

2002 Mackinac Solos

Report

Race Chairman's Report - The Huron Side

June 15 marked the start of the 24th Port Huron-to-Mackinac Solo and the 6th Chicago-to-Mackinac Solo. The paperwork, phone calls and last minute details seemed insignificant as boats began leaving the dock and heading for the starting line. All of a sudden, it looked too easy! The plan was coming together! Two separate starting lines - hundreds of miles away - were organizing a rendezvous on Mackinac Island.

Jean Webb and the yacht *Jaclyn* coordinated the Lake Huron start. Nineteen solo competitors answered the starter's cannon. Conditions were near perfect! A warm westerly breeze at 5-10 knots gave way to spinnaker starts for each of the four monohull fleets. However, by late afternoon, the wind had clocked to the northwest with an added chill in the air. Most of the fleet was planning to round the Goderich mark by nightfall. An added bonus for the GLSS this year was the VHF presence of *Sea Gypsy* (Robert Baechler) who confirmed mark roundings from Goderich Yacht Club. Thank you Robert!

The Goderich mark was more than a turning point of the course this year. It was also a turning point for the weather. By 10:00 PM, the winds had picked up to 15-20 knots out of the north-northwest. It was cool, damp and misty with 3-foot seas. The prospect of crossing the lake "on the nose" (combined with miscellaneous mechanical & electrical problems) prompted the early retirement of 5 competitors during this first leg: *Aurora Zen*, *Jalapeno*, *Candide*, *Black Diamond* and *Ruwach III*. All announced their early withdrawal from the Solo Challenge.

At the midnight radio check-in, Kevin Hogan of *Kintaro* announced, "I don't know if I have ever seen it so black before!" Our weather system was acting out its forecast like a script. The wind was steady, cool and brisk while blowing from the north-northwest. By noon on Sunday, apparent winds reached a constant 30 knots with regular gusts to 35. This steady wind combined with bow-spray and an occasional shower lasted from noon to midnight. By daybreak on Monday morning, the apparent wind speed dropped to 20 knots - finally a relief at 20 knots!!! However, the unfavorable conditions had contributed to four more withdrawals: *Black Magic*, *Odyssey*, *Foxfire* and *Charisma*. The wind remained "on the nose" to the finish! We were envious of our "Chicago-side" competitors who were most likely enjoying a fast reach to the Island!

Cheryl Cameron of *C-Spray* was the first to cross the line at approximately 1:00 AM on Monday morning. Only 9 more competitors remained who turned in finish times through the day up to approximately 8:00 PM. To our surprise, our Chicago companions had not reached the Island! Lake Michigan was influenced by a completely different weather system characterized by light and variable winds!

After a long (2-hour!) nap combined with the appropriate blend of barley & hops, phase-II of the Solo Challenge was well underway. Now that both Michigan & Huron competitors were on dry land, wave heights were reported to be in excess of 15-feet. Wind speeds had been clocked above 90 knots. And temperatures were recorded in the single digits! However, the most sobering report was straightforward with no room for exaggeration. Cal Karr rescued Fred Ball who had been stranded on his capsized multihull for 12-hours. Cal, we salute you for answering one of the highest calls of a sailor.

At the annual awards luncheon, the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society was proud to invite six new members into its fold: John Ayres, Mike Murray, Larry Petersen, Todd Scott, Eric Thomas & David Wagner. Eric Thomas and David Wagner each received "The President's Trophy" for their respective finishes on the Huron and Michigan sides for having the best overall corrected times for a new member. Pat Nugent was honored with the Peter Fisher Memorial Award.

The Board of Directors met briefly and confirmed the date for next year's Mackinac Solo Challenge. Mark your calendars for the start: June 21, 2003.

Patrick Nugent

The following report on the Inaugural Chicago to Port Huron Super Mac was also submitted.

If you have never sailed a Mac Solo out of Chicago I would highly recommend it. A skippers meeting on the 370 foot *Abegweit*, Columbia Yacht Club's unique clubhouse, with all the Lake Michigan Solo and first time skippers set the stage for the combined Chicago Mac Solo and the first ever Chicago to Port Huron Super Mac.

