

2007 St. Clair Solo Regatta

By: Michael Mahar

This year's Great Lake Singlehanded Society's fall classic, the Lake St Clair Solo Regatta, had 30 boats in six different classes testing out our new JAM, PHRF and Multihull courses. For the first time, the GLSS offered a shorter course for the JAM fleets - instead having all the yachts going to Thames River, we kept the JAM fleets on this side of the lake with a shorter 11.7 mile triangle. The only comment we've had so far from the JAM sailor is that we need to make the course longer - rumor has it the race chair has already been looking at lengthening the JAM course.

Tom and Barb Munson were the perfect hosts for the Friday night's skippers meeting - they took care of all the food! One small problem: "we" (who will remain nameless) - gave them (Tom and Barb), too high of a head count so "we" - who will still remain nameless - had plenty of left-over burgers and buns. Steve Stoll, our Race Chairman, paid them off in cash, reimbursing the Munson's with gas money for their motor-home trip to North Carolina - they were planning to leave on Monday. Have a safe trip Tom and Barb - I can't say enough about what they have done for the GLSS over the years. Need to get Barb back her old bowl! The veggie tray bowl! Try not to forget the bowl Mikey!

On the subject of cash - we're getting wise to you Canadian sailors that come over for this Regatta. Now that the exchange rate favors the Canadian dollar, they all paid us in American money. We love you guys, and we had a great time hosting our Canadian neighbors - you give us the honor and pleasure to call the St. Clair Solo an International Regatta! Bring more of your sailing friends from the "Land of Maple Leaf" next year! It may even be a better deal yet for our Canadian sailors if the exchange rate keeps on the current trend.

My GLYC sailing rival and friend Barney Mathie gets the 'saved the start award'! The LSSC, Lake Shore Sail Club, "G" mark was supposed to be the pin end of the start/finish line. It was apparently hit by a power boat - still floating but partially submerged. You couldn't see it, unless you were on top of it. Some smart thinking by our Principle Race Officer (PRO) Tom Verbeke resulted in Barney grabbing one of the GLYC marks. Getting it inflated and delivered put Barney in a bind and he really had to hustle to be ready for his start. With his assistance, the RC got everyone off and running on time without incident.

Speaking of assistance and organizing, the skipper who registered online Friday night and didn't show up for the skipper's meeting deserves to be spanked - pants down! I don't know who you are but - come on! Pay and register online at the last minute?! Call into the RC a half hour before the start?! The nameless, faceless guys that organize this event bend over backwards and don't ask for much, but that's just pushing the envelope!

Now that I have vented my spleen, back to the race. The first mark for all the fleets was R18 buoy on the freighter channel - with the wind out of the southeast, it was a beat and you couldn't lay the first mark on one board. For the sailors doing the long course you would still be on beat after clearing the R18 mark. This led to our first casualty, Mark Gutteridge on *Gutsea*, who sailed right on past the mark and kept going on the same port tack. Tactically and strategically it was the right call, but he wasn't going to get any award for seamanship or navigational prowess. Mark sailed right into the dumping grounds on the far side of the freighter channel and ran aground. He did manage to free himself and proceed on in the race. Mark later dropping out with concerns about his mast step and rig, but he did inform us he wasn't taking on water. Mark, we're not giving you a seamanship award but we are giving you a communications award! He made sure we knew what the problem was and where he was going and he would check in with us again. Sorry Mark, get the boat fixed and hope to see you for the Huron Challenge in June 2008, now that you are retired.

The JAM boats rounded the mark and went on a broad reach heading to 1PH buoy eight miles to the north. The PHRF boats that headed south on port tack toward the Canadian shore made out OK. To avoid the big - "*Arctic circle route*" when sailing into a persistent wind shift, take the header first (one of Dave Perry's *Speed Smart* tips). Those in the multihulls and PHRF fleets

that did head south and hugged the Canadian shore received a 'get-to-the-windward-mark-first' coupon - for many, it was redeemable at the awards later. Even though there seemed to be more air out in the lake it was the persistent shift that really paid off. Me, I split the difference and basically sailed the lay line. In *Reality* (Barney Mathie's boat) - the PHRF fleet had one long beat from the start to the Thames River buoy. The R18 buoy for the long course was just something you had to go around - that obstacle is referred to as - the dumping grounds! We won't go into that again, or will we? - Time for some lore, fact and fiction.

