



Port Huron to Mackinac Island

Race 2008 and *Respite*

Written by Dave Bannister

We could see it coming on our on-board satellite weather system, and on the water. On the chartplotter in front of me at the helm, it was a fast approaching blob of crimson and yellow, fringed with narrow bands of green and punctuated with symbols for thunderstorms and lightning strikes. As it has been on the Great Lakes for mariners dating back to the natives and earliest European explorers, the signs were there on the water as well. A storm was coming.

The sky to the southwest turned gray-white, and darkening patches on the water from that direction indicated rapidly-strengthening winds approaching our position near the starting line of the 2008 Bayview Port Huron to Mackinac race. The 219-mile race is a venerable tradition on Lake Huron dating back 84 years to early in the past century... its sister race on Lake Michigan from Chicago to Mackinac celebrated its 100th anniversary this year. (Editor's note: *Stars and Stripes* lost its mast within 50 miles of the start.)

We were in pre-start maneuvers aboard "Respite", our 1984, 35 foot C&C sailboat, having left Sarnia Yacht Club an hour earlier and anchored briefly to clean any algae off the bottom. From the staging area, we were able to cross into the starting area 20 minutes before the gun for our start and begin setting up for our run at the start line. The object in sailboat racing is to hit the starting line at full speed as the gun goes off, allowing you to break through with clean air in front of your competitors. I had remarked to the crew, five other experienced skippers from Grand Bend Yacht Club, that I wouldn't push too hard for the starting line as it was a long distance race and seconds count for less. Rick Zupancic, a competitor in club racing said, "I know you too well for that, Dave."

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Entering the starting area involved crossing the international shipping lanes, and we had to wait briefly for a mammoth southbound freighter to pass through before we headed there at 11:30, Saturday July 12th. Our start would be at 11:50.

Shortly after we entered the pre-start area, the waves of thunderstorms and driving rain hit. We tacked back and forth behind the starting line marked by two big motor yachts from Bayview Yacht Club, avoiding getting in the way of competitors in the fleet starting immediately ahead of us. By the time we were in the five-minute countdown for our start, hard-driving rain had obliterated the start line and most of our 13 competitors (also jockeying for a fast start position) from our view. We had to resort to our collective instincts to know where we were on the lake, while at the same time feathering the sails to avoid being blown too far downwind.

A time-honoured and effective starting technique in sailboat racing is the timed Vanderbilt start. Assuming that your boat will leave and approach the starting line at a similar speed, you mark the time remaining until the gun while tacking away from the start line. When half that time has expired, you turn back toward the start line with the intention of hitting it at the gun, at full speed. It's not an exact science, as the wind conditions are constantly changing. We had last seen the start line at about 3 1/2 minutes to the gun. In continued driving rain, I told my crew that we would begin our run back toward the start line with 1 minute, 30 seconds to go, and we tacked for the line accordingly on port tack. This would not give us right-of-way over starboard- tack boats but it appeared most were planning to start on port, and we could run down the start line if needed to begin the race. We nailed the start gun and were on our way! This was the moment we had anticipated during months of preparation.

My job then was to climb to windward of our competitors as best we could, and we did well, with some of them reefing or shortening sail to cope with the big gusts that were enveloping the fleet. We had not put up our gennaker (large, colourful fore-sail, sometimes referred to as a "kite") yet due to the high winds, and the fleet starting behind showed us the wisdom of this conservative move: Many blew out spinnakers and several were blown over with their mastheads close to the water! Concentrating on getting into clear air and keeping the telltales flying, I stole just one backward glance in time to see a blue and yellow sail go flat to the water taking a boat with it; for the rest, I just listened to the crews' reaction to various wipeouts and ripped sails. That was an expensive start for some boats!

