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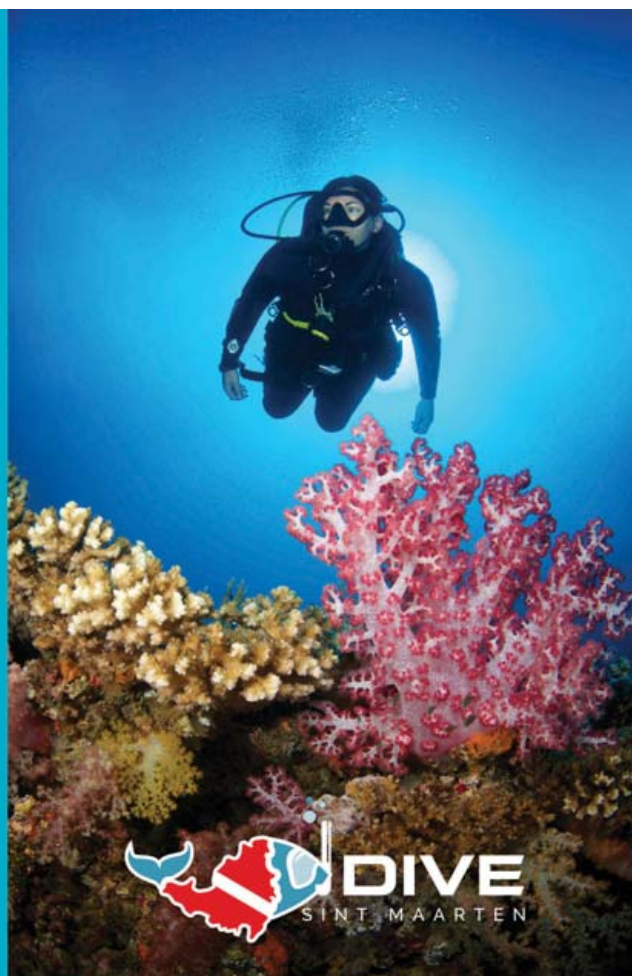
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There's no stopping it

It's a respectable age for any event, but already in its 44th edition, the annual St. Maarten Heineken Regatta has become a true tradition. In addition to the sailing competition, which is of course what it's all about, great parties with quality live concerts make it interesting also for non-sailors, including thousands of visitors who come to enjoy the event each year.

Perhaps even more important are the millions of dollars' worth of publicity and promotion for the vacation destination in general, and its yachting sector in particular, that the entire happening

generates. Its positive impact on the tourism economy, both directly, through more guests when it takes place, and indirectly, due to the worldwide exposure, cannot be overstated.

Please remember that all this is only possible, thanks to the efforts of the organisers, sponsors and essential volunteers who make it all happen. We wish them, as well as everyone else involved, smooth sailing and especially a wonderful experience on "The Friendly Island."

The Publisher



Race Director David Sprague: In the driving seat for the 2024 Heineken

By Robert Luckock

This will be Canadian David Sprague's fourth time at the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta and the first as Race Director. He brings vast experience to the role and is ably assisted by two senior Race Officers, each very experienced with equally impressive résumés.

"It is a bit like being the conductor of an orchestra, but most of it is actually pre-planning, understanding the courses and working closely with the rest of the organising authority, Regatta Director Michele Korteweg and Cary Byerley from the Race Committee, and the mark laying boat and marines, making sure all the marks are in," explains Sprague. "I have two Race Officers who run the physical races on the water; Principal

Race Officer (PRO) Mark Townsend from Long Beach, California and Rob Rowlands from Annapolis.

The PRO runs the more demanding Course A and the other race officer runs the B course in Simpson Bay for classes like Island Time, the Bareboat classes, and sailors on more of a relaxed vacation.

"I'm the guy who's mostly on the shore, anticipating issues, looking at the weather, helping to decide what courses to run next day, etcetera," Sprague adds. "The last three years I was on the water. This time, I will be partly on the water, but not on the Race Committee boat. I think we have nine or 10 starts on the A course, and seven on the B Course."

It helps enormously that all three race officials know each other, working together since 2020 in fact. Sprague has been sailing since he was 12 years old, growing up in Winnipeg. He's what's known in the sailing world as an International Race Officer. "There are about 200 of us around the world who are certified as International Race Officers."

He's been a Race Official on the water at the Beijing Olympics, on shore for the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, officiated at four to



Race Director David Sprague

five Pan American Games, the 49er FX and Nacra 17 Worlds in Nova Scotia in 2022, and other events around the globe. He is also an International Measurer.

"I've been an International Race Officer now for 20 plus years, I think that's why Cary (Byerley) wanted to get me involved from the racing point of view, and to assist with jury procedures, handicapping and measuring.

"In terms of pure racing, it's hard to tell. One of the most memorable for me was China in 2008. We had all sorts of conditions and this was a country that had never organised an Olympics before. But all these events have been great in their own ways when you are dealing with real athletes.

"But not to belittle the couples on the bareboat,

they are also athletes here to have a good time, to race as hard as they can and improve their abilities. That mix is what I like about the Heineken Regatta. I've known the regatta for decades and we are back up to over 100 boats and that's great. When I'm recruiting people to come and help, they never fail to say "yes". They love to be involved in it."

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The Heineken Regatta
Special 2024
is a publication of

**The Daily
Herald**

Coordinator
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Graphic Design/Layout
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Front Cover Design
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Sustaining a legacy: More than 100 boats registered for 44th St. Maarten Heineken Regatta

Simpson Bay—The 44th St. Maarten Heineken Regatta, February 29-March 3, will be celebrating key values of sustainability and innovation, and has attracted teams with similar values. More than 100 international boats, 110 at the time of writing, are making the annual pilgrimage by sail to compete in this bucket-list regatta.

Hundreds of boats and sailors descending into Simpson Bay, plus a fleet of charter teams flying in, can make a big impact on an island and the environment. To ensure the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta maintains a positive impact on the island, both economically and environmentally, the event has written sustainability into its core values.



Over 110 international boats, with new teams registering each day, are set to compete in the 44th St. Maarten Heineken Regatta February 29 - March 3, 2024 © Icarus Sports via Heineken Regatta.

At the Regatta Village at Port de Plaisance and throughout the many event locations, the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta promotes and supports environmental initiatives. Last weekend, in partnership with the Sint Maarten Yacht Club and the St. Maarten Nature Foundation, the event hosted the annual beach clean-up of the sailor- and community-favourite Kim Sha beach. Local youth, sailors, and members of the community rallied together to preserve the natural environment and historic host site of the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta.

In addition to Regatta-run sustainability initiatives, the event also attracts many teams with similar values and projects. One such team this year, a Swan 65 Blue Magic, is sponsored

by CORE POWER, a global leader in the development of new nuclear technologies for the maritime sector with a mission for zero emissions.

"Moving the maritime industry away from fossil fuels presents an almost insurmountable challenge of scale. New Nuclear for Maritime is that solution, no other energy source or power system gives us a truly zero emissions footprint," said Jen Weineck, Head of Marketing for CORE POWER. "We share many of the core values seen in yacht racing, including a desire to protect our marine environment and the value of teamwork to reach our goals, which is why we have decided to align ourselves with the sport and

sponsor our CORE POWER colleague Tony Huston and his crew on the Blue Magic."

The Blue Magic team is made up of long-time friends and competitors, mostly from the International One Design Class. The team has deep big boat racing experience, and includes IOD World and regional champions. "Although a first-time St. Maarten Heineken Regatta for some of the crew, we have solid venue experience and expect to be competitive in what is universally known as the premier regatta in the Caribbean," said Blue Magic Captain and CORE POWER Managing Director, Tony Huston.

There are three Swan 65s

currently registered for the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta, from Switzerland, Germany and Sweden, showing the enduring popularity of this historic blue water yacht class. Crafted as the flagship of Nautor's Swan, the Swan 65s ceased production in the 1980s, but are still going strong today. Swan has continued to innovate and a new-century Swan 100, L'Hippocampe from Spain, will join the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta for the first time this year.

Innovation is a driving force of sustainability, and the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta is integrating technology and innovative solutions to sustainably grow as an event. This year, the event is utilizing Sail Insight technology to trial live tracking and performance analytics with the island's local Diam24 fleet. The growth of this local fleet has provided a new high-performance one-design charter option that attracts international sailors; and the new tech will further attract performance-oriented sailors to the event.

"We are trialling this race software with the Diam24s for both safety performance and just pure fun reasons. The Diam24 trimarans race around the island with the rest of the fleet, and from personal experience racing them, I know, if capsized, they will require assistance. The tracking systems allows our operations team to mon-

itor the Diam24s, while also providing the teams with access to cool performance software and analytics," explained Regatta Operations Chair Morgen Watson. "It also offers a live feed for spectators to see these boats whip around the course – so it's a win-win-win!"

On the shore-side, Regatta revellers will get an enhanced viewing experience with the new access to track the fleet live and where to spot racing. Select "Regatta Ready" venues around the island, such as the Sint Maarten Yacht Club, will have the live tracker and Island92 live video feeds running through the event to offer real-time reporting. Island visitors can connect to all of the "Serious Fun!" on the water by picking the ideal viewing spot and grabbing a Heineken, Tito's cocktail, or popping a bottle of Veuve Clicquot at one of the "Regatta Ready" venues during the week of the Regatta: Sint Maarten Yacht Club, Dinghy Beach Bar, K Beach, Holland House, Seaview Beach Hotel, and Bikini Beach Bar.

Then at 6:00pm Thursday-Sunday, the Port de Plaisance Regatta Village is open to the public for the daily prize-giving to celebrate the teams' performances on the water. Musical performers then take the stage, including international headliners Tarrus Riley, Kevin Lyttle, Rupee and more. Tickets are available at Divico, Mailbox,

Van Dorp and other island retail locations as well as on the KBand app. Learn more about the Regatta schedule and to purchase tickets online on the event website: www.heinekenregatta.com/schedule/

This year at the Port de Plaisance Regatta Village, regatta sponsor Divico is leading a recycled cup initiative, supported by Cup Zero, to help reduce single-use plastics at the event. Cup Zero is a sustainability company focused on providing reusable products and services designed to eliminate single-use waste. "We believe that there is a better way than throw-away, and want to empower all Regatta visitors with the ability to be zero-waste," shared Tanvi Goklani, Heineken Brand Marketing Executive.

