

Scott award a stunner for Valkyrie crew

By Bill Wagner, The Capital Gazette

June 24, 2001 - Members of the *Valkyrie* crew had no idea something special was in store when they showed up at Ida Lewis Yacht Club Thursday afternoon for the Annapolis-to-Newport Race prizegiving ceremony.

Brothers Bobby and Kurt Muller, co-owners of the aged Owens 39, figured they were simply picking up trophies for finishing first in Class IV and third in the 51-foot PHRF fleet.

When race committee chairman Ron Ward stood up to present the inaugural Gaither Scott Memorial Award, Kurt Muller -- like many in the audience -- wondered what it was for.

"Ron Ward gave a very emotional speech. He talked about Gaither Scott and how much he meant to the Annapolis-Newport Race," Kurt Muller said. "Ron broke down several times during the speech and by the end I don't think there was a dry eye in the house."

Ward explained that the award had been established in honor of Scott, longtime Annapolis-Newport race committee chairman, who died last year at age 83. He related that the special award would be henceforth given to a boat that accomplished something significant during the biennial race.

"There is no criteria, no guidelines. It's a very subjective award and the winner is chosen at the race committee's discretion," Ward said. "We tried to keep in mind what Gaither would have appreciated, what he would have found noteworthy."

Ward mentioned that the race committee had settled on three viable candidates for the Scott Memorial Award. He then announced the winner by saying: "Let me tell you about *Valkyrie*."

"We were absolutely floored. None of us expected to get this award," Kurt Muller said. "It's a tremendous honor and the entire crew was crying ... even Bobby had tears in his eyes, which is something I haven't seen in a long, long time."

Carrera, which established a new elapsed time record for the 473-mile race and topped the 11-entry IMS class, was one candidate. However, the Farr 60 was professionally crewed and owner Joseph Dockery of Stamford, Conn. was not onboard.

Trader, an Andrews 70 owned by Fred Detwiler of Grosse Pointe, Mich., was also considered after finishing first among PHRF boats with an elapsed time that also shattered the previous mark. Detwiler had his 16-year-old son and four classmates from the St. George's Academy aboard as crew when *Traderran* into gale force winds.

"The owner didn't want to put anyone else at risk so he went forward and handled the sail changes himself," Ward said.

Ultimately, however, the race committee felt the *Valkyrie* crew showed the greatest Corinthian spirit. Bobby Muller spent countless hours rehabilitating and restructuring the 1978 vintage IOR boat for Annapolis-Newport.

The Muller brothers purchased new sails and applied a new paint job to *Valkyrie*, but unfortunately could not get the boat's electronics to work in time for the start. Things got worse when the Windex blew overboard during a nasty squall in the Chesapeake Bay.

The team was forced to sail by the seat of its collective pants, which wasn't a real problem since that's how Bobby Muller does it anyway.

"This was Bobby's race. He's the one who stood in the middle of the boat and called all the shots," Kurt Muller said. "He just has this natural instinct for how to sail a boat."

Navigator Rick Jackson said Bobby Muller was "always 10 minutes ahead of the wind" in terms of making sail changes and altering trim. He did the difficult downwind driving when 30-knot breezes filled the spinnaker.

"I don't think Bobby slept the entire trip. I was at the helm around 3 a.m. one night and I hear him bellow from the aft berth, 'Stop pointing so high and pinching the damn boat.' I thought he was asleep, but he's down there feeling our sailing angle," Kurt Muller said.

Valkyrie, which revels in offwind conditions, reeled off 187 miles in the initial 24 hours of the race. The 18,000-pound warhorse somehow surfed into the Narragansett Bay doing 11 knots under asymmetrical spinnaker and crossed the finish line at Castle Hill Light early Tuesday evening.

Valkyrie's corrected time of 57 hours easily topped the 18-boat PHRF IV class. More surprising is the fact it was good enough for third in fleet behind *Chessie Racing* and *Trader*.

"The race committee was unanimous that *Valkyrie* exceeded all possible expectations," Ward said.

A perpetual trophy that features crystal sails mounted on a mahogany board shaped into ocean waves will be displayed at Annapolis Yacht Club. Fittingly, the initial entry on the Gaither Scott Memorial Award will be a boat owner who knew the man well.

"It's an incredible thing for Bobby's boat to be the first listed because he's a longtime Annapolis Yacht Club member who appreciated what Gaither Scott stood

for," Kurt Muller said. "We put this program together just to have some fun and it's turned into a fairy tale."

FAST LEARNERS: Neither Ryan Hastings nor Russ Meier had ever been aboard a sailboat prior to arriving at the Naval Academy.

Ensign Hastings hails from Washington state while Ensign Meier was raised in Blair, Pa. Yet those two showed a lot of sense by staying close to shore and not trying to chase a front that developed offshore.

Credit their Naval Academy training, which above all else emphasizes following orders. Navy intercollegiate coach Pat Healy recommended hugging the coast during a pre-race weather briefing and that advice proved accurate.

Even Hastings and Meier were surprised by how much they learned about sailing in four years at the academy.

"We have some of the best instructors in the country teaching us in Brad Dellenbaugh and Pat Healy," Hastings said.

Hastings and Meier led a youthful crew of Midshipmen from the offshore sailing team that included Kevin Beatty, Tara Feher, Jon Silverberg, Mike Kingen, Dan Washington and Dave Nielsen.

FAIR RATING: Gibson Island sailor George Collins wasn't too pleased with the harsh rating that had saddled his new *Chessie Racing* with several poor finishes in major regattas.

Collins, who sold a Santa Cruz 70 downwind sled in favor of the more well-rounded Farr 52, was thrilled with the on-water performance of the offshore racer drawn by Farr Yacht Design and built by Carroll Marine. Yet stiff time penalties were preventing *Chessie* from picking up any hardware.

Prior to this year's winter circuit, Collins and longtime friend Jim Allsopp made some changes that succeeded in getting the rating reduced from -64 to -54. That 10 seconds per mile proved crucial in Annapolis-Newport as *Chessie* corrected over *Trader* by two hours and 33 minutes.

Chessie had a top-notch crew that included Annapolis residents Greg Gendell, Rod Jabin, Tucker Thompson, Johnny Moran, Ryan Breymaier and John Von Schwarz.

However, the unsung hero of the team was unable to do Annapolis-Newport. Ian Gordon, who meticulously prepared *Chessie Racing* for the voyage, was an usher in the wedding of fellow professional sailor Tom Weaver.

BIG WINNER: Annapolis resident Arthur Birney and his *Adventurer* crew had the ingredients for a nice party when they arrived in Newport.

Birney, owner of a rare and beautiful Cherubini 48 schooner, bet *Javelin* owner Larry Bulman a bottle of Gosling's Black Seal Rum and *Donnybrook* owner Jim Muldoon two gallons of Haagen Daz ice cream that he would beat them both on corrected time.

Adventurer, which enjoys a generous 126 rating, was slowed by light air on the Atlantic Ocean and placed fourth in PHRF IV with a corrected time of 64-18-39.

Conditions favored *Donnybrook* (Custom 73) and *Javelin* (Farr 49), both of which got into the low pressure system that propelled half a dozen big boats to Newport well ahead of the remaining fleet. However, *Donnybrook* and *Javelin* both blew out mainsails and were forced to withdraw.