



# Solo Challenger



*Newsletter of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society*

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*Summer/Fall 2003*

## A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

*Jim McLaren*

Labor Day?! No wonder our Newsmeister Extraordinaire Tony (Flyby) Driza is getting so testy with me! And what happened to all the sailing I was going to do after the Solo Challenge?

The Solo Challenge!! Now there's an amazing phenomenon: The **TWENTY-FIFTH** running from Port Huron! An incredible anniversary fittingly marked by extraordinary efforts from many folks to pull together an excellent celebration, attended by veterans (including Larry Rotta, Joe Vallee, Frank Voorheis, Jim Douglas, and Robin Smart) as well as a bumper crop of rookies – you know who you are, no matter how many Challenges you've completed! We owe a huge thanks to many members for their contributions to the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Challenge, and certainly none more than Bill Dembek, Dan Pavlat, Alan Veenstra (I still like the sweater vest idea!), and Wally McMinn, who *thankfully* crossed the finish line in time to pay our bill at Mackinac Island Yacht Club...hate to have had to book next years' at the *Pink Pony*.

The Seventh Annual Chicago Challenge, with terrific performances turned in by "old" salts David Wagner and Matt (Naked Turtle) Scharl, and *really* "old" salts Gramps Veenstra and Flyby Driza, brings us to a **cumulative record of 32** long distance Solo Challenges, and countless Solo "Sprints"...a truly incredible Society which we all – old and new – embrace with an intense pride!

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And speaking of pride - **The Department of Congratulations:**

***New Lifetime Members:*** Bob Erndt, Jo Buckingham, Wesly Bush, Bill Kruger, Rick McLaren, Bob Reaume, Steve Stoll, and Jeff Urbina.

***2003 Presidents' Award:*** Bob Erndt & Jo Buckingham.

***2003 Peter Fisher Award:*** Harold Beaton

***Our warmest congratulations to each of you for your remarkable achievement!***

Jeff Urbina has contributed a piece here which eloquently captures the profound personal impact this event has on each one of us. I know we all enjoy reading these stories – please shoot one to Tony Driza or myself for inclusion in a future newsletter.

***Notable Dates:***

***AGM Challenge – January 17, 2004***  
***Solo Challenge – June 19, 2004***

I'll close (at last!) with focus on the AGM "Challenge": Let's bring as much energy, enthusiasm, intensity and momentum to January's AGM as we brought to the events surrounding this year's Solo Challenge. I hope we'll each make a special effort to be at Bayview Yacht Club on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

**Here's to a long Indian summer!**

*Jim McLaren*

## **GLSS 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Port Huron – Mac Solo**

*Dan Pavlat*

June of 2003 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Port Huron to Mackinac Solo and the concurrent 7<sup>th</sup> running the Chicago to Mackinac Solo. It was less about the race and more about the people and where the *GLSS* has evolved since its inception. Dedication to the Society was shown by the number of members who have not entered the Solo in years but made the trip to the Island to mark the silver anniversary. I will apologize in advance to anyone who I fail to mention in this article but the size of the group made it impossible to keep track of all of the skippers, past and current. There were many more of our past skippers present than are listed below.

Robin Smart made the trip from North Carolina and brought his trawler and a custom made large banner reading "*Happy 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday GLSS.*" Nice touch, Robin! The banner was also proudly displayed from the porch of the Mackinac Island Yacht Club – all the fudgies knew we were there. Terry Netzloff our "legal eagle" who was heavily involved in finalizing our Constitution and Bylaws was present. It must have been a good job because the documents have stood the test of time. Larry Rotta had his name written into the *GLSS* history books as he made the trip back to Michigan, borrowed a boat and became the only individual to complete both the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> Solos. Larry also won a flag in his class along the way and then decreed he would "NOT be back for the 50<sup>th</sup>" as this race had proven to be a very slow, windless test of patience and food supplies for all the competitors. Larry also mentioned "There is nothing that compares to the first time." Jim Douglas elected to work as finish line crew this year having previously completed 21 of the 25 solos. Dick Lappin with his finish matched the 21 finishes including one on Lake Michigan.

The Wednesday awards luncheon included recognition of the Charter Members in the audience: Jim Douglas, Larry Rotta and Joe Vallee, who were awarded sponsor Flags to recognize our appreciation for the

founding of the *GLSS*. An interesting story came to light in that Frank Voorheis was part of the original group that launched the *GLSS*, but due to outside circumstances had to scratch his entry in the first race and is thus not listed as a Charter Member. We know you were there to get it all going Frank!

