

Light, Constant Winds Push Chicago Sailors North to Mackinac

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had good speed and we could sail where we wanted to go," said Tony Orlebeke of

"I had the time of my life."

— Ben Biddick,
Petoskey sailor

Sheboygan, Wisconsin, who sailed on the 70-foot boat *Evolution*.

Ben Biddick of Petoskey, who was sailing his first Chicago-to-Mackinac race, agreed.

"The wind was pretty constant," he said. "The only time we didn't have any wind was a couple of times for only about an hour or so. The wind was pretty constant until we ran into the storm."

Mr. Biddick, aboard the 70-foot *Pied Piper* from Evanston, Illinois, said that during the storm, the crew spent about two hours on deck trying to communicate with each other, but the rain and thunder were so loud, they had to scream and holler to be heard. He said lightning was within a half mile of the boat and they all stayed clear of the mast, since it acts as a lightning rod.

Despite the storm, Mr. Biddick said, "I had the time of my life." This week he will be crewing on the *Pied Piper* during the Bayview Yacht Club's Port Huron-to-Mackinac race.

The storm also was pretty intense for Chicago sailor Darius Barkauskas, who crewed on *Thirsty Tiger*. He said they hit the storm south of Gray's Reef and thought the storm was intensifying while they were caught in it. The rough wind, he said, forced them to make three sail changes in 15 minutes.

"I've never seen lightning like that," Mr. Barkauskas said. "The air was so static, there were lightning fireballs overhead."

Following the storm, a southwest wind on Lake Michigan settled down to approximately 15 to 20 knots for much of the day.

Family, friends, and race enthusiasts were able to track the race on the Internet. FlagShip Integration Services Inc. of Palatine, Illinois, outfitted 73 of the 299 starting yachts with a global positioning transmitter, said Jean Velazquez of FlagShip. Each transmitter tracks the boat's location and speed and it is plotted on a race map. The information was made available on the Chicago Yacht Club's Web Site.

Crews were required to report into the Chicago Yacht Club race headquarters at Windermere Point when nearing the Mackinac Bridge, which helped the club to track the progress of the race. As the boats crossed the finish line, which was marked by the Round Island Lighthouse to the south and a flag on the headquarters roof, an air horn similar to those used to keep birds off airport runways was sounded.

Of the 299 boats that started the world's longest fresh water race, at 333 miles, eight dropped out, including the capsized *Emma*. The last boat to cross the



First In: Peter Thorton, owner of *Holua*, the first boat to reach Mackinac, along with several crew members, takes a break to visit the Island. From left are Bogdan Ogorek, Dan Knight, Peter Thorton, and Gary Marino.



Thirsty Tiger: Rob Almada (second from left), the offshore sailing coach at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, crewed on the 70-foot *Thirsty Tiger* from Chicago, along with Jeff Balsin (third from left), who celebrated his Ph.D. in biomedical engineering by making the trip. With them are Ed Marshall (left) and Chris Welsh.

finish line was *Nantucket* from Chicago, arriving Tuesday, July 19, at 8:57 a.m. with a time of 68:57:34 and a corrected time of 51:34:53.

"It was a beautiful race," said Tom Murray of Chicago, who sailed aboard the first boat to finish, *Holua*.

Tactician and navigator for the vessel, Stuart Johnstone, who has sailed in 20 Chicago to Mackinac races, eight of them on winning boats, said, "This race was slower than some, but no less challenging. The Mac race always is challenging."

Unlike ocean races with one or two challenges, he said, "The Chicago-to-Mackinac race is so much more." It can be broken into about six separate races, he said, with each one offering unique challenges and requiring different sailing skills.

The start of the race, including positioning of the boats, could be considered race one, he said. Next is the open lake to Point Betsie. Sailing techniques used in the Point Betsie area can make or break a race, he said. From Point Betsie to the Manitou Islands, the course offers sailors interesting challenges because there is an area where the lake current changes and pushes south. The Manitou Islands to Gray's Reef demands skilled navigation through the rocky area. From Gray's Reef to the Mackinac Bridge can offer interesting conditions with winds and weather sometimes affected by Lake Superior. Finally, from the bridge to the finish, on the race's last three miles, he said, conditions and the geography changes.

"I've seen racers lose it in



Hung Up: The 46-foot *Quintessence III* from Wisconsin got hung up in the yacht harbor. Sailors took the incident in stride, sending one crew member up the mast and another out on the beam to help tilt the vessel to free it.

those last three miles," said Mr. Johnstone.

Enhancing the challenge of the race is what Mr. Johnstone calls, "the race within the race." This is the psychology of the race where leadership and teamwork come together, and where some teams break down, he said.

Mr. Johnstone said they thought they already were beaten shortly after the race

started, as they were off shore of Evanston, Illinois, but they did not give up.

"It's a question of perseverance," he said.

Mr. Murraray agreed. "You have to keep the goal in mind of winning."

Race results are posted on the Chicago Yacht Club Web site www.chicagoyachtclub.org/race/tomackinac/results.cfm.

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