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Revived St. Petersburg–Habana race marked by a lucrative restart

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The historic St. Petersburg-Habana Race roared back to life following a more than half-century hiatus, bringing in nearly \$700,000 to St. Pete as the regatta restarted an old tradition.

The 40-foot FOMO, led by St. Pete resident Lloyd Thornburg, won the race, beating Conviction, a 52-foot vessel skippered by Douglas Fisher of Sarasota. The two ships arrived at the Hemingway International Yacht Club in Havana on March 2, with a time of 1:17:00:32 for FOMO and 1:20:21:04 for Conviction.



COURTESY OF ST. PETERSBURG YACHT CLUB

Thornburg is the founder of an internationally known yacht racing Team Phaedo 3. Thornburg's international crew came from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and South Africa.

The winning crew's makeup reflected the global appeal of the event to the sailing world. Nearly 675 sailors hailing from those countries and others such as France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands descended on St. Pete for one week prior to the race's start and spent an estimated \$676,786, according to the St. Petersburg Sailing Center.

The race had the biggest estimated economic impact of all the boat races out of the **St. Petersburg Yacht Club** so far this year.

Of the 80 boats that entered the race, only 22 remained in contention by its completion. Winds remained scarce from the start in Tampa Bay until the very finish, with many of the boats exchanging their sails for motors to reach Havana. The majority of the sailors arrived late afternoon on March 3.

Once in Havana, the race participants were scheduled to compete in a second event from the Hemingway International Marina to the Morro Castle, but it was canceled due to high winds and choppy seas. By departure time on Sunday and Monday, strong winds kept boats from leaving port and heading home. Many sailors flew back to the U.S. and will return to Cuba to sail their boats back to Florida when better weather and their schedules allow.

The race began 87 years ago but was last conducted some 58 years ago. The regatta was one of four pre-eminent races in the United States in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

The St. Petersburg Yacht Club last staged the race in 1959, when Cuba's government came under the control of the late revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. It was originated in the late 1920s by George S. Gandy as a promotional event to help St. Petersburg, which was suffering from a housing bust brought on by the Great Depression. It was also the era of Prohibition. At the time, 11 boats competed in the inaugural regatta, which started on March 30, 1930 at the St. Petersburg Municipal Pier.

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