Frank and the Charter Members were then joined by Robin Smart to hand out the medallions, flags, and President's Trophies for the Port Huron and Chicago finishers. It was a special moment when the 20<sup>th</sup> Peter J. Fisher Memorial Trophy was presented to Harold Beaton by Larry Rotta, the first recipient of the award. Previous winners on hand besides Larry were Joe Vallee, Dick Lappin, Frank Voorheis, Jim Douglas, Blair Arden, Lynn Hulber, Phil Rubright, Bob Van Eck, Dave Evans, Al Merrithew and Dan Pavlat. Our thanks again to Sue Phillips for her continued support of this award that perpetuates the memory of her brother.

No celebration like this would be complete without some reminiscing and many of those who had not been involved in the last several years of Mac Solos were glad to share their memories of the founding of the Society and the events in the first several races. Some of the stories may have been a little embarrassing for the skippers that we now consider our grizzled veterans as miscues of their learning years were brought to light. It was all taken in good humor and reminded us that every skipper has gone through the learning curve.

Probably the most telling comment came from Jim Douglas when he recounted how he was contacting some of the charter members to solicit what they would like the *GLSS* members to do for them for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. One of the founding fathers replied, "I think we should do something for them. They are the ones keeping the *GLSS* going." This mutual admiration shows the kindred spirit that has existed over the years by skippers that compete in the Mackinac Solos. We are all grateful to those that had the vision to conceive the organization and then establish it.

For a wrap up Robin Smart was able to deliver one of his patented stand-up routines complete as always with his yellow paper notes to insure that no zinger was forgotten. It was enjoyed by all. Then the luncheon was over all too early and the skippers headed for their boats to depart in many different directions but with more memories than they carried when they came to the Island. All Mac Solos are special, come just more so. This was one of them.

*Dan Pavlat*

# THE OTHER MAC

Jeff Urbina

## Prelude

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Did you realize that there are two Chicago-Mac Races? There are. There is the famous crewed Chicago-Mac Race that runs in July and the little known single-handed Mac race that runs in June. Yes indeed, people actually race the same course solo to Mackinac: it's called "The Solo Challenge", and with good reason. Most of us read about the adventures of Brad Van Liew, Tim Kent and Ellen MacArthur and wonder, "...what in the world could they be thinking?" Down deep, however, for most of us who have sailed for a number of years, the question is often "...I wonder what it's like?" Well, this year was the 7<sup>th</sup> running of the Solo Chicago-Mac Race and I decided to answer that question for myself. I have sailed numerous crewed Macs over the last 25 years and have found it to be fun, exhilarating, boring, frustrating, exciting and all the rest. It's a great race, but it may be a while before I do it again with anyone else.

I did not start out wanting to solo the Mac, or any other race, for that matter. I had always been a "team" player and loved it. Great times on great boats like *Atra*, *Tabasco*, *Freedom*, *Pegasus*, and a couple I don't want to remember. Somewhere along the way, perhaps when my wife and I bought an old 1982 Baltic named *Bodacious*, the reality of dealing with a serious racing effort became a little less appealing. Not that I don't enjoy people (although they may not always enjoy me), but I started sailing with fewer and fewer just to spend time on the boat and finally thought about sailing it alone. I used to crew with David Scully, who sailed around the world in the solo race that is currently known as "Around Alone" back in 1994-95, and I figured that if he could make it around the world alone without killing himself or someone else (and those of you who know David, know what I mean), I could probably make it the 333 miles to Mac!

I found out about this crazy enterprise by going on-line and seeing that you had to qualify for the race: you must sail over 100 miles in over 24 hours to get in. Yeah, that's right, more than 24 hours with no one to relieve you. Remember all of those college cram sessions you did that took you into the next dawn? That's the one. I think the organizers want you to get a small taste of how nasty it is really going to be. I did my qualifier on the weekend of this year's Michigan City Race, two weeks before the big race. It was foggy, cold and all I could think about throughout the night (while I was trying to stay warm in my Mustang suit) was what a great time everyone would be having in Michigan City and how miserable I felt! Finishing my run in a real blow on Sunday afternoon capped off the fun. Frankly, it was the first time I had really

single-handed the boat and I entered the race with more than just a little trepidation.

