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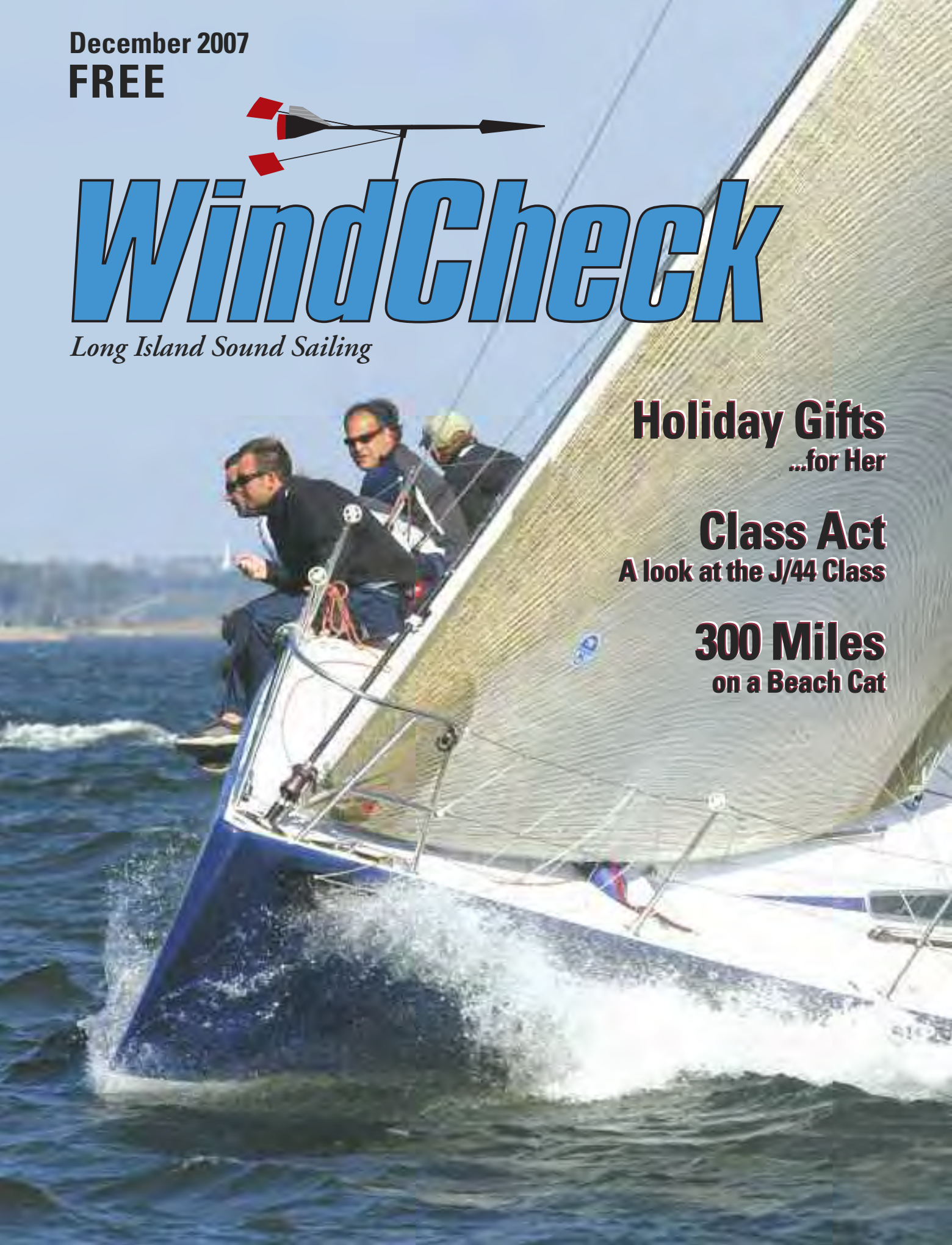
