

## *The Inaugural Trans Superior Solo*

*by Tony Driza*

“Pass me a line - you can raft off of us.” Welcome words indeed from Allistair Grant on board *Felucca*, competing in the crewed division of the Trans Superior. So began the inaugural Trans Superior Solo Challenge - with a little help from my friends. Locking through is an interesting experience regardless of the number of times it has been done, and this one was the most memorable of all as some of the 30 boats lined the lock wall and rafted the others off. Sights of the crew being hoisted to the spreaders for a photo op, and good natured kidding were in



abundance for our locking through. From the locks, it is roughly an hour's motoring out to the starting line near the Gros Cap Light. Jim McLaren's son Justin on patrol with the USCG Station Sault not only gave us a proper Coasty welcome, but also kept the starting area clear of the many other boaters who wondered what so many sailboats were doing on such a windless day. And windless it remained through the start, as it took better than half an hour for all of the boats just to cross the starting line. Happily, the breeze began to fill in from the SW, and spirits rose

considerably as the racers headed out into Whitefish Bay.

Dusk on the first night found *Whoa Nellie* NW of Whitefish Point Light on a nice reach, and making good speed. The singlehanders were all within radio range, and I found myself settling into my established routine of 25 minute naps, and thinking about fixing a hot meal that I could re-heat as necessary the rest of the night. I had prepared for cold, but it turned out to be quite pleasant - in fact wearing my standard foulies was usually *too* warm! I had been running a lot of electrical equipment that day, and my main bank monitor was showing the effects of my wanton electrical usage. With little else to do, I decided to fire up the Yanmar, and replace the spent electrons.

I had expected to see somewhere in the neighborhood of 120 amps going back into the bank, but instead of charging, I was still seeing a discharge which reflected my current (no pun intended) use. Not a good thing, as I estimated that I would be on the lake another two days minimum and my onboard electrical system didn't have enough left to see me through it if I maintained the same usage. I thought back to Apollo 13 and the famous "Houston, we have a problem..." phrase. It seemed as though either my alternator or voltage regulator was shot. It didn't matter much to me which one it was, as I didn't have a spare of either on board. I had a separate battery, which I vowed to keep only for starting and last minute electrical use when I was assured of finishing the race. My concern was simple - how could I make it to that point with what I had left in the main bank. The choices were pretty straightforward - I could either retire from the race or do everything I could to save what was left and see if I couldn't finish what I had started. Figuring that I didn't come 400 miles to quit, I opted for the latter. I went into the true economy cruise mode, and started shutting down all the goodies that make racing aboard an Island Packet a pretty luxurious affair. If the item drew any type of load, I shut it off unless it was absolutely

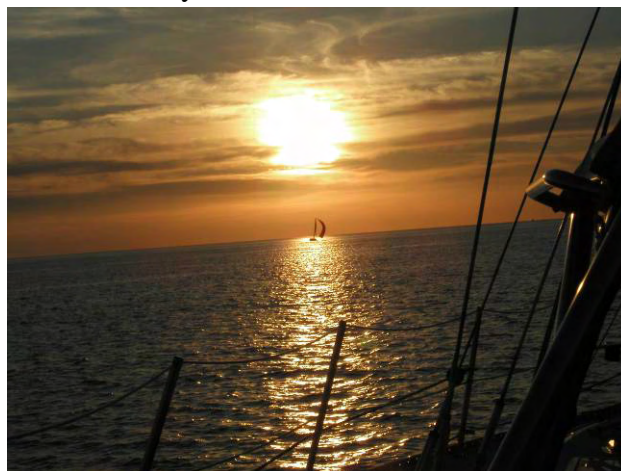
necessary. I made a call to Wally McMinn on *Odyssey* and let him know I wouldn't be doing much in the way of transmitting on my VHF, or anything else for that matter. One of the bigger draws on the boat is the autopilot, so I stocked up on food and water at the helm, and settled in for what would be roughly 48 hours of hand steering. The plan was simply to steer until I couldn't keep my eyes open, and then use the autopilot for a nap. Repeat as necessary. Out came the back-up nav lights, and a bin of batteries to power them up. I had never replaced my cabin lighting with efficient LED devices, and the others drew too much, so a flashlight was going to have to suffice there. So much for the microwave, and I was happy that I hadn't prepared a bunch of frozen, microwaveable meals like I usually do, or it would have been tough dining. I could use the stove for as long as there was power to hold the propane shut-off solenoid open, so I wasn't relegated to cold meals, which would have added considerably to the misery level.

