

Two months and four days before the first hooter of the 42nd Antigua Sailing Week sounded, on 18 February, Robert Allen Stanford was charged with a multi-billion dollar fraud, his assets frozen and his passport confiscated. The first American to be knighted by the Antiguan government, Stanford was the island's biggest private employer and investor, responsible for an estimated 800 local employees. He was also the title sponsor for Sailing Week.

It could well have been a crippling blow: "We had to cut back significantly," ASW chairman Neil Forrester confessed, "namely on advertising, video coverage, banners, backstay flags etc, but even though we were financially challenged we had to make sure it was a success and not a second-rate regatta."

Furthermore, attendance also threatened to be significantly down. The recent highly publicised shootings on the island hardly helped the cause. However, with an increased police presence on and off the water, the vibe was noticeably positive from the offset.

And it was the cruisers, bareboats and performance cruisers – the nucleus of Sailing Week – that showed their colours and came out in force. They made up over 80 per cent of a fleet totalling 140 entries (just 30 boats down on last year) and were justly rewarded with classic Caribbean sailing conditions – sunshine, 28°C and with 15- to 25-knot easterlies every day. "We were blessed with the conditions we profess to be selling, but don't often get," Forrester enthused after the event.

This year saw two firsts: the use of UK-based GWM Racing to manage the racing afloat and the introduction of the Ocean Series – three offshore races (Guadeloupe to Antigua, Round the Island and Around Redonda 80nm) as a 'regatta within a regatta' for the offshore specialists.

With the chance to experience this first hand, I joined the Cookson 50 *Lee Overlay Partners* for the 50-mile *Yachting World* Around the Island Race.

Around Antigua... quickly

In the brisk conditions, *Lee Overlay Partners* was frothing at the mouth, raring to be let off her leash. As the A2 popped open, the raw energy was no longer containable and we leapt forward. As exhilarating as the sleigh ride aboard *Lee Overlay Partners* would turn out to be, the frightening loads involved demanded intense concentration. Today's racers are getting used to the unforgiving noises of high loads amplified through a carbon shell, but I found the mechanised whirr of the canting keel and the turbo-electric primaries unnervingly android.

My job of controlling the vang tension downwind was made poignantly topical because the previous



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Photos Toby Hodges/ywpx



Antigua Sailing Week may have lacked its title sponsor after Robert Stanford was charged with fraud, but none of the the 140 crews noticed, not with sublime sailing conditions and smooth organisation to enjoy. Toby Hodges reports





design is his perfect tonic; a lightweight carbon machine that thrives in a breeze.

Unfortunately, there were few boats for *Lee Overlay Partners* to test herself against. The poor turnout of the Racing fleet was an anticlimax and arguably one of the only low points of the regatta. In Class 1 of the Racing Division there were just four boats racing each day (*Lee Overlay Partners* and *Sojana* were only competing in the Ocean Series), which was reduced to two when the *Simonis 56 Windemere III* cracked a bulkhead and *Leopard 3* limped back in on day one.

The fast and furious few

It was a bitter blow for Mike Slade and his 25-strong crew, the serial line-honours seekers who won the Guadeloupe to Antigua race, but missed the overall record of *Mari-Cha IV*'s 2004 run by just seven-and-a-half minutes. (Worse still, I had hoped to get a ride on board during the week.)

That left the coast clear for Peter Harrison, ably assisted by local legend Peter Holmberg, to enjoy line honours on his 115ft ketch *Sojana* and set new records in both subsequent offshore courses, the *Yachting World* Around the Island and Corum Round Redonda races. However, *Lee Overlay Partners* sealed the Ocean Series on corrected time to cap a successful season for Adrian Lee after he won the newly established Caribbean RORC 600.

Out of the two boats in Class 1 left racing daily around the cans, Charles Dunstone's IRC-optimised TP52 *Rio* dominated, with his Team Origin crew

recording eight wins out of eight – enough to earn Dunstone the Fletcher Trophy for Best British Yacht and eclipse a credible performance from their closest rivals aboard the green Rogers 46 *Yeoman XXXII*.

Rumour has it that Simon Le Bon was spotted in the Virgin Lounge at Gatwick whistling his acclaimed Duran Duran song 'Rio' – the name of the boat he then joined for the week. Having campaigned his maxi *Drum* in two Fastnets and a Whitbread, he no doubt helped keep *Rio* and Team Origin well-tuned!

