



## A Blue-Chip Partner On and Off the Water: A Storm Trysail Club Flag Officer Shares his Views on the Wirth M. Munroe, the Islands in the Stream, and the Evolving South Florida Racing Scene

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*Steve Benjamin and Ed Cesare at the Wirth M. Munroe skipper's meeting 2017*

*Photo: Double Shot Studios*

**E**d Cesare knows ocean racing. The Rear Commodore of the Storm Trysail Club (STC) is a veteran Class 40 skipper, and has raced in major international offshore events like the Sydney-Hobart Race and the Fastnet Race, where he was the navigator aboard a class winner in 2017. A fixture on the U.S. East Coast racing scene, Ed has also sailed in 18 Newport-Bermuda races and many Wirth M. Munroe Ocean Races, including last year's edition aboard

Wirth Munroe Chair Tom Bowler's ESCAPE II. Two years ago, Ed collaborated with Sailfish Club of Florida Yachting Committee members Dr. Paul Gingras and John Brim, as well as STC member Steve Benjamin, to coordinate a handover of Wirth Munroe partnership support to the STC from the Cruising Club of America, which had a long history of contributions to the event. This move brought the STC's deep experience and broad reach to the Wirth Munroe as an official partner with the Sailfish Club in the race's Organizing Authority. As the STC representative on the Wirth Munroe team, Ed has helped build the profile of the race, improve operational efficiency, and acted as a catalyst in generating interest and excitement in the Islands in the Stream series, which includes the Wirth Munroe, Nassau Cup, Lauderdale to Key West, Pineapple Cup and Miami to Havana races. The Sailfish Club asked Ed for his thoughts on how all these pieces are fitting together and what that means for the offshore racing scene in South Florida.

**Sailfish Club of Florida:** *Remind us of the Storm Trysail Club's mission and how its involvement in the Wirth Munroe Race furthers the Club's goals for this element of our sport.*

**Ed Cesare:** Straight from the Storm Trysail Club's by-laws, our mission is "to promote good fellowship among blue water sailors and ocean racing yachtsman and to encourage the sport of ocean racing and offshore cruising." We at Storm Trysail think it is an important time for



*Tom Bowler, SFC Race Chairman with Ed Cesar*

*Photo: Double Shot Studios*

oceanic and offshore sailing here in the United States, and it is an important time for the club. We have just over 1,000 members now, and providing value to the membership by increasing opportunities to get them and their boats racing offshore is one of the most important things we do. We see this as a time of "green shoots" in the offshore game in general and in the South Florida circuit particularly. Participation generally is beginning to rise and interest in larger boats and being offshore among junior sailors is developing even faster.

**Sailfish Club:** *Aside from the beautiful setting, tropical weather and legendary Sailfish Club hospitality, what makes the Wirth Munroe such a draw for sailors across a wide spectrum of our sport -- from grand prix racers, to racer-cruisers, to cruisers, and increasingly, multi-hulls?*

**Cesare:** Well, you had me at "legendary Sailfish Club hospitality"! But, I think the presence of the Gulf Stream in the feel and tactics of the race is a draw. For grand prix teams, the race seems to fit well as a tune-up for the winter schedule. For Corinthians, the fact that the race is relatively quick and on a Friday means you get some real quality racing that fits into a busy holiday schedule.

**Sailfish Club:** *As someone who has raced in the toughest and highest-profile offshore events around the world, please share with us some personal highlights from your participation in past Wirth Munroe races.*

**Cesare:** As you know, there are two distinct versions of the WMR: the sunny and warm downwind one, and the cold and wet “post frontal” one! I think my fondest memory of this race was in the early 2000s sailing with Gordon Ettie in his Swan 40 center-boarder, SAZARAC. It was the cold and wet version of the race, and the sea state in the Stream was just horrendous. After toughing it out in the Stream, we took our first shot at working in towards shore. I remember feeling the distinct sea temperature change from the rail and I said, “Guys we’ve tacked too early – we need to go back out.” This was not a popular suggestion! Well, we did go back out, caught some more of the elevator and managed an overall win. The other thing I remember is that I have never seen anyone as seasick as Gordon’s girlfriend, who came along for a “nice sail up to Palm Beach.” But she was a great sport, and by the time the famous Sailfish Club buffet started, she was showered, recovered and raring to go. That was a really fun day.

