

Sunday, 10th May 2009

Powerboats - Malta Grand Prix of the Sea

Controversy in opening round

Seagull awarded second place after Baia penalty

Valhmor Camilleri, Valletta Waterfront



Darrin Zammit Lupi yesterday captured the moment an Italian boat collided with a Ukrainian boat steered by Maltese champion Aaron Ciantar during the Malta Grand Prix of the Sea.

The opening round of the 2009 P1 Championship in Malta was marked with controversy yesterday.

Supersport newcomers, Team 26, were declared winners of the Malta Grand Prix of the Sea first leg after Italy's Baia Attolini, who had finished first, were handed a time penalty for overspeeding and were demoted to fourth place.

Ukrainian entry Seagull, with Malta's Aaron Ciantar and Angelo Tedeschi at the helm, were promoted to second at the end of the sprint race ahead of MasForce who also benefited from end-of-race decisions after Ikocasa, of Audrienne Ciantar and Shelley Jory, were handed a five-minute penalty, also for overspeeding, that pushed them down to fifth place.

More controversy and penalties followed in the more powerful Evolution class as Cigarette Smash Poker crossed the finish line first ahead of Lucas Oil Budweiser.

However, both teams were handed a three-minute penalty for passing the wrong side of the buoy and demoted to second and third places respectively, SNAV OSG being declared winners.

The incident between Seagull and Baia Attolini caught most of the attention at the end of the Supersport race with both teams accusing each other of unruly driving.

Seagull were leading the race and about to turn round the buoy on lap seven when Baia Attolini opted for an audacious overtaking manoeuvre on the inside lane that resulted in a collision.

Team 26, of Daniel Cramphorn and Kim Collins, profited from the situation as they sped past the two front-runners to go on and win the race.

"It's a great feeling for us to be declared winners in our first race as an official powerboat team," Cramphorn, who last year competed in the last two races as a wild card entry, told The Sunday Times.

"Competition is very tough in this category but we are just happy to have done so well in our first official race in the championship. We know we have to work harder to keep the pace with the top teams but we are looking forward to what promises to be a very competitive campaign."

Aaron Ciantar, who won both legs of the Malta Grand Prix of the Sea along with Tedeschi on Conam Yachts last year, had mixed feelings on the final outcome of yesterday's race.

"The race stewards were right to penalize Baia Attolini for their manoeuvre. That move practically cost us victory today," Ciantar said.

"When the collision occurred, we had just taken the lead. I'm sure that we would have passed that buoy safely had the others observed the rules. We had a great chance to win this race as our boat was improving with every lap that passed.

"But second place is a good result and the most important thing is that no-one was injured and our boat suffered no extensive damage."

However, Baia pilot Stefano Acanfora was furious and threatened to pull out of the championship.

"This is absolute nonsense," Acanfora said.

"There was no way that we broke any rules today. Our boat was inside the speed limit when we tried to pass Seagull and I think that when Team 26 overtook us they were over the speed limit themselves.

"These decisions are unacceptable and if our appeal against the result is not heeded, we will think about pulling out of the Malta Grand Prix and the world championship altogether."

The Malta Grand Prix of the Sea continues today with an Endurance race along the Sliema seafront which starts at 2 p.m.

Evolution class

1. SNAV OSG (Italy) 35:14.94; 2. Cigarette Smash Poker (Italy) 37:02:00; 3. Lucas Oil Budweiser (US) 37:44:00; 4. Silverline (Britain) 35:08.23 + 1 lap; 5. Cranefields Wine (Germany) 35:26.75 + 1 lap.

Supersport class

1. Team 26 Racing (Britain) 37:20.65; 2. Seagull Chaudron (Ukraine) 37:25.98; 3. MasForce (Belgium) 38:57.58; 4. Baia Attolini (Italy) 41:09.00; 5. Ikocasa (Italy) 43:49.00; 6. Blue Shaft (Italy) 38:50.33 + 1 lap.