

# North Americans won by Szabo and Suarez

The Columbia River Gorge is a natural wind tunnel that extends about 100 miles from the cool Pacific Ocean in Portland Oregon, through the Cascade Mountains in an easterly direction to the desert. It has walls as high as 1500 feet on both sides, and is about a mile wide where we are sailing in Cascade Locks. This gorge is a natural pipeline for the sea breeze to travel all the way to the desert. As long as there is sunshine over the desert, air will rise and pull wind up the gorge at a routine 18-20 kts every afternoon. About 20 miles to the east where the Hood River joins the Columbia River, the gorge walls are very close, funneling the wind to a normal 30 kts with standing waves from the current; windsurfing paradise.

It is in this unbelievable setting, surrounded by the spectacular beauty of the Cascade Mountains, that the Snipe Class is holding the 2003 North Americans. Only 12 boats are in attendance; a result of the Gorge's reputation for heavy air, and the heavy schedule of great racing over the last month eating away at everyone's vacation time. But, if you did not come, you are missing it.

The start of the first race found Lampros and Thompson both over at the pin-end of the line, and both came back to restart giving the rest of the fleet a huge lead. The current was about equal across the river at the wide spot where we were racing, although the chop was much worse at the bottom of the windward-leeward course. Henry Filter and Kim Couranz rounded first followed closely by George Szabo and Shelly Suarez.

The second race continued with the unusual shifty conditions, but the wind was now 14-16kts. George Szabo and Shelly Suarez performed a perfect 360° turn (but on the wrong axis) capsizing and turtling with less than 3 minutes to go before the start. At 1:30 they were still capsized. Expertly they got it back up the first try and actually had to luff a while at the pin end because they were early. The start was otherwise clean and uneventful. Again, Henry Filter and Kim Couranz beat George Szabo and Shelly Suarez to the first windward mark, but this time George and Shelly were able to sail by-the-lee all the way to the mark, blazing fast, and moving into the lead. There were many capsizes in this race as the wind built to 19 kts and the chop got proportionately higher. George and Shelly finished the day with two bullets. There was beer on the beach, and a lot of excitement, as heavy air always seems to bring out in Snipe sailors. A pizza party at a small pub ended a full day's activities.

Saturday morning was gorgeous; cool 64°, and only a light wind coming up the gorge. An early start was planned since the heaviest winds are usually in the mid-afternoon. It was only 6 kts as we left the beach, but that kept the weekend windsurfers off the river for a while. A windward-

leeward course was set and the current pushed several boats over early in the lighter air. Everyone scrambled back to restart, and there was no need for a general recall. Szabo found all of the shifts and kept in the pressure, passing Tillson half-way up the next beat, and extending it before the weather mark. Tillson held onto second, Griffith held third, Filter fourth, and Thompson remained fifth. The wind was beginning to pick up now, 10 kts and shifting a little to the left. Szabo and Suarez were now powered up and easily won the third race; Filter and Couranz were second. Many of the boats sailed to the beach to change their rig tuning assuming that the 'big' wind was coming for the next race.

The wind was up to 12-14 kts for the fourth race, which was enough to start getting the windsurfers and kite boarders out on the river. Henry and Kim rounded the leeward mark easily 20 boat-lengths ahead of Lee and Gus, with Dave and John holding third. Carolyn and Eric Krebs had moved up to fourth until their rudder came off, which required assistance to retrieve, forcing them to retire without rounding the last leeward mark. George and Shelly were energized with their short swim and passed boats like crazy to get back to finish fourth; Henry and Kim won, Lee and Gus were second, and Dave and John were third. The RC called for a two hour rest while the afternoon breeze pushed the windsurfers around.

By 1600 the wind seemed to be calming down enough to go back out for the fifth race. There were so many windsurfers and kite boarders that we had to move the entire course west a quarter mile. At the start the breeze was still measured as 17-18 kts but it was coming down from the 22 kts an hour earlier. The RC signaled a "W" course. Everyone was at max-de-power. Henry and Kim hit the committee boat end, right on time, going fast, and took off rolling the entire fleet as they headed for the shelter and shifts of the left corner. They rounded first with Tillson second, and Szabo third. The windward mark was in the lee of the launching beach so the spectator crowd had a great view of the action.

The next day the Gorge was glassy calm; unexpected to say the least. 30 minutes after the scheduled start we had a steady 6-8 kts and a windward leeward course was signaled. There were several over early but everyone heard the hail and returned rapidly with little effect in the light air. The wind started to pick up as the fleet sailed the final leg but remained 10-12 kts max until after everyone was back to the beach. George and Shelly kept a loose cover on Henry and Kim for the remainder of the leg winning the sixth and final race, clinching the series, and becoming the 2003 North American Champions. The trophy presentation was in the parking lot as everyone finished packing up their boats. The US Snipe Class gratefully thanks the Columbia River Racing Association, the Willamette Sailing Club, the town of Cascade Locks, and all of their volunteers for hosting such a terrific regatta. This venue is truly one of the great treasures of North America and we intend to keep coming back for more for a long time.

-Bill Welch

## North American Championship Results

<i>Skipper/Crew</i>	<i>Sail #</i>	<i>Finishes</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. George Szabo/Shelly Suarez	29957	1-1-1-(4)-3-1	6
2. Henry Filter/Kim Couranz	29867	(2)-2-2-1-1-2	7.5
3. David Tillson/John Fretwell	29112	(4)-4-3-3-2-4	16
4. Lee Griffith/Gus Wirth	29204	5-3-4-2-5-(6)	19
5. Carolyn/Eric Krebs	28955	3-7-7-dnf-(dnc)-3	29
6. Kirk Smith/K. Ivashchencko	27522	6-5-6-dnf-4-(10)	30
7. Bertel/Nicolas Bojlesen	27668	9-dnf-(11)-5-6-7	37
8. Brad/Johnnie Beckett	26752	8-6-10-6-7-(12)	37
9. Cliff Wright/Richard Welch	28472	7-(8)-8-7-8-8	38
10. Jerry Thompson/Sherry Eldridge	24702	(dnf)-dnf-5-dnf-dnc-5	41
11. Charles/Graham Heimler	29302	10-9-9-dnf-(dnc)-9	46
12. Jim Lampros/Sarah McAllister	27377	11-(12)-12-8-9-11	51