**Sailfish Club:** *As you know, the Wirth Munroe is introducing a two-course format this year -- the 40-mile Sprint and the 60-mile Classic. Tell us about some of the considerations behind the decision, and the outcomes you hope to see.*

**Cesare:** The move of the “Classic” starting line back to its original spot in Miami has been favorably received. The cooperation of Biscayne Bay Yacht Club has been crucial here, and the connection of that club to the Wirth and Munroe families is really cool. That said, the “Classic” is just a little long for some of the smaller PHRF competitors to complete and still make the buffet in good order. After all, it is the “Buffet Race”!

**Sailfish Club:** *We are seeing increasing interest from multi-hull sailors -- in fact, you helped sail Jason Carroll's MOD 70 trimaran ARGO from Newport, R.I. to Florida for the race. What does the rise of multi-hull sailing say about the direction of racing and, perhaps, the sport overall?*

**Cesare:** The ARGO delivery was quite an adventure. We cleared Castle Hill in Newport at about 1300 on Wednesday and by late Thursday afternoon we were abeam of Cape Hatteras! It’s an interesting question about the rise of multi-hulls, and the answer is: I’m not sure. I guess one factor is the advancements in design and particularly in materials for construction and running rigging have enabled the development of these boats. The big cruising cats like the Gunboats have quite a strong class association going and are developing their own rule. I think this reflects a trend in rating rule development worldwide. Rules seem to be migrating to reflect the game the owners want to play rather than owners building boats to a certain rule.

**Sailfish Club:** *The SORC and Biscayne Bay Yacht Club are key players in the Wirth Munroe, especially with the evolution of the two-course format that includes a Miami start. Tell us how important it is to the success of events like this for the STC to integrate with these organizations.*

**Cesare:** Storm Trysail organizes, co-organizes or partners in close to 30 events each year. We are all about collaboration. We really applaud the good work being done by the SORC under the leadership of Carol Ewing. Our Southern Station Captain Bill Moriarty has also worked closely with STC and Biscayne Bay Yacht Club member Bruce Harper to knit things together for the Wirth Munroe. There is a lot to do to build participation across all events, and with the vast majority of tasks falling on the shoulders of volunteers, we firmly believe that “collaboration is king.”

**Sailfish Club:** *The Islands in the Stream series is an interesting and ambitious initiative. Please tell us some of the progress being made, and what the aspirations are to make it an even bigger success.*

**Cesare:** I’m just old enough to remember the glory days of the SORC. I think the Islands in the Stream series has a good chance of restoring something of that former glory. There are a lot of folks working to make it successful: the SORC, Storm Trysail, Biscayne Bay Yacht Club, the Montego Bay Yacht Club and their commercial partners at Manuka Sports Event Management. As I said before, collaboration is the name of the game.

**Sailfish Club:** *Looking ahead, how do you see all these pieces fitting together -- and are there other opportunities on the horizon you would like to explore? Are we seeing a revitalization of the offshore racing scene in South Florida?*

**Cesare:** Although the scratch sheets are just beginning to show it, I think offshore sailing in South Florida is most definitely on the upswing. The Islands in the Stream series provides a robust schedule of events for local boats and for owners who want to bring their offshore-capable boats south but need a full schedule to make it worthwhile. This echoes the success of one-design classes like the J-70 and the Lightning, which plan multi-event winter schedules. At Storm Trysail, we believe offshore and oceanic racing is on the rise nationally. At least it has stopped contracting and is beginning to lift off a bottom. The sharply growing popularity of big-boat and offshore sailing among juniors is most promising. We see this in the Northeast and at the 12 or so Junior Safety at Sea seminars put on by Storm Trysail nationally. A priority for us is to get both Junior and Senior Safety at Sea seminars going here in South Florida.