



The *Solo Challenger*

Newsletter of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society



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Summer 2005

**A NOTE FROM THE
PRESIDENT**

Tony Driza

Labor Day weekend has come and gone, and the summer GLSS races including the Macs and the inaugural Trans Superior are now in the history books. On June 18th, record numbers of skippers took their places on the starting lines in Port Huron and Chicago for the 27th Port Huron to Mackinac Island and 9th Chicago to Mackinac Island Solo Challenges. New entrants on both lakes accounted for nearly one third of the total participants, and of that number, we now welcome *twelve* new lifetime members to the GLSS! A hearty round of congratulations to new lifetime members of the Society:

<i>Chris Eagen</i>	<i>John Hoskins</i>
<i>Tom Hughes</i>	<i>John Lubimir</i>
<i>Jim Lyden</i>	<i>Bob Meador</i>
<i>Elisabeth Reichling</i>	<i>Bill Tucker</i>
<i>Ken Verhaeren</i>	<i>Brian VanWieren</i>
<i>Bill Vesey</i>	<i>Ron White</i>

These new members have pushed the lifetime memberships in the GLSS beyond 200 – there are now 209 skippers that have earned the distinction of sailing solo from either Chicago or Port Huron to Mackinac Island! History may well be made again in August, as there are several non-members entered in the inaugural Trans Superior race, and should they receive a finish in the race, they too will join the ranks.

The winners of the 2005 President's Cups were *John Hoskins*, who managed to thwart the dead calm that descended over the Chicago-Mackinac Island course on board *Cierzo*, and *Bill Tucker*, sailing the Port Huron to Mackinac race aboard GL Cubed.



**John Hoskins
and Cierzo**
*Photo courtesy of
Jon Hoskins*



**Bill Tucker aboard
GL Cubed** *Photo
courtesy of Joanie Driza*

To the veteran skippers, and newcomers alike, heartfelt congratulations in completing this year's Solo Challenges successfully and safely!

2005 also saw the running of the 8th Super Mac Challenges, and this year marked the first time in GLSS history that competitors from both Port Huron and Chicago successfully completed these Challenges simultaneously. Chicago was the venue of choice for the multi-hullers with veteran *Matt Scharl* on *Gamera*, and first-timer *Jim Lyden* on *Panacea* completing the nearly 600 mile race. Port Huron fielded two classes of monohulls for the event, and finishing in PHRF 1A were *David Wagner* who again set a blistering pace aboard *Gigi*, followed by *Dan Pavlat* on *Taz*, *Jon Jacobs* aboard

Loose Shoes, and **Patrick Nugent** on *Spanky*. The PHRF 1B skippers who completed the Challenge were **Tony Driza** aboard *Whoa Nellie*, **Bill Erdmann** on *Harbour Haze*, and **Wes Bush** sailing *Twiggy*. Nine finishers of a Super Mac in the same year, yet again another record participation in a GLSS sanctioned event!

I would like to thank the 2005 Mac Race Chairman **Blair Arden** for working tirelessly to put together the great races, the Mackinac Island luncheon, and the Awards Ceremony. Without a doubt, Blair was probably the most delighted skipper to see the race start, as he could finally get some much-needed sleep! Kudos also go out to **Jim McLaren**, the Lake Michigan Vice-Chair; Jim put on yet another fantastic skipper's meeting at Columbia Yacht Club in Chicago, and helped shepherd the large group of first-time skippers up the lake. **Gerylann Arden** and the entire finishing line race committee are to be congratulated for a job well done, with comments from the competing skippers saying it all, "...very professional, with a friendly touch just when it was needed most!" A huge "Thank You" as well to Vice President **Paul Schloop**, for standing in for me at the Awards Ceremony on Mackinac Island while I was competing in the Port Huron – Chicago Super Mac. Putting on these races is truly the work of a great many volunteers - without them, we'd all be out cruising!

The running of the Mackinac Solo Challenges are only the first of a great slate of singlehanded racing this year – there are plenty of races yet to come. Please see the calendar of events for the dates, and be sure to visit the GLSS website: <http://www.solosailor.org> for all of the details on the upcoming races.

Have a great time on the water this year!

2005 Solo SuperMac *Panacea – Jim Lyden*

My journey to the finish line off Sarnia Yacht club began over four years ago when I was shopping for an F-27 trimaran. I attended the Spring GLSS Meeting at North Star Sail Club where the hook was firmly set by listening to two of the most recent GLSS members describe their first Solo Macs. One of the chief recommendations made that night were to get the qualifying sail out of the way as early as possible. Several comments were made that due to the vagaries of the weather, that it often took multiple attempts to successfully complete the requirements.

Due to delays in acquiring the boat, I was unable to make the challenge that first year. The following two years, despite my desire to participate in the challenge, other commitments derailed my plans to qualify and enter. Finally, in 2004, I decided to get serious about getting the qualifying sail completed. Following the Doublehanded Huron Challenge, I sailed the boat back solo from Rogers City. This was a great learning experience and the lessons learned were applied to the 2005 Solo Mac.

I had planned to sail on Lake Huron but in February of this year, I was at a crew reunion with Bruce Geffen (Nice Pair) who mentioned that they expected five multihulls for the Lake Michigan side and that in fact, three of the five planned to continue to Port Huron. Although I believed Bruce, I emailed Ron White (Stampede) to verify that this was in fact the case. With regards to the Super Mac option, my exact comment to Ron was:

'This kind of stupidity has my name written all over it.'