Visitors are encouraged to plan their stay sustainably, and take advantage of eco-friendly transport options such as carpooling and the Regatta Village Shuttle from the Sint Maarten Yacht Club. This year, the Regatta Village Water Shuttle will be running in support and benefit of the Sint Maarten Yacht Club's junior and accessibility sailing programs for \$5/person/trip. Sailors, visitors and locals are all welcome at the Port de Plaisance Regatta Village to enjoy a melange of Caribbean food, drinks, entertainment and music in celebrations of the 44th St. Maarten Heineken Regatta: February 29 - March 3!



The annual beach clean up of Kim Sha Beach collected a record 1,224.5 lbs of garbage from the beach by volunteer youth and members of the community © Digital Island via Heineken Regatta.

Daniel Gaw – Offshore Aspiring Athlete, part of the Canadian talent on the water

By Robert Luckock

Big boat sailor Daniel Dagenais-Gaw from Ocean Racers is part of the resurgence in Canadian boats participating in this year's St. Maarten Heineken Regatta and he will be racing on "Hermes", a Pogo 12.50, as the skipper.

“The best way to describe the Pogo is a Class 40 with a cruising interior,” Daniel explains over the phone. “It's not built as an upwind, downwind boat, but it's very good on reaches and in big waves. It's more of an offshore boat.”

The boat is built in France, from the second iteration of the Pogo Class40 hull mould – transformed into the first of its category: a racer-cruiser. So, on deck, it looks like a race boat, but down below, there is a basic minimalist interior. More information about the Pogo 12.50 can be found here on our website: <https://oceanracers.net/project/pogo12-50/>

“In 2020, I was racing on a Volvo 65 Sailing Poland in the Heineken and before that a Whitbread 60. Those boats don't rate that well in general and are difficult to sail inshore. I



Daniel Gaw pictured in Simpson Bay with "Hermes" in the background before leaving to sail another Pogo 12.50 back to the US in May 2020 when the owner couldn't travel during COVID.

(Photo credit: Meg Reilly-Ocean Racers).

wasn't here for the Heineken in 2023. This year, I am just doing the Caribbean 600 and the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. We tend not to do the BVI Spring Regatta and Antigua Sailing Week as it conflicts with being in Europe, or the boat will be too big for them.”

For the Caribbean 600, Daniel will be racing on the Swan 62FD, “Uxorious IV”, in the pit with a team from the rigging shop Marine Rigging Services UK, whom he worked with last summer before flying to St. Maarten to join Hermes.

“I like St. Maarten a lot; it's one of my favourite islands

in the Caribbean. It's where I've spent the most time during the racing season. The people are great and you can get things done. The regatta organisation is always good and the balance between racing and the parties is a mix that, for me, is the best in the Caribbean. I'm excited to be coming back.”

“Hermes” is owned by Meg Reilly and her company Ocean Racers and Daniel's association with them goes back to 2015.

“Daniel first got into ocean racing by joining Canadian Ocean Racing (now known as Ocean Racers) as



“Hermes” in action during a previous Heineken Regatta. (Photo Laurens Morel)

an “Aspiring Offshore Athlete” Reilly explained. “He applied to the programme that myself and my husband Morgen Watson started to help develop Canadian offshore talent on the IMOCA 60 Canada.

“Since that experience of sailing “Canada” coast-to-coast and campaigning the IMOCA 60, Daniel's offshore career blossomed. He then went on to serve as boat captain for Volvo 60s and 65s, and ultimately race in the Ocean Race Europe on board Team Austrian Ocean Racing in 2022 and

2023 (this boat is also racing this year in the Heineken Regatta) as their bow man.

“There is a lot of Canadian talent here at the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. My husband Morgen Watson is Canadian, we own Hermes Ocean Racers boat and business, and he also serves as the Operations Chair for the Regatta. Our Race Director for the event, Dave Sprague is also Canadian.

Hermes has done three Heineken Regattas in the past, this will be her fourth

event, and we are happy to have a well-matched Class40 to race against!

“Also, our company Ocean Racers operates every season in St. Maarten, so anyone looking to charter for racing or fast cruising in the future can do so with us. We are unique that we have the fastest charter sailboat based on the island, and we also offer access to fast cruising vacations for sailors looking to enjoy a little more performance than a typical sailing charter.”

Entry list in line with yachting's resurgence

By Robbie Ferron

The entry list for the 2024 event is very good and in line with the resurgence of all yachting events after the pandemic.

The numbers are a little inflated by a dinghy class so comparisons are not accurate, but even discarding these entries, the participation is good and stands out with some events (like Voile de St. Barths) having been cancelled.

There are some significant big boats like “Leopard 3” that has just won the Caribbean 600 and numerous others. The presence of three classic Swan 65's will remind old timers of the days when these grand dames were the leading boat of the time and remind all of their magnifi-

cent design.