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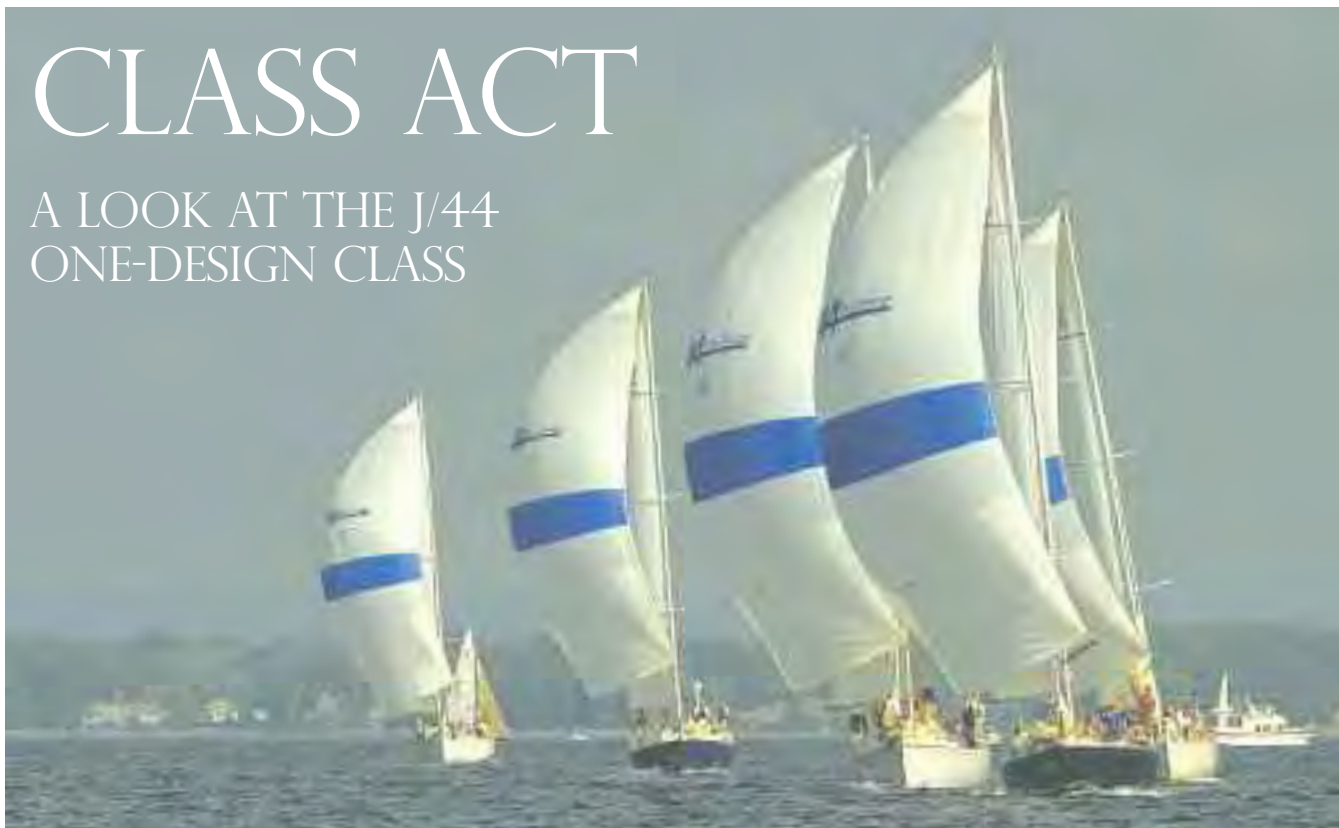
Class Act
A look at the J/44 Class