I've been racing sailboats for over 35 years and have participated in over 40 Mackinac races and I have never been to skipper's meeting as fun as the one at Columbia Yacht Club. One of the obvious mistakes was to seat skippers in the same class together. This put all the multihull sailors at the same table (as I commented to Matt Scharl (Gamera) the next morning before the start, *'there's a reason the monohull guys think we're jerks...we are!'*) Despite the laughter and camaraderie inherent to the meeting, serious safety issues and radio check-in procedures were emphasized. The overriding message communicated throughout the meeting and at each table was to sail safely.



All the non dump trucks look alike to me....Photo Courtesy of Stan Folz

Saturday was a beautiful day with a 15kt north wind at the start. It was just a great day of sailing with the group of multis off the Michigan shoreline at dusk. Saturday night the winds died with little progress made and in the morning, light winds came up and the entire day was spent slowly reaching with spinnakers along the Michigan shore. Sunday evening, the breeze filled in and the last 130nm of the race were spent running/reaching in solid breeze, all under clear skies. Panacea finished just before 3pm (cdt) Monday afternoon and despite some enticement from a few of the finished multis, I continued to Port Huron finishing around 2:30pm (cdt) on Wednesday.

Some random thoughts on a number of issues:

Funniest/Scariest Moment

These were one in the same for me. During the Sunday 2000 radio check-in, I went below and traded positions with a number of the other multis. Two of the other multi sailors who will remain nameless were chatting about this and that. One of them remarked that he was glad that he no longer sailed 'dump trucks' which I inferred meant monohulls (ref: earlier jerk comment). I continue to sail monos in both Mackinacs and in other races but still probably chuckled at the comment. While this conversation was going on, I was hastily making a peanut butter sandwich and had just taken a large bite when a new voice came on the radio with a comment to the effect *'this is so-and-so sailing a dump truck 36.'* My first response was to laugh which immediately caused me to begin to choke on the sandwich.....seriously choke on the sandwich. Instant panic. Thoughts on how to perform the Heimlich maneuver on ones self raced through my mind as I grabbed water and fortunately was able to straighten things out.

Interesting Moment

After finishing the Chi-Mac portion, I was becalmed east of Bois Blanc Island most of Monday night and was able to get some much needed rest. Early in the morning, a light NW wind came up and a series of thunderstorms approached from the West. According to NOAA weather, these were not severe but I still dropped the sails as the first storm approached. There was substantial lightning which always gets my attention as the grounding on the F-boats is suspect as often it has been removed and I do not know the status on my boat (although I should). Each subsequent flash/thunder was getting closer and I began to count the seconds between the lightning and thunder, 5....4....3.... interesting, if the lightning is equally spaced and moving at a constant velocity, it's coming right for me. 2.....1.....the next thing I know, my right arm gets a shock that is reminiscent of learning about electricity at 10years old by playing with a lamp socket. The tiller on Panacea is aluminum with a short wooden tip that looks like a conventional laminated tiller end but it is only about 12 inches in length. It is bare wood and with the rain, was completely soaked. I had only a single finger on the tiller when shocked and my conclusion is that the water was struck nearby (my masthead was fine) and the current traveled through the water, up the rudder/tiller and the saturated tiller end conducted well enough to produce the shock I received. It was much more effective than coffee at providing a wake up call.

Hallucinations

Exactly consistent with my qualifying sail, the only semi-hallucinations I experienced was the feeling that the jib on the foredeck was a person lying on the deck. Every once in a while, the head of the sail would bob on a wave and it appeared that someone was pointing their arm. It was an interesting feeling.

Advice

There are many others much more qualified than me to give advice but I thought I would include some of the tips I received that proved very useful. Much of this comes from the Rode Show emails that Patrick Nugent

distributed years ago and can be viewed through the GLSS website.

1. Qualifier – Get this done as early as possible. The lakes are very cold in May/early June. Doing the qualifier the previous July/August is a much nicer way to go.
2. Stay ahead of the boat – reef before it is absolutely necessary, drop the spinnaker before you actually have to, etc. This is obvious but each maneuver should be played out mentally to ensure it goes smoothly.
3. Sleep – work to get rest whenever/however you can. I did not sleep on the Lake Michigan portion but as mentioned above, was becalmed shortly after starting down Lake Huron and was able to rest. On Tuesday coming down Lake Huron, the weather forecasts were calling for very strong NW-N winds on Tuesday night associated with a cold front passage. Rather than sail the boat aggressively in light winds during the day Tuesday, I took things very easy and rested knowing that the stronger winds would preclude any overnight rest. This worked well.

Conclusions/Acknowledgements

Anyone contemplating doing a Solo Mac should just do it. It was a wonderful experience and one that I am sure will provide a lasting sense of accomplishment and pride. Having done the Super Mac, I now need to finish at Mackinac Island so I can enjoy the festivities.

I want to thank **Mark Gutteridge** and another gentleman who kindly caught me when I docked in Sarnia. Mark is a Super Mac veteran and was wholly aware of how much help I required.

Finally, I also want to thank and congratulate all the other participants and in particular the other multihull sailors for the advice, encouragement, and friendship they provided.

See you next year.

The 2005 Mac Solo Challenges

Tony Driza

Skippers in the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society (GLSS) have completed the 27th Port Huron to Mackinac Island and the 9th Chicago to Mackinac Island Solo Challenges. Additionally, 2005 saw the running of Super Mac Solo Challenges, in which a skipper could opt to bypass the fun and festivities at Mackinac Island and continue on to a finish in Chicago (for those who began the race in Port Huron), or for those Chicago starters, to a finish in Port Huron. The two latter races are the longest solo freshwater races in the world.

