



Newsday / David R. Swanson

Leonard Ruby, left, shows the way past a marker in Southold Yacht Club's Sunfish Masters National Championship. Ruby was first in all six races. Trailing him are Paul Odegard (27777) and Joe Sullivan.

Sunfish Racing Is Fun For Sailors of All Ages

By Grant Glickson

On any given day throughout the country, Sunfish sailors of all ages are trying to knock the wind out of each other's sails.

While not every Sunfish owner needs competition to enjoy his or her craft, the group of 40-year-olds-and-over that raced in Southold Yacht Club's first Sunfish Masters National Championship took great pleasure in seeing how they stacked up against the rest.

The sun was beaming throughout the weekend and the intermittent light breezes were apparently perfect for the 22 contestants who sailed in four races on Saturday and two on Sunday. The participants, whose ages ranged from 40-72, set sail around a triangular Olympic course that was set up between Shelter Island and Southold.

It didn't take Leonard Ruby, 43, of Chestnut, Mass., long to demonstrate the skills that had made him North American Sunfish champion in 1982. He finished first in all four races on Saturday, and he never looked back. He concluded the weekend by winning the last two races, completing a six-race sweep. The 1981 North American Sunfish champion, Paul Odegard, 50, of Vernon, Conn., placed second, and Alan MacGovern, 49, of Acton, Mass., finished third.

The oldest man in the regatta, Alan Bogert, made his 55 years of sailing count. The 72-year-old man from Bucks County, Pa., finished 10th overall. "My strategy is to win," he said. "I try to go upwind because that separates the men from the boys. Of course, there were no boys here today."

There were, however, a couple of women that competed in the regatta, one of whom placed 17th overall. Barbel Polanski, 44, of Oyster Bay, and winner of the Foxy Princess award for the first female finisher, said she just stayed within herself. "I just hang in there on days like this when the competition is strong. I enjoy it [sailing] tremendously."

Enjoying Sunfish sailing is easy — especially

since it doesn't require a large sum of money. "Sunfish boats are relatively inexpensive," said 57-year-old John Dawson of Glen Head, who finished 11th in the regatta. "A brand-new boat is maybe \$1,300 and you can certainly pick them up for less than that and still be competitive. There's very little maintenance, and everyone could enjoy it."

It also requires very little wind. While the lack of vigorous wind might keep the ordinary sail boat docked, the Sunfish continues to cruise on. The boat requires only a soft breeze since it weighs almost 140 pounds and is only 13 feet, 10 inches long. It has a 75-square-foot sail on a single mast mounted on a hull that is attached to a fiberglass board.

"Sailing a Sunfish is true sailing," said race committee chairman Joe Sullivan, who placed eighth overall and was the recipient of the Senior Master Award for finishing first among contestants over 50. "Years ago when the Sunfish started out a lot of people thought it was a toy. But these are very serious races."

So serious that during the club's 1986 odd-couple race, in which two inexperienced sailors get together, sail around a buoy and return to shore, two women provided comic relief that would have made Tony Randall and Jack Klugman proud. "In the middle of the race one woman slid out of the boat and the other wouldn't go back and pick her up," Sullivan laughed. "She wanted to win so badly [that she left her there]. We had to send a boat out there to pick her up."

If you qualify for the odd-couple race, or if you just have no idea which way the wind is blowing, a few lessons could set you on the right course. Lessons at Southold cost \$200 for 50 hours of instruction over an 8-week period. "It's advisable to take at least basic lessons to learn the fundamentals of sailing," Sullivan said. "With all the boats out there, you ought to have an idea of what you're doing."