We carried on with main and genoa up, moving well through the fleet as the rain gradually eased and the wind settled in to a steadier pattern. A few miles due north up the course, we launched the gennaker- and promptly saw it float back down onto the foredeck and partially into the water. The snap shackle holding the head (top) of the sail had released! A bigger problem was that the halyard (line) that had raised it was now stuck at the top of the mast, and we didn't have a spare.

Bill Morrison, who was on the helm at the time, remembers thinking "No-one is going to be stupid enough to go up and get that halyard", then turned around to find Randy Brown hauling out the bosun's chair, ready to go up. What a trooper! We had to drop the mainsail and haul him 50' up the swaying mast to retrieve it; then we re-launched the gennaker, taping the shackle shut. (Shortly after, with the colourful new sail pulling beautifully, a helicopter arrived and circled overhead twice, taking some dramatic photos that were later available on the island.)

We continued on up the rhumb line (most direct line to the next mark) for several hours, maintaining consistent speeds of 7.5 to 9 knots.

Later in the day, with the sun weakening toward the west, the breeze lightened considerably and went patchy, causing frustration for most of the fleet as various boats sailed into a "hole", while others caught a chance wind line and ghosted ahead. Looking for the patches of darker water that indicated a little more breeze, we worked our way slowly through the fleet, managing to gain on several boats, while losing ground to a few others at the same time.

Light winds really demand concentration from the helmsman and sail trimmers to keep the boat moving... they can easily represent as much of a challenge for the racer as very heavy winds at the other end of the Beaufort Scale. (As I write this I am attempting to watch the 49er dinghies sailing in the Beijing Olympics, and the winds are not cooperating again: While these little rocket ships struggle with light winds on the Chinese course, my satellite television reception keeps cutting out due to near-gale force winds here!)

At this point in the race we were off the American port of Harbor Beach. This brought back memories of being stalled there for a full night the previous year, going nowhere fast. It had been disheartening to find the view unchanged from sundown to sunrise, and we were certainly not keen to see a repeat this year. Fortunately the breeze gradually built through the evening until we were once again flying across the waves.

I took the opportunity of flatter conditions to put dinner in the gimbaled propane oven below. For this evening, shepherd's pie prepared by Rick Zupancic's wife Sandy was the fare, and it was pronounced delicious by the crew. After a strenuous day of sailing, a hot meal is always appreciated.

As night approached the wind and waves continued to build, we were again consistently hitting speeds of 8 knots as we ran through the steering rotation, with each crew member helming for an hour at a time. Steering could be difficult, as the helmsman had to work around 4-5 foot waves that were hard to see as they approached the port stern quarter. The on-deck helmsman was designated the navigator, through who all other crew members directed input for the driver, to minimized distraction. The rotation was: Myself, Randy Brown, Tom Quigley, Bill Morrison, Howard Tims, Rick Zupancic, then me again. (Many skippers we spoke to later talked about the grueling nature of the race, and in particular how exhausted the helmsmen were. We were indeed fortunate to have six of them onboard, as even a one-hour shift was often quite tiring at the wheel.)

Around 23:00 hours (11 p.m.) Saturday I came up on deck to begin my shift as navigator, with Rick now on the helm. I sensed that the boat was becoming unstable with the wind speed rising into the 20s (the top end of where we could safely fly the gennaker). After talking to Rick who confirmed the helm was increasingly difficult to control, I mustered all hands on deck for a sail change, an exercise that becomes much more challenging after dark and in a blow.

Each crew member took up a position, ensuring they were clipped onto the boat with a safety tether and harness. At the "ready" call we dropped the gennaker, hauling it below through the main hatch, then rolled out the genoa while the mainsail kept us powered up. The change went well, and we settled into a smoother sailing motion- just in time, as the wind quickly accelerated into the high 20s, a velocity that would easily have blown out the gennaker or thrown us into a broach (burying the bow and having the stern overtake it... never a good thing). Now some of the crew who had been trying to catch a bit of sleep wedged into one of the various bunks below could return to them.³

Things did not go as well on another boat in the fleet ahead of us. Randy had just relieved me at the helm at 01:00 (1 a.m.) when a Mayday was issued from the vessel "Night Train", a Thomas 35 off Point Aux Barques with a crew of 11 on board. There was a person in the water dragging from the bow after an unsuccessful spinnaker takedown.