Participation in the 2005 Solo Challenges was at an all time high, as 25 skippers started the race from Chicago,

and 23 answered the starting gun in Port Huron. Ten first time skippers entered the Chicago – Mac event, and the Port Huron- Mac saw 5 new skippers taking up the Challenge. Of those, a three-boat contingent of multihulls competed in the Chicago – Port Huron Super Mac, and 10 monohull skippers in two classes registered for the Port Huron to Chicago Super Mac Challenge. This was the first time in GLSS history that skippers completed the SuperMac courses in both directions simultaneously.

As always, the weather played a major role in determining the outcomes of all the races. A forecast high pressure was to be the dominant factor in the success, or lack thereof, in the races on both lakes. The forecast for the Port Huron starters was to be light winds from the north for the start of the race on June 18th, with conditions becoming even lighter as the weekend unfolded. The faces at the skipper's meeting held Friday night at the Port Huron Yacht Club pretty much said it all – long faces, as everyone anticipated a very slow race to Mackinac and beyond. Similar looks were the norm in Chicago as well, with skippers left pondering where the wind would hang on and then fill in for the later portions of the race.

Proving that weather forecasting still is as much art as science, race day dawned with plenty of wind for the starts on both lakes, with the Port Huron skippers scratching their collective heads about the unexpected bounty of stronger than forecast winds. True, they were still from the north, ensuring a stiff beat to the first mark of the course at Goderich, Ontario, but all were relieved that the unpleasant experience of wallowing in leftover slop with light air was at least left for some point in the hopefully far distant future. There were a couple early withdrawals from the race as one skipper encountered a total instrument failure, including his autopilot, and another received word via the cell phone of a shore-bound family member who was in need of medical attention; both skippers proceeded back to Port Huron, where fortunately, both situations eventually had happy conclusions.

Over on the Lake Michigan course, the wind gods smiled favorably upon the start as well, and skippers were tasked



The Chicago Start...A great breeze to begin with!

Photo courtesy of Gary Hirsch

with choosing a side of the lake to stake their fortunes on. It's hard to forego the shortest distance, moving right up the rhumb line, and with the winds blowing pretty much down the rhumb line, at least that was an easy choice to make. That left holding onto port and making for the

Michigan shore, or tacking over to starboard and taking the somewhat longer, but oftentimes surer thing (in the case of a high pressure area) as the only two considerations. The fleet, with one notable exception dutifully headed toward Michigan to take their chances as the race wore on. The lone dissenter to the strategy was first-time skipper John Hoskins aboard *Cierzo*, who opted to tack over onto starboard and work his way up the Badger shoreline, until far enough north to cross over towards the Manitou Islands. It's a lonely decision, and seeing the rest of the fleet sail off carrying good boat speed on a shorter course is a true test of mental fortitude. For John, it eventually paid huge dividends, as he was able to hang onto the wind as the rest of the competitors sailed into windless holes all up and down the Michigan coast. *Cierzo* was the only monohull from the Chicago start to finish on day three of the event – John easily won the Lake Michigan President's Cup Trophy as the first time skipper with the fastest corrected time.

As the strategy on Lake Michigan was being played out, skippers dueling over on Lake Huron began exhaling huge sighs of relief at rounding the mark at Goderich, a notorious parking lot, particularly as evening starts to fall. There were a few exceptions, as boats in the Huron Division started to see the wind shut off for them – the remainder of the fleet began the north-west haul back across Lake Huron toward the east coast of Michigan. Skippers were waiting all night for the other shoe to drop, and for the forecast of calm winds to materialize. Much to their delight, the high slowed its progress west of the course, and winds from the north continued to allow good progress towards Mackinac. As the first night on the water gave way to dawn on the second day, the winds began to clock just a bit to the northeast, then east, and skippers who were west of the rhumb line, awake and aware, were lifted right up the Michigan shoreline.

Skipper David Wagner aboard his J 105 *Gigi*, showed once again that it doesn't make much difference which lake he races upon – David turned in a blistering corrected time of 34:34:18, and not content with one finish, David continued on down Lake Michigan to complete his first-ever Super Mac as well, taking first place in the PHRF 1A class.

Back on Lake Michigan, the stalled high-pressure system was creating monumental problems for the fleet, with the exception of lone skipper Hoskins, who was happily shooting up the Wisconsin shore. As Saturday night wore into Sunday morning, the winds were shutting down all along the entire east side of the course. It became a matter of picking a place to park, and settle in for a long siege, waiting for the high to drift east, and for the winds to fill in from the southwest. The remainder of Sunday saw very little progress for the fleet, save for that of the multihull crowd, and by Monday, hopes were fading for a Mackinac Island finish before the Wednesday awards luncheon.

Flag winners for the Port Huron to Mackinac race were:

Superior Division

David Wagner *Gigi*
Cheryl Cameron *C Spray*
Bob VanEck *Tango*

Michigan Division

Jon Jacobs *Loose Shoes*
Dan Pavlat *Taz*
Patrick Nugent *Spanky*

Ontario Division

Mike Mahar *Miriah*
Harold Beaton *On Beat*
Jo Buckingham *Bijou*

Erie Division

Dick Lappin *Ginger Kay*
Tony Driza *Whoa Nellie*
Bill Tucker* *GL Cubed*

Huron Division

Blair Arden *Otis B Driftwood*
Chris Eagen* *Tia Lisa*

Flag winners for the Chicago to Mackinac Solo Challenge were:

Superior Division

Brian VanWieren* *Zapada*
Joe Turns *Renaissance*
Todd Scott *Celebration*

Michigan Division

John Hoskins* *Cierzo*
Elisabeth Reichling* *Night Hawk 3*

Ontario Division

Bob Meader* *Moondance*
Jim McDonnell *Black Pearl*

Erie Division

Ken Verhaeren* *Kismet*
Bill Vesey* *Serenity*
Mike Murray *Not There Yet*

Green Bay Division (Multis)

Matt Scharl *Gamera*
Jim Lyden* *Panacea*
Ron White* *Stampede*

Super Mac Port Huron to Chicago

PHRF 1A

David Wagner *Gigi*
Dan Pavlat *Taz*
Jon Jacobs *Loose Shoes*

PHRF 1B

Tony Driza *Whoa Nellie*
Bill Erdmann *Harbour Haze*
Wes Bush *Twiggy*

Super Mac Chicago to Port Huron

Matt Scharl *Gamera*
Jim Lyden* *Panacea*

* *Denotes first time finisher and new GLSS member.*

A complete set of the race results can be found by pointing your web browser to: www.solosailor.org and click on the "Race Results" link.

