

A Look Back, 20 Years Ago.

# Race to Bermuda

Plan. Prep. Race.....<sup>Win!</sup> And, the Wild Ride Home.

By Douglas Ely

*For many racing sailboat owners, it starts with a twinge of desire, usually a year or so before the big event. Once the desire turns to commitment, there's no turning back. From that point, forward, until the boat is returned safely back to her dock, it's a solid wall of planning, preparation, logