



Solo Challenger



Newsletter of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society

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A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

This will be my last newsletter article to you as your President. It's been a busy year and it's gone much too fast. I've been privileged to work with a great group of guys on the GLSS Board. They have been very conscientious and dedicated board members and I would like to thank them for all their efforts on behalf of the GLSS.

I would like to express my appreciation again to Pat Nugent for an excellent job as race chairman for the Mac Solo. Did anyone else feel at loose ends when the *Rode Show* and Pat's weekly assignment stopped coming? I wasn't sure what to do with myself the first week after the race without Pat's good advice. Those 20 tips should be required reading for every new participant in the Mac Solo.

Jim McLaren, Dave Rearick and Alan Veenstra can always be counted on to get the Lake Michigan side in gear for the Mac Solo. The growth in the Lake Michigan contingent of the GLSS has been truly outstanding and its due in large part to the enthusiasm of these three members and their commitment to the GLSS.

Mark Gutteridge and Dan Pavlat also did a terrific job with the two races they chaired. Several years ago, Mark took it upon himself to start the Lower Huron Solo Challenge and has chaired it ever since. It's a great race and I don't think Mark gets enough credit for keeping it going year after year. Dan Pavlat ran an outstanding St. Clair Solo in September. He worked hard to pull in new racers and his efforts

were evident in the large number of participants in the race and the re-emergence of a multi-hull division.

In September GLSS member, Tim Kent, started the "Around the World Alone" race on *Everest Horizontal*. Several GLSS members were in Newport in the days prior to the race helping Tim prepare his Open 50 for this incredible adventure. Dave Rearick was "taskmaster" with a stack of papers an inch thick listing tasks that had to be completed before the start of the race. Dave found chores for everyone who showed up: Alan Veenstra, Tony Driza, Mike Silverthorne, Rob Robbins, Bob Van Eck, myself, and some of our wives and friends. Cheryl Cameron also stopped by as did Drew Moeller. One item on Dave's list was an emergency rudder and he gave that task to Bob Van Eck and Alan Veenstra. These very talented fellows had that rudder engineered, built and installed in two days. I was so impressed! Each day Dave's list slowly grew shorter and was finally finished one-half hour before Tim pulled out to the start line. Sir Robin Knox-Johnson, Chairman of the Around the World Alone Race, was so impressed with the amount of help Tim received from his GLSS friends that he sent the Society a letter commending our efforts on Tim's behalf. I think I'm speaking for everyone who participated that it was an absolutely wonderful and amazing experience. Look for our picture in a recent

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issue of *Sail Magazine*. It's been great fun receiving Tim's e-mails and following his voyage on the web. Check it out at <http://www.aroundalone.com>.

As most of you know, the Michigan Scramble ended tragically this year with the loss of Mike Silverthorne. Mike completed his first Mac Solo in 2001 and this year completed the Super Mac. Many of us in the Detroit area did not have a chance to become well acquainted with Mike which is regrettable as he was held in very high regard by his GLSS friends on Lake Michigan and his loss has affected them deeply.

Because of Mike's death and Fred Ball's unfortunate incident during the Mac Solo, there are many of us who think a re-evaluation of our safety requirements may be in order. This is a matter the Board will be discussing in the near future. As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome.

I'm going to end this article on a subject I mentioned in my first article to you early in 2002 -- the annual dues. But instead of badgering, cajoling and wheedling you to pay your dues, I would like to thank the members who do. My appreciation to those of you who haven't raced in more than ten years and still pay your dues and to those of you who haven't raced in more than five years and continue to pay your dues; and, of course, to the faithful, steadfast members who pay their dues every January not knowing whether they'll be at the start line in June. My sincere appreciation to all these loyal members. They are the heart, soul and backbone of this fine organization as well as the hope and future of the GLSS.

Best wishes for a happy holiday season and a wonderful New Year from a proud member of the GLSS.

Tom Munson
President

The Annual General Membership Meeting (AGM) is scheduled for Saturday, January 18, 2003. Please mark your calendars. Your invitation will be mailed within the next few weeks. If you do not receive an invitation by the first of the year, please call or e-mail Tom Munson: 734-522-8124 / temunson@aol.com.

IN MEMORY OF MICHAEL SILVERTHORNE

April 11, 1952 – September 21, 2002

During this September's Lower Lake Michigan Solo Scramble, we tragically lost Mike Silverthorne. We don't know and we probably won't ever know for sure exactly what happened, but during that night, something on *Chute the Breeze* went very wrong. We believe Mike went forward to deal with a problematic roller furler and take down his Genoa in the 20 knots of S. W. breeze and 6 foot seas. When dawn arrived the next morning, *Chute the Breeze* had sailed herself back to the beach where Mike was found alongside the boat. He was abiding by the prudent practices of solo racers in that he had on his foul weather gear, was harnessed and tethered to the boat and was wearing an inflatable life vest.