For the first time in a long time, the highly competitive Melges 24's will have their own class with four local boats. Regrettably, this being a one design class, they will now not be able to race boat for boat against the sensational little “Surprise” design helmed by Tristan Marmousez from Martinique, who was last year's overall winner. This boat stands out as the hull is a very old one and more likely to have been discarded at the back of a boatyard rather than dominating Caribbean podiums.

But the superior one design class will be the ten Diam 24's. No other island in the Caribbean can boast of such a class, not



The J-120 J-Aguar chartered by Marcos Weinstein racing in the 2023 St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. (Photo credit Laurens Morel-Salty Colours)

only because they are one design and there are 10 of them, but also because they are a modern breakthrough design.

In the CSA classes, there are a host of interesting boats. “Huey Too”

took away most of the silverware in the second Heineken Regatta in 1982. She is back more than 40 years later with a recent strong record of successes.

J boats are well represented. There is a J 120

(“Jaguar”) two J122's (“El Ocaso” and “Moana”) as well as a J111 (“Spike”) A J99 “Learning to Fly”, and even an old J30 which should never be underestimated. There are also two J105s (“Solstice” and “Umakua”). Then there is the local J70 from the Maritime School.

Some 26 bareboats are entered, which will remind us all of the early days of the Heineken Regatta, many Dutch entries, as well as some from the US and Germany and a Greek entry – many identical boats, so close competitive racing is guaranteed.

In the multihulls, the happy situation is occurring where the more financially manageable cruising multihulls are going to have a

good race and the highly invested rockets are not going to dominate the podium. Whilst the goal of most “classes” is to have the most similar boats competing, the ultimate is a “one design” class. In the case of the “Island Time” class, there is no interest in this goal. The class is for sailors who don't want the hassle of getting rating certificates, but want to be part of the event. So the entry in this class is the greatest mix of floating and sailing vessels from very small to huge, and without regard to the hull number. Fun in diversity!

Wind forecasts for the event have been varied, but seem to be settling down to decent trade winds.

Next Generation Race returns after successful debut last year

By Robert Luckock

The Next Generation race is a two-day race for kids of the sailing school between the ages of 8 and 13. This year, 24 children in 12 teams of two sailors have been selected from the Primary School programme and the after-school sailing programme to race on the RS Zest sailboats, a two-person boat with mainsail and jib.

There are six boats available and all the teams will rotate. One team rests and the other team races. The racing takes place in Simpson Bay on March 2 and 3 and it gives the kids an opportunity to be part of the Heineken Regatta.

"Last year, we did for the first time and we had six teams of three persons per team," says Sint Maarten Yacht Club (SMYC) Manager Saskia Revelman. "There was so much interest to participate in it and we were able to do it in a rotating format."

On the Saturday morning, the kids are at the yacht club at 9:00 for the bridge show, so they can be exposed to all kinds of boats passing through, always an impressive sight. Then they sail in the morning, as long as weather conditions are good, and in the afternoon, they go to the Regatta Village in Port de Plaisance for the daily prize giving.

"At the village, we promote the sailing school with the kids. There will be a Sint Maarten Yacht Club stand there as well, and we will be showing the new "sailability" boat, that is adapted for persons with physical challenges, and do some fundraising for it.

On Sunday morning, they go on the water again with their coach to watch the start of the big race, followed by sailing in the afternoon. "It's a combination of being part of the regatta in the village and on the water. A regatta within a regatta," Saskia adds.



Participants will be sailing from the Sister Regina School, Seventh Day Adventist, Leonard Conner, and the ACE (All Children Education) Foundation in Cole Bay. And, they will be joined by those from the after-school sailing programme comprising experienced sailors to racers, all in the same age group.

As for the sailability programme – the new RS Venture boat was christened last year at the yacht club – interest is growing, but as Saskia explains, the yacht club currently doesn't have the staff to grow the programme – and no funds.

"We started the programme with the Resources for Community Resilience (R4CR) funds from March 2023 to March 2024 with the White and Yellow Cross students and we've found a way to continue it, but at the same time struggling to grow it financially to have more people participate in it.

"It's hard to find specialised

sailing instructors for that on the island so we are setting up a three-month training programme for youngsters, who are currently unemployed, to become sailing instructors for small boats. With the collaboration of Sint Maarten Yacht Club and Kidz at Sea, that will start in April to June, training six youngsters to become sailing instructors. We already do a lot with a small team, but if we want to grow our programmes and fulfil our dreams, we need more instructors.

Keeping the continuity going for sailing instructors can be a challenge as they mostly come from the Netherlands and stay only a year.

"We don't have this skill and expertise on the island at the moment, but we can instruct our own instructors as well," she reasons. "That's our focus now to get extra well-trained staff, who are going to stay, for these programmes."

On the Heineken Regatta

social media Facebook platform, attention is given to the yacht club being the hosting club and the programmes that it is running. A sailability Instagram video has just been launched, and there is content on the primary school programme and press release on the Next Generation Race. It's

well worth a look to keep abreast of what's going on with youth sailing.

"We really appreciate that the Heineken Regatta is sharing our story and giving us publicity on the free programmes that we run," Saskia concludes.



