

Racing

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Racing in Paradise: Young Canadian Crew Takes on Heineken Regatta 2025 Aboard Bella J



March 27, 2025

By Kenny Harris

Our J133 crew was one of the youngest in the Antigua Sailing Week fleet, with an average age of just 27, thanks in part to a few of the young bloods from Nova Scotia. Every member played a key role in getting Bella J around the course: Kenny Harris (Helm), Helle Stjern (Mainsail Trim), Christina Fong (Jib Trim), Noah Villafane (Jib Trim), Noah Taylor (Mid Bow), Peter Inches (Bow), Ray Rhineland (Owner/Navigator), Patrick Dyer (Grinder), Andrew Burke (Grinder), Henry McCallum (Tactician), Emily Roy (Float/Strategy).



Bella J Photo Wendy Loat



As a Newfoundlander, the sea has always been a part of who I am. Our maritime heritage traces back to the days when sailors from our shores ventured south, trading salt cod for Caribbean spirits. That spirit was alive as we took Bella J to the Caribbean, escaping the Canadian winter to race.



Have another Heineken Photo: Wendy Loat

The Heineken, as it is known, is a true spectacle, blending world-class racing with an atmosphere that is second to none. The event kicked off with a 30-nautical-mile sprint around the island, a race that demanded constant tactical adjustments as we navigated shifting winds, strong currents, and complex wind shadows off the island's rugged coastline. Passing Anguilla, we were met with a mix of rain squalls and confused seas, adding to the challenge. The remainder of the regatta featured two days of tight windward-leeward racing in very light winds and a day of short point-to-point courses along the scenic Dutch Antilles coastline, between Cole Bay, Simpson Bay, and Philipsburg.

The camaraderie among competitors stands out. The Heineken Regatta is known for its mix of Corinthian and professional teams, and we found ourselves facing off against top-tier talent. Despite the competitive action on the water, the atmosphere was welcoming—both on the docks before heading out, or at the regatta village after racing. As Canadians far from home, we felt instantly welcome, and as a Newfoundlander, I couldn't help but think that islanders—no matter where they're from—just get each other.

In addition to Bella J, there were six other Canadian boats that took part in the Regatta including Hermes, Imaginaire, Panacea X, Sassafras, Salish Sisters and Aletheia.



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Special shout-out goes to Sarah Nicholson and her crew, who took on the RORC Caribbean 600 just before I arrived in Antigua to deliver the boat to Sint Maarten. Bella J finished as the best-performing Canadian boat in IRC 2. That team—made up of Sarah, Paul [unclear], Colin O’neill, Grace Flemming, Simon Rees, Dave Richards, Tom Nicholson, and Ryan Kelly—faced one of the toughest offshore races on the Royal Ocean Racing Club’s calendar. I’m also incredibly grateful to Ray Rhineland for trusting Sarah and I with Bella J for the C600 and Heineken Regatta.

Beyond the racing, the event was flawlessly organized. The race committee and volunteers ran an outstanding regatta, and their hospitality was unmatched. The Heineken Regatta isn’t just about what happens on the water—it’s about the entire experience. The post-race concerts, the food, the daily bridge show while transiting Simpson Bay Bridge and the energy of the regatta village made every moment off the water just as memorable. The week finished on a high note with an unforgettable performance by The Wailers—an epic way to close out an incredible regatta.

Thank goes to the dedicated delivery crew and friends who helped bring Bella J over 2000 nautical miles from Eastern Canada; North Sails for their exceptional livery of 3DI sails; and all the East Coast Canadian boatyards and marinas that have supported Bella J over the years. Special thanks to the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron, the Royal Newfoundland Yacht Club, and Sail Canada for their continued support of offshore sailing and Canadian teams competing internationally.

I’m optimistic that we’ll see even more Canadian teams taking part in these Caribbean events—the Caribbean 600, Heineken Regatta, and Antigua Regatta. The mix of world-class racing, warm weather, and welcoming atmosphere makes it an experience unlike any other. I know I’ll be back for more.