

BLUEFLASH

November 1, 2014



J88 Blue Flash

J88 Blue Flash Surfs to Victory 2014 Rum Runner Race

Newport Beach to San Diego

Some days on the water are better than others, and racing my newly bought J88 offshore in the Rum Runner Race from Newport Beach to San Diego was supposed to be one of the good days. But it wasn't just our first race, it was also the first time any of the crew had sailed the boat, and only my third day aboard, so anticipation was tempered by the reality that we had no idea how the day would really unfold.

All week the forecast was amazingly consistent; a cold front would move onshore

overnight before the start and bring strong 25-30 knot Northwest breeze that would last all day with seas "steep NW", at least until the remaining SW wind waves stopped mixing with the predominant NW swell. Interesting. At 29' and 5000 pounds, we were certainly the smallest boat in the race, and not likely to have much company out there if things got wild.

But it was my 50th birthday weekend, and luck was going to be on our side. The forecast moderated, and by

race morning, Commander's Weather was calling for mid teens, gusting low 20's. The Beach Boys "Surfin' USA" started running through my head. And when we woke up gazing over the beach in Newport, the breeze was on, the waves were running, and most important for our Portland based crew, it wasn't raining and the sun was starting to peek through the clouds. There was even a rainbow offshore. Which should have been a clue. But the shower that passed only made us smile at the Socal "rain"; the skies had been



Balboa Yacht Club hosted the start of the inaugural 2014 Rum Runner Race. The 75 mile course started just off the Newport Beach Pier and ended in San Diego off Point Loma.



The Northwest Breeze took its time filling in, but never died!

pouring for two straight weeks in Portland and we were fully acclimated. Besides, my buddy Phil from West Coast Sailing in Portland was doing a product demo of the new Zhik foul weather gear, and he was shedding water like a duck!

We weren't smiling at the start, however, because the cloud was followed by sun and exactly zero wind. As we bobbed across the line in the first start, it wasn't too clear whether to set a kite or a jib, or maybe just fire up the engine and grab lunch back onshore. It was starting to look like a beautiful, sunny, windless day off Newport Beach, and I started mentally writing a "feedback" email to the good folks at Commanders Weather; "Dear Sirs,

Please elaborate on the value of 20 knot forecasts on windless days...."

But I have finally learned a little patience at 50, and Commander's turned out to be spot on as the day unfolded. First a little breeze line came in from the NW, and by this time the big boats had started and were already beginning to creep over us. The OMRA 60 trimaran "Mighty Merloe" didn't creep, she whooshed past in her own apparent wind, in her own private race, quickly leaving the fleet behind. Onboard our J88, we set the Code Zero for the first time and got our first pleasant surprise of the day; we were hanging in there with the Flying Tigers, the J124, and quite a few other big boats. The first "leg" was a 14 mile fetch, and the breeze kept

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surfs south at speed

building into the 10-12 knot range. We went between our J1 and the Zero, and felt happy to have our crack bowman David Aymar from Socal onboard. Dave has worked the bow on "Pyewacket" (Andrews 70) and "Bud" (TP52), and despite the small platform, he felt at home on the J88. We were pretty happy to round just behind one of the Tigers, who owed us quite a bit of time (we rated 75 random leg course and they were 48). The other Tiger was already around and we would never see them again; they went on to take a well sailed second place overall.

Turning the corner, we set the big A2 PHRF kite figuring that the breeze would moderate and we'd need all the help we could get just to get close to home before it died completely at sunset. We also figured that was the last we'd see of the Tiger and the J124. We were wrong on both counts. We quickly found out that the J88 likes going downhill in 14-18 knots, and while the seas were a little jumbled, we found a groove and started seeing boat speeds of 12-14. We quickly caught the Beneteau 40 ahead, while we seemed to be hanging with the Tiger and J124. But we had great rudder control even with our big A2 and the waves a bit more on our beam than ideal; we could stay up on the rhumb line while they fell off to leeward.

"the boat speed record of the day was 17.8 knots!...instead of fading, the pressure came up to the 18-23 knot range and suddenly we were launched."

We were starting to believe the forecast at this point, so our goal was rhumb line or better yet further right, in order to stay out in pressure as long as possible before it started fading.

But then an interesting thing happened; instead of fading, the pressure came up to the 18-23 range and suddenly we were launched. Boat speeds went to solid sustained 14-16's and I got my birthday present with the "record of the day" at 17.8! We put the Tiger and J124 on the horizon and started catching some pretty big boats like the Swan 651 and the SantaCruz 50. The J88 was proving to be a weapon in those conditions with a really forgiving groove, excellent buoyancy, and to our surprise, a dry ride. Every once in awhile we'd catch a wave sideways and round a bit, but we never actually totally wiped out; she would be off again in just a few seconds. Kudos to my friend Kerry Poe (North Sails Oregon) who traded driving with

Rainbows and Long Wakes

The five crew got in the groove as soon as the breeze came up and the boat headed south.



