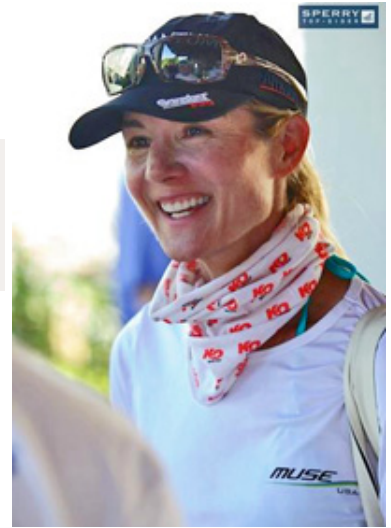


# The MUSE Perspective- A Woman's View Sailing J/70s

(Newport, RI)- The J/70 Class newsletter "Momentum" had a chance to interview Heather Gregg-Earl about recently sailing the J/70, how she won the inaugural J/70 North Americans and what it's like to sail the J/70 as a woman skipper.



1) You didn't know you won until you hit the dock. What were the conversations on the way in?

*HEATHER: "When we crossed the finish line of the last race, we all took a moment to decompress...none of us thought we won. We were all giving each other high fives as we knew we had a solid regatta and felt really good about how we sailed. Tricky conditions with all the good guys up and down. We were pretty consistent except one race where we had to do a penalty turn right after the start in light air landing us in 55th that race with no throw-out in the Championship. Not good! After that, we didn't focus on the scores so much...we just focused on trying to be super consistent. On the way in, we all started to guess where we wound up. We guessed anywhere from third to fifth. Pleasantly surprised when a competitor told us the news as we hit the dock."*

2) The title came down to the final race, and you had quite a bit of ground to make up to secure the championship. What was your approach in that last race?

*HEATHER: "Our approach throughout the regatta was to be consistent and keep ourselves in the game. And that definitely was our approach for the last race. Not to take too many risks as there wasn't a throw-out race. After the first day, we stood 13th after finishing the day 5, 5, 55. With a 55th, we knew we had some hard work ahead of us to make the top 10. Going into the last race, the leader had 31 points on us and a few boats were just points behind us. Our approach was to, again, keep ourselves in the game. Given the shifty conditions and the fact that sides were paying big, we focused on making sure we were clear at the start, starting away from the pack a bit, so we could punch out and get to the side we wanted. Luckily, that worked and Billy Lynn, our tactician, did an amazing job calling the shots that final race."*

3) Tell us about your experiences thus far racing the J/70. What brought you into the Class?

*HEATHER: "I have to say I haven't had as much fun sailing since college sailing! The J/70 is a blast! The boat is a hoot to sail, especially in the breeze. It truly is one-design, it's manageable in terms of crew (only three other people needed to sail), it's great value for the money, and the fleet after one year has such depth in talent. Eighty-nine boats on the line and just one year old...impressive. When I was looking for a new One-Design Class to jump into, I wanted one in which the sailing itself was more fun. And buying into a Class where I had a lot of confidence that the fleet would develop quickly and with a lot of talent was important to me. As a mom chasing my 10-year-old around the Opti circuit, I needed to make sure that the new Class I picked had enough well-attended regattas throughout the year to make it worthwhile. When I went for my first spin in the J/70 with Stu Johnstone one 20 knot day in Newport, I was sold."*



4) What expectations did you have coming into the North Americans?

*HEATHER: "Our goal was to win the Corinthian Division and place in the top 15 overall and have a ton of fun with an all Jumbo crew from Tufts, my alma mater. That, we did!"*

5) The conditions on the Chesapeake Bay allowed for racing on two of the three days. Did you expect it to be a generally light air event?

HEATHER: "Yes, harkening back to my college sailing days, I spent many a light air regatta at Annapolis in the fall so we were prepared for what we ended up getting. It was unfortunate that we didn't get any racing in the second day, but my hat's off to the PRO Sandy Grosvenor and her RC for conducting such a well-run event and calling the racing on that second day."

6) How did you maintain your boat speed in the conditions?

HEATHER: "Constantly changing gears all the time. Overall, a light regatta but we did see the breeze up and down a bit. The racing spanned 5 to 15 knots of breeze...so adjusting rig set up, sail trim, and weight placement was key."

7) Do you feel the J/70 is a good platform for women sailors?

HEATHER: "Yes! And for all you women out there who don't know what to put on your Christmas List... Santa knows exactly where to get a J/70. All kidding aside, I think it's a great boat for women. It's manageable in terms of putting a program together given number of crew, and women can easily sail the boat. It's totally manageable for women as drivers or any crew position for that matter. I've sailed it with an all women crew a few times, and we had a ball."



8) Many top professional sailors have been quite active in the J/70 in its young history. Yet, you won the North Americans with a full Corinthian team. What advice do you have for fellow amateur racers who want to compete in major championships?

HEATHER: "Crazier things happen. My advice to fellow amateurs is:

1. I think it's great to stick together as an amateur team. Stay together.
2. Putting together a good team with great chemistry goes a long way - don't underestimate the power of this.
3. Practice, practice, practice - together as a team.
4. Make sure having fun is one of your goals- we all tend to do better when we do."

9) The J/70 has had an amazing rise to popularity. How is the Class evolving in the United States?

HEATHER: "The Class is on fire. In just one year, they are up to 350 boats sold in North America. And another 150 in Europe. It's a real testament to the confidence so many sailors have in J/Boats' ability to build deep and competitive one-design fleets. This boat hit the market at the right time for sure. It's going to be a great Class to be a part of. I can't wait for Key West."

As one might guess from this narrative, Heather is an experienced woman sailor. She started in her youth on the classic Wianno Seniors off Cape Cod— a favorite of the Kennedy family from Hyannis port on the Cape. She was three-time College All-American on the Tufts University Women's Sailing team. She was second in the 1984 470 Olympic Trials to JJ Fetter/Isler by just one point (JJ went on to grab a Silver Medal in the Olympics). Heather sailed for years on J/22s and J/24s (with Etchells 22 World Champion Dave Curtis as well as the two Johnstone Brothers- Stu & Drake). Later she spent time sailing Sonars for New York YC's Team Racing program in Newport, Sardinia and Cowes. More recently, she sailed Melges 20s in their Winter Circuit and experienced Viper 640 sailing as well. Ultimately, she bought her J/70 for all the reasons she outlines above- it's the ultimate "fun" sportsboat to sail with her friends and kids. As Heather says, "nothing else even comes close!"