



EVENT REPORT

22 APRIL 2007

NEWCASTLE CHALLENGE GOES UP IN SMOKE **OFFSHORE POWERBOAT SERIES**

The third round of the Australian Offshore Powerboat Series ended prematurely this afternoon when defending Class One champion SIMRAD went up in flames, with the race red flagged and consequently ended after four completed laps.

Perfect conditions meant the race was able to get under-way without any drama, until the fifth lap when Simrad quickly burst into flames filling the skies with thick smoke and putting to bed any thought of an un-eventful Newcastle Challenge.

Racing was fierce at the front of the field for the opening laps, with the lead between SIMRAD and Maritimo changing before SIMRAD duo Ross Willaton and Luke Durman had their million dollar vessel catch fire.

“Everything was running as usual, and then all of a sudden we had a very loud vibration that we thought was probably a thrown propeller until the cockpit started to fill with smoke and really make things interesting,” explained Simrad throttleman Ross Willaton.

“Luke (Simrad driver) and I quickly realised the port side had caught fire and had to act quickly, not only for our own safety but to try and save the boat.

Willaton has been around the offshore circuit and has plenty of racing experience; however his racing partner Luke Durman is in only his second year of offshore racing, luckily Willaton was able to put his experience to good use having dealt with on-board fires previously.

“We are well trained in these areas so we knew what we needed to do, obviously we had some fire fighting gear on board but it took the help of the local Maritime to fully douse the fire, it burnt for a hell of a long time.

Rescue boats were also close by to lend a hand to the Simrad pair as they stayed aboard to try and save their million dollar machine, all the while trying to minimise the damage as much as possible.

“We will have to assess the damage further, but the boat and engines have had to deal with a lot of immense heat so at this stage we just don’t know the full extent of it,” said Willaton.

Newcastle has played host to a range on unbelievable scenes in the previous three years, with Global Racing catching fire in 2005, the ACME Racing team flipping their boat at 150km/h last year, and the amazing scenes at this year’s event completing a trifecta of mishaps for the Newcastle round.



“I’m not sure what it is about Newcastle but we manage to have some unbelievable events when we come here, it’s certainly not boring for the fans that’s for sure,” said race director Russell Embleton.

Racing was red flagged and subsequently called off after Simrad burst into flames, gifting the race win to last year’s Newcastle challenge winners and father son duo Bill and Tom Barry-Cotter.

With racing having been underway for the best part of half an hour, there were concerns about re-running the event due to the amount of fuel left aboard the Class One boats after they were well into their fifth lap, and whether or not they would be able to finish a re-started race of roughly the same duration.

Re-starting the event would have resulted in a fewer amount of laps being completed than in the initial race, and consequently the results were awarded based on race position after the last completed lap.

“Obviously the race ended unexpectedly but we can only continue under the conditions dealt to us,” explained Tom Barry-Cotter who battled illness this weekend to try and defend the Newcastle Challenge crown.

Maritimo owner and throttleman Bill Barry-Cotter was also diplomatic when asked about the race win, also having other issues on his mind as the owner of the Simrad vessel.

“These things happen in racing but it’s not the best feeling to have one of your boats catch fire, I’m just glad that Ross and Luke are okay and we will assess the damage during the week,” explained Barry-Cotter.

The Class three fields were won by Blade Custom Boats (6 litre) and the Kwozzy Racing Team(4 litre).

Newcomers to the Haines one make series, Jericho managed to win under the shortened race conditions and Piranha took out the Production Class.

CLASS WINNERS

CLASS ONE	Maritimo	Bill and Tom Barry-Cotter
CLASS THREE- 6 litre	Blade Custom Boats	Cameron David & Gryff Ethol
CLASS THREE- 4 litre	Kwozzy	Adam Nicolls & Jim Harris
HAINES/ SUZUKI one make	Jericho	Rodney Walker & Brett Carroll
PRODUCTION CLASS	Piranha	Rory Brown & Murray Brown