## The Race

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You quickly come to realize that this race has a very different flavor to it than the crewed Mac. The race is run by the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society and is sponsored by Columbia Yacht Club on the Chicago end and the Mackinac Island Yacht Club on the other end. This year, a total of 18 of us (plus some wives and groupies) were at the skippers' meeting/lunch at Columbia on June 20<sup>th</sup>. No need to go to the Field Museum auditorium for the skippers meeting for this race! The usual drill...make sure everyone knows the weather, the course and how the start will work off the south breakwall light. Personal safety is stressed more than in the crewed Mac for obvious reasons. Our start was expertly run by J.T. and the race committee at Columbia ("...do you want a 5 or 10-minute sequence? Don't worry, just stay on the radio and I'll talk you through what I'm doing..."). The start this year was at 6pm Friday night so we could finish concurrent with the 25<sup>th</sup> (!) annual Port Huron solo race, which starts on Saturday morning, at about the same time (which makes the finish all the more interesting since boats were finishing going across the same line in opposite directions).

The participants range from the old hands (Paul Schloop on *Blue Max*, a Bavaria 35, has done all 7) to the totally inexperienced (me and a couple of other newbies). Excluding the multihulls, David Wagner on *Gigi* had the honor of being scratch boat. We are divided up into four classes but we all start at the same time...assurances of a nice long line. My primary objective at the start, since I think this will be the hardest part of the whole trip, is to avoid hitting anyone! Success! OK, so I was a bit late across the line (like the committee boat had already pulled up anchor and said "you've all started...have a good race" by the time I got there), but I was off.

We let out in a light breeze from the Northeast, which meant for some slow going, but I definitely appreciated it for my first outing. As these things go, the wind pretty much died and we drifted slowly north, only getting to just around Milwaukee by Saturday night. Sunday night was to be spent drifting in the Manitou's. You do sleep in this race, just not in very long stretches, unless you consider 20 minutes long. The theory is that if there is no boat on the horizon, you can't get to anyone and they can't get to you in 20 minutes. Additionally, you don't fall into a deep sleep (I can assure you). Attach an egg timer to yourself and you're set! I was so nervous I didn't sleep much the first night anyway. Next time, I'm hitting the snooze button whenever the wind dies!

There is a mandatory check-in for the entire fleet every 3 hours, just to make sure that everyone is OK. Honestly, when you're alone, it's a great comfort to know that somebody else is actually out there. As the fleet separates, you end up checking in with those closest to you (only a couple of boats had radios powerful enough to hear everyone...the mother hens who got even less sleep than the rest of us: Alan Veenstra on *Parvenu*, a Valiant 47 and Jim McLaren on *Sovereign*, a Valiant 40). The radio contacts became one of the great parts of the race for me: it's a chance to see how friends are faring, not whether or not you are winning or losing. I seemed well matched with Jon Jacobs' C&C 35 *Loose Shoes* and we match raced each other all the way up the lake. Literally, we passed each other 4 or 5 times. As it turned out, we ended up on radio call together and became fast friends. There is something special about your closest competitor asking if you are OK after seeing you execute a particularly ugly gybe/takedown and you are sitting on deck, totally spent, wondering whether or not you can get a chute back up (I did). Someone warning you that there is a barge heading straight for you in the Manitou's when your chute is hanging down in front of the boat like a curtain. Someone motoring back to find you find you when you sleep through a radio check (honest, it was Jon, not me). I didn't even really remember from the skippers meeting what Jon looked like until I got to the Island, but it was a nice reunion when we got there. You find that you have to take care of each other out there. There is a special character to this race and the people who do it.

The wind died halfway up the lake, the wind died in the Manitou's and the wind died at the finish. A lot of the sailing was downwind, which made life interesting. Ever dip-pole gybe a chute alone? Neither have I. The most I could manage was to pull down the "snuffer" and reset the chute on the other side: I think I got it down to a 5-minute process. The best were those infrequent times when it piped up to 15-20 and the sailing was glorious, blasting along at 8+ kts., all alone. The worst was when you all of a sudden realized that you were heading toward a shoal and you had better gybe...like right now! Handling the boat is one thing but add in navigating through the obstacles up north coupled with a definite lack of sleep and you start to realize why they call it "The Challenge". I was with Paul Schloop and Jon Jacobs at Gray's Reef heading down the Straits at about 6pm Monday evening. As the wind died so did I. Sleep deprived, I drifted out of the shipping lanes and slept (in 20 minute increments, of course) for over an hour...too long, as Paul and Jon both had the wind and, more importantly, the perseverance. After struggling past the bridge in 5 kts. Of breeze (why is every tack a knock?), my final challenge was to be the 2 hours it took me to make it from Round Island Light another 200 yards to the finish as the ferry wakes turned me around 3 times. The race committee was starting to discuss whether or not it would be legal for

me to cross the line backwards. The end mercifully came as I slipped across the line at about 9am Tuesday.