It was reported by all who stopped at the Island that the luncheon was beyond reproach. Prime rib, shrimp and assorted entrees rounded out the bill of fare – kudos to the staff at MIYC for a scrumptious dining experience. It's going to be even harder not to stop at the Island for those considering a SuperMac in the future!

The Solo Challenge Siren Call

Gary Hirsch

As do many finishers of the Solo Mac, I have my medallion where I can see it every day. It reminds me of a challenge completed, but, I did that seven years ago! It seemed like the time was right to go again if I could find a reasonably priced boat that was comfortable enough to take my aging body up the lake. Sometimes, the challenge that one is expecting takes on a different shape. I was soon to find out.



Blue Belle...Before

Photo Courtesy of Gary Hirsch

I happened upon a sweet looking woody that was a one owner. However, the owner was now 76 years old and hadn't set foot on the boat in two years. She was in Baltimore, in the water year round. I wondered what she would look like. You're right, she looked like a bad dream – but, I was mentally committed – and the price was very reasonable . . . My wife wanted to physically commit me.

From April 1st, I spent every day at the marina trying to get all the hoses and wiring replaced, the hull scraped from the keel up, the mast refinished and safety gear installed. Towards the end it came down to – what needs to happen to get her launched. Two weeks before the start, I couldn't get the engine started. I called Blair and



Blue Belle, After... Way, Way After...

Photo Courtesy of Gary Hirsch

cancelled. I then spent every day, going through the fuel system. I took the injector (yes it only had one – a 7.5 hp one-lunger Volvo with raw water-cooling) to Holland, MI to have it tested. I tried everything and then after rebuilding the priming pump, it started. I took her out on the lake and everything went well. So, when I came in, I called Blair to re-enter.

The sail to Chicago was perfect except for one thing. When I went to start the engine to enter Monroe Harbor, the blankety-blank hunk of metal blew the main fuse on the battery. I finally got her going and spent Friday worrying about the race with a questionable engine. I decided that if she would start on Saturday, I was going to the Island.

Saturday was a great day for a sail! This was a perfect start, although the forecast didn't look as favorable. Mid afternoon, I decided to try the engine to charge my battery – yes there is only room for one battery. I found a bunch of oil in the bilge. When I checked the oil, it was gray and frothy. I stewed about it for the rest of the evening and then about midnight came to the conclusion that it would be best to drop out. I had one quart of oil available. I needed the beast to run one more time. Just get me into my slip – that's all I need.

After I was safely in my homeport slip and a good amount of sleep later, I found that the two rear engine mounts were broken with bolts sheared off in the block. Nothing was holding up the back of the engine/tranny except a short run of shaft through a fairly stout packing assembly. The extra stress on the transmission to engine gasket caused a big leak. These engines are notorious for rusting from the inside out with raw water-cooling, especially when kept in salt water. I think that caused the water in the oil.

By the following Saturday, I had removed the old Volvo and replaced it with a two cylinder Beta Marine Diesel 13.5 HP. While those that finished the Race were partying on the Island, I was horsing 260 lbs of steel out the hatch. That was a challenge that I don't want to repeat, especially solo.

I am planning to make it to the Lake Michigan Scramble. After all, the siren is still calling...

2005 GLSS Huron Challenge

Mike Mahar

All right I'll plead guilty! The boat is going faster this year that it did last year. A lot of people were asking how I got that Jeanneau to go so fast - continuous improvement is the answer! I keep working on the boat and looking for things to improve to make the boat go faster and make it easier to sail.



Mike Hanson (l) with Mike Mahar *Photo from Mike Mahar*

Here's the list of items I fixed or changed since last year. The big ones are I re-bedded the keel and completely drained my water tanks. The keel to hull joint had a gap that just kept growing. When I pulled the boat last year it was up to ½ inch, at the front end where the keel attaches to the hull. It was time to do something, so I dropped the keel and cleaned out all the old caulking/adhesive and reinstalled it. A lot easier said than done!

The other improvements, I have to thank my sail maker, Andy Unger. He told me to get all the dead weight off the boat. Sails you don't use, books, extra food; "he that seek shall find". I found about four to five hundred pounds of liquid bricks. My water tanks are bladders and I thought they were empty. Wrong! I never use them because the water always tastes terrible. Now I know why, the way the system is set up the tank never completely drain. It's a poor design from the original manufacturer – now the boat floats higher.

Other secondary items are the NKE Gyropilot that went back to France over the winter for a tune up. Now it doesn't randomly decide that I have fallen overboard any longer. Mysteriously going into the MOB mode was really getting old. The only rigging related change I made was to the spinnaker pole. I put trigger style end fitting on both ends of the spinnaker pole. It makes solo spinnaker jibing a lot easier. Ok, confessions are over, now for my version of the puff by puff of the twenty-seventh running of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Solo Huron Challenge.

This was largest number of entries and new entries since I have been doing this race. For the new guys, congratulations!!! The first Solo Challenge is really the toughest. For the guys who did the Super-Mac, how did you every make it a past the Island? Also my hat is off to the skippers that came up from Lake Erie, it was adventure just to get to the starting line. Additionally, Blair Arden and the *Otis B.* finally had some real completion with the first time challenger Criss Eagen on *Tia Lisa*.

All adieu aside, the Huron Challenge started in ten to fifteen knots of wind out of the north. One of the changes to this year's race was only had two starts instead of a start for each class. It sure made life easier for the Race Committee and more fun for me. Picking the windward end of the line I started a little late on port tack but managed to find clean air. Slowly the wind built through the afternoon until the Jeaneau's sail area was down to the second reef and half rolled up head sail. We had wind, and it was on the chin. Most of the fleet made it to Goderich before sunset, setting a fast pace for this race. Missing were the light and variable winds that the weatherman had predicted.

After a seventy mile beat and over standing the Goderich mark I tacked the boat and pointed it on the long hundred and twenty mile leg across Lake Huron. Slowly the wind died and the boat started to struggle though the residual waves from earlier in the day. This is when the head sail was unrolled and out the reef came. The lighter air made it a good time to catch some sleep. Napping off and on I woke in the middle of the night to see that the wind had veered far enough aft to put up the asymmetrical spinnaker. This kept the boat powered up as the wind went soft and further aft. Some time after sun up I swapped out asymmetrical spinnaker and put up the symmetrical on the pole. Little did I know that would be my sail of choice until almost the tip of Bois Blanc Island.

Closing in on the wreck off Presque Island winds started to get real soft and a little fluky. There's something about that place, the wind always does strange things and then there's the wreck....sticking out of the water. I wasn't far from Presque when the 12:00 hr radio check started, so after swapping positions I pulled out the "bino's" and tried see if I could spot the competition. There were only two boats I could see even with the binoculars, one was *On Beat* several miles behind me and the other I could barely make out on western horizon ahead of me.

Slowly the wind started to fill in as *Miriah* headed up in to the "Straight" towards Bois Blanc Island. It was one of those picture perfect afternoons; the wind was dead aft to my course oscillating slowly from side to side. To keep on the layline and have good speed I jibed the boat six times over the next eight hours. For awhile the anemometer was reading in the low twenty knots true range. The ride was great and I kept closing in on the spinnaker ahead me. As the sun set the wind started to fade and in the darkness I started sailing the boat deeper

and slower to keep on course. In retrospect I should have just kept sailing to my polars and jibing the boat!

As the sun's last rays faded the only lights were the aids to navigation and reflective light off the clouds over Cheboygan and St. Ignace. Slowly I was getting into a situation I didn't like. I hadn't even caught a nap in over eighteen hours, it was starting to catch up with me and I knew it. You just can't sleep up here in the "Straights", too many things to hit!

The wind kept going forward and getting lighter. The spinnaker came down and the 155% head sail was unrolled as the boat struggled to make head way in the sloppy following seas and fading breeze. In the dark I couldn't see Bois Blanc Island and had to rely on my GPS. Then out of darkness another sail boat approached me from port – who would be cruising out here this hour at night? I finally figured it out; it was Cheryl Cameron on *C Spray* heading home.

Coming around the northwest corner of Bois Blanc Island I could see the lights of Mackinaw and heard the yacht *Loose Shoes* radioing the Race Committee. So that's who I have been chasing for the last twelve hours or so! We were with in a mile of each other both heading for the finish line with about two to three miles to go. Then the wind completely died, and my favorite sound started, slap, slap! Adding to the situation a freighter was coming through the Straights of Mackinac. Slowly, *Loose Shoes* and *Miriah* had drifted to within a half a mile of each other as the freighter turned through the "Straights" with the red, white and green running lights all perfectly aimed at us. I was expecting to hear five blasts on the horn or the radio and kept thinking this can't be happening to me now. Who ever was helming that freighter must have been a yacht racer he just split the difference and steered right between me and *Loose Shoes*. Thank you skipper!

The Breeze filled in again as the sun came up and *Loose Shoes* took off towards the finish line. He beat me by a couple of minutes and just kept going, *Loose Shoes* was one of the Chicago boats doing the Super Mac. After getting those reassuring words from the Race Committee, "Welcome to Mackinac Island", I hit the starter button and panicked. The engine warning horn stayed on! After a few minutes I figured the problem out, squared the boat away and headed towards the dock to be met by my wife Janet with hugs, kisses and, a bottle of rum.

Super Size My Mac *Tony Driza*

One would think that enduring a lone Super Mac would be enough to satisfy a solo sailor. The distance by itself is daunting, life ashore is put on hold for nearly a week, not counting a possible delivery back to the home port or just getting to the start of the race, and there is the ever-present agony of sailing past Mackinac Island and the post race festivities. Those should be sufficient reasons to

say once is enough, but as Dave Rearick has said before, “We’re not wired quite right!” True words indeed.

I had done the inaugural 2002 Chicago to Port Huron, and although I managed to finish it, I wasn’t overly pleased with the effort. A few bad choices led to the inevitable price to pay for them, and parking at various locations up and down lakes Michigan and Huron became the norm for me. I had been looking forward to a bit of redemption ever since that race ended, and with the consensus of mono-hullers opting to go from Port Huron to Chicago, I made plans to do so as well.