Mike, who those of us that knew him affectionately called "Laughing Gull" because of his wonderful sense of life, had sailed his first Solo Mac three years ago. Just this past summer Mike completed the first Chicago to Port Huron Solo Super Mac sailing into the foggy finish in Port Huron at 4 a.m. - tired, frustrated and still laughing. Mike had seen many challenges in his life from Viet Nam to oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico to working for the Steel Workers of America as an arbitrator and negotiator. He had a sense of compassion for everyone and a sense of fairness that equaled none. The things that meant the most to Mike in his life were his wife Cheryl, whom you may know as an assistant manager at the West Marine store in Michigan City, and his two sons, Wilson and Kevin. I hope someday you get a chance to meet these two fine men that reflect the spirit and values of Mike.

Mike loved to sail and he loved the sailing community. I often tell the story of how easy Mike was to convince to do a Solo Mac. I'd never met Mike before. We were introduced to each other at Matey's, a small harbor bar in Michigan City, IN. When he told me of his boat, I quickly recognized it and him. I remarked that I always saw him sailing alone and that he should consider doing some solo racing. He asked when? I answered in June we do the Solo

Mac. He agreed. The waitress hadn't even had the time to bring my beer yet.

Quite a vast group of friends and family showed up to Mike's services to tell stories and share their emotions. Mike's family requested that donations be made to Tim Kent's *Everest Horizontal* effort in this year's Around Alone as Mike along with others had just spent the week prior getting *Everest* prepared for the start in Newport. Throughout that week in Newport and again back at home, Mike often told me that that was one of the best weeks in his life.

We'll miss Laughing Gull immensely.

Dave Rearick

2002 St. Clair Solo

2002 was the return of the multihulls to the St. Clair Solo with seven entries. There were 42 entries overall allowing three JAM and three PHRF classes to fill out the scratch sheet. As in 2001 the weather cooperated with mostly sunny skies and a northern breeze for the start which meant we had a port tack from the start to R14. Part of the impact of 9-11 was the requirement that we add a RC boat at the R 14 channel crossing to insure we kept well clear of all freighter or Coast Guard traffic, all skippers were reported as "well behaved" by our RC boat. As we sailed towards the Thames River turning mark the wind slowly clocked to the northeast at 10 to 15 knots. All the PHRF boats were anxious to make the turn and finally set their chutes to put some distance between them and the JAM fleet. Multihulls were also anticipating double digit speeds if they could only get this tight reach behind them.

Mother nature had other ideas and the wind moved back to the north and wavered from the northwest as the wind dropped in strength, forget the spinnakers for now! As the afternoon progressed the winds became very fickle which spread the fleet across the lake while chasing what zephyrs seemed to be the lifted tack at the time. By 1600 boats were beginning to see triple zeros on the knot logs and the drifting began. But look at the bright side guys (yes once again we were devoid of any women skippers - come on out next year ladies!) temperatures were in the seventies, the sun was out, there were no waves and most importantly there were no flies. This

was not a bad way to spend a day on the water in late September.

As time passed a few skippers began to drop out even with the announcement that the course had been shortened to finish at the R 28 channel crossing near the mouth of the St. Clair Cutoff. After 1800 the wind began to stir from the south, out came the spinnakers and the wind filled in with the back of the fleet receiving the benefit first. With the wind on the beam and the seas still flat the boats had a screaming broad reach to the freighter channel and R 28. The finish line boat had its work cut out for them with all but four boats finishing in a 23 minute time span.

With the setting sun and fair winds, most skippers could not resist leaving all sails set as we headed for North Star Al Merrithew and his team treated us to the traditional "Big Al's All You Can Eat Steak Roast" dinner followed by the awards ceremony. All in all a great way to cap the GLSS solo racing season. Our thanks to the many people that made it happen this year, we hope to see you on the water again in 2003.

-Dan Pavlat, Dave Evans, Pat Nugent

25th Anniversary

The Great Lakes Singlehanded Society will be celebrating its 25th Anniversary next year. Jim Douglas is in charge of the celebration. He will appreciate your comments, suggestions and help. Jim can be reached at: 810-765-7188 or e-mail him at: douglasharbor@earthlink.net. Let's make it a great party!

Remembering my 1st Mackinac Solo Challenge

Last week Tom Munson asked me to summarize my experience of making my first Mackinac Solo Challenge.

I can say that it was an immense experience but one which I can remember few details—except for a few moments like calling over to Dave Evans during the first leg saying, "These are really good sailors" as he passed over me with us both flying chutes during intermittent rain

squalls and strong winds. These were lousy conditions and all of the boats were being well sailed. I remember being soaked through layers of clothes and jacket, wool hat, a rain suit and Mustang anti-exposure suit and shivering like I never had before during the freezing cold Saturday and Sunday nights, remember the thousands of large waves and then, most of all, the pride of actually finishing.

I raced on many Bayview Mackinac Races and recommend that any solo racer crew on at least one to get the feel of how long it is and what the mix of boredom, fear and exhilaration an offshore race can be—and to learn to respect Lake Huron. I relied upon my knowledge of some of the landmarks during the solo race and retreated back into the same resolve to just keep going (in spite of difficult conditions) that I had learned on prior crewed races—except on those you could get tired and sick and take a break and come back to help later on in the race, not here.