Some seven Lycée students between the ages of 15 and 18, from the Robert Weinum Cité Solaire, will be taking part in the Heineken Regatta over the four days, under the supervision of their teacher Eric Deloof on a First Beneteau 21. Students from Collège Mont des Accords are also expected to participate on another Beneteau 21. The two boats have been sponsored by Mélimer, Friars Bay Sailing Club, and St. Martin Tourism Office. The students will rotate on the two boats, ideally forming a female crew and a male crew or mixed crews.



Children training for the Next Generation Race on the RS Zest sailboats. (Photos by Digital Island)

The Special Story of the Diam class in Sint Maarten

Multi hull designs keep developing at a rapid pace, but the introduction of the Diam design overcame a few stumbling blocks in medium size multihull development to achieve a new plateau.

Each cat depends on trapezes for stability, but not everybody wants to get on a trapeze in order to go fast. If you are going to get the right moment without trapeze, you need beam. So you

shift to a trimaran in place of a catamaran to make it more sailable, and you put rudders on the amas so that you can sail the boat on one ama and get through the water with absolutely minimal resistance as speed comes naturally.

The result is a manageable low cost boat with modern technology and great speed. You create very clear class rules so that the one design standards can be easily maintained. You make the ultra easy to break down

and manage at low cost and you put it in a great tropical sailing location where a driving force like Pierre Altier happens to live and – it's a wow!

You may go fast, but you will find a class here in Sint Maarten where the standard of sailing these machines is improving at a rapid rate as a result of the amount of sailing being done as the standard of sailing has gone up hugely.



At this year's St. Maarten Heineken Regatta, the Diam24 class will be trialing a new tracking and data application, Sail Insight, for both safety and performance reasons © Laurens Morel via Heineken Regatta.

The Grand Dames gracing the Heineken Regatta 2024

There was a time when the premier yachts at regattas were "all round". They were solidly built, fast for their time and elegant.

Whilst more recent yachts are either faster or more elegant, there are very few that match the attributes of an earlier era. The Swan 65 is the icon of

that era and there are three of them entered in this year's Heineken Regatta – a rare occurrence in the Caribbean!

The three entries are "Blue Magic" (Swedish), "Sisi" (Austrian), and "Saïda" (Swiss). These yachts are built by a leading yacht builder, Nautor Swan.

Many years ago, someone dreamt up the idea of a race around the world when previously there had been none. It was called the Whitbread Ocean Race (it has since evolved with other names). A Mexican gentleman called Ramon Carlin bought a Swan 65 and proceeded to win the first round of the world yacht race. They say he won



in comfort.

These yachts are no longer the likely race winners due to their weight and somewhat dated technology, but they are solid safe vessels

with outstanding interiors and great see keeping qualities. Their lines, created by Sparkman and Stephens, are classic and continue to be appreciated.

Yacht aficionados will be delighted to see these on the course of the Sint Maarten Heineken Regatta, which runs for four days, starting tomorrow, February 29.

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'GFA Caraïbes' on hot winning streak coming into the Heineken

By Robert Luckock

CSA 3 watch out! The Martinique-based "GFA Caraïbes-La Morrigane", the 24ft Surprise Archambault whose crew raised the Most-Worthy Performance of the Regatta trophy last year, are back to defend their title.

The crew didn't rest on their laurels after that success in St. Maarten, but went on to win all the regattas they entered in the Caribbean and Martinique.

"It was a crazy year," agreed skipper Tristan Marmousez. "And, this year, we are defending our title everywhere."

The 2024 season started very well with the team winning the "Mango Bowl" Regatta in St. Lucia, then they racked up wins in January in Grenada Sailing Week for the second year in a row, and at the Schoelcher Nautical Week in Martinique 10 days ago.

"We haven't made any changes to the boat and the crew is almost identical. Just two replacements for the Heineken Regatta and they already work very well with us," Tristan noted. "Above all, we are friends and work instinctively together."

"As for our competition, we know they will be expecting us. We will no longer be the hunters on the water, but the ones being hunted! We also have a new competitor who comes, like us, from Martinique with the same boat as us (surprise class). They are very strong. So, it's going to be an interesting battle between us." This year in June "GFA Caraïbes" is planning to go to a very popular regatta in Switzerland, the "Bol d'Or", more than 500 boats including more than 100 surprise classes.

The crew, usually six on board depending on wind conditions, will most likely charter a catamaran mother ship to tow "GFA Caraïbes" to St. Maarten as they did last year. Normally, it's about a 36-hour sail from



"GFA Caraïbes-La Morrigane" (Photo by Tim Wright)

Martinique (last year, it was 42 hours having to stop frequently to clear Sargassum weed) but this way, the crew arrives fresh and rested. The

24ft. "Surprise" has zero comforts on board and is purely set up for racing.

This will be Tristan's ninth

Heineken Regatta. He used to race a Melges 24 but switched to the "Surprise", an old design from 1986, on which he has a lot of experience.

The crew have a reputation for sailing the boat very well to handicap as their results prove.



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Team "Keelforce" is set for their first Heineken

Team "Keelforce" is scheduled to make their first appearance in this year's 44th St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. Captain Brad Law and his nine-member crew from South Carolina are avid sailors, but none has raced in the Heineken Regatta to date.

"Some of us have visited St. Maarten, but not for the regatta," explained "Keelforce" crew member Alicia Cameron. She continued, "This regatta is a bucket list item for our captain. He convinced us all to go, but it didn't take very much convincing to sail in the Caribbean."