But while the big boys all returned each night to Falmouth Harbour, it was in neighbouring English Harbour and Nelson's Dockyard where Sailing Week was being enjoyed the most. With more than 40 bareboats and 40 performance cruisers in three classes and 30 cruisers, not to mention tradewind conditions, the reggae social nights were thriving.

Chasing stars

Two crews seemed to stand out: *Girls For Sail* (see panel, right) and the *Star Chaser* crew, bedecked in bright green shirts. "We're a bunch of old XOD sailors from the Solent and we're having a blast," roared the charismatic Frits Janssen, who along with friends and family had chartered the Swan 51, *Star Chaser*. Bewitched by his enthusiasm, I happily accepted an invitation aboard and received the perfect insight

Charles Dunstone's TP52 *Rio* smokes downwind during her domination of the Racing 1 class – with Team Origin crew and Simon Le Bon aboard



"We were blessed with the conditions we profess to be selling, but don't often get!"



Girls For Sail

With a different matching attire for each day, their 'Here Come the Girls' anthem blaring out and even a nautically choreographed dance routine, the *Girls For Sail* boat monopolised attention. There to have fun, they were also learning to sail and had only met as a full crew for the first time the week before.

Under the guidance of *GFS* boss Annie O'Sullivan, they had four days to figure out who pulled which strings and get their chartered Dufour 40 into competitive mode for the Cruising 2 fleet. Despite picking up the worst set of collective bruises I'll ever see, they formed a formidable team, did some competent spinnaker gybes and beat three other boats in their class during the week.

Established for three years, O'Sullivan's *GFS* is based in Portsmouth and, as well as being an RYA school, takes parts in numerous regattas, including Cowes Week, Voiles de St Tropez, the ARC and the BVI Regatta. Three of her crew this year in Antigua had returned for the second year running and two were Day Skippers. The rest aboard were near novices.

"It's all about trying to encourage more people into the sport – anyone can do it, as long as it's a safe environment," O'Sullivan says. "Nine girls will have walked away from this week and will feel safe and comfortable afloat now in most conditions.

"Sailing's not just for men with beards any more!"



Above: with the able help of Peter Holmberg, Harrison's 115ft Farr ketch *Sojana* won *Yachting World's* Around the Island Trophy, setting a new elapsed-time record. Top: the multi-national crew aboard *Chieftan 50 Lee Overlay Partners* hike to windward before the downhill ride

day *ICAP Leopard* had snapped her boom in front of the vang during an unprepared bear away.

But despite my apprehension, we smoked that downwind leg, hitting 19 knots and averaging 16 for about 40 minutes. 'Awesome' is not a word I like to use often, but it applied aptly to that speed window. We circumnavigated Antigua in a blurry 5h 20m, 40 minutes behind the 115ft *Sojana*.

Having bought the highly successful ex-*Chieftan* from Ger O'Rourke last year, *Lee Overlay Partners*'s owner Adrian Lee has been keen to quench his thirst for offshore racing while raising the profile of his currency overlay management business. With her canting keel and canard, the Mick Cookson and Farr



Photos Toby Hodges/YW pix

Star Chaser leans over to reveal her Netherlands Lion (and Dutch skipper's sense of humour). Inset: her UK crew were thrilled to have chartered the Swan for the week

into Sailing Week, racing with 14 crew to Jolly Harbour for the night and back. Four 60- to 70-year-old XOD sailors, together with half a dozen younger generation with mixed-to-minimal sailing experience, had a bubbly mix of fun and frenetic racing aboard *Star Chaser* in the Cruiser 1 fleet. Janssen, who came up with the idea to charter the boat, wore a constant grin. Having done the last eight Sailing Weeks and the last four on bareboats, he was like a kid in Hamley's – he just couldn't get over the fact that they were now racing on an iconic boat of his generation, a 1981-pedigree Frers Swan 51. Throughout the race *Star Chaser* rang to one collective shout from the crew: "Oh, for ****'s sake, Andy!" It was a ribbing our 63-year-old trimmer Andy Hamlett didn't deserve. After a promising start, a lazy spinnaker sheet around the rudder cost us time during Wednesday's race. Dutch owner/skipper Wijnand Van Den Boogaard (aka 'Boogie'), runs his boat calmly, safely and happily, with the help of his fiancée Marlies Sanders controlling foredeck, so such a problem was handled in his stride. But that didn't stop Hamlett from becoming the ironic scapegoat for any mistakes aboard *Star Chaser*. Indeed, so therapeutic were the effects, other crews joined in! Our formidable afterguard comprised the beaming Janssen, his old friend Nigel Souster, who had been his opposing number when they captained

