

Race Report: Thistle Pasco Regatta 2006

By Doug Stumberger

The 2006 Northwest Circuit Kicks off with Big Breeze on the Snake

The twenty-plus gust hit Dwaine Trummert's *Weatherly* (3669) as we ran downwind along the north shore of the Snake River. Standing with my back against the boom, I saw the spinnaker fully to windward of the forestay and felt the boat begin to rock into a Laser-style deathroll. I dove for leeward rail, aiming for the centerboard, now nearly out of the water. How Dwaine managed to get 3669 back under the kite and avoid capsizing us, I do not know. He called out a cheery "We're fine!" and I gingerly made my way aft, past Deanne who was still completely focused on trimming the chute, to the back of the boat. As I sat on the other side of the rear grating from Dwaine, *Weatherly's* bow lifted out the water and we took off on a full plane, dead downwind, with the leeward mark still a quarter mile distant. Thistle racing just doesn't get any better.

The 2006 Northwest circuit kicked off with two great days of racing in strong winds on the Snake, just upriver from its meeting with Columbia near Pasco, Washington. Seven Thistles traveled from around the district up for the thirtieth annual Desert Regatta, organized by the Columbia Basin Sailing Club and promoted by local Thistler Paul Reeder, sailing *Electric Radish* (3357). This desert land is beautiful in the green of spring. Standing by the river's edge, I imagined Lewis and Clark's Corp of Discovery rafting by on their journey to the Pacific two hundred and one years ago, though sadly the river no longer "teems with salmon." (Clark estimated ten thousand pounds drying in one Native American village.)

The lack of salmon aside, the racing on the Snake was fast and fun. The first race on Saturday established the pattern for the weekend: a pile up at the starboard end of the starting line, a short windward leg that required careful positioning for both shifts and puffs, and key passing opportunities on the runs.

The racing started in a twelve knot southerly, but the wind quickly built to twenty as gusts rolled down off the surrounding bluffs, and the real race—for the longest joyride—was on! Wayne Balsiger's *Rainbow* (3664) and the Lettenmaier team on 3922 led at the first windward mark, with Trummert's 3669 rounding third. The rest of the fleet was close astern: Pat Schirmer on *Ranger* (3663), Ted Sumner and Michael Rees on *Fling* (3590), Reeder's 3357, and 2006 PN District Governor Dave Bogue on *Odyssey* (3520). Lettenmaier gybed to port after the rounding and opened up a healthy lead. Balsiger played the run to the right, while Schirmer gybed and worked furthest left. The first run had a video-game feel to it, as each boat would lift onto a plane, surge ahead of the pack, and fall back as another planed into the lead. After the beat to the finish line, it was Lettenmaier first, Schirmer second, and Balsiger third. The race committee kindly gave us just enough time between races to tie up at a nearby set of finger piers for a snack, some conversation, and a few minutes of lying on the thick grass in the sunshine.

The second race was Schirmer's. He led at the start, called the layline to the windward mark perfectly as the wind shifted right, opened up a convincing lead on the long run, and covered the fleet upwind

Skipper	Boat	Place	Individual Races						Total
			1	2	3	4	5	6	
Terry Lettenmaier	3922	1	1	2	2	1	1	(4)	7
Pat Schirmer	3663	2	2	1	(3)	3	3	3	12
Dwaine Trummert	3669	3	(4)	4	1	2	5	2	13
Wayne Balsiger	3664	4	3	3	4	(DSQ)	2	5	17
Ted Sumner	3590	5	5	5	(DNF)	DNS	4	1	23
David Bogue	3520	6	6	6	5	(DNF)	6	DNS	31
Paul Reeder	3357	7	7	7	6	4	(DNS)	DNS	32

for the win. Lettenmaier finished in second, followed by Balsiger. After a close scramble up to the first turn of the third race, the fleet gybed away and rolled downwind in a pack. Trummert was first to capitalize on a blast off the north shore, lifting 3669 onto a long downwind plane and into the lead. But Schirmer found joy on the right and rounded the leeward mark just ahead. Trummert and Lettenmaier split left from Schirmer on the beat to the finish, and at the first meeting both were able to cross Schirmer. Midway up the leg, it was Trummert and Lettenmaier trading tacks for the lead, with Trummert finally passing Lettenmaier

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on the last tack onto the starboard layline to the finish for the win. Lettenmaier, finishing second, was now the regatta leader, one point ahead of Schirmer, and never relinquished the regatta lead after this race.

Saturday's last race saw Schirmer blasting around the pin to win the start, but Lettenmaier was the first to gybe after the windward mark and burst downwind like they were shot out of a cannon. Trummert gybe-set in pursuit, planing over Schirmer and Balsiger who had worked tarried too long down the right side. The fleet, led by Lettenmaier, rounded a "reverse gybe mark" off the left shore, keeping the mark to starboard. On 3669, Dwaine and I sat on the rear grating while Deanne, Dwaine's wife and a second generation Thistle sailor, steered the boat with the kite. We put the bow up in the air and roared off on wild reach across the river. Lettenmaier covered Trummert on the final beat for the win, with Schirmer finishing in third. The racing was done, the sun was shining, and we retired to the campground for dinner and an evening of Thistle talk.

Sunday dawned cool and cloudy and downright windy. In the first race, in twenty-plus, Balsiger was first upwind and then planed down the right side on the run. Lettenmaier gybed immediately and won the left, arriving just ahead of Balsiger at the leeward mark. After a short beat, Lettenmaier scored their third win of the series, with Balsiger in second and Schirmer in third. The last race of the regatta started with another traffic jam at the pin. Lettenmaier

hit the mark, and then shipped enough water to clean out the dust from winter storage. Sumner then worked 3590 up the shifts in the middle and led at the windward mark, with Balsiger, Trummert, and Schirmer close behind. Sumner and Balsiger hugged the right side on the run, while Trummert played the middle and Schirmer worked left. Every boat was on a full plane dead downwind, but Trummert's downwind speed was tops, passing Sumner just after the gybe mark and leading the pack around the leeward mark. But with the wind now a steady twenty-five, Sumner ground Trummert down on the long beat to the finish and took the bullet for the last race, with Trummert in second and Schirmer finishing in third.

The race committee signaled that we were done for the day, and we headed for the barn. Dennis and Terry Lettenmaier and Laurie Weitkamp on 3922 won the regatta with seven points after the throw out, with Schirmer in second and Trummert a point behind in third. Balsiger, Sumner, Bogue, and Reeder rounded out the results. It started to rain as I left the campground for the four hour drive back to Seattle, and my car's thermometer read a chilly fifty-three degrees, a far cry from Saturday's warm sunshine. No matter, we had enjoyed two days of great racing, enough to tide us over to the next installment of the Northwest circuit, the Yale Lake regatta, hosted by the Portland fleet and raced in the shadow of Mt. St. Helens.

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Doug Stumberger has raced a succession of J24s, Thistles, Tasars, and Lasers since 1996. He currently lives in Seattle with his wife Julie and can be reached at dstumberger@hotmail.com.