Most of the crew have sailed their entire lives.

"We are a car mechanic, a charter boat captain, a retired Coast Guardsman, an engineer, a realtor, a tech executive, an insurance agent, and a few business owners," explained Cameron. "Not only are we friends, but we have a father-daughter and hus-



Team Keelforce from South Carolina is set to make their Heineken Regatta debut racing a Sunsail Charter boat 46 called "Maguy 3". This photo is from their South Carolina Halloween regatta last year. The boat pictured is their usual boat (named "Keelforce"). They will be chartering a boat for the Heineken.

band-wife crew on board," she continued.

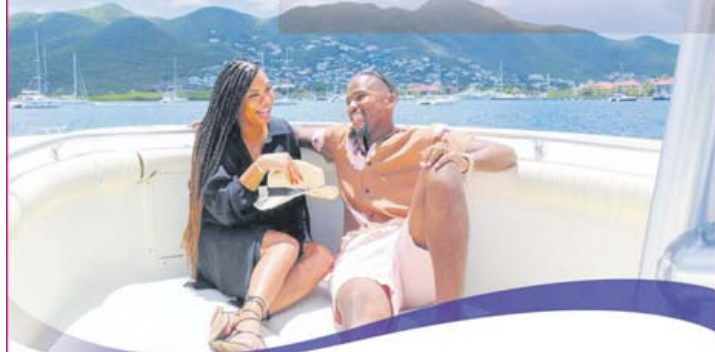
"Keelforce" will be racing a Sunsail Charter boat 46 called "Maguy 3". The Sunsail 46 is a Beneteau. It is 47 feet 9 inches long and has a beam of 14 feet 7 inches. It carries 150 gallons of water and 52 gallons of fuel and

features three cabins. It has three bathrooms called heads and, yes, it does have air conditioning.

So watch out for the team from South Carolina as they enjoy their first Heineken.

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Dive Sint Maarten's Willem Dekker Head Mark Layer for the Heineken

By Robert Luckock

Retired Dutch marine Willem Dekker has a long association as a volunteer with the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta, going back to 2005 when he was part of the A Team.

This will be his fourth consecutive year as the head mark layer on the boat "Double Dutch." He's juggling this crucial task during the four days of the regatta with overseeing the smooth running of his thriving Dive Sint Maarten business.

The mark layer's job is a physically demanding one, not to everyone's taste, but a vital one that ensures courses are set correctly every day for the hundreds of participating boats in the regatta. The mark layer boat is in constant radio communication with the race committee.

"It's very exciting to be on the water, that's where the action is, placing the buoys in the right place and I like it," says Willem (70). "It is a tough job; we start early in the morning and during the race, we have to keep an eye to make sure the buoys stay in the right place. It's usually not a big deal. We also work with the Dutch marines."

According to variations in the wind direction, buoys may have to be adjusted on the instruction from the Race Director. In the unlikely event a mark drifts away and boats are fast approaching, then the mark laying boat has to act as the buoy, waiting until the entire fleet of boats has passed it.

"If that happens, I have to keep my boat in position with the GPS, only looking at that and nothing else. And I have three radios. I know the routine after four years. Last year was a very easy regatta for us."

Willem is assisted on the mark laying boat by first mate Jeroen van der Werff, who has considerable experience in this particular job. To Willem's surprise and disappointment, the Canadian David Sprague, who previously assisted on the mark laying boat, is now the Race Director for this year's Heineken Regatta.

"He's a very nice guy, but he didn't get our Dutch sense of humour," Willem laughs.



Willem Dekker pictured at Dive Sint Maarten, Bobby's Marina.
(Robert Luckock photo)

"But I'm going to miss him. At first, he wanted to be on top of everything until he realised we knew what we were doing."

There is a replacement for Sprague on the boat who Willem has not yet met, another Canadian living in Bermuda, but is confident with van der Werff's guidance he will fit right in.

"Most of the marks are inflated and taken out by the Dutch marines with their fast-raiding interception and special forces craft (FRISC) by the time we go out. The only marks we do are special marks for special races. We have to check that everything is okay. If a boat complains that there is no mark then we are the mark."

"We always have someone from the regatta organisation on board who is in direct contact with the Race officer. There are pin end boats, who are doing their own jobs under the race officer and we are also guiding the marines."

The tricky part is hauling those buoys back into the boat after the races. The anchor

line depth can vary from 10 metres to 50 or 60 metres, the latter buoys are usually a few miles out for the big ocean racers to go around.

"At that depth, you need a lot of line and it takes about four people to pull the mark up, believe me."

The good news for Willem is that the dive business doesn't have to close as it had to last year, because of the regatta, since he has acquired a Delta 38 dive boat to keep the diving business going while he's on the mark laying boat.

"For us, it's high season, and the busiest time for the diving business. It's very possible that the dive boat will be out at the same as we are working, and that's very exciting."

The dive business is booming, especially from the cruise ships, around 200% more clients than last year, Dekker discloses. About 80 % of them come directly to the dive shop in Bobby's Marina, Philipsburg, just a 10-minute walk from the ship. "We have very good reviews and are on top of everything. Very busy."