The dramatic backdrop of the skyline along with a steady soft breeze and intermittent sunshine sent twenty one skippers off in one quick start. Although the 200 plus mile rhumb line could be laid to the Manitou Passage a few skippers opted to favor the western shoreline. An afternoon thunderstorm had all of us scrambling to reduce sail and later kept the radio alive with weather and radar reports from the front of the fleet as localized storms rolled through. As the sun set that evening, the glow of Chicago was still very visible astern. With the VHF scanning 16, 72 and the common freighter channels a surprise transmission was received at 02:50 Sunday between the Coast Guard and Cal Karr on *Belle*. Cal had picked Fred Ball off the overturned 50' trimaran *Lucretia*. Fred had been hit by one of the intense squalls eleven hours earlier and had waited on the overturned hulls through most of the night. As more information on the capsize and rescue spread through the fleet there was a sigh of relief that this story had a happy ending. We all paid very close attention to the weather reports the next afternoon as a repeat performance of thunderstorms rolled down the lake.

By sunset Sunday we were all wishing for thunderstorms or wind of any velocity as the wind died and the fleet slowed to a crawl with a momentary peak of five knot winds over the next twenty hours. Decision time came as each skipper neared South Manitou and the radio discussions began anew - "You going inside or outside? Is there air in there? Don't even try it! I think I should have gone the other way. Wait, the wind is filling in. Oops I guess not, down to triple zeros again!!! More *&#@^ flies!!!" The discussions went on for hours but we all had plenty of time as we drifted under the Sleeping Bear sand dunes.

This area of the lake has no parallel on the Huron Solo course. You pass between the Manitous, Fox, Beaver, Garden, etc. Islands to port and the sand dunes or the Lower Peninsula bays to starboard. With the flat seas and strong sun it was spectacular scenery with the culmination at Greys Reef. Picture yourself after 300 miles of solo sailing, approaching an area where the chart is littered with symbols for bouys, lighthouses, more than one horn, all sorts of shallows and what appears to be a slot the width of a needle that is the safe zone. Did I mention that you are on a beat, it is 02:00 on a moonless overcast night and the chart shows a few unlit buoys among the flashers and lets throw in a few freighters plying the same slot. . Lake Huron sailors, you need to try this at least once!

It is now Tuesday morning and the wind has died again, you can see the Mac bridge but can do nothing but try to coax the knot log to register an actual number. We float for several hours before the wind comes up out of the East quickly building to twenty knots and the boats charge for the island.

It is now decision time for seven skippers. As you cross the finish line and hear the greeting "Congratulations and welcome to Mackinac Island" from the sirens of the finish line committee. You are drawn to the island where you can sleep uninterrupted, where there are no freighters but there is cold beer, warm food, showers and many of your friends and fellow skippers. Instead you hear yourself say into the VHF "It is my intent to continue on to Port Huron to complete the Super Mac". Six skippers make that announcement.

After passing the Bois Blanc light we feel that we are truly in Lake Huron, leaving the island behind. It is no longer a race but a true endurance test. You settle into a routine, with night and day seemingly inconsequential, only the position on the chart represents a passage of time. For the next fifty hours the wind blows out of the southeast directly up the rhumb line. At times dropping below 15 but always returning into the twenties with waves to match. The cadence of the boat going to windward in the waves is mesmerizing. The heel of the boat dictates when to reef, reef again or shake a reef out. There are no other adjustments, the working jib is all that the boat will allow all the way to the Goderich turning mark. The wind keeps the flies away during the day and the night sky is clear and spectacular with an occasional shooting star. By now life feels normal at 35 degrees of heel and you feel that you could sail this way for another month. But as we close on Port Huron the winds are out of the southwest, it is before dawn on Friday but the air off the land is so hot it is finally time to shed the Mustang suit and finish the last of the 600 miles in a short sleeve shirt. After rounding the finish buoy you announce your time on the VHF to no one in particular and there is a great feeling of satisfaction in accomplishing the Super Mac Solo.

In predawn light you motor into the Sarnia Yacht Club. Somehow there is absolutely no wind and the scene seems surreal like a neutron bomb has obliterated all living things but left everything else untouched. You realize that you have not seen another human face for over six days, not even your own. Find an open slip, tie up, leave the main and jib spread across the deck, go to sleep.

All six of the skippers that decided to continue on from Mackinac Island finished the Super Mac.

Great job to Tony Driza, Mark Gutteridge, Dave Rearick, Mike Silverthorne, and Bob Van Eck.

Note the next Super Mac will be in 2005.

Dan Pavlat