



MEDIA RELEASE

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### **ACME BURNS AS SIMRAD STAYS IN THE HUNT**

Airlie Beach was given its first taste of offshore powerboat racing this afternoon, with spectacular scenes seeing current series points leader *ACME Racing* catch fire as defending champions *Simrad* took out line honours to stay in the race for the 2007 Class One title.

Proceedings got underway without incident at the first powerboat event seen in the Whitsundays, until just after the first lap was completed when the *Acme* team noticed a warning light come on in the cockpit.

An impressive crowd turned out for racing at Abel Point marina, with the local spectators and tourists keen to get a glimpse of the action out on the water.

"The warning light came on and we thought we had better stop and have a look to make sure everything was okay," explained *Acme* Racing throttleman Steve Searle.

"We soon realised the boat was on fire, we stayed aboard for ten minutes or so trying to limit the damage and eventually the fire was brought under control, but not before a fair amount of damage had been done.

"It seems like a fuel line problem has caused the blaze, it's too early to estimate damage but I don't think this particular boat will be ready for the Gold Coast round in two weeks.

The fire today couldn't have come at a worse time for Steve and Andrew Searle, the brother combination is currently leading the 2007 series and needed only to finish today to assure a 2007 championship.

"It does leave the door open for the *Simrad* team, we are only 300 points ahead of them now leading into the Gold Coast round, but I don't care what I have to do even if we have to freighter a replacement boat in from the U.S we will be competing at the Gold Coast," said Searle.

*Simrad* were the lone rangers in the Class One field, with the *Maritimo* team also forced to retire with mechanical failure, said to be a blower belt that forced them to retire.

"In the end we ran out of boats in Class One so we just played it safe knowing that we have a round coming up on the Gold Coast in two weeks time," said *Simrad* driver Luke Durman.

"You never know what could happen, but I doubt very much *Acme* will let it slide that easily, but it's great that the championship result is decided in the final round."



The best racing of the day was seen in the Class three- six litre category, with Saracen and Blade locked in a tight battle for most of the afternoon until Saracen were able to pull away for an impressive win.

Blade also had some trouble this afternoon, hitting a turn buoy during the race and handing the lead to Saracen who never looked back.

“The boat was terrific today, it was able to handle the conditions quite well and respond every time we were challenged so it was very pleasing,” said Simon Thomas of *Saracen*.

*Hogs Breath Racing* won the Class Three- four litre race, Paul Gibbs and Paul Fowlds leading their field from start to finish recording an impressive victory

“It was a great to come here and have a win in front of a new crowd of people, we were very happy to be able to put this event on at the Whitsundays and we really enjoyed the location and the support of the local crowd,” said Hogs Breath driver Paul Gibbs.

Participation in the Production Class was at a season high, with a range of new competitors jumping on board and racing in their local event, a sign of things to come with the AOPC keen to race again here next year.

“We couldn’t have asked for a better weekend in terms of the backing of the local businesses and people, we have been welcomed with open arms and it’s a credit to the area the way things have been conducted,” said Race Director Russell Embleton.

Townsville pairing Wayne Lamont and Greg Hounsell took out the production Class win aboard *The master*, while Jericho made it three wins in a row to notch up the Haines Suzuki One Make Class.

The series moves to the Gold Coast for the final round of the year in two weeks time on June 30- July 1.

The AOPC would also like to thank sponsors the Azure Sea Grand Mercure, Terraces Restaurant, Meridian Marina's and the Airlie Beach Hotel for their support of the Whitsundays Offshore Powerboat Classic.

### **Whitsunday Offshore Powerboat Classic Class Winners**

Class One	Simrad	Ross Willaton & Luke Durman
Class Three- six litre	Saracen	Antony Defina & Simon Thomas
Class Three-four litre	Hogs Breath	Paul Gibbs & Paul Fowlds
Production Class	The Master	Wayne Lamont & Greg Hounsell
/Suzuki One Make	Jericho	Rodney Walker & Bret Carroll