Dive Sint Maarten operates with two boats, "Double Dutch" and "Sea Dragon" from Saba acquired on a contract. Diving tours are organised in the mornings, check in time is 8:30am except for cruise passengers who have a special check-in time at 10:30am.

The 8:30am boat returns around 1:00 or 1:30pm and goes out again in the afternoon for Discover Scuba

Dives (DSDs) at Little Bay for non-certified divers. These are for people who have never dived before. They get a theory session in the dive shop before going to Little Bay, instructed on under water skills before diving with an instructor one-to-one.

"If there are no issues, most people are so excited that they come back and take a course. Dive Sint Maarten is increasingly offering Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) open water courses, and PADI advanced courses as the standard one is only to 80 metres. The advanced certification allows you to dive much deeper and explore wrecks, etcetera."

"Besides that, we organise diving courses all the way up to Dive Master level. We have five people at the moment doing Dive Master training. That's always a good thing for a dive centre to offer."

Dekker took over the dive business in Bobby's Marina in April 2019 when it was previously Octopus Diving. There are some 25 dive spots that divers are taken to on the south west side of the island. Off Cupecoy is the "Gregory" and old former fishing boat "Fu Sheng", the latter a very deep dive for advanced divers, possible when weather conditions are calm, as well as other sites.

Most dive spots take about 20 to 25 minutes to get there. In very calms seas, another option is on the east side between St. Martin and St. Barths, where there are at least six beautiful dive sites.

One difference from other dive companies is that Dive Sint Maarten offers drift diving. This involves dropping divers off at one spot with their instructor. They are left for about 15 minutes, and the dive boat follows the bubbles. The divers surface far away from where they started.

"It gives divers more freedom to explore along the reef instead of staying in one spot," Willem explains. It's more exciting for them, because they never know what they are going to see."

Dive Sint Maarten also caters to charter groups, for example, at the time of this interview, 22 Canadians from Aquamundo, a company that organises dive trips worldwide, were arriving next day for five days. Needless to say, bookings are also streaming in from the latest behemoth on the water, "Icon of the Seas."

"Aquamundo has chosen us in the Caribbean for the first time, Dekker discloses. "It's all about the positive reviews and what people are saying about us."

A two-tank dive is US \$130 including equipment and free refreshments and snacks on the boat, and after the dive, free ice-cold Amstel Bright beers. For diving with your own equipment, the charge is US \$110. Dive packages are also available for those staying longer on the island. There special prices for 5 x two tanks or 10 tanks, etcetera. Flexibility and customer satisfaction are always key.

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44th St. Maarten Heineken Regatta: A celebration of Caribbean culture

Prepare for some serious fun from Thursday, February 29, to Sunday, March 3, at the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta Village at Princess Port de Plaisance. As the sun sets on each day of world-class racing, patrons will enjoy the sounds of the Caribbean as various international headliners take the stage. This year, the 44th St. Maarten Heineken Regatta will be celebrating its key values – sustainability, generation, inclusivity and celebration – through music.

Tomorrow, Thursday, February 29, marks the beginning of the four-day Regatta with an exhilarating DJ Battle featuring local DJs. EDM enthusiasts can anticipate an extraordinary showcase of the best riffs and loops in the Caribbean. The focus on sustainability takes centre stage on this opening night at the Village, not only through the cashless KBand payment system (as highlighted in a related story) but also with a novel recycling system. This system offers the choice



Jamaican-American reggae artist Tarrus Riley will headline the final party night of the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta on Sunday, March 3.

to either keep your cup or dispose of it in a designated bin for a thorough cleaning!

On Friday, March 1, the Heineken Regatta embraces the spirit of generations with a

spectacular throwback concert! Caribbean icons Kevin Lyttle and Rupee will take the stage as the evening's headliners, serenading the audience with their chart-topping hits from back in the day. Kevin Lyttle gained global recognition with his



Kevin Lyttle will perform his throwback songs with Rupee on Friday, March 1.

dance-pop hit "Turn Me On", infused with Caribbean vibes from his home island of St. Vincent. Rupee adds to the generational celebration with soca sounds from his native Barbados, including the ever-popular "Tempted to Touch." The Friday line-up also features local artistes such as King T-Mo, Control Band, and Mix Master Pauly, guaranteeing a fun-filled Friday night.

Saturday, March 2, is dedicated to inclusivity as French Urban pop duo DROXYANI graces the stage. Uniting the love and spirit of one island, Sint Maarten/Saint Martin, the duo celebrates "Twice the Caribbean" with a French infusion of Caribbean sounds. A true island-wide dance party is in the making! The line-up includes local artistes King James, Latin Sugar, Urmain Drum Band, island DJs, and a Carnival Troupe dance performance, creating a vibrant Caribbean melange.

Sunday, March 3, is all about celebrating the final day of the Regatta with international artiste Tarrus Riley, a

Continued on pg. 14

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A celebration of Caribbean culture...continued

Jamaican-American and true Rastafarian. As the main headliner, Tarrus Riley brings pure reggae melodies uniquely his own, accompanied by an incredible band. His signature song, "She's Royal", is a crowd favourite. Recognized for his exceptional live performances, Tarrus Riley has collaborated with major artistes like Major Lazer and Ellie Goulding.