The J88 bow is narrow
but the sections flare nicely aft
keeping things dry at speed!

me. Kerry was an Olympic level 470 skipper in the 90's, but I most definitely have a non-sailing day job, so I'm happy to report the J88 certainly doesn't require "pro" level skills to be fast.

After years of watching J125's surfing on Youtube while heading to Cabo or Hawaii (typically on a dark rainy day in Portland's bleak mid-winter), I found it almost surreal to be ticking off miles for hours at those speeds in a 29' boat. Dr Laura had named the boat "Crazy 88", a reference to a Quentin Tarantino film, but I was thinking "Easy 88". It was fast, but no drama. We had already re-named the boat "Blue Flash", a reference to the seldom seen blue version of the "Green Flash" (the boat is painted blue). As the sun set, we got neither green nor blue flash, but I did get another birthday present. The breeze kept blowing!

No matter how much preparation (Thank You Kenyon at JK3 and David and Will at SD Boatworks!), teamwork, and expertise you bring to this sort of sailing, there is no accounting for good luck. We knew full well that with the STP65 and TP 52 catching us in the first minutes of drifting off the start, and then disappearing for good at the turn, we



"How cool would it be to do an even longer race with (hopefully) similar conditions (CABO!)"

would need luck to correct out in the end. As those boats finish before sunset, the typical pattern would catch us still out there in the dying breeze watching victory fading away with the light. But it was our lucky day and our conditions, and as we gybed into the last mark, we still had 12-14 knots of NW breeze and didn't even need the Zero to fetch the last 2 miles to the finish. The gun was sweet confirmation of victory in class, but it wasn't until later that night that we found ourselves correcting out over the Tigers, the J125, TP52, and

Rogers 46. At least on this day, she was the "little blue boat that could".

How cool would it be to do an even longer race in the J88 with (hopefully) similar conditions (CABO!)? Well, you'd have to be crazy to do it in such a small boat. But then again, maybe Dr Laura had the right name for this boat in the first place?



Scott Grealish
J88 Owner Scott Grealish enjoying his first SoCal offshore race in perfect conditions!

J88 Sailing Impressions looks good, feels better

By Scott Grealish

I've been fortunate over the years to have owned a J80, J105, J70 and now the J88 and I've driven several other J boats including the J111 in some breeze. I've always appreciated reading about the sailing impressions of others, so hopefully mine will help those considering their options. I find the j88 so far to be an extremely well done mix of the J70 and the J111. The helm is great, and in flat water she feels light like a J70, yet offshore it felt like you had the control of a J105 (a really solid boat in breeze).

It's easy to make a lower drag rudder than the one on the J88, and I'm sure we could debate certain aspects of the design (it could be smaller, higher aspect, better tip efficiency etc.); but while others wiped out around us trying to go higher, we were able to put ourselves where we wanted to be in control. I'm a fan of rudder control in small boats without dedicated grinders etc, where the driver spends a lot of time steering to the waves and the kite isn't always constantly trimmed.

J88 Sailing Impressions one design, multi-purpose

I think the J88 benefits from the sum of many incremental changes in yacht design over the past 20 years: the hull is lighter and stiffer, the sections are finer forward and flatter aft, the rig is taller with a higher aspect ratio which is more efficient and better in light air, the sprit is longer which moves the kite forward helping to drive the boat and reducing interference with the main, the keel is more efficient with better lift and lower drag (and importantly it is encapsulated in molded glass so doesn't require fairing).

We had hoped she would be stiffer than the J70 and J80, to allow easy shorthanded family sailing, and in fact she does feel like a much bigger boat, again much closer to a J105 or J111 in breeze and waves. The interior is really similar the J105, and for day racing it works well with room for sails, stuff, and people. Compared to our J80 and J70 experience, the J88 will be much better for family outings. The inboard engine is a game changer as is the head (with privacy curtain). You can go below and sit or sleep comfortably. Who cares on a "race boat"? I do. My wife and daughter go sailing to be with my son (a dedicated racer) and I, not to be in "race mode"; we want them happy. Yet, after 21 years, my wife is shrewd enough to know that if the boys are sailing fast in a fun boat, the whole day is going to be a winner.

The purchase price is high for this size boat, and there are many new and used options (including many older J Boats) that will give more boat for the money. But my experience has been that it's the "round trip" costs that really count in the end, and resale on J Boats is always strong precisely because they do keep making incremental and meaningful improvements in their designs that keeps driving demand. I wish I could buy one of their bigger boats in some ways, but our plan has been "buy the one we can afford and just go sailing". Lot's of fun so far!



**J88 Blue Flash
Launched 2014**
Honestly it was a
case of love at first
sight.