

The Great Equalizer

Out on the water,
Parker is just
another sailor

By SEAN LEWIS
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Tom Parker is a successful and well-respected man. His foundation gives grants to non-profit organizations, and a lifetime of hard work earned him that respect.

On Wednesdays — none of that matters.

That's when Parker and co-owners Jim Yabsley and Dick Compton take out their boat Taxi Dancer as part of Wet Wednesdays out of the Santa Barbara Yacht Club. Compton was absent from Wednesday's running, but Yabsley and Parker were both on board, and both were hard at work getting the 70-foot yacht to go as fast as possible.

"Everybody likes me here, but it's different," Parker said. "Nobody is trying to be nice to me. If I mess up, there's no end to the kind of ridicule I take, but always smiling. It's just kind of fun."

Taxi Dancer, named for the dance partners for hire that used to consort with Navy men on shore leave, finished seven minutes and 57 seconds ahead of its competition — Skian Dhu — but the large handicap over the seven-mile course gave Skian Dhu the victory. Despite the narrow loss, Yabsley and crew were pleased with the evening's sail.

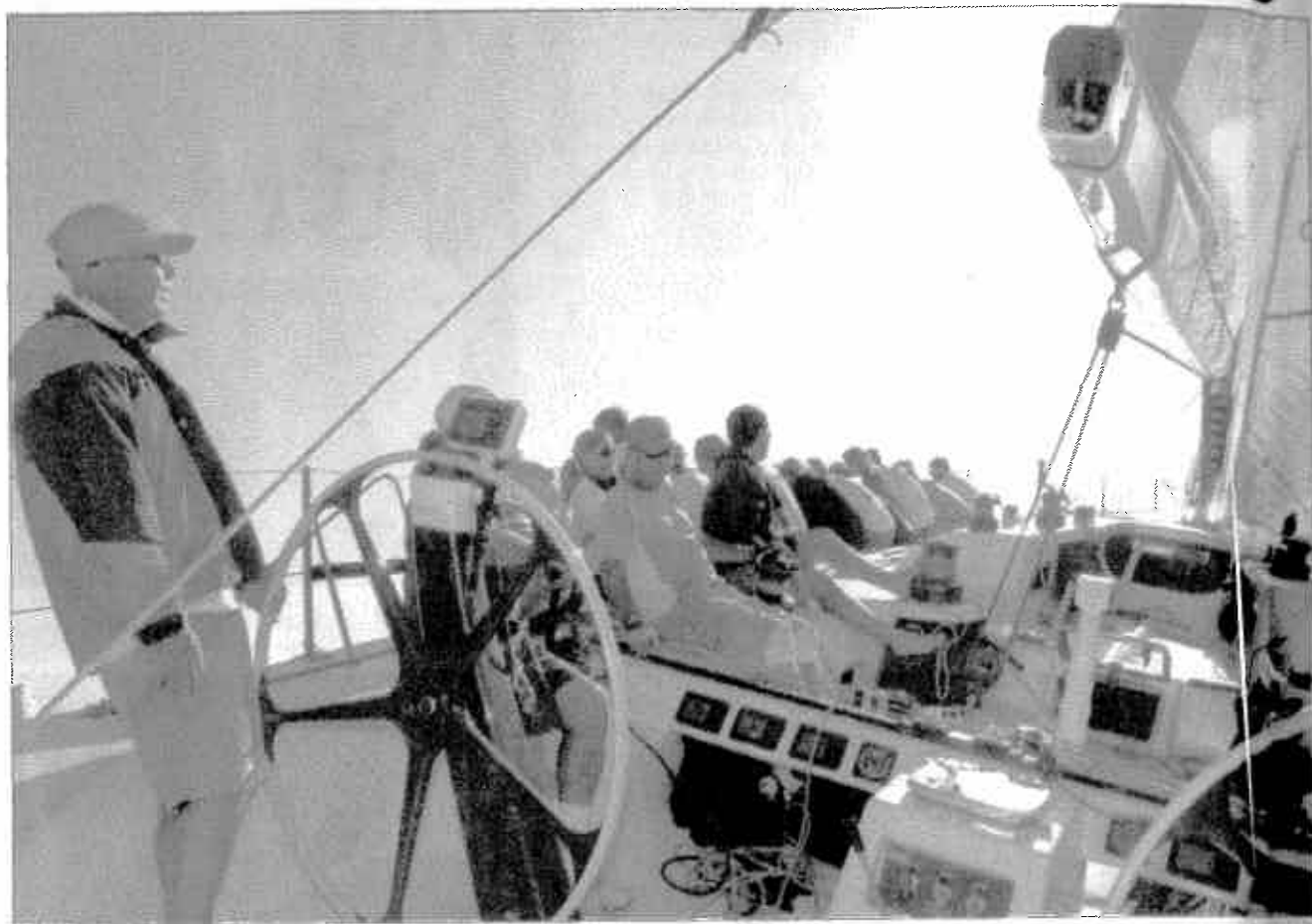
"That (late start) hurt us a little bit, but we came out of it fine," Yabsley said, referring to a 20-second timing discrepancy that left Taxi Dancer chasing the start line. "It didn't really hurt us too much. It was close racing after how long we raced. It was at least a good hour."

Yabsley, Compton and Parker bought the yacht in 2006, but had been sailing with and against each other for nearly 40 years. When they purchased Taxi Dancer, they knew they were getting into something good.

Compton and Yabsley had owned a similar 70-footer named Alchemy, but when the opportunity came to purchase Taxi Dancer they took the opportunity to snatch it up and brought Parker in as well.

"This is one of the premier 70-foot boats on the west coast," Yabsley said. "It's one of the best known."

Part of the boat's notoriety comes from the fact that it's 70 feet long and bright yellow, but part comes from the fact that the crew has a good time



THOMAS KELSEY / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS
Above, Tom Parker takes control of Taxi Dancer during Wednesday's race. At right, the crew of Taxi Dancer changes the sail during the regatta.

of people with their legs dangling over the side, but up close it's a group of friends working hard and playing hard together.

"We do. Sailing is funny, because it's just a sport," Parker said. "It's just for fun, but once you're out there the competitive juices start flowing and we all care about winning during the process. When the process is over, it doesn't matter. It's a funny sport that way. We want to do well so we push ourselves, but really it's just about having a good time."

The crew consists of experienced racers like Doug Young, Jon Jurt, Pamela Thiene and many more, but also a good helping of guests. In total, there were 22 people on board for Wednesday's race.

"It's a platform to have a lot of close friends," Parker said. "We sail together, we work together, we play together. This is a family separate from an of-



family you can have in your life, the better."

Parker's Wednesday evening family may not have gotten the actual victory at the end of the race, but after a beautiful day on the water with friends it

"I have my job, what I do in life to try and make a difference, and this to me is just a release to have fun with friend," Parker said. "I have loved it since I was seven years old."