The Solo Challenge is like nothing I had ever done, including the required qualifier. Experienced solo racers agreed that this year's race was at least a moderately difficult one (I thought that it was *very* difficult) with sustained strong NW winds starting a late Saturday afternoon – building large waves as they traveled down the length of Lake Huron. The race started under reaching conditions, then rain squalls while flying chutes towards Goderich then to small jibs as we approached the turning mark. I think nearly all of the boats had an energetic (or emergency) chute takedown during that leg!

Approaching Goderich, I had radioed Tom and he told me that he was going to pull into Goderich to avoid pounding into the large seas that he knew stood between Mackinac and us. He had given it a log of thought and relied upon his years of knowing what Lake Huron could be like and on his knowledge of what he and his boat were going to have to put up with – prior to him deciding to pull in. I instantly missed him as he was the last person I really knew that was racing this race – I had met other solo sailors in this race but Tom had taken time to help me out even before I decided to make the attempt and I had enjoyed breakfast Saturday morning in Sarnia with Barb and Tom.

I had never felt as alone and out of a race as I did after dousing the jib at the Goderich mark and going all Saturday night on main only, due to too

much wind and waves that were too large to allow me to work on deck at night without an autohelm that I could rely on (I'll fall on the sword and admit that it was a simple installation error I made that caused the autohelm problem). The autohelm was adequate to hold the tiller with the main only and while steering high into the wind but it could not give the tiller the quick pull to lay the bow off and then back down to power the boat up over the next wave—in short, I did not trust the autohelm to keep the boat out of trouble with me up on the foredeck changing/hoisting a jib at night when the conditions were so risky.

I watched the stern lights of several boats pass by me at night while I feathered the boat northward on one long port tack. Sitting on the high side rail, I tried switching aching steering arms many times (that night, the next day) but realized that I would not be on starboard tack until I reached upper Lake Huron. I hoisted a small jib at about 7:30 AM Sunday thinking that the other boats were long gone and I recall that I did not tack back towards Michigan until sometime Sunday afternoon. The waves were unrelenting and required that I lay the bow off on the back side of every one so that I could manage to avoid the boat launching forward off of the wave and free-falling down into the next trough. It was very difficult sailing and I only kept going by believing that it had to light up soon and give me a break. It did not.

The thing I recall most about the Goderich to Presque Isle leg was just hanging on, steering the boat and watching the waves and wondering thousands of times whether the boat was going to make it up the next large wave. I've talked to several solo racers since listening to Larry Rotta talk about the very first GLSS solo races – and I always shook my head and wondered if I could put up with the abuse and fatigue associated with sailing that far on Lake Huron. I had also thought (while on night watch on crewed races sometimes with all or most of the crew asleep down below) how the solo racers manage to do it hour after hour. In talking to other solo racers and based upon my experience crewing I had expected a break in the weather when a pot of coffee and a hot meal could be made—not during this race. I brought a good supply of food but carried almost all of it back home, relying on quickly grabbed Gatorade, pretzels, canned fruit and water to keep going.

I'll never forget the relief and pleasure of seeing Pat Nugent's boat appear out of the haze about 75 miles off of Presque Isle on Sunday afternoon. I hadn't seen another boat, freighter, seagull or plane since late Saturday night and thank Pat again for taking the time to talk to me about me possibly putting into Presque Isle for a break and then me deciding to keep on going since he was in sight and not going to stop.

I experienced confusion, fear, delusion and a well considered resolve to keep going with the final result that I finally saw the island and had the fun of continuing to beat to windward in much reduced wind and waves towards the island—but now against boats that I could see. I finished the race Monday evening with several boats finishing close ahead and astern—making it a truly fine ending to a long race. Tom and Barb, Linda and Jill were there at the dock to say hello and help avoid the dock pilings as was each sailor who finished helping the next one in.

Recognize that the Challenge is a huge personal undertaking and potentially grueling event but the satisfaction of completing the Solo Challenge is worth it, but I will always remember that pulling out of the race when conditions are going against you is your only choice when the margin of personal safety gets too thin.

I thank the Board for organizing the race every year and the volunteers who work long hours and worry for days about the sailors, all of the Solo sailors for the opportunity to sail with them and talk about the race and their experiences, but particularly thank Dan, Tom and Pat for their kind words, and assistance before, during and after the race. I do not have the years of single-handing experience many of the other racers have, but offer to help new racers who are considering sailing in next year's Challenge, by pointing out the many mistakes that I made this year and hope to have corrected in time for the 2003 Challenge.

Just remember that you can smell the pine trees when you get near the top of Michigan and can smell the horses as you get close to the island and usually nighttime on Lake Huron will provide some meteors to watch—plus you will have some new friends with their own unique experiences to share by the time you leave the Island.

I am very proud to belong to the GLSS—a group of sailors who each have experienced something very unique and personal and whose completion of the Challenge required a profound amount of work, concentration and stamina. Thanks for the opportunity to sail with you and wave as you go by next year.

Larry Petersen
(T-10 Tenacity)