

The Newport Laser Fleet, Home of Champions

By Joe Berkeley



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How far would you go to sail in Newport, Rhode Island's Laser Fleet 413? Christine Neville moved 3,090 miles across the country. The aspiring Olympian, who stands an athletic 5' 11" tall, enjoyed the temperate climate and spirited breeze of San Francisco, but longed for the crowded starting line of Fleet 413. "It's the best and the most fun sailing education," Neville said. "I learn more from racing against this fleet than anywhere else."

And it is not just aspiring Olympians who are attracted to the keen competition and 45-boat fleets. On many days, two generations of the same family compete on the same course. John Kirkpatrick is a high-school student at St. George's School who races Radials in the summer and full rigs in the winter. A sparring partner of Christine Neville's, John finished second in the Laser Radial Atlantic Coast Championship last summer.

John often rigs up next to his Dad, Steve Kirkpatrick, a Master sailor who has won the day three weeks in a row. A graduate of the Wharton Business School, Steve finds Laser frostbiting in Newport to be "the best value in sailing." Storage and dues are just \$140 per season. Kirkpatrick was also quick to point out that gently used boats can be found for around \$2,500.

Just don't tell that to Dwight Escalera. A marine surveyor for Executive Marine Services in Wakefield, Dwight bought a Laser he found on craigslist for – and this is not a typo – \$650. The powder blue yacht, named *Improv*, had been stored in a basement for 35 years. His sail number, 13222, is the actual hull number, which is remarkable considering that more than 200,000 Lasers have been built.

Another father/son campaign is made up of Larry and Parker Colantuono. Larry is the General Manager and Vice President of Brewer Wickford Cove Marina. Parker is a freshman at Portsmouth High School whose height makes him look more like a freshman in college. Parker enjoys sailing against his dad, but even if he has a great day on the racecourse there is no trash talking in the truck on the way home.

Dan Neri, the Chief Operating Officer of North Sails, is a former fleet captain

and a Fleet 413 stalwart. An astute observer noted that during the season, Neri often switches between his red Zhik lifejacket and his white SLAM life. When asked why, Neri said, "You know how some fans wear Michael Jordan's basketball sneakers? Well, when Scott Ferguson beats Peter Shope, I wear the Zhik lifejacket to be like Ferg. Lately, Shope has been beating Ferg so I wear the SLAM to be like Shope."

Ah, well, fans can be fickle and one can only hope that Ferg, who designed the masts for the America's Cup winner *ORACLE*, won the Laser Masters Worlds twice, and was inducted into the



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