The *Dumping Grounds!* Roll out your charts guys and take a good look at the Dumping Grounds. For our Canadian sailor, take note that the Dumping Grounds are on Canadian side of the freighter channel but still on American side of the international border (one of the few places this happens on the Detroit River, St Clair River and Lake St Clair). Almost all the way from Lake Erie to Lake Huron the international border is in the center of the freighter channel, with a few exceptions...Also take note of the depths and added notes on the chart. *Mariners beware!!* You really don't want to sail over or even motor over the *Dumping Grounds* with some shoal drafted vessels! I have even noticed the fisherman seem to avoid it; I am assuming the fishing isn't very good over that area.

What are the Dumping Grounds? We all hear the stories about cars that went through the ice and fishing shanties - used to be the norm - guys would just leave them out there till the ice melted. Well both of these objects and a lot of other foreign matter do litter the lake. Some people say this is where the early City of Detroit trash was barged out to and dumped. But, really the dumping grounds are tailings from dredging the freighter channel across Lake St Clair. I have no idea when this was done, but I am assuming it happened sometime between the United States Civil War and World War One. Remember Lake St. Clair is only fifteen feet deep on average through the center of the lake. This isn't the only place you will find dumping grounds on the Great Lakes; there are several going up the St. Mary's River and other places in the shallow areas of the Great Lakes.

On to the Thames River mark... After a nineteen mile beat the red and white striped clear water buoy sure looked sweet. By the time I got there, the guys with training wheels (multihulls) had rounded the mark and a lot of the boats that hugged the Canadian shore line were in front of me footing off, having over-stood the mark. This was turning into one of the longest windward/leeward races I have ever done. The spinnaker and pole was all set to go and I had over-stood the mark by a few degrees but not near as much as some of the boats that had sailed down to the Canadian shoreline.

Gybing at the mark - the pole went up and spinnaker followed. At first I sailed high of the course - "putting some money in the bank", and quickly realized that wasn't helping and went back to sailing my polars. This was the first time I had a chance realize what a great day it was - you couldn't have paid for better sailing weather. Ducking down below, I changed into my shorts and a lighter long sleeve shirt and also set the GPS to the R28 buoy. The wind was still eight to thirteen out of the south-east; the sky had some very high cirrus clouds, and the visibility was unlimited! With the temperatures in the high seventies to low eighties - I don't do Celsius - my apologies to our Canadian guests. In summary it was a bright'n beautiful, sunny fall day - glad I remembered the sun tan lotion before the start. Now that it was early afternoon and sailing downwind, you finally realized how warm it was.

The Great Lakes Singlehanded Society wasn't the only organization out on Lake St. Clair enjoying the beginning of autumn. Bayview Yacht club had their *North Channel Race* in progress and my old hangout, Crescent Sail Yacht Club, had their *Ice Breaker Regatta* going on too. Besides a lot of sailing action, there where also hundreds of fisherman spread out all over the lake. The anglers fished mostly on the American side of the freighter channel; some were moored, other just drifting or trolling. I passed quite close to a few of the fishing boats - most didn't mind since sail boats don't throw out a large wake, but a few did make comments to me. What caused me apprehension were the ones I didn't see until the last moment, hiding under the head sail; it was difficult to tell if they where moored, drifting or trolling. One yacht, *Vallhalla*, had an incident with one of the fishing boats (with five belligerent fishermen on board) somewhere around the Thames River. Apparently they where trolling and he hooked their planer board with his keel and the fishermen became very upset - so upset that they started chasing and threatening him with bodily harm, while circling his sailboat. No one else mentioned seeing the incident but as is often the case, the solo sailor was left to his own

devices. He was quite shaken up over the incident! After the regatta, many of the competitors mentioned the large number of fishing boats out there and having to tread their way through groups of them.

Resetting the Sail comp I realized the wind was still slowly backing toward the East. Passing the last of smaller boats in PHRF, I could pick out my competition in front of me with a decent lead - heading for the R28 buoy, further north on the freighter channel - I also realized that I was going to have to throw in a jibe or two. Like the windward legs, the boats that headed north first were the ones that made out. In retrospect, I shouldn't have jibed at the Thames River buoy but just bore off and set the spinnaker. Realizing this, I was one of the first boats to jibe and started heading North Northwest toward the next mark. Closing in on Dan Pavlat on *TAZ*, I realized I had good chance of catching him - having raced against Tartan 10s before, I knew going downwind wasn't a T-10 forte.

By now the JAM fleet was already back to Great Lakes Yacht Club and I figured all the beer would be gone before I ever got there. It was kind of funny listening to *Northern Spy* trying to warn the race committee that he was already closing in on the finish line several hours earlier, before I had even rounded the Thames River buoy. *Northern Spy*, a Beneteau 40.7, was the first JAM boat to finish about a quarter after twelve. Before the race I asked GLYC club member Tom Stewart on *Wind Sprit* who was sailing in the JAM fleet, to put out some beer and ice out for JAM sailors when he got back. Little did I know that his race was really short! Tom had some rigging issues with his boat and didn't even start the race. Another boat that had a rigging mishap was our race chair person Steve Stoll - he managed to perform some plastic deformation of his spinnaker pole and put a ninth degree bend in it - ouch! But he did finish and complete the course.