It’s a challenge just to get the boat over to the other coast from Holland, and thankfully my bride agreed to make the delivery with me. Pulling all-nighters isn’t nearly as bad when there is a sweet smelling crewmember aboard to stand watches as needed. Making that happen required a bit of planning as we had to drive a couple of cars over to Port Huron and spot one so Joanie could get back home after the start – scratch the better part of one day. There was no way I was going to pass Mackinac Island twice, so after a windless start in the delivery mode, we decided to make Mackinac our initial stopover. The wind eventually filled in to the point where I could at least get the creases out of the new sails, or more accurately, put in a few new ones of my own making. The boat likes the new sails that Wally Cross of North came up with, and I’m beginning to think good things are on the horizon.

It’s pretty common to round Grays Reef and have the inevitable thought “I’ve got it made now” run through one’s mind. Hey, what can go wrong in 25 miles? Shouldn’t have said that... The first clue was that despite excellent visibility at the Grays Reef light, the bridge wasn’t there. Dusk had fallen and the twin towers and resulting span should have been a welcoming sight, but zilch at that point. No lights, no glow, and I was pretty sure that it hadn’t moved, even though I hadn’t poured over the latest Notice to Mariners. No worries, it will show up soon, and there aren’t any freighters about (yet) to muddy up the passage to the Island. That went out the window when after an hour or so the *Oglebay Norton*, a thousand-footer, called in with “upbound Grays Reef Passage in 30 minutes.” Still no worries, he has more lights than most small towns, and a radar that will microwave food miles from the boat. Sure enough, she soon comes into view lit up like a Christmas tree – still no sign of the bridge. A flip of the VHF over to get the latest hourly update reveals that Mackinac Island is reporting fog. Well, that at least clears up the “I can’t see the bridge yet”.

The radar was working just fine, and all was where it should be, as I turned aft to look at the *Norton* again. This time, there is no *Norton*, as we had motored into the fog bank. Visibility extended right to the bow, and not much more, and as seems to be the case, other freighters started calling in announcing passage through Round Island, the South Channel – the whole works. By this time, we were only four or five miles from the bridge, and it seemed like a prudent idea to get out of the steaming

lanes for a while as the freighters sounded their horns, and lumbered past in the mists. I dutifully get out all of the horns I have, canisters, hand pumps, and a gadget that sounds like a smoke alarm going off, and emit rather wimpy in-comparison-to-the-freighters’-horns blasts to announce our presence. I’m not too confident that they are heard inside the wheelhouse of the floating steel behemoths. The coast finally clear of freighters, we resumed on past the bridge, and for the first time in my life, I couldn’t see the roadway as we slid under the span. The only indication that we were passing other than a black blob on the radar was an occasional glimpse of the south tower, and it looked like something out of a Hitchcock movie, or *The Lord of the Rings*. I half expected to see creatures from the nether world as we went by.

Just six miles to the Island now, but we can’t see it – at least the freighters have gone, right? Not quite, as it turns out – yet another announces his presence west of the bridge heading for Round Island Passage. Enough already – at least it’s starting to approach dawn and it’s easier to see how little we can see in the dense fog. At this point, we’re debating on whether or not to go into the Island, or just anchor out and wait for the fog to lift. We



Didn’t beat it by much...Photo by Tony Driza

caught a bit of a break, for as we approached the Island, the fog lifted just enough to reveal the harbor, and as we anchored, the top half of the upbound freighter passed by, presumably connected to the bottom half, although you couldn’t prove it by the visibility.

We took a day to cram in all of the things I would miss during the Super Mac, planked whitefish dinner at the Village Inn and all. Even managed our own version of a pub-crawl which, lame as it was, still brought back some great memories of crawls gone by. Too quickly, it was time again to head for Port Huron and the start of the Super Mac.

First day out brought more light air, but good progress as bargain diesel at only \$2.25 a gallon shot us down Lake Huron. As night settled in, so did the proverbial fog, and it was another damp, radar monitoring night, mournful freighter horns sounding as we worked our way on past

Presque Isle and Thunder Bay. At some point in the night, we picked up a hitchhiker in the form of a rather sorry, soggy looking finch. He was quite content to stay



until dawn, and either thought we must have been crazy to be out there, or that he could find his way back to shore from there.

At any rate, he bid us a fond farewell and launched off again. Even with radar, fog is not fun, and it was with great relief that it parted after sunrise. A midday check on the weather channel revealed that we should have been happy with fog, as a pretty intense line of thunderstorms was marauding across the state and exiting near Harbor Beach. So, coincidentally, were we. This time radar revealed a massive blob of black that was changing about as fast as the sweep of the scanner. Taking a page from Al Merrithew's book, we opted to reduce sail to the point where we had none left, and waited for the storm to hit. I must say we made a noble effort to beat it into Harbor Beach, but a 45 knot squall beats a maxed out Yanmar any day. The rain came in sheets, what little wave existed was hammered flat by



Ruh-Roh.... Photo by Tony Driza

the downburst from the squall. Kind of fun actually, lending further credence to the "we're not wired quite right" theory. One squall should have been enough, but the second course nailed us within a couple of miles of Harbor Beach. This one was a lot less fun, and with the boat headed into the storm, we endured 50-knot winds and stinging rain (when foolish enough to stick one's head out of the dodger) for about 20 minutes. Managed to get to our slip without running aground, but the depth registered 0,0 beneath the keel in more than a few places. We are assured it's just silt, not to worry...

We awaken to a very fresh breeze, the kind that bodes a fantastic sail, and we weren't disappointed. The "magic bus" made great time all the way to Port Huron, and after negotiating a few bridges we were tied up at the Port Huron Municipal Marina. A few pleasant days pass, prepping the boat, taking in the sights, and spending an enjoyable evening at the Port Huron Yacht Club, the

guests of Jean Webb. A spaghetti dinner, race instructions, and "see ya on the water" took care of the evening, and skippers tromped back to their boats with the thought of very light winds and sloppy seas to start the race. It was not a pleasant thought as sleep settled in.