Backed by Blind Earz, artiste Adam O, hailing from the US Virgin Islands, gets the party started with Caribbean spirit through soca and reggae tunes. DJ Puffy will also make his debut on the Regatta stage, known for his



Rupee adds to the generational celebration with soca sounds from his native Barbados on Friday.

unique Caribbean-EDM sound and hailed as a finalist of the Red Bull Thre3style World Championships. Local talents Tamlia Chance and Kenyo Baly round up the stage, showcasing the home-grown musical talent of St. Maarten.

All these incredible artistes will perform at the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta Village at Princess Port de Plaisance daily, beginning after the Regatta prize-giving around 6:00pm. The bars will offer ice-cold Heinekens, together with celebratory bottles and glasses of Veuve Clicquot champagne and a variety of Tito's Vodka cocktails. With abundant food and entertainment suitable for all ages, the Regatta

Village, which will open to the public daily from 3:00pm, is a family-friendly venue with a medley of sailors, locals and visitors who all share in the Regatta vibes.



French Urban pop duo DROXYANI will grace the stage on Saturday, March 2.

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Cashless Convenience

For its 44th edition, the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta is adopting a cashless approach to enhance efficiency and reduce plastic waste! Say goodbye to waiting in lines for tokens that might go unused by the end of the night. This year, all transactions for drinks and food within the Regatta Village at Port de Plaisance will be conducted seamlessly through your KBand app or card.

To ensure a swift and hassle-free experience, multiple top-up locations, accepting both cash and cards, will be strategically placed throughout the village. For those with data, bypass the queues altogether by topping up your credit directly on your phone using the KBand app – no need to throw out your leftover tokens at the end of the event!

Heineken Regatta hopes that this innovative initiative will significantly reduce wait times, eliminating the need for cash or tokens. Patrons can simply tap the QR code on their phone or card, transforming transactions into a smooth and convenient process for both customers and staff. More importantly, bartenders can now focus more on what matters most – crafting and serving your drinks – without the hassle of counting tokens.

Don't miss out on the Serious Fun! Secure your tickets online through the KBand app or at any of the following places: Divico Cash & Carry, Tech Hub (Carrefour Bush Road), Boutique Levis Marigot, Mailbox (Simpson Bay), Van Dorp, Kalaboom Headquarters and Digicel (Marigot and Hope Estate).



Don't miss out on the after parties at Green Zones by Heineken Silver!

The 44th St. Maarten Heineken Regatta is officially underway! After each thrilling day of sailing, everyone is invited to enjoy local cuisine, ice-cold Heineken and performances by both local and international talents in the Regatta Village at Port de Plaisance. On Friday and Saturday, the celebration continues at the Green Zones, where various artistes will grace the stage in the island's hottest music venues.

Powered by Heineken Silver, some of the best international EDM artistes will take partying in paradise to a higher level at the three Green Zones. With its extra-refreshing taste

son Bay Lagoon from 11:00pm onward.

SikDuo, comprising DJ culture pioneer DJ Riz and house music prodigy Chris Moody D, is one of Jersey's favourite DJ groups. Their remixes, original tracks, mashups, and bootlegs have gained support from world-renowned DJs like Kaskade, Tiësto and David Guetta.

Saturday Afternoon @ Elev8

On Saturday, March 2, music enthusiasts will party in the sky at Elev8 at Rainforest Adventures with DJ Joey Daniel, supported by local DJs Ajay Raw and Jayson Miro from 3:00 to 9:00pm.

Joey Daniel's career

in the Village, before party animals head to the open-air Moonbar to dance under the moon with DJs Klingande, Killian Christolome and Phil Conti from 11:00pm until.

Klingande's sublime melodies have positioned him as one of the most refreshing and original producers in modern dance music. Known

for the standout track "Jubel", his innovative sound has significantly influenced the melodic house genre, earning him recognition at major festivals like Ultra Music Festival, Tomorrowland, and Creamfields. Now, he brings his talent to our shores for the 44th Heineken Regatta!

Don't miss out on the

serious fun! Check out the full schedule on heinekenregatta.com/schedule.

And make sure to get your tickets online on the KBand app or at any of the following places:

- Divico Cash & Carry
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Tickets for Elev8 on Saturday are available through <https://www.ticketfairy.com/event/elev8-hilltop-sunset-party-heineken-regatta-2024-special>



and subtle finish, this accessible and less-bitter lager is the perfect choice to fuel your dance moves all night long!

Dive into this year's after-party line-up:

Friday Night @ Soggy Dollar Bar

Kick off the festivities on Friday, March 1, at the Regatta Village with headliners Kevin Lytle and Rupee, followed by DJ duo SikDuo at Soggy Dollar Bar, where you can dance under the stars on the Simp-

can be summed up as nothing less than a well-deserved rise to fame. The Rotterdam-born Amsterdam-resident has been making waves on the Dutch dance scene for nearly a decade now. But 2015 was Joey's international breakthrough year when he took the leap every DJ secretly dreams of and had his first big gigs in Ibiza.

Saturday Night @ Moonbar

Saturday night heats up with French Urban pop duo DROXYANI

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