While I gave up on using my VHF to transmit, I did monitor it enough to learn of a rigging failure on Mike Hanson's *Solar Express*, and a halyard problem on Lease Schock's Pearson 36 *Phoenix* that unfortunately caused them to withdraw from the race, and return to the Soo. I know disappointment levels were running high on board those boats, but there didn't appear to be anything either could do to rectify their respective problems. We learned later they both made it back safely to the Soo.

Strangely, the race seemed to go by pretty quickly, and whether or not I was more focused because of my situation, I couldn't really say. I came to thoroughly appreciate the few moments that I fired up the autopilot to take a break, grab some sleep, make a position report, or put up a chute. Mostly, I was eternally thankful that I had installed an electronic usage monitor that allowed me to catch the problem early on. Had I just gone through a couple of charging scenarios without realizing I wasn't actually doing anything, the situation would have been much worse, as I could have been left with no way to get the engine started if I had to.

To say that finally seeing the western shore of Superior was a relief is probably the understatement of all time, but like most races, there were still a few unexpected events to deal with. After a great afternoon and evening of close reaching, I was within 50 miles of finishing. The early morning skies near Two Harbors, Minnesota were being continuously lit with wicked looking bolts of lightning, and weather advisories were being broadcast that matched what I could see. The thought of hand steering in a thunderstorm with driving rain was less than appealing, but the finish line beckoned. I was certain I would have to deal with that weather sooner rather than later. I didn't factor in *never* having to deal with it, but that turned out to be the case. As the line of weather crossed, the fair wind that I had been enjoying left the lake, and I began seeing speeds less than 3 knots. Then two, one, .5 and the inevitable 0.00. Listening to reporting stations along the western Superior coast didn't fill me with any sort of hope either as they were reporting light and variable or calm. If there was a silver lining to the moment, I didn't have to worry much about the helm, with the sails hanging limp. I had been close to John Ayres on *Rip Tide* and Wally McMinn on *Odyssey*, but true to my prior racing experience, I got just close enough to watch them hang on to the last of the breeze and move SW while I began to sit. Is there anything worse than that especially after hundreds of miles of racing?

As the sun rose, wind started to return, but it wasn't steady and served to only rise, then dash hopes of a daytime finish in Duluth. Speeds of eight knots came and went, only to be replaced by indications of less than one, or the dreaded triple zeros. As the large lift bridge near the finish came into view, the winds really tapered off, and as the afternoon wore on, the winds wore out. I somehow managed to keep moving although I couldn't see any indication of wind actually reaching the water. I could catch just enough aloft to manage a knot or so, but no more. It seemed like a finish in daylight would occur, but then I heard from Mike Labore on *Integrity*, a Nassau 45. He had been parked within feet of the finish for hours, and pleaded for me to drag him in some wind. I must have, because I watched him slowly slide across the finish line, about the same time I took his place in the parking lot. From about 400 yards short of the finish, I watched the race committee on the breakwall, and could hear the sounds of Duluth. Flags were moving ashore, but there wasn't a breath of air stirring on the lake. I asked the race committee if they could perform any sort of wind dance, but thinking I'd be on the lake for a good long while, I thought it best to grab something to eat and figure out how I was going to manage the frustration of sitting that close to the finish for another night. Someone, somewhere must have heard my pleas for a bit of breeze because the sails slowly filled, and I slid across the line at a blistering 1.7 knots and received a congratulatory call from RC on the pier. It didn't take long to clean things up, wait for the lift bridge to open and motor over to a welcoming committee at the Aquarium, including my wife Joanie, who had just flown into Duluth and had seen me sitting near the finish as the sun was setting. Alas, no camera...



I can't say enough about the efforts of Dan Pavlat, Dick Lappin and Eric Thomas to get this race up and running. Eric single-handedly saved the day by getting me a new alternator in record time, which allowed us a wonderful cruise home. The crewed Trans Superior folks bent over backwards to help us every way they could, and the efforts of Paula Hall and her staff were greatly appreciated by all of us. This is one race that you simply must make the time to do - it is unlike anything else on our slate. The next one will be **July 28, 2007** - mark your calendars now; it is well worth the effort!