A crew overboard (COB, or MOB, man overboard) situation is the nightmare of every boat, and all of us listened to the VHF transmissions in near-silence, dreading the outcome under such challenging conditions as it took longer and longer for any change in the situation. The crew member was dragging in the water from some of the spinnaker lines, and these had undoubtedly also fouled the boat's propellor, as they were unable to start the engine to maneuver.

The voice on the VHF must have been that of Lisa Marino, the only female listed in "Night Train"'s crew, and we listened to the barely-controlled urgency in her voice as she continuously updated the Coast Guard operator on the situation. She was doing a very professional job.

The Coast Guard dispatched a rescue helicopter and motor boat, and nearby competitors stood by but could offer no assistance in the dark with 4-6 foot waves. (Editor's note: [Click to read some details of the Coast Guard rescue.](#))

Finally and miraculously, "Night Train" got the crew back aboard, conscious but with mild hypothermia. A flood of relief swept over our boat, as I am sure it did every other in the fleet. All Mackinac crew are required by the race organizers to practice a COB drill, and we had done so, but all hope they never have to put it into practice "for real."

"Night Train" finally recovered the use of her engine and made for port in Harrisville, retiring from the race. The Coast Guard informed them their boat would meet them en-route to provide medical assistance if needed. The competitors standing by resumed racing, and would later be credited for the time they lost.

Daybreak found us approaching the turning mark, a weather buoy 140 miles due North from the start. Randy took over the helm from me again at 07:00 shortly after he and Tom had shaken out a reef in the mainsail, and we were regularly hitting speeds of 9 knots (once over 10 while Rick was on the helm). I went below to make coffee, and reported our rounding time of 09:41 to the Race Committee on the VHF.

The boat that called in immediately ahead of us was "Bedlam", a C&C 35 Mk I out of Sarnia and fore-runner to our own 35 Mk III. I was reminded of her sistership, "Tomahawk" which gained notoriety after taking on water and sinking in the 1985 Port Huron to Mackinac race, generally considered one of the toughest on record. All hands were safely rescued by another competitor, "Old Bear".

By 14:30 Sunday we were pounding into 6-8 foot waves with occasional 10s, doing 5-6 knots with both sails shortened. Thirty miles past the turning mark, we tacked for the first time in the race as the wind swung around on our bow and we could no longer sail the rhumb line. The fleet spread out, with some tacking off to the north, some south, making headway as best they could into the building wind and seas.

Unlike storms in the open ocean which tend to build long swells between wave peaks, the Great Lakes are notorious for sharp, slab-sided waves with short intervals between them. They forced the helmsman to work carefully around the breaking ones, but often the boat would launch off the crest of one and become completely airborne, crashing into the next trough with a sickening thud. It was tough, wet going and I was a little worried about whether "Respite"s fibreglass centerboard (a board that swings out from the bottom of the lead keel to improve pointing ability) could take the punishment, but it came through fine. Going below, the noise became incessant, from the constant creaking of the hull to the whistling of the rigging, and the slap and swish of the water on the hull. It was only relatively quiet for the brief moments when the boat became airborne.

At one point I was below, and Bill sat up in his bunk and asked "What was that noise?" as there came a different banging sound. I told him the crew above were tacking (the sails were rattling against the rigging in the process). Bill replied that it sounded more like someone was "attacking."