I motored into my slip at Mac, and three guys jumped on the boat to help me tie up. I think they know you are a little screwy and don't want you to total your boat! There were 10 people on the dock applauding and saying congratulations...someone handed me a bottle of rum (since Bacardi sponsored the race) ... all a blur. Shower, rum (OK rum first), sleep.

David Wagner on *Gigi* worked the boat hard and won Section I (*Gigi* was 3<sup>rd</sup> in the J105 class in this years crewed Mac and I still wonder if David let the crew do anything). *Parvenu* was first in Section II, Tony Driza's *Whoa Nellie* (an Island Packet 40) was first in Section III and Matt Scharl's *Gamera* won in the multihulls Section IV. I came in 4<sup>th</sup> in class (out of 4) and I felt like a champ. I know everyone that finished felt the same way. I would tell you where I ended up overall, but I haven't bothered to look: that was never really the point. I'll get 'em next year, anyway!

#### Aftermath

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There are a few things that I am particularly proud of in my life and completing the Solo Mac is one of them. For me, it was less of a race than a rally. The awards lunch at the Island was a treat with everyone from Chicago and Port Huron spinning their tales. Certainly easier to embellish the facts when there is no crew around to dispute your memory! In many ways, the race harkens back to the days of "Corinthian" racing and it's a spirit that I am hoping will never die. The Mac Race will always be a great race and one that I plan on making for many more years. Alone.

Interested? Give me a call (312/364-8318) and I'll be glad to tell you more or stop by *Bodacious* on the dock ... sometimes, I even enjoy the company.

*Jeff Urbina*

***Please keep your email and  
"snail mail" addresses up-to-  
date!***

***Send any changes to Tony  
Driza ([tdriza@wmis.net](mailto:tdriza@wmis.net)) and  
I'll update the information!!***

***THANKS!!!***

## Tanks' fer Nothin'

OR

### Head's Up

Rick McLaren

(Ed. Note: Like Jeff Urbina, Rick completed his inaugural Mac this year. Happily, I was upwind of him...)

As everyone downwind of *Dulcinea* knows already, my holding tank let go into my bilge sometime Saturday morning. The tale (chuckle-chuckle) actually began three years earlier.

Shortly after I had closed on the purchase of *Dulcinea* in February 2000, I had been warned: "...watch the heads you've got there, it'll sink your boat." The speaker was a delivery captain who was the last person to sail *Dulcinea* in 1980 before she went into storage. Taking the warning to heart, I replaced the toilet itself, the thru-hull, the seacock, the discharge hose, the intake hose, and I added a siphon break to the intake hose. But the Nauta bladder holding tank had worked OK for one summer, and it wasn't connected to the sea, so I did not replace it.

Fast-forward three years to the start of the 2003 solo. Things were going reasonably well, I thought. *Dulcinea* was last across the starting line, as planned, and I had not hit anything or anybody. A long night becalmed in the shadow of the Sears Tower was better than a gale for the first night of my first solo, said I. By some miracle Mike (Osborne) and I had avoided floating into each other for lack of steerageway. All was well. At some point when things really slowed down I used the head.

Saturday morning dawned and the wind more or less picked up, sort of. After breakfast I started noticing a pretty strong smell. Now *Dulcinea's* sewage treatment plant had never been the best, but this was rather strong. I investigated, all the while keeping a good look out, of course. I pulled up the sole, and the fluid in the bilge was black. At first I thought I had engine oil in the bilge. I took apart the engine box. Nothing. No leak. I checked the engine oil. Fine. I checked the reserve supply of oil. Intact.

So I went forward. I pulled out all of the miscellaneous stuff from under the port V-berth, and down at the bottom, under the Nauta tank, was the same black "engine oil." It was sewage. Smelly black sewage. The old rubber tank had let go across the bottom seam. Although the V-berth locker was supposed to be watertight, it wasn't. Believe it or not, I was relieved. At least the engine was OK.

From that moment on, until the finish on Tuesday afternoon the race took on a whole different "challenge." Stop the "leaking," flood the bilge, and turn on the bilge pump, you say? Good in theory, difficult in practice. Two years earlier I had replaced the wimpy electric bilge pump and hose with a Rule 3700, the biggest they make. The bilge had to be really, really full for it to work, and I didn't want to fill it with sewage anyway. I folded the Nauta tank in half by pinning the bottom two corners to the top two corner mounting screws. That stopped the leaking. The bucket brigade started. Buckets of Lake Michigan water (with Dawn dish detergent) cleaned out the V-berth locker, slowly. The bucket brigade went on from noon Saturday until noon Tuesday, one bucket in, one bucket out with a hand pump. Sitting becalmed right in the middle of the shipping lane a few dozen yards north of the Gray's Reef Passage Tuesday morning provided wave action.