Throwing in one last jibe, I started heading for the R28 mark on a port board and soon realized I had jibed too early in a fading breeze. So it was either sail really deep or throw in two more jibes - I chose to sail deep and slo-o-o-w! There were four of us in a loose group rounding the last mark, Dave Evan on *Ratso*, Dan Pavlat on *TAZ* and one of our new GLSS sailors, Luke Brockman on his new S2, *Baboy*. Luke had a new ride - his blue twenty-four foot Shark, *Loanshark*, on which he did the 2007 Huron Challenge in back in June, had been replaced with an S2 7.9. True to form, Luke took first over all for the PHRF fleets once again this year; he has some kind of unofficial record going for first overall in St. Clair Solo regattas.

Baboy was the first in the cluster to round the last mark and seeing he could lay the finish line with his spinnaker up, I decided to keep mine up when I rounded the mark. Both *Ratso* and *TAZ* decided to drop their spinnakers and use their head sails for the close reach to the finish. Having a larger yacht I quickly closed in on Luke and *Baboy* as we both headed for the finish line on a close reach with our spinnakers up. This seems to happen to me every year - once again I was trying to pass Luke Brockman, a race within a race. Here we were on the last leg to the finish line and were both in luffing duel - no way was Luke going to just let me roll over him. When he pointed the boat a little too high and spinnaker collapsed - I knew my chance had to come! Footing off, I drove the thirty-three foot Jeanneau below the S2 and found a clean lane of wind and finally pasted him to leeward. We had both been sailing high of the course, and now I knew for sure that I could lay the finish line with the spinnaker up. The only problem I had now was picking out the RC boat! There were a lot of larger powerboats drifting around where I thought the RC boat should have been anchored. Turning on the Gyropilot, I ducked below once again set the GPS, this time for the finish line. Having a bearing, I corrected course and eased the spinnaker and main out for some more speed and started heading straight at where the RC boat should be moored. I was just to the windward of *Ratso* - *Taz* was now to the leeward and behind me. Luke and *Baboy*, were to windward of me, but I knew there was no way he was going to physically beat me to the finish line.

Just keep the bow down and boat moving on course, that was all I could do for now. Somewhere towards the shoreline, the RC boat and finish line was hiding - I just couldn't pick them out yet. So once again, I placed my trust in the GPS and modern electronics - sail the bearing off the GPS, I knew all four yachts were going to converge at the finish line. Bob Hoffman, his dad (all the way from Colorado), and Jim Lyden (GLSS member), did the scoring and were kind enough to man the finish line. They were but a few of the nameless faceless guys that helped make the St. Clair Solo possible. They were anchored by the "G" mark enjoying the warm afternoon sunshine out on the water, while waiting to take the finish times and photos of all the

participants in this year Lake St. Clair Solo. These guys were kind enough to wait out there until the last boat finished and escorted the pickle boat into Great Lakes Yacht Club in the dark.

Mean while back at the ranch – I mean the yacht club – the steaks and baked potatoes were cooking. “We” - the nameless, faceless guys that organize this event, decided to try catering out the *Steak Roast* this year. Now for some explanations; two years ago, the start of the GLSS St. Clair Solo was moved to GLYC because CSYC was under a major (and badly needed) retrofit. This year, the NSSC (North Star Sail Club), decided to make their first race of the NSSC Fall Series into a Leukemia and Lymphoma Society fund raising event. The prelude is a party on Saturday night, at the same time the SCS would have our *Steak Roast* and awards presentation. Guess what, we got the boot! As they say in the auto industry “that’s how shit happens”!

OK – the short course, JAM course - after a conversation with long time GLSS member and previous SCS race chairman, Dan Pavlat, he recommended we try a short course – and we did! There are a few other side benefits to starting and finishing the race at GLYC. We can now run the races either rounding the marks to port or starboard - both courses making a complete loop, so the competitors will have courses that offer all points of sail.

Yes, I will stop and brag about GLYC. As we (GLYC members) like to say, “it’s the best kept secret on Lake St Clair.” Beautiful grounds, a well protected harbor and excellent facilities. Besides these attributes, it is conveniently located in the “Nautical 9 mile” within easy walking distance of several restaurants and marine supply stores. I hope every one of you had a great time - “we”, the nameless, faceless guys that organize this event, did. Please tell your sailing buddies and friends to come and enjoy - it will only get better next year!