A few hours later I was resting in my bunk below when Randy sat up from the bunk opposite and said "There's water in here... my elbow's in it!" Everything was wet on the port side, which was low in the water as we were heeled far over. As Randy and I searched for the source of it, Howard, our resident troubleshooter, called down for us to check the sink in the head (bathroom). Sure enough, there was water pouring in over the front of the sink like Niagara Falls, as it was now below the water line. Closing its seacock and swinging over onto the other tack solved the immediate problem, then Randy and I proceeded to pump about 15 two-gallon pails full and poured them down the galley sink. It was not an easy task while working with the boat heeled far over; the water was everywhere- in lockers, under bunks and in the bilge.

Cooking was impossible under these conditions as the stove would only gimbal over so far (and would be dangerous), so the planned Sunday evening dinner of beef bourguignon prepared by the Tims had to be set aside in favour of power bars.

We alternated between port and starboard tacks through Sunday night and early Monday morning, keeping a watch out for navigation lights as other boats crossed tacks, and the odd freighter passed through the fleet.

The wind gradually abated, and we crossed the finish line at Mackinac Island at 04:16 Monday morning, 40 hours and 26 minutes after we started the race. We were 6th in our fleet of 14 boats, the top finishing Canadian boat among the four Cruising classes, and happy with the result in our second "Mac".

We were assigned a berth at the island's historic "Coal Docks" now under restoration, and daybreak brought into view a sea of masts occupying every spare bit of dockage available. My wife Anne found us at 05:00 enjoying a delicious breakfast of beef bourguignon washed down with a choice of fine rum and coke or wine. Tom spotted her first and called out, "A fan!" She welcomed us to the island where we all had rooms at a bed-and-breakfast for three nights, with firm, stationary beds and relaxing dinners out.

Later we spoke to a friend, a crew member on "Bedlam", the boat that had rounded the turning mark just ahead of us (they were rafted up nearby). With a gleam in his eye, he told us about their

“Chinese broach” at the start, during which they had buried the end of their spinnaker pole 10 feet under water. It was the boat I had briefly glimpsed with the blue and yellow sail!

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Footnote: I thought this would be our last “Mac”, but we have reservations at the B&B for next year, made by Shelagh Morrison while I was still catching up on some sleep on Monday. We’ll consult later when the crew has time for some sober second thought.

On Wednesday, the women took a separate ferry to retrieve vehicles and our cruising gear at Mackinaw City while we took one to St. Ignace where we had delivered “Respite” a day earlier. As

we all boarded, one of the significant-others called over to our ferry, “See you next year, sailors!” We laughed, with Randy making a comment about “briefly-significant others,” but apparently a woman behind the ladies in the ferry lineup gave them a suspicious glance. They informed her that the sailors were actually their husbands.

Photo: Clockwise left to right- Howard Tims, Tom Quigley, David Bannister, Bill Morrison, Rick Zupancic, Randy Brown.



**Respite, 2008 Bayview
Mackinac Crew**



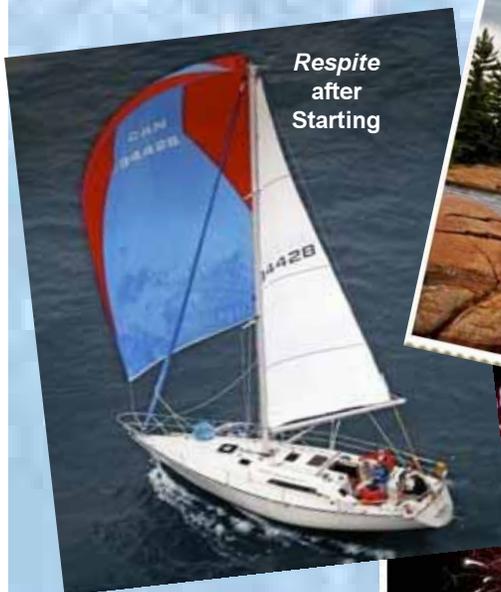
**Covered
Portage**



**Fox
Harbour**



**Turnbull
Island**



**Respite
after
Starting**



**Fireworks
Kincardine**

Race Results

Preliminary Results Port Franks Race



Div I Summer Heat	Craig Coleman	1st	Div II Atacuari	Bill Morrison	1st
Respite	Dave Bannister	2nd			
Nautilus	Steve Dietrich	3rd			

