

Two Handed Race Log 2010; Grueling back breaker

On the 8th of May I met at Mark's dock to prepare for the 14 mile, four hour, Two Handed Race (max two people on board). The wind was reported to be out of the east at 25 gusting to 30 and expected to switch to the northeast after a late morning frontal passage – with higher gusts.

Keep in mind that the 14 miles represent point to point (see chart at http://www.ryctx.org/Race%20Program/Race%20Marks%20in%20Aransas%20Bay_cop y%281%29.htm)

but that sailing is seldom point to point since we must tack (track) to maximize the use of the wind over our sails. Our race from +H on the chart then south to +A then northeast to +F and then southwest back to +H and jogging to the left of +9 mile point due to shallow water. As you will notice on the Web site, each “mark” is a gas well platform.

I brought the beer and Mark had sandwiches, chips and water should we have time to consume any of that during the race.

Mark had loaded the coordinates of the various marks in his laptop and handheld GPS as I had done to my handheld GPS.

We rigged the spinnaker - it's in a bag tied to the bow rail and two lines are tied to it so we can guide the spinnaker should it be pulled from the bag for a down wind run. We suspected we would not use it unless we had a trailing wind on one of the legs and it is very difficult to deploy and control with only 2 people. Typically we want four.

You might remember that our prop energy output was lagging in the last use so Mark had gone under water to check out the prop and keel. He found very large chunks of barnacles on the prop blades and on the keel. He was able to scrap the prop blades clean and remove some off the keel but not directly under the keel since it was again slightly in sand/muck.

As we motored down the canal and out the channel toward Aransas Bay we purred along smoothly with prop energy to spare. This time we entered the Bay with both sails still down. I went forward and raised the main then I took the helm and Mark went forward to raise the jib. I would guess the bow rose 10 feet as I worked to keep the boat into the wind making it a bit easier for him to raise the jib. Keep in mind that in such conditions the strain on the body is often to my limits attempting to hold on to the mast, pull the up haul sheet (line) and then use the wench to finish the raising of the sail and secure the sheet.

Our trek to the starting buoy (+H) was without incident arriving some 30 minutes before our 12:10 starting time. Perhaps 8 boats were racing with three in our class of all sails.

We did our outbound time run and inbound trial run and chose a land mark building as our inbound reference to begin a run to the start with 4 minutes 30 seconds to hit 12:10.

Well.....due to wind speed changes we missed it by about 1 minute...late... with our two competitors on time. Ugg..

That first leg ended with Entropy (us) some 5 minutes behind our competitors. Our only twin hull started 20 minutes behind us but went whistling by us at maybe 15 kts while we were pushing 6.5. Fast dude..

When we rounded +A we debated the distance we should stay on our new tack and decided to stay much longer than the others thinking we'd pick up better wind closer to the barrier (Mud) Island. Turned out to be a bad choice. We pounded through wave after wave each slowing us just perhaps ½ knot and just enough to put us behind by 28 minutes at +F.

By the time we reached +F, I was really tired and sore. We had occasional moments to get water but no time for food. Rounding +F to port we decided on wing-on-wing so I took the tiller and Mark went forward to connect and raise the extender (long pole that connects to the mast and to the jib sheet (line) to hold the jib out as far as possible gathering as much air as possible thus speed.

The downwind run was smooth and straight crossing the finish line 33 minutes behind our competitors -- which seems not to win races....but does win snickers. ☺

Just after crossing the finish line, we caught what must have been a 40 kt gust that yanked the main sail so hard that it broke our boom in half. Now if you want to get someone's attention in high winds and rolling seas on a warm sunny day just break a boom. I was on the tiller and fortunately Mark was below getting a beer when the shotgun sound of aluminum cracking and a huge sail going crazy sent me on edge. It actually took some seconds for me to realize what had just happened.

I turned into the wind and Mark went forward to lower the jib. The wind made it very difficult to balance and pull the jib down to the point where Mark strained muscles to the point of cramps forcing him to the deck for some 2 or more minutes as I was steering and holding onto the main sheets <http://www.sailfree.com/sailboats/sailboat.htm> and the swinging end of the broken boom (broke about midway up the boom). The physical strain was excessive yet no awareness of fear. It took all my strength to hold onto the main sheets and the tiller as we weaved and bounced in the high seas and gusty winds.

Mark got the main down and tied up the sails and started the engine as I worked to maintain control. Not easy.

We were to go to a party at 6 but I was so exhausted by the time we returned to the dock that I decided not to go. We had a beer and sandwich and by eight, I was out and sore most of the next day. I worked out today (Tues) and still could feel muscle pain in my back. So, Mark will again be out of action for a few weeks replacing the \$1k boom. Not sure when the Summer series starts but likely the 1st weekend in June. All the best...and awaiting the next adventure..:-)