

5 7/8's Isotopes Experience Spring Fever 2004, April 8-10.

The Isotope Fleet traveled to Lake Hartwell, GA to join around 80 other catamaran skippers from Colorado, New York, Florida and places in between to spend the weekend enjoying the red clay, yellow pollen, and unpredictable weather and winds of the 6th Annual Spring Fever Regatta. Spring Fever is one large catamaran camping party. The goal is to have fun, and get lots of catamarans out



on the water. Competitive and new, young and old, the skippers were reminded at the competitors meeting that sailing is fun, settle it on the water, and look out for each other.

Walter Brier and John Riley were both able to free up their work schedules to be able to sail on Friday, as did the majority of participants. Eric & Joleen Rasmussen and Kemp & Jackson Harris arrived between 6-7 on Friday night, with enough light to get the boats unloaded and the masts up, before hitting the tail end of the pizza party and the front end of the dancing. Front end in that after finishing up pizza, we crashed Walter's campsite.

Walter had a lovely point campsite, secluded from other campers. Too bad about the poker game one site over that lasted 'til 11:00pm. Also, being on the point meant that we were right close to the bass boats that were heading out at 6:30 in the morning, just after the geese. John, however, was right next to a trash can that was collecting beer bottles through much of Friday night.

For the last couple of years, I've heard about Spring Fever, how it is too cold, too windy, too light. This year held true to form. With six boats, the Isotopes and Chesire (14ft version of the 16ft Isotope, or 7/8ths), were a class starting with the Hobie 17 and Hobie 18 fleets. Jackson, sailing the Chesire, sailed with Isotopes rather than the Formula 14 and Hobie 16 thanks to an Isotope friend, Sam Evans, who thought to suggest it to us. Jackson definitely wanted to sail with the Isotopes rather than the spinnaker sporting Formula 14s. Friday's racing was hot and light. The boats hung out for about three hours, when Race Committee moved from the middle of the lake with no wind, into a cove with a bit of wind. The race started in light, steady wind, but subsequently died, resulting in a shortened course. Walter has yet to learn to watch out for the S flag on a mark boat. Walter was third across the line for a first place finish. It was a hot day on the water. No one knew what to expect for Saturday. The winds on Saturday started promising, though shift. The Formula 18s were the first start, the second start was Inter 20 and Inter 17s. The third start was the Formula 14 and Hobies who were caught slight off guard, as their class flag was numeral pennant 4. The Isotopes were the fourth to start. Half way through the first race the wind shifted 180 degrees, lightened, then freshened. At the point that it reversed direction, Joleen was just approaching the first windward mark. Joleen had the opportunity to approach that mark about 7 times, before finally making it around. Even though he was in the fourth start, Eric, on Isotope 42 was the first boat of any class to finish in the first race on Saturday. After that, he hit a mark in every race.

With only two races on Saturday, and one on Friday, RC posted a schedule change to start the racing at 9:30 rather than 10:45. Sunday's weather forecast was a bit grim with storms promising. We parked the truck close to the tent, and took foul weather gear into the tent. We made an early night of it, and this time there was no poker game next door, and we were up before the geese went through. It had rained some during the night, but the morning was clear, and not as cold as Saturday morning. Even so, I still put on my wetsuit as I could always take the top portion off if I got too hot. Walter made a coffee and biscuit run, while Eric did some lace repair on my trampoline.

The first race started shortly after 9:30, and we were again the forth start. The winds were picking up and on our upwind leg, we were on a close reach, hiked out, with the windward hull just out of the water, sailing though the downwind fleet. It was neat. Had to think starboard, port, windward, leeward a fair amount.

The second race was a downwind start for the fourth start, and the winds began to die. I was last to reach the windward mark, though I stayed in clear air, and avoided the pinwheel mess at the mark. Last around the mark in the Isotope fleet, and in the lessening air, I decided to go the left side of the course, rather than the right as all the other boats, every single one in all the classes, had gone to the right. Also, the wind was slightly better on the left side. It was the longer leg, as the finish line was closed, but if the wind held on the left side, the gambit might pay off. It was a slow sail down the lake. I watched as the boats on the right side of the line bunched up in the middle of the downwind leg near the committee boat. I watched as I sailed past them on the other side of the lake, the lone boat. I kept sailing for a while past the pin before I tried to jibe for the leeward mark. I jibed, and I stopped. I jibed back, and went a bit further, jibed again, and was able to sail to the leeward mark. I looked up the course, and couldn't spot any Isotope sails. I looked back, and saw that I was ahead of Kemp and Walter. Couldn't spot Eric or John. As I approached the finish line, I still could not find any Isotope sails ahead of me. I whooped as I crossed the line, thinking that I may have been first. Sure enough, the others were all behind me. The clear air gambit paid off.

The third race had Eric and I starting port, which a couple minutes before the start was the favored tack, but at the start, the winds were square to the line, so we sailed behind the starboard boats, ending in not so bad a position on the lake and at least in clear air.



In the last race, the winds had picked up a bit and John, on starboard, was T-boned by a Hobie 18, on port. The Hobie hit John square on John's port shroud chainplate, twisting it a little bit. The two boats were hung up with John's shroud embedded six to eight inches deep into the bow of the Hobie for about half a minute. The Hobie was less fortunate and headed to shore rather than finishing that race as its bow looked like a can-opener had been used on it.

The good wind did not last the race. As I rounded the leeward mark, I passed Kemp to windward, on the layline to the pin. Alas, the winds died as I approached, and rather than tack away, as Kemp did, I pinched for the pin, and managed to nicely hit the pin. Kemp finished before I did. I rounded the pin to finish again, and was forced to tack back to starboard due to the small pack of boats on starboard heading for the pin. I did another 360 and sailed a bit up the line before taking to starboard for my third shot at the finish line. What a way to end the sailing.

For five of us, it was our first time at Spring Fever, and for four of us, it was our first time sailing with many other catamarans. For Jackson, it was his first time racing as a skipper. We all had a terrific time, in spite of our mistakes and mishaps. I found the competitors helpful and considerate while looking out for each other. Scoring-wise, the top three boats in the Isotope fleet were only one point apart.. Every Isotope took a first this weekend. Since John was the only one with two firsts, accompanied by two seconds and a third, he took first place. It was close and competitive in light and fluky wind conditions.



Isotope Class Standings.

First – John Riley, Second - Kemp Harris, Third– Eric Rasmussen, Fourth – Walter Brier, Fifth – Joleen Rasmussen, Sixth – Jackson Harris.