Div III Impetuous	Randy Brown	1st	Div IV Nessie	Tom Quigley	1st
			Oasis	Dale Hughes	2nd
			Zig Zag	Bob Laidlaw	3rd

Preliminary Results Spring Series Race #1

Div I Respite	Dave Bannister	1st	Div II Atacuari	Bill Morrison	1st
			Lazy Bones	Jerry Jean	2nd
Div III Impetuous	Randy Brown	1st	Div IV Nessie	Tom Quigley	1st
Last Lady	Bill Newton	2nd	Oasis	Dale Hughes	2nd
Grand Cru	Rick Zupancic	3rd	Slo Motion	Bill Gray	3rd
			Tempus Fugit	Dave Maguire	4th

Preliminary Results Spring Series Race #2

Div I Respite	Dave Bannister	1st	Div II Acacuari	Bill Morrison	1st
			Lazy Bones	Jerry Jean	DNF
Div III Grand Cru	Rick Zupancic	1st	Div IV Nessie	Tom Quigley	1st
Last Lady	Bill Newton	2nd	Oasis	Dale Hughes	2nd
Impetuous	Randy Brown	3rd	Slo Motion	Bill Gray	3rd
			Tempus Fugit	Dave Maguire	4th

Preliminary Results Spring Series Race #3

Div I Respite	Dave Bannister	1st	Div II No race available		
Div III Grand Cru	Rick Zupancic	1st	Div IV Nessie	Tom Quigley	1st
Impetuous	Randy Brown	2nd	Oasis	Dale Hughes	2nd
Last Lady	Bill Newton	3rd	Slo Motion	Bill Gray	3rd
			Tempus Fugit	Dave Maguire	4th

Preliminary Results Spring Series Race #4

Div I Summer Heat	Craig Coleman	1st	Div II Lazy Bones	Jerry Jean	1st
Atacuari	Bill Morrison	2nd			
Respite	Dave Bannister	3rd			
Nautilus	Steve Dietrich	4th			
Div III Overtime	Bill Ive	1st	Div IV Nessie	Tom Quigley	DNF
Last Lady	Bill Newton	2nd	Oasis	Dale Hughes	DNF
Grand Cru	Rick Zupancic	3rd	Slo Motion	Bill Gray	DNF
Impetuous	Randy Brown	4th	Tempus Fugit	Dave Maguire	DNF

Preliminary Results Spring Series Race #5



Div I	Respite	Dave Bannister	1st	Div II	No starters	
Div III	Impetuous	Randy Brown	1st	Div IV	Nessie	Tom Quigley 1st
	Grand Cru	Rick Zupancic	2nd		Slo Motion	Bill Gray 2nd
	Last Lady	Bill Newton	3rd		Tempus Fugit	Dave Maguire 3rd

Preliminary Results Spring Series Race #6

Div I	Respite	Dave Bannister	1st	Div II	No starters	
	Atacuari	Bill Morrison	2nd			
Div III	Impetuous	Randy Brown	1st	Div IV	Nessie	Tom Quigley 1st
	Grand Cru	Rick Zupancic	2nd		Slo Motion	Bill Gray 2nd
	Last Lady	Bill Newton	3rd		Tempus Fugit	Dave Maguire 3rd

Preliminary Results Spring Series Race #7

Div I	Respite	Dave Bannister	1st	Div II	No starters	
Div III	Impetuous	Randy Brown	1st	Div IV	Nessie	Tom Quigley 1st
	Grand Cru	Rick Zupancic	2nd		Slow Motion	Bill Gray 2nd
	Last Lady	Bill Newton	3rd		Tempus Fugit	Dave Maguire 3rd