The smell wasn't so bad by the time we beat our way across the finish line. They found me a slip, and it happened to be right next to the pump out. Jim and a zillion people helped me dock, and I needed them all. A pump out and two Mackinac heavy green garbage can liners (doubled up) disposed of the Nauta bladder. John Ayres suggested Clorox and water, and that finished off the bilge cleaning and the smell. Several hours of hot showers improved the moral of the crew.

Back in Chicago I discovered that Nauta still makes the exact same size bladder. Sailnet sent it in a few days. I expect it to last another twenty years, just like the last one. So we're back in business, and *Dulcinea* is legal to boot.

Lesson learned: replace EVERY rubber part on a thirty year old boat that has been in storage for ten years, including the holding tank. See you next year!

Rick "The Bro" McLaren

## AGM Dinner Free This Year!

OK, I lied; it's NOT free this year, but now that I have your attention, please continue to read on. **There are a few Board of Director positions that will be coming available in January,** and they will be filled at the AGM. These positions are for a three-year term, and require you to be available for Board Meetings the first Monday of every month. The meetings are held in a central location to both the East and West siders, typically Kalamazoo. Travel to and from the meetings is at your expense, as is the dinner held along with the meeting. If this sounds too good to be true, and you would like to submit your name for consideration, or just want more information, please contact Jim McLaren via email at [JGMLINDPUB@aol.com](mailto:JGMLINDPUB@aol.com).

***Do You Have Your 2003 Twenty Fifth-Anniversary Race Booklet?***

We have some 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Race Booklets left over from the 2003 event. Pat Nugent did a great job in formatting the booklets. Along with the usual race information you will find detailed lists of the Charter Members, winners of all the Presidents Cups, Ralph Eilberg Award recipients, Peter J. Fisher Memorial Trophy recipients, all the current class record holders and a list of all the SuperMac finishers. There is even a congratulatory letter to the GLSS from the governor of the State of Michigan, Ms. Jennifer Granholm.

If you would like a copy you can request it by email from Dan Pavlat ([fdpavlat@peoplepc.com](mailto:fdpavlat@peoplepc.com)) or you can call Dan at (248) 471-2420. First come first served while supply lasts!

***AGM Challenge  
January 17, 2004***

It goes without saying that the AGM in January is one of the highlights in the *GLSS* year. By the time the meeting rolls around, everyone will have forgotten all of the bad luck, broken gear, black flies, and hours of windless drifting accompanied by the sound of sails slatting. Tales of heroism will have grown to new, previously unreachable heights, and it is always good to renew old friendships.

This year's AGM promises to be all of that, and dare I say it, *much more!* Our very own **Tim Kent** has graciously offered to regale us with not only the tales of his tremendous accomplishment in *Around Alone*, but to give us the first hand account of the capsizing of *Everest Horizontal* off of Bermuda while competing in the Bermuda One-Two earlier this year with Rick McKenna. Escaping with little more than what they were wearing and a handful of flares, they managed to affect a rescue, and the subsequent recovery of *Everest Horizontal* as well. This promises to be one of the more interesting presentations ever to grace the AGM.

Seating is limited, and it is sure to fill up quickly. Official notices of the AGM will be going out very shortly – ***please get them sent in at your earliest convenience to assure that you are guaranteed an evening of fun, friendship, and tales from the high seas as only Tim Kent can spin them!!!***

***26<sup>th</sup> Port Huron-Mackinac  
8<sup>th</sup> Chicago-Mackinac  
Solo Challenges***

It's never too early to think about next year's races, so now that you've probably gone out and purchased a 2004 calendar, please take the time to mark it with the date of our premier event.

***June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004***

We would obviously like to see the number of entrants take a tremendous jump for the next race, but that won't happen without some effort on our parts. Please take the time to talk up the race around your respective yacht clubs and marina over the next few months – there are still sailors out there, wandering the docks that have an interest in solo distance sailing but don't know the venue for it exists. Remember too that the *GLSS* sponsor flags are given to members who recruit a new member into our ranks, and they are very cool looking indeed. The goal is to have one of them flying from each of our boats next year – please to all you can to help make that a reality!