

## K6 Racing in Italy

In late June the Wilson family headed to Lake Garda, Italy to sail in the RS K6 Euro Cup Regatta with Jim skippering, Hope and Molly as crew, and photographic support from Judy. This was the first K6 event to be held at Garda and 18 boats attended from Britain, Germany, and the U.S. Rest assured that all and more will come back.



Lake Garda is one of the world's best small boat racing venues. The lake is about 30 miles long and a couple miles wide at the racing location and is at the foot of the Alps, about equidistant from Venice and Milan. The cool waters fuel a reliable thermal breeze, known as the Ora, whenever the sun shines that is accelerated by the funneling effect of the thousand foot cliffs and hills that surround Garda. On a typically day the sea breeze begins around 11 am and is cranking at 20 knots by 1pm when the northern end of the Lake fills with windsurfers and all sorts of sailing dinghies and small keelboats. There are no powerboats allowed on this part of the lake except for ferries and racing support boats.

The regatta was based at the town of Riva Del Garda on the very northern tip of the lake. The club at Riva, Fraglia della Vela is a regatta running machine with some sort of world championship or other major event held about every week through the summer. For part of our time we shared a course with the Intervela, a junior event with about 120 I420s (including several US boats), and about 30 each of 29ers and 470s. The following two weeks will see the 49er pre-worlds and worlds. So there is plenty of action around the club, and all sorts of cool boats. The town itself is a picturesque Italian alpine village. It attracts loads of tourists for the hiking, biking, windsurfing and sailing. But it absorbs the people well

and there are all sorts of accommodations from campgrounds to 4 star hotels. And of course, since it's Italy the food is great.

The regatta was to begin on Monday June 29<sup>th</sup> so we arrived via a flight to Venice late on Saturday to get acclimated and check out the venue. The K6 builder, Paul Young had offered to provide us a new boat (sold by the end of the week) to sail, and he arrived Sunday with two K6s stacked on a trailer, a Blaze dinghy on the roof and several spare masts all attached to a Volvo wagon that he and another K6 sailor had driven straight through from England, about 16 hours. Other K6s came on single trailers behind cars and campers and there was one triple trailer. Putting the boats together was fairly smooth and we were ready to race on Monday.

Monday was a classic Garda day. We awoke to bright sunshine and a moderate northerly katabatic breeze coming off the mountains. By 10:30 the wind had died and a light southerly began that would build until the sun set. The schedule for the week was two long races Monday, followed by five short



races Tuesday, a distance race on Wednesday and two long races each of Thursday and Friday when we would start and share a course with the Intervela. Start time each day was a civilized 1:00 pm. By the time we got out to the course on Monday it was a solid 22 – 25 knots of breeze for what would be a windward-leeward three times around. It is a poorly kept secret that it is fast to head to the cliffs on the right-side of the course upwind. You get more wind, flatter water and a nice header, but you have to sail close to the cliffs, really close – about 15 feet where you are still in 200 feet of water. So Monday's first race saw

everyone crowd the boat and immediately tack to port to head for the cliffs. After a few short tacks the fleet would then sail a long starboard to the top mark in the middle of the lake. This would repeat itself in most races and the key was to time your exit from the cliffs so as to lay the mark perfectly, or at least maintain clean air. On that first beat two of the English boats that would eventually finish first and second, Ian Robson and Jonathan Calascione quickly showed an edge in heavy air speed that they would keep throughout the week and rounded 1-2. We got to the top mark mid-fleet, set the kite, and a full-on, wild ride ensued with the front half the boat out of the water most of the time. Hope was able to manage the spinnaker fine and we kept our noses clean and managed a 6<sup>th</sup> in that race. The second race was much the same. After a good start and first beat we reached the first mark in second, set the spinnaker and took off yet again. Unfortunately we were heading for the wrong leeward mark and were nearly last by the time we got to the right one, and spent the rest of the race working our way back to 10<sup>th</sup>.

After a K6 Class party and pasta feed Monday night, Tuesday's conditions were nearly identical to Monday's with a few knots less breeze. We had five short races of about 35 minutes that were really tight. We rounded the marks overlapped several times and finished overlapped on another boat more than once. Coming into the leeward mark on port at high speed with other boats converging at 20+ on starboard and yelling for room ("water", actually) was particularly exciting, but there were no collisions.

Wednesday's weather was different than the prior days with several clouds, a few of which were pretty big and threatening. The race for this day was a mega windward leeward with the turning mark being a small island about 10 miles up the lake, near the town of Malcesine. Despite the clouds, we had a decent 18 knot thermal breeze at the start and the fleet headed to the cliffs once more. We had a mediocre start, could not hold a lane, and got spit out the back eventually to last place. But this race was far from over, and about 45 minutes after the start the wind began to die and get really fluky. Now it was Long Island Sound conditions (without the powerboats) and we adjusted a few settings and started to roll through the fleet. By the time we got to the island we had made it to fourth place. We got the spinnaker up and drawing and after a few well-timed jibes we had clawed our way to first with about 30% or six miles of the race left to go. This was too much as boats either side of us caught some breeze, pulled even, and eventually passed us leaving us close to last again. So we headed back toward the cliffs, got some breeze, and thanks to many boats overstanding we jibed around the last mark in 4<sup>th</sup>. We only had about a mile to go now, and were reaching under spinnaker in about 8 knots of breeze, but more excitement was in store. Near the bottom of the leg the wind came forward forcing us to douse the kite, and this was quickly followed by a 25++ knot puff from astern that nearly drove the bow under and fully tested the integrity of our mast and rigging. We quickly moved our weight back, popped the bow out and ripped downwind under jib and main. The wind then eased enough to get the spinnaker back up and we managed to hold onto our fourth at the finish.

Thursday was very similar to Wednesday with more clouds and thus less wind and racing was cancelled after two hours of drifting around which gave us plenty of time to get ready for another convivial Class dinner at a local restaurant. Because of the light airs of the prior two days the racing for the Intervela was way behind schedule, so Friday's start was moved up to 9 am try to get a race or two done in the morning northerly. This worked at first as we started Friday's race in a fresh 17 knot mountain breeze that behaved a lot like the tail end of a northwester on LIS. We made a few wrong moves off the start, but got hooked up halfway up the first beat and ended up about 6<sup>th</sup>. The wind was continuing to fade by the time we started the second race. Once again it was our conditions and we rounded the top mark in the first five and worked our way up to second on the run before the wind died altogether and the race was abandoned. Both the K6s and the Intervela fleets headed to shore and the K6 racing was considered concluded for the week. However by the time the prizes were given out a lovely thermal had filled in that was too good to walk away from so a few of us headed back out for a six mile rabbit start, bottle race – a great encore.

This was a terrific week of sailing in a fantastic place, and it was especially fun to sail together as a family. Even in the big breeze the boat was very manageable for the girls and there were a couple other families sailing as well as several husband/wife combinations plus a third. International sailing is one of the great things to do as you can combine good racing with visiting interesting places and meeting new people. Alan Marantz and I sailed a k6 event in England earlier in the year, and the K6 Class will be doing more of this kind of thing in the future with Cork (Ireland) Week and the AYC International Regatta scheduled for 2010 as well as an event or two in Germany. The class will also be working on providing attractive charters and boat transport to make the events more accessible. K6s will return to Garda in 2011, and we will be there. How about you?

