

11 in 2011- #10 The Don Aronow Memorial Around Long Island Marathon

by seriousadmin
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2011 was an “interesting” year for performance boating events across the country. Of all of them, the NPBA-sponsored Aronow Memorial race ranks pretty high up on the interesting scale. After a twenty-one year hiatus, the Around Long Island Marathon quickly became one of the most anticipated events of 2010.

The significance of this race is most likely best represented by the list of its former winners. That list includes Sam Griffith, Jim Wynne, Odell Lewis, Alan “Brownie” Brown and Dick Genth as well as the team of Bill Sirois and Fred Kiekhaefer.

The resurrection of this iconic race was the result of the efforts of NPBA’s Billy Frenz and HORBA president and Banana Powerboats CEO Charlie McCarthy. It seemed only fitting that the 2010 race was won by a boat built not too far before the last LI Marathon was run, an 80 s vintage Sonic 30. No trailer-queen resto, owner Joe Fusco’s Sonic was powered by a pair of small blocks in front of Merc Alpha drives. Rounding out Joe’s team was Jonathan Tobin and the aforementioned McCarthy. We’re not sure if it was Charlie’s decades of cockpit time, his home-court knowledge of the route or just the strong dose of Irish luck he brought along, but McCarthy proved he’s still got what it takes to get his hands on a checkered flag.

No greater success could have been hoped for from the 271 mile race around Long Island that last ran in 1989. Anticipation for the following year was running high, especially considering the state of our economy and its impact on the sport. But like the expression goes, the best laid plans.....

Early in the year the efforts to grow the field of participating boats began in earnest. And while hopes were being held high for the September 24th event, the last-minute entries failed to materialize. Waiting for the 11th hour registrants put McCarthy and Frenz in a bind. Their perseverance and patience was rewarded with fewer entrants than anticipated. Too few to make the race viable. The plug was pulled just after the weekend prior to the event.

The ensuing talk about the dissolution of the event was at best spirited and more frankly it was at times downright derogatory. No place saw more of this than the discussions on the various message

boards. The unfortunate part of this backlash was that it was coming from a group that had neither registered for the event nor seemed to have any intention of participating in any way. But that's the nature of the beast- especially these days. The challenge confronting race promoter Billy Frenz was formidable. When the typical last-minute entries didn't develop, it left the NPBA with just two registered entrants, one being 2010 winner Fusco who was clearly looking to repel challengers to his title.



Grasping for another tired metaphor, the cacophony flowing from the message boards became the proverbial “double-edged sword”. As the conversations grew in both size and temperature, some lines were drawn. Some of the positions from the old-school camps challenged the present-day practice of multi-lap races that never cross the horizon, or for that matter even come close. As tempers flared and a few elbows were thrown, the effects seemed to help gel interest in the event. In a brief period to follow, teams stepped up to register. Volunteers came forward to offer safety and patrol boat services. People from the business side caught the spirit and offered the use of facilities. In short order the pieces fell into place and the promoters flipped the switch back to “on”. The race was going to go as originally planned.

The course run by the racers runs clockwise around Long Island with the start/finish at Port Washington. While the first leg runs northeast through Long Island Sound, a hard right turn at Montauk Point puts the fleet on the outside for a long open-ocean run down to the mouth of the Hudson River. If you've never raced, or even boated on Long Island Sound, you are truly missing an experience. This is simply one of the most beautiful pieces of water to be found anywhere. Not only does this race provide this fantastic experience, the course then loops around the northern end puts the fleet right out into the Atlantic. Some great scenery, topped off by a 100-plus mile run in the open ocean. What's not to love?

While no serious events took place on the course, the race upheld the grand tradition of old-school offshore racing in that a full two thirds of the fleet failed to finish the race. This in itself was a fitting homage to the days gone by where “winning” one of these races was defined by simply finishing- or surviving.

A pair of Joes, Cibellas and Sgro took top honors and at the same time broke the existing course

record in the process. Their weapon of choice was Cibellas' 725 Ilmor-powered Outerlimits 43, which propelled them to a course time of 3 hours and 5 minutes, overshadowing the previous record by a scant one minute. That previous record, dating back to 1989 was held by Stu Hayim and Joey Imprescia.

And so the story of the second annual Don Aronow Memorial Around Long Island race came to a happy ending. Almost.



Right off, questions were raised about the validity of the record. Assertions were made that there were variations from the original course that the record was set on. But at the end of the day the record was declared to be valid and committed to the record books.

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In a gesture intended to commemorate the legend that this race was run in memoriam of, Outerlimits, with the blessing of Don's son Michael, announced a Don Aronow tribute model of their race-winning 43 foot v-bottom. The color scheme, penned by Grafik EFX paid homage to the designs of Don's "#1" paint schemes.

Now, an Outerlimits carrying a copy of the colors of Don Aronow's world championship winning Cigarettes seemed to be too much for many on the forums around the world. It didn't seem to matter that Don won championships in a Magnum and a Cary. Somehow, a line had been crossed. You can't please 'em all.

And so the story of the seco... Whatever.

The 2012 Aronow Memorial race is already scheduled for this coming September. Once again, we can hardly wait to see what transpires in the months and days leading up to this season-closer in the Northeast. Hopefully this year we can skip the “fun part” and see a nice fleet of racers and volunteers out supporting this event and helping to cement its permanence in a sport that could use as many positive endings as it can get its hands on.

Too much to ask?

2011 Entrants and results:

19' Monza/Donzi with a 351 Homan and Moody driveline, crewed by Virginia's Brian Zellner and Lon Price started and made it to Hempstead Bay before the ignition box failed. Their race finished early at the end of a rope.



30' Sonic SS with 350 Chevies, and last year's winner, Connecticut's Joe DeFusco with his son, Joe DeFusco IV, started and made it to the Atlantic Ocean off Montauk Point before one of those Alpha's popped.. Their dreams of back-to-back wins dashed, they came home on the trailer.

42' Outerlimits with 1075 HP's from Brick, NJ, with Dr. Gabe Jasper and Rolf Papke at the helm, started and battled for the lead, but lost 'boost' when a tensioner bracket broke causing the belt to fail. They plowed on, holding a pace at 60 mph on one motor. Drive line vibrations signaled the onset of serious powertrain injury forcing Gabe and Rolf to put it on the trailer at Long Beach.

38' Fountain Center-Console Sport Fish, "Road Runner", with quad Mercury 300 HP Outboards, ran by Norm Salem from Stamford, CT and Bob Kolenberg, Jim Troy and Dan Pickering of ThinkFast Films. They broke the old Outboard record of 5 hours and 22 minutes by completing the course in 4 hours and 15 minutes.

25' Active Thunder with 500 HP was piloted by Chris Philindas of Riverhead, NY, and crewed by the 'Phantom Bronx Race Team'. They held third place until Orient Point, where they suffered engine issues and ended up trailering back with a few crewmembers riding in the boat.

43' Outerlimits with Ilmor 725 HPs, Joe Cibellis and JoeSgro from New York. Winners when they completed the course in RECORD TIME: 3 Hours and 5 minutes.