

2024 KEY WEST POKER RUN

Birds Fly South For The Winter



The old adage "Birds of a feather flock together" couldn't hold more true for the Formula Boats Poker Run team. With the Midwest Poker Run season coming to an end, the itch to continue boating was just too much to handle.

The Florida Powerboat Club and Stu Jones' 32nd annual Key West Poker Run was slated for November 5- 11, 2024. As most South Florida boaters know, the weather can be dicey in the fall, and this year would be no different with hurricane Rafael bearing down on Cuba.

It's Not Just a Boat, It's a Lifestyle

Stu and his team at the FPC made the decision to forgo the scheduled Wednesday departure, opting to have boaters run to Key West on Tuesday, Thursday, or Friday. With safety as the name of the game when it comes to Florida Powerboat Club poker running, Team Formula opted to head down on Tuesday to beat the worst of the weather.



Team Formula consisted of 3rd-generation owner and captain Jeremy Porter, co-captain Christopher Everett, navigator Jessica Everett, and crew Matt, Pat, & Cindy Feldhaus, and Katie Shank. Departure out of Grove Harbour Marina was scheduled for 10:57 a.m., with a lunch stop at the famous Gilbert's in Key Largo, followed by a lengthy stretch of roughly 140 miles of ocean waters to Key West, with 14 other boats opting to make the Tuesday run with Team Formula. We stowed our luggage down in the cabin of the 2024 Formula 387 Center Console Sport and started the trip to Key West.

Our feet barely left the dock before we were off to Key Largo, with the seas of three-foot waves for the first 20 miles. The Formula handled them with the panache and performance that we have all come to recognize from this storied brand. For those who have not boated in the ocean before, the salt spray, sun, and wind will make you either smile or want to turn back, but the Formula team knew we were in good hands with Captain Porter at the helm.

The Formula cruised beautifully around 45-50 mph as we made our way to the lunch stop.

A wonderful buffet of fresh seafood, burgers, and other delicious items was at hand for all boaters and crew on the trip. With bellies full of food and our mood filled with laughter and stories of the first 40 miles, we reembarked to complete our trip to Key West.

Docktails & Cocktails make any meal great!

As most boaters know, things happen when boating, especially on a more extended trip like this. We noticed one of our running mates flagging us down about 15 miles outside of Key Largo. As we slowed to see what we could do, we discovered that they had spun a blade off their propeller. They asked if we could take their six passengers with us the rest of the way to Key West. Boating is a community! As close friend of mine recently said, "We are a tight-knit family. We would do anything for anyone!" They joined us for the rest of our voyage, and we now totaled 11 on our boat.

The next stop was planned for Marathon for fuel, but the Formula 387 Center Console holds an impressive 500 gallons. With fair seas ahead, we blasted right past the key. Team Formula was on a mission, Key West or Bust.

Slicing through the intercoastal waterway, beautiful and lush mangroves were everywhere, adding to the fantastic ride for the next 120-ish miles. As we turned to head south past Saddlebunch Keys, the wind and seas reared their ugly heads, and while a following sea is not always the most comfortable for the crew, The Formula still handled it like a champ. Pulling into our port for the rest of the week, located right outside the Conch Republic Seafood Company, we all headed to our accommodations for the event for a chance to scrub off the salt and sun before dinner and drinks.



(Photo Courtesy of Speedonthewater)



(Photos Courtesy of FPC)

Participants for Thursday's run departed from various locations up and down the coast of Florida. Around 140 boats made the trek down to Key West, well short of the 254 registered vessels. Again, safety, weather, and insurance policies hindered some boaters from making the run; however, everyone else showed up in cars, trucks, or planes. The show was not going to be stopped.

Safety First - Stu Jones

While writing this article, I still have a heavy heart recalling an unfortunate solo boat accident during the event that occurred just 10 miles off the coast of Key West in the early evening. It appears the boat hard-grounded after missing a turn, claiming the life of a young woman. Formula Boats and the boating community express our deepest condolences to the family.



(Photos Courtesy of FPC)

Boating is a family, and the tragedy hung heavy in the air like a thick blanket of fog, never far from anyone's mind for the rest of the event. Jones and FPC pride themselves on running safe events, and accidents happen. But "We have to be better," he said.



(Photo Courtesy of Speedonthewater)

With tragedy, we all hope something will triumph in the face of sadness. Thursday evening's 11th annual Speed On The Water benefit auction at Pickles Pub was just the chance for that.

Last year's total raised \$200,000 for the Samuel's House shelter for women, children, and intact families. We were all set to ensure that happened again.

Formula joined in with our friends from Rock The River Poker Run to add to their generous prize of a complete poker run package to their event next year, plus RV parking and tons of extras.

Formula added a custom Yeti cooler loaded with tumblers and Formula swag. When all the bids were finished flying around, the package brought an impressive \$2,300.00 for charity.

For the 2nd straight year \$200,000 was raised for charity!

For the second year in a row, R.J. Noble Company, owned by the Carvers, a family well-known in performance-boating circles, matched the amount raised. That brought the total haul for Samuel's House to \$200,000. "We started this thing at the BurgerFi restaurant on Duval Street 11 years ago as a small get-together to buy burgers and beer for our advertisers and a few particularly supportive readers," said Jason Johnson, the co-publisher of SpeedontheWater.com. "That BurgerFi is gone, but the annual party is still here and stronger than ever."





(Photo Courtesy of Cindy Feldhaus)

Friday brought calmer winds and seas, which meant the offshore racing event would be on full display. Team Formula and friends jumped aboard the 387 and drove just outside of turn one to watch all of the action. Spending roughly 5 or 6 hours anchored just outside of the marina was an amazing experience. Our Formula was equipped with a SeaKeeper gyro system, holding it rock solid in the face of the occasional wake the race boats kicked up. Night events at the dock gave crowds of onlookers a chance to see the boats on display. Team Formula passed out Poker Run Shirts as everyone enjoyed checking out the new 387 CCS.



(Photo Courtesy of FPC)



(Stu Jones, Co-Captain Christopher Everett, Captain Jeremy Porter, FPC)

Saturday night, the fun and festivities were in full swing, with Sponsor awards on stage with Stu and the FPC.

The Conch Republic Seafood Company played host to a fantastic dinner of each guest's choosing.

Tales of the week and laughter filled the air.

Team Formula invited Patrica "Pat" Feldhaus to come to enjoy the bounty of food and drinks.

Pat recently lost her husband, affectionately known as "Big Al," not only for his size, but for his personality as well. She sat with us and told us stories of how they used to rent a house for a month in Key West almost every year, instilling the desire and passion for boating deep into her twin sons, Pat & Matt, Formula Boat owners themselves.

Listening to Pat talk about Al, Key West, and boating in general, we could not contain our smiles.

That's what Formula stands for as a brand: Family, fun and fellowship.

Team Formula and our crew would like to express our gratitude to the entire boating community and the Florida Powerboat Club for hosting such a wonderful event. We look forward to our continued tradition of building the best performance boats in the boating industry.

Until next time, keep the propellers spinning and the smiles going for miles!

Reported by Christopher J. Everett, Technical Assistance Group Media Manager



(Jeremy Porter & Patrica "Pat" Feldhaus)