300 Miles
on a Beach Cat



CLASS ACT

A LOOK AT THE J/44 ONE-DESIGN CLASS



By Chris Szepessy

The J/44 is the most successful large offshore American yacht design ever. Until 2006, it was the only boat to have a one-design start in the Newport to Bermuda Race, and anyone who's watched the action at Block Island Race Week, the American Yacht Club Spring & Fall Series or the Manhasset Bay Fall Series has seen J/44 sailors enjoying some of the tightest class racing around.

The J/44 came about as a result of a study of the 1988 Newport-to-Bermuda Race by the J/Boats management and design team. The company was thinking of building something bigger than the J/40 and their analysis determined that the most popular offshore boats were racer/cruisers between 41 and 45 feet. Designed by Rod Johnstone and built by TPI, the J/44 was launched in May 1989 and *Sailing World* Magazine named it Boat of the Year in 1990.

Sixty-eight '44s' were built, and they're sailed by enthusiastic owners in 14 countries. The 44 was victorious in the Fastnet Race (IMS Overall; 1991), the Sydney-to-Hobart Race (IMS-1; 1992) and the Bermuda Race, and it's a fine cruising boat that can be comfortably handled by a couple. Many sailors consider the 44 to be "the perfect boat," but it takes more than a boat to make a great class. We asked Tom Castiglione, the J/44 Class Director and Jim Bishop, Class President and co-founder, about their winning formula.

Bishop, who owns *Gold Digger* (USA 49; New York, NY), the J/44 North American Champion in 1995, '99, 2000 and '02, explained that the template for the J/44 One-Design class rules was implemented by the International One Design class in the 1960s. "A number of International owners were quite well-heeled,

while others weren't," he said. "Some boats were being pulled out every Monday, being fiddled with and having their bottoms done, and they'd come back with new sails. These fellows decided to stop fooling around, so they created a rule where you could only haul a boat twice a season, and they went with one-design sails. That created an extremely level playing field...the International class produced every skipper for every 12-Metre in the America's Cup Trials until Bill Ficker came from the West Coast." The J/44 One-Design Class Association was established in 1994, and it's attracted good sailors from a wide financial spectrum. "We have people who have sailed all their life in one-designs, so it's a way of moving the one-design sailing experience into ocean racing without having to be somebody who's spent most of their life accumulating capital," said Bishop.

The J/44 Class owns and maintains 16 sets of class sails. "We only have three one-design sails: a #1, a main and a 3/4-ounce spinnaker," Bishop continued. "We rotate them and keep track of the hours on each sail." Castiglione, a sail consultant at North Sails, explained, "Members pay one-design fees that maintain these sails, so for \$3,500 a year (for the sail program), you can campaign a 44-foot boat at a pretty high level. If someone's going to campaign a 44-footer without this structured one-design sail program, they could spend upwards of \$30,000 a year on sails, and that's just replacing a few to remain competitive in a class."

"Before we race, we have a person designated to call what sail we're going to use," Bishop said. "If it's blowing harder, we go with our own #3 and 1 1/2 -ounce spinnaker. This keeps people from blowing out their sails. We've gotten six years out of a main-sail and I think we got six years out of a jib, and not one person has ever complained that they lost a race because of the sails."

A SPRIT FOR THE J/44

By Scott Dinhofer

In an effort to breathe new life into our J/44 *Brown-eyed Girl* (USA 44007) we embarked this year on installing a bowsprit and asymmetrical sails. Bill Ketcham, the owner of J/44 *Maxine* (USA 83000) and I worked on this together. The requirements were simple deployment, cost effectiveness and robust engineering. I worked on the feasibility study with Alan Johnstone of J/Boats. The starting point was essentially a J/133-sized spinnaker. After consulting with numerous sailmakers and running a few trial IRC certificates, we came up with a sprit and spinnaker size that we felt was optimal.

We achieved a spinnaker with 30 percent greater area and an equally longer luff - with no penalty under IRC. Of course, this means that we can no longer pole back. We feel that if we were to use this in distance races or achieved a one-design class conversion, it wouldn't be a factor. It's our belief that we'd gain on the standard rig in light, pole-on-the-headstay reaching conditions, and begin to lose out somewhere in the mid-teens, as traditional boats would be able to pole back. We also believe we'll gain ability to handle the boat in true heavy air conditions without wiping out.

