



Great Lakes Singlehanded Society

2006 Lake St. Clair Solo Race

Mike Mahar

The Singlehanded boyz from the Great Lakes are still at it before the ice forms! The GLSS (Great Lakes Singlehanded Society) held the 28th running of the St. Clair Solo race this weekend. Yea, we still have a good month left on the Great Lakes sailing calendar.

This international, multi-club race starts off of Great Lakes Yacht Club on Lake St. Clair just outside of Detroit and heads across Lake St. Clair into Canadian waters to the far side of the lake. Rounding the Thames River center channel buoy, it's back across the lake to the shipping channel buoy R-28 with a turn up into Anchor Bay for a finish off the Clinton River. This season finale for the GLSS is a 38 mile race with 5 different classes and had 29 entries this year, racing in JAM, PHRF and multihulls divisions.

To start the regatta off, it's a brewski and barbeque, using a skipper's meeting as an excuse to get together at Great Lakes Yacht Club (GLYC) Friday night before the race. This also gives the transient boats a chance to stage at GLYC for the early Saturday morning start. There's a continental breakfast; we stuff them with dog-nuts and coffee and sent them on their way. And as they say "it's off to the races"!

The weatherman was true to word for a change, in summary it was snotty! The winds were in the twenties and gusting to thirty knot range with choppy three to six foot seas. You're DSQ if caught spewing! To add to the wet ride we had intense rain squalls on and off through the entire race. Lake St. Clair usually doesn't get much for waves due to the depth and fetch of the lake, but the pitch is always short and erratic making for a real bouncy ride and difficult steering.



Panther on the way to a first place finish 2006 SCS

One of the really scary things in single handed racing is the starts. Every one is hanging out around the starting line in the high winds, rain and waves trying to get their sails up, finding the RC flags and getting in to the proper start sequence. When you're alone on the boat it's hard to steer, work the sails and keep an eye out for your competitors all at

the same time. Fortunately we didn't have any collisions, but I had a very close call. Glad the other skipper had some good lungs, because I didn't see him till the last minute.

The smaller and slower boats started first as the RC launched us out across the lake on close reach to a beat toward the Canadian shore. With the reefed main and 100% jib it was a fight to keep the boat under control during the puffs. As you closed in on the Canadian shore and the turning mark the wind and waves abated. Sure helped going into the mark rounding! The trip back across the lake was beam reach but being solo and the high winds no one dared to put up a spinnaker until rounding the last mark at the shipping channel and a run down wind. The chute went up and it was drag race for the last six miles to the finish line.

If everything goes as planned the contestants can finish the race and make it to "Big Al's" steak dinner and collect their flags. The dinner and awards were held at NSSC, (North Star Sail Club) about a mile up the Clinton River from the finish line.



From left: Steve Stoll, Janet Wolf, Julie Dembek, Mike Mahar, Bill Dembek

No regatta can happen without the organizers and Race Committee; so a special word of thanks to the organizers, Race Chair Steve Stoll, assistants Bill and Julie Dembek, Mike Mahar and Janet Wolf. Also a word of admiration for the guys and gals who bounced around on the RC boats for us - Tom Verbeke and John Franks at the starting line and Cheryl Cameron and Gordon Bagley for covering the finish line.

We had a few gear failures, some neonates that were baptized and for most it was just a wet and wild solo ride. Special acknowledgement goes to the three sailors that made it up from Lake Erie: Lease Schock, Randy Handley and John Ollila (John came all the way from Grand River OH!). The GLSS is throwing down the gauntlet to 6.5 Mini solo sailors, we have the venue when are you going to show up?