

## The Antigua Classic Regatta, 2008 and 2009

First, an explanation for all my non-boatie friends. The Antigua Classic is a 5-day event held annually in late April in Antigua. People who own “classic” boats (over 25 years old or having specific lines, eg full keel, or are traditional working sailboats or are modern boats built as replicas or in the spirit of classic boats) display them on the docks at Antigua Yacht Club Marina and participate in 4 races. Admirers of the boats can tour the docks and watch the races (24 miles) from various perches on the hillsides outside the harbor.

What makes the Antigua Classic special is the sense of community that unites participants and onlookers. The Antigua Yacht Club and the major sponsor Panerai host parties at the club and on the docks, including a Pimm’s Cup party and on the last day a ‘veddy British’ tea party during the gig (eg wooden dinghy) races. And on the docks the boats are really lovely, most of them polished to perfection, with owners and/or crew happy to answer questions. People return to the Classic Regatta year after year.

The stars of the show are the the early 20<sup>th</sup> C America’s Cup boats (or replicas) and big schooners and ketches. At left is the start of the Big Boat group containing (left to right, Windrose, Eleonora, and the J-5’s Velsheda and Ranger (1920’s America’s Cup lines but with kevlar sails). The big boat class was a bit smaller this year than last – casualty of the global economic downturn. These boats are very big (120-180’) and all have their own websites which you can Google. At right is Eleonora heading out to race.



Like very fine race horses, these big boats have the cachet of being the passion of owners with an awful lot of money. But I forgive them for being rich if we peons can enjoy watching these thoroughbreds go.

Velsheda and Ranger are pure racing machines and each is accompanied by a mid-size mega-yacht to accomodate the crew, owner’s guests, etc. At left below is Ranger and her house-yacht Vita. At right is Velsheda coming into the dock after a workout.



The races are gorgeous to watch. At left are Rebecca, Velsheda and Ranger headed to a downwind mark, with Ranger apparently too high on the mark. At right is the mark. Rebecca was ahead but left too much room and Ranger tucked in between her and the mark. Sweet. Rebecca kept having things break in the first two races but she actually outperformed the J-5s in Race 3.



But the pleasure of the Classic is not limited these ultra-expensive boats. Boats of all sizes adorn the docks. What is appreciated by all is the effort the owner has made to restore and maintain the boat. At left is Meggie, a 30' Bermuda, the smallest boat in the Classic in 2008; she was sailed to Antigua from the upper mid-west by a young couple. At right is a shot of part of the deck of Ticonderoga, gleaming.



Where else but this Classic Regatta can one see flocks of beautiful schooners and ketches and vintage sloops of all sizes.



Here are some of us non-racing boaties watching the action from a strategic point (eg the only shady spot on the hill)



The highlight of this year's regatta for me was that by capitalizing on a very brief conversation with its first mate during the Pimm's Cup party, I had the incredible luck to sail on the Kate, a St. Kitts-built replica of a 1909 America's Cup boat. Here is a picture of her sailing in an earlier race (sail number E5; the boom is 46' long) with Ranger overtaking:



photo credit: [www.photofantasyantigua.com](http://www.photofantasyantigua.com)

And here is a picture of me sailing on Kate (I am the forward-most bit of rail meat, with the red cap): My responsibilities were 1) do not fall off the boat and 2) sit on the high side. I accomplished them beautifully. Do you think they will invite me back?



Connie “crewing” on Kate, Race 3. Thrill of a lifetime.

photo copyright Jason Pickering; all rights reserved. [www.jasonpickering.com](http://www.jasonpickering.com)

Antigua Classic Regatta is followed 10 days later by the more famous Antigua Race Week, a totally different kettle of fish. By the time all 2000 participants of Race Week sail and fly in, most of the Classic folk have sailed away to quieter harbors.