their respective university sailing teams, and 71-year-old Philip Almeida, who has sailed in X One Designs since the Fifties. I joined them in the afterguard when Boogie invited me to drive for the last two marks – a windward beat followed by a reach into the Jolly Harbour finish. We caught up a competitor and pushed him up before dropping off and shooting the lower end of the line to pip him by half a boatlength, leaving our whole crew stoked – me especially. Finishing shortly after us were *Girls For Sail*, minus battery power, so use of their engine. Towing them into harbour alongside us, with both crews singing *American Pie* accompanied by a ukelele, aptly demonstrated the camaraderie of the event. After a night dancing to local band Itchy Feet and free-flowing rum punch, Thursday was the final day of racing for all but the bareboats, and another cracker. Despite a bad start, it was a textbook last beat back to crown a glorious week's sailing.

Getting involved

For those without boats who wanted to sail, there were numerous opportunities. As well as the 40 or so bareboats (predominantly Sunsail and The Moorings), and skippered charters, On Deck were there with seven yachts, including four Farr 65s. The official merchandisers for the event, they offer



Photos Tim Wright/photoaction.com

everything from day sails to a week's racing for anyone from novices to experienced sailors. Chairman Pete Anthony told us that On Deck hoped to 'go global' and set up a base in each continent.

Layday blues

There were few complaints about this bumper Sailing Week, but the two main ones we heard were the lack of a layday – considering the percentage of the fleet is there for 'fun racing', a day off to see the island, rest and enjoy the social side was always appreciated – and that the Racing and Cruising divisions were divided, with crews ending up at different ports/finish lines. It may be a pain to organise, but to keep the fleet on one racecourse increases the enjoyment for everyone – crews want to see a Maxi come scorching past them while they're imprinting rail marks on their backsides. Chairman Neil Forrester concedes the lack of layday was a misjudgment and recognises that most people want a 'tourism day'. "Keeping the fleets together is not so easy," he says. "The surveys suggest racers want to start and finish in Falmouth, while the B Division prefer point-to-point racing, ending in different locations. And with challenging courses set in the A Division, there was also a defection of boats – Farr 65s, large Oysters – to the B Division, which made the racing fleet seem a bit scarce."

Top: the colourful S&S Swan 43 *Pavlova* Above: Nick Burns and Hong-Kong based crew aboard the chartered Swan 44 *Crescendo* blitzed their class with eight straight bullets

RESULTS	
Racing 1	Rio
Racing 4	Curacao Marine
Performance Cruiser 1	Mad IV
Performance Cruiser 2	Crescendo
Performance Cruiser 3	Biwi Magic
Cruising 1	Dragon Fly Plus
Cruising 2	Hugo B
Bareboat 1	Sea You Later
Bareboat 2	Nifty
Bareboat 3	Rossi
Bareboat 4	Fantasque
Bareboat Overall	KH+P Sunking
Cruising Multihull	Running Cloud
International Dragon	Compass Point
Ocean series	Lee Overlay Partners

Toby Hodges/YW pix



Smooth management

"It's been a blessing having GWM on board and actually having communication with what happens on the water," the shore team reflected. The UK-based race specialists were contracted for the first time by Sailing Week to oversee an area which had long been regarded as the primary weakness of the regatta. With Peter Wykeham-Martin, ex-chief executive of the RORC, and John Grandy, chairman of Cowes Week, at the helm, the organisation afloat was described as "a breath of fresh air" by Sailing Week organisers and dramatically reduced the number of protests. Together with Paul and Deborah Miller of CSA Database, who correct and post the results as quickly as they come in – and do so for most of the Caribbean events – the racing ran like clockwork. Most of the volunteer shore team live or have lived in Antigua and come back every year. Having first come to Antigua in 1963 and met fellow committee member Sandy Squire in 1967, Jo Bowker has been a team member for 23 years and bows out this year "now that it's in safe hands". Pictured above (from left): Sandy Squire, Desiree Samuel, Cathy and Micelle Alchin, Emma Norcross, Jo Bowker and results duo Paul and Deborah Miller – without whom the Week wouldn't work.

Toby Hodges/YW pix