Preliminary Results Labour Day Regatta Race #1

Div I	Respite	Dave Bannister	DNF	Div II	Lazy Bones	Jerry Jean	DNF
	Nautilus	Steve Dietrich	DNF				
	Atacuari	Bill Morrison	DNF	Div III	Impetuous	Randy Brown	1st
	Jig Saw	Ray Rogolino	DNF		Overtime	Bill Ive	2nd
					Last Lady	Bill Newton	3rd
Div IV	Odesseus	Don Chalmers	DNF				
	Nessie	Tom Quigley	DNF				
	Slo Motion	Bill Gray	DNF				
	Templus Fugit	Dave Maguire	DNF				

Preliminary Results Labour Day Regatta Race 2

Div I	Atacuari	Bill Morrison	1st	Div II	Lazy Bones	Jerry Jean	1st
	Respite	Dave Bannister	2nd				
	Nautilus	Steve Dietrich	3rd	Div III	Overtime	Bill Ive	1st
	Jig Saw	Ray Rogolino	4th		Impetuous	Randy Brown	2nd
					Last Lady	Bill Newton	3rd
					Shepperke	John McPhee	4th
Div IV	Nessie	Tom Quigley	1st				
	Slo Motion	Bill Gray	2nd				
	Templus Fugit	Dave Maguire	3rd				

Preliminary Race Results Labour Day Race #3

Div I	Respite	Dave Bannister	1st	Div II	Lazy Bones	Jerry Jean	1st
	Nautilus	Steve Dietrich	2nd				
	Atacuari	Bill Morrison	3rd	Div III	Impetuous	Randy Brown	1st
	Jig Saw	Ray Rogolino	4th		Overtime	Bill Ive	2nd
					Last Lady	Bill Newton	3rd
					Shepperke	John McPhee	4th
Div IV	Nessie	Tom Quigley	1st				
	Slo Motion	Bill Gray	2nd				
	Templus Fugit	Dave Magurie	3rd				



Boom Sailing School

The club's Ontario Sailing Association, Learn to Sail, for youngsters 14 and under was very successful. Tom Quigley was told the instructors were extremely good this year. The class of 16 was full and the sole cost to the club was the \$49.50 worth of pizza that was purchased for them. Tom had several potential students on waiting lists. If a commitment was made by the parents, perhaps two-weeks of instruction next year is viable. Cost to send a child, \$250/week GST exempt.

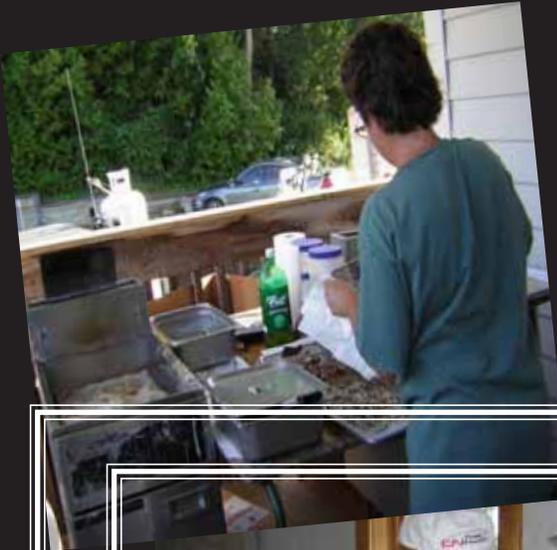


Pictures taken by GBYC member, George Dutka



Fish Fry Pictures

taken by Nicole and Michelle Dutka, submitted by George Dutka



Bulletin Board



The painting of the Club House and roof are to begin Monday, September 21, 2008.

Members are asked not to wash the club's decks. Non skid is being contemplated by the executive to prevent injuries. It has come to the board's attention that the decks become slippery when wet.

Club burgees \$25.00



Upcoming Events:



Source: The original of this graphic is from a vintage Art Nouveau poster by artist, Leonetto Cappiello advertising Contratto,



Enjoy the equal day/night
of the
Autumnal Equinox

September 22