The execution of the sprit design by Goetz Custom Boats of Bristol, RI was flawless. They engineered a forward ring on a bracket that's through-bolted to the stem fitting on the bow. The robust carbon pole sits in this collar with the butt end affixed to two pad eyes on deck. The sprit has both a rear unloaded storage position and a forward deployed position tied into the boat structurally via an under-deck L-bracket bolted to the forward bulkhead.

We've had three opportunities to test this configuration to date: the Vineyard Race, the Stamford-Denmark Friendship Race and the Indian Harbor Yacht Club Gearbuster. We started the Vineyard Race with a code zero flying from the end of the pole. We saw a fair amount of lateral flex in the pole and slight upward flex. We think this was about the heaviest loads we would see, as it was tight for a code zero and was blowing around 17.

Given the nature of this year's Vineyard Race, we ended up flying various genoas and our jib top more than anything. We utilized the sprit again for the code zero between the tower and Block Island. I'd like to think this was our "secret weapon," as we won our class! The only issue we had was the bow piece bent quite a bit and we sent it back to GMT Composites in Bristol for reengineering. The folks at GMT, led by David Schwartz, were very helpful and stood by their work. We've since bolted a much heavier piece to the bow and haven't seen those issues since.

We sailed against two other J/44s in the Friendship Race, and beat them by a bit on the first three-mile windward leg, so we didn't see a side-by-side comparison with the symmetrical spinnaker. We flew our largest sail, the 2A runner, on the first downwind where it got extremely light and were able to keep the sail full and drawing the entire time.

photo:boat.com



After a fetch and a strong southerly filling in, we rounded Bell 14 off Lloyd's Point about six boatlengths behind Steve Benjamin's *High Noon*. Our sail chart had us on the edge between the 3A reaching spinnaker and the code zero. We opted for the 3A so we could start to learn our angles. It turned out to be the right call. We gained on *High Noon* in a 14-knot southerly, finishing overlapped with them. We won our class in this race, a first for the *Brown-eyed Girl* team!

The Gearbuster started in a light but building westerly (255-265) and our course was 94 to the Stratford Shoal tower. This would be a good test in a run. Our competition was a number of well-sailed boats: a J/122, J/133, J/37 and *Bombardino*, a Santa Cruz 52. The wind built, and most of this 22-mile run was sailed in 12-14 knots - conditions where we thought we'd lose out to a symmetrical boat on rating.

We sailed the shifts and pressure lanes, jibing about eight times, and we lost the J/122 on a shift or missed pressure. We pressed down and appeared to hold our time on *Bombardino* and the J/133. We later learned that our North Sails designer, aboard the J/122, felt we'd consistently sailed at too high an angle, but given that we finished second we feel good about the boat's ability to sail with the new kites. ♦

Scott Dinhofer lives in Chappaqua, NY. Racing under the burgees of Indian Harbor Yacht Club and the New York Yacht Club, Brown-eyed Girl (USA 44007) was the first IMS finisher in the 2001 Around Long Island Regatta, and won the J/44 class in the 2006 Newport-to-Bermuda Race. "In the 18 years since the first J/44 was built, nothing has come along to unseat it in this size range as an offshore racer that can truly be cruised comfortably and raced around the buoys," says Dinhofer. The team's online at: usa44007.com.

"The unique thing about this class is that they're not building any more of these boats. The owners have a lot more control, and that helps the class," said Castiglione. "This formula can be done in other classes if the owners will take control of the class, and it should be done, because it keeps people in sailing," said Bishop, who will be competing in his twentieth Bermuda Race next June. "I've been ocean racing since 1960, and most of the people I sailed with got out of sailing. One guy - who built four ocean racers - got out because a boat would be obsolete by the time it was launched. It's not good for sailing to have people run through a class because they're told they'll win if they spend enough, because there's always somebody with more money."

"Every owner gets a vote when we change something, and we've made changes to keep the boat up-to-date and going fast," Castiglione continued. "When I first got involved, the spinnaker poles were all aluminum, and after a good bit of discussion the owners decided it was an upgrade to get carbon poles, which are lighter, faster and safer...same thing with the winches and main-sheet system. That's why we experiment with things like sprits, different size poles and spinnakers. For example, the boat gets a credit under IRC for a smaller headsail." Bishop added, "We've found that with a little bit of breeze, a 145 is faster than a 155. The boat has a big, big main, and the smaller jib reduces backwinding."

"The guys who've tried the sprit like it," said Castiglione (see left). "The initial concept was to make the boat easier to sail with fewer people. Sprits have proven very effective on distance races, but if you're sailing a distance race, you want to maximize IRC crew weight, keep the rail down and keep the boat going as fast as possible." Bishop added, "There's no question that the asymmetrical is faster on a close reach, but on the short windward-leeward courses that we sail almost all the time, it isn't. Then you have to fool around with jibing those things. I don't think it's the answer, but it's interesting to try these things."

"Two years ago, we wrote into the rules that an additional

crewmember under the age of twelve will be allowed on the boat at any time for any event, regardless of the number of crew on board," said Castiglione. "That's specifically to get kids used to sailing on a big boat. There's been quite a handful of young kids out there doing it - it's been great."

"There's a pretty good contingent of family members on every boat," Castiglione continued. "Most of Larry Glenn's crew on *Runaway* (USA 444; Oyster Bay, NY) is his family. His wife Anne is the tactician more often than not. *Resolute* (USA 43787; Huntington, NY) owned by Don & Rick Rave, is the newest boat in the class. Don's son is their tactician and his father sails with him often, too." *Resolute* placed 2nd in the 2007 J/44 season rankings. Bishop's son Jim Jr. is *Gold Digger's* tactician.

Jeff Willis (*Challenge IV* USA 42880; Huntington, NY), who sails with his sons David, Tim and Todd, finished first in class in the 1994 Bermuda Race. *Challenge IV* has won the J/44 North Americans every year since 2003, and she won her class at this year's Block Island Race Week, the American YC Fall Regatta and the Manhasset Bay Fall Series. "It's been great having the Coast Guard Academy sailing a 44 (*Glory* USA 42324; New London, CT)," Castiglione said. "There's nothing better for training than getting young sailors on boats and teaching them offshore sailing." *Glory*, skippered by Robert Lally, won the IRC II division in the 2007 Annapolis to Newport Race. Seven J/44 owners loaned their boats to college teams for the 2007 Storm Trysail Club Intercollegiate Offshore Regatta. The U.S. Naval Academy sailed *Resolute* to victory in the 44 division with a perfect score.

"When we go into the final race of a series, any one of about five boats can win on the last day," Bishop said. "We had thirteen boats in the Bermuda Race one year, and ten of them finished within an hour and a half. If you race together for a period of time as we have, and the boats are as even as they are, it creates a charisma among the participants." Castiglione added, "The one-design class has made the boat, the crews and the racing as good as they are, and I can safely say that the J/44 party is one of the best

parties in Bermuda that week. It's grown from a couple hundred people to where we've sunk docks the last two years. I don't know how we get that much rum down there, but it's turned into quite the event."

There are seven or eight 44s currently for sale - all in essentially race-ready condition, according to Bishop and Castiglione, who noted, "If someone wants a boat we'll help them find one." Bishop added, "The boats are selling for about \$230,000 to \$250,000, and it's really a dual-purpose boat. A new boat like that would cost about a million dollars. We're looking forward to having more people understand what we've got going, because I think it's quite special." For more information, visit the J/44 One-Design Class Association website at j44.org. ♦



The J/44 dock party in Bermuda has become one of the post-race highlights.