It was a relieved ensemble of skippers who woke to find the dire predictions of very light air had not come to pass. Two starts later, everyone was off on a beat to the mark at Goderich, Ontario and as the day wore on, the winds filled in nicely, eventually building up seas in the three to occasionally five feet range. Nice conditions for *Whoa Nellie*, but it was still a struggle, as she doesn't point up anywhere near where most of the boats did. Lease Schock and I were duking it out for the boat furthest south of the rhumb line, when I opted to tack back to the northwest. As I did so, it prompted a catcall or two from boats that I eventually crossed with. "See you on the next tack...." Whatever....

As the afternoon headed on into dusk the majority of the boats had rounded the mark, and I finally made it close to the buoy as the winds were starting to die off. Please lord, not again, don't let me sit in sight of the mark for hours while the rest of the fleet sails off into the sunset. After taking a few shots at the mark and coming up short, I finally managed to get around it, just behind Bill Erdmann on *Harbour Haze* and John Lubimir on *Sabrina*. The breeze never completely shut down, and I managed to keep moving along quite well, well enough in fact to catch up on some sleep. Once the boat settles into a rhythm, I find it pretty easy to sleep, no matter how violent it is. As long as the noise stays the same, all is usually well.

Dawn broke with light winds that eventually shifted to the SE, and out came the asymmetric. It's a beast of a sail, and with it, I kept moving along steadily most of Sunday. There weren't too many boats visible, and the ones that I could see were off quite a bit to the east, sailing up the rhumb line. I'm now talking to myself, and answering pretty regularly as well, mostly bemoaning the boat's inability to point. As Sunday wore on, the winds steadily increased, sending *Whoa Nellie* on past the wreck of the *Noordmeer* and on towards Bois Blanc Island. The breeze eventually went stronger to the south, and those are the conditions that the 23,000 pound Island Packet thrives in. After waiting the entire race to put the chute up, I wasn't about to take it down without some heavenly intervention, and the miles really piled up quickly. I found myself envisioning the thought of an Open 60, with the roar of the waves echoing off the stern. Life was good right up to the point where the wind shifted further to the SW, rendering the chute useless. Down with chute, back up with 145, and progress is still not too bad. By now, Dan Pavlat on *Taz* passes by, but this is as close as I've ever been to him this far into a race. Life is still good, but there's no sense trying to point where he can - it isn't going to happen. I manage to stay within sight of him all the way to the finish line at Mackinac early Monday morning. So far so good, but the harbor, and my wife who is working on Race Committee beckon mightily. I

sail by close enough for a picture and a wave and state that I have dates with two beautiful women in Chicago (that being my bride and my daughter), and announce to the Race Committee that I'm continuing on down, and tell the welcome voice "Thank you for doing a great job – we all appreciate it."

Although the wind was decent crossing the line at Mackinac, it didn't take long to find the first of what would be numerous sits for the rest of the race. *Taz* managed to hang on to the wind and he made the bridge in just under an hour. On the other hand, I struggled to make it in a couple of hours; when the breeze did fill in, it was with a vengeance right on the nose out to Grays Reef. *Spanky* caught and passed me before the reef, and thinking I could avoid a tacking duel, I committed the most egregious of my sailing miscues – abandoning the fleet, boldly going where none has gone before, to the north of Garden and High Islands, to pass to the west of Beaver Island, hopefully to take advantage of a predicted wind shift later that day to the north west. Great theory, if it had just worked.

With two reefs in the main and the genoa furled to a 135, I was screaming along quite happily with my plan. The knot meter was bouncing around in the high eights, nary a cloud in the sky. It stayed that way right up until the time it read less than 1, which took all of about 10 boat lengths to achieve. By now, I was to the north of Hog Island, and with the numerous reefs to the south, that was no longer an option. Not wanting to chance being stranded behind the islands forever, I wheeled the boat back around to the east, hoping at least to catch enough wind to get back to deep enough water to cross the reef west of the buoyed channel. As the last of the breeze died off, I found myself bobbing around in about 9 feet of crystal clear Lake Michigan water, staring at the many boulders that permeate the reef. About 400 yards to the southwest, 3 feet of water waited, should I fall asleep and drift onto it. Needless to say, sleep was not an option...

After remaining motionless for the better part of 4 hours, I finally got enough of a breeze to make it to the deeper water on the south side of the reef, and although I was not moving along the rhumb line, I was more than delighted to be moving at all. By now, I was in contact with many of the GLSS racers doing the Chicago – Mac who had endured many more hours than I of drifting under the massive high-pressure system gripping the lake. They too were mighty tickled to be moving, albeit slowly under spinnaker. After being incommunicado for a while, it was really nice to talk with Mark Perkins, Brian Van Wieren, Ken VerHaeren and Jim McLaren, and get a sense of what they had encountered. The whining ceased in a hurry...

The remainder of the trip on down to Chicago would be marked with equal portions of parking and enjoying a glorious run. After another four or five hour stint of chasing the slightest cats paws northeast of the Manitowoc and finally getting sleep, the breeze filled in nicely for a great run under the asymmetric to a point somewhat

southeast of Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Time to sit again and it was particularly cruel as wind came in intermittent spurts. I tried to corral it with the chute up, down, poled out, or free flying. It didn't seem to make much difference, and all I managed to get out of it was a hole just above the foot of the chute where it snagged on the pole. Just lovely – now I'm remembering the "challenge" part of this whole ordeal. Bill Erdmann and *Harbour Haze* were closing the gap, and Wes Bush was close enough with *Twiggy* to be talking with Bill. I could finally see Bill on the horizon, but he too eventually shut down and joined the parking lot.

