevala II finished strong in the 2006 Gulf Stream Series, topping the results table in the New York YC's Annual Regatta (above) and the Bermuda Race.

classes, sailing at 2006 Acura Key West Race Week. IRC 1 featured a battle—one that would repeat itself numerous times through June—between *Aera*, Nick Lykiardopulo's proven 55-foot IRC rocket, and Jim Swartz' Swan 601 *Money Penny*. The latter was sailing for only the second time under the IRC Rule.

The two boats combined to win seven of nine races in IRC 1, tying for first on corrected time in the third. They started the final race deadlocked at 12.5 points.

"The key moment in the last race was when *Money Penny* hooked a lobster pot at the top of the penultimate upwind leg," says *Aera* skipper Jez Fanstone. "This allowed us to get ahead and round the next two marks ahead. There wasn't enough distance left for them to put their time on us."

Aera won the regatta by 2 points. But *Money Penny*'s team took home an enormous amount of confidence in the boat's potential, and the GSS lead as its total corrected time for the regatta was slightly less than that of *Aera*.

"We knew about *Aera*, which is an IRC killer," says Swartz, a newcomer to grand-prix racing. "We went into [Key West] with a lot of trepidation and came out feeling great about the 601 as an IRC boat."

The action was even closer between these two teams at the Acura Miami Race Week in March.

They finished the regatta tied on points, with *Money Penny* winning the tiebreaker, but *Aera* taking the top spot in the GSS standings for that event.

In addition to the Florida events, there was also a three-regatta Caribbean swing. *Devocean* and *DSK-Comifin*, two Swan 45s, chose this route, competing in events in St. Maarten, St. Thomas, and the British Virgin Islands.

The second half of the 2006 Gulf Stream Series started with the Storm Trysail Club's Block Island Race at the end of May. Qualifying for the series required counting either this race or the Fort Lauderdale Key West Race, which only *Kalevala II* had sailed.

In the 186-mile spring classic to and from Stamford, Conn., around Block Island, *Aera* made its most important move of the series. Brutally light conditions forced all but 15 of 103 entrants to retire. Of the seven GSS competitors in the race, only Lykiardopulo's team persevered, finishing after 41 hours.

The win gave *Aera* a strong lead in the GSS, but with two required events remaining there was still hope for the boats close behind. After struggling early in the season, Saavalainen's team hit its stride in June. "The key for our progress was a permanent crew from the very beginning of the season," says Saavalainen, a 59-year-

old economist from Washington, D.C. "The boat was new, it took time to learn it, to tune it, as well as make the crewwork seamless."

Kalevala II, the smallest boat in the GSS series, took top honors in both the New York YC's Annual Regatta and the Bermuda Race and moved into second, with an outside shot at first with one race remaining. "We focused on one regatta and on each race at the time," says Saavalainen of his approach to the multi-regatta series. "However, when we started the RBYC's Annual Race, we were well aware what was at stake."

The team responded for the third time in as many events, producing a second among the GSS boats. However, it proved to not be enough as *Aera* was able to hang on for the Gulf Stream Series championship, 2.13 to 2.53. *Money Penny* finished third with Jim Bishop's J/44 *Gold Digger* in fourth. Stephen Devoe's *Devocean* and Hap Fauth's 66-foot *Bella Mente* also qualified for the overall standings.

Getting six boats to the finish line, says US-IRC director Barry Carroll, was an achievement for the inaugural GSS. "But," he adds, "I'm guessing we'll have triple that this year."

Saavalainen will be back. With a full year sailing his boat, he'll be an early favorite. But it won't be easy. "It requires determination and strong team spirit because of the demanding distance races," he says, "and quick minds and professional skills around the buoys. We will focus on one race at a time, while keeping the big GSS picture in mind. The 2006 GSS showed that, under IRC, smaller production boats have as good a chance to win as the big and famous. There's no magic bullet for the title but hard work."

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