After a while, I gave up on trying to actually trim the chute when it started to fill. Every time I tried to do so, no matter how incrementally, it would just collapse. Now, as the apparents came forward, I simply bore off a bit, and eventually escaped the Manitowoc parking lot, and began making nice progress down the Wisconsin shore. Eventually, the building southwesterlies forced a take down of the chute, and start the unenviable process of tacking the rest of the way into Chicago. Long tacks, shorts tacks, and increasingly common and long-winded conversations with me became the rule as the race wore on. I did manage to put a few more hours in the sleep bank, and upon awakening from one of my 20-minute catnaps, completely focused on tacking the boat, I found the cockpit suddenly bathed in a blinding light. At first, I thought, "great, abducted by aliens to study the not-wired-quite-right-part of the brain." As the beam shifted, rows of deck lights outlined the otherwise black hole that was being occupied by a downbound freighter that had closed to within a mile or so. Strangely, I didn't feel the need for any further sleep after that.

Still dark, and only 35 miles out of Chicago, and by now I should have thought I'd at least see the glow of the city off the top of the Sears or Hancock towers. Nothing. The ongoing conversation now has me exploring the very real possibility that I've sailed into one of those "cracks in the lake where ships have gone missing", or some kind of time warp that has me just outside of Chicago 300 years in the past. Both seemed pretty realistic at that point, while the thought of fog or haze was a pretty distant option. By now, it's Friday morning, no chance of seeing any more lights, but I should be able to start picking up some shoreline. Still nothing and I am ready for the Challenge to end in a big way. It was with a huge sigh of relief that I emerged from the haze to be greeted by the wondrous sight of Chicago, and better yet, winds that allowed me to point right up to the finish between the piers. Home free?



Tantalizingly Close Photo from Jim McLaren

weren't certain where to go as I tacked back and forth to try and lay the line – they took the safe approach and

Not quite. The winds shifted all around the compass as I closed on the finish. Fishermen working the edges of the piers probably

tucked into the rocks as close as they dared, probably figuring that I wouldn't run into the breakwaters. I was nearly at the point by then that I didn't care – good thing they didn't know that. Just as I was about to finish, one of Chicago's finest, a Marine Police vessel came out from behind the pier, forcing me to harden up to the point where I back-winded the sails, and it was in a hove to state that I rather ingloriously drifted across the line. Like my golf game, not a pretty thing to watch, but it served the purpose. With the winds now howling around the compass points, it took nearly an hour to secure the boat and proceed on over to DuSable Harbor, where I tied off in a dead calm and was welcomed by Jon Jacobs from *Loose Shoes* and, eventually, by my bride with a kiss and a bottle of rum.

Will I do another? Not if you drove bamboo splints with a two pound hammer under my fingernails! Having said that, the not-wired-quite-right brain has a wonderful ability to chuck the unpleasant side of just about any occurrence, so there's a three-year recovery that I assume is already taking place.

A First Timer's Look at the Mac Challenge

By Bill Tucker

Before the race the question I was most often asked: "Are you ready?". My answer was that I would know at the end of the race. I have made a number of single handed passages of several hundred miles, but the challenge always seems to be getting the boat ready and working off all the items of my "To Do" list, or deciding they aren't really necessary. Over the last two years I had made a large number of changes to my Beneteau 30, which I have owned for 25 years. These included engine replacement, blister repair, replacing the mast, adding roller furling, and purchasing two new autopilots to name just a few. It was a relief to get underway and forget about the lists. I was surprised by the number of wind shifts during the race. I also discovered that I need to do a lot of work to improve my light air sailing skills. As a cruiser, in light



Photo courtesy of Bill Tucker

air, I either turn on the engine or on longer trips take down the sails and take a nap. In a sense this was the shakedown sail for all the new equipment and modifications. It all worked fairly well. Just a few hours into the race I started to discover things that could be changed to make the boat sail better and started yet another list which continued to grow during the race. I was impressed with the level of organization at both ends of the race and the team spirit amongst all the competitors.

The Short Rides

Now that the "serious business" of long distance singlehanded is done...on THREE LAKES this year!!...its time to turn attention to the really fun stuff of which adventure and comrades are made: The Short Rides!

There is no question that a Solo Summer is not complete without one on the Shorties; the Michigan Scramble, the Lower Huron Romp, and the St Clair Solo are upon us, and the volume of calls and e-mails foretells a bunch of sailors preparing for their first Solo challenge in one of the Short Rides...and for sure all who've done one before won't mill a Re-Pete. We get few chances to Solo together and then have a Party! Seriously...Bottom Line...Do you know *anybody* who's better company than you?

See you out there!

First Dates on Your 2006 Calendar

AGM 2006

We'll be back at Bayview YC this year: **January 21, 2006** is the date to save!

Strictly Sail 2006

In honor of our Best Small Booth award @ Chicago's Strictly Sail 2005, the GLSS has been chosen for a booth at Strictly Sail 2006! The **Show dates are February 2-5, 2006**, so mark your calendar and look forward to seeing everyone there.

If you're considering volunteering for Booth Time, there is Good and Bad News:

The Good News is the required equipment list is considerably shorter than a Solo Mac's.

The Bad News is the Personal Qualifications are not flexible and will be strictly enforced...respiration, verbalization, and passion about singlehanded are all requisite.

If you do not meet these qualifications, please do not apply for Volunteer Status. If you do qualify, please let me know, because our GLSS booth will need a bunch of friendly help!

A *casual* GLSS dinner/get together is in the offing for Friday or Saturday evening of Strictly Sail. Please drop me an e-m (jgmlindpub@aol.com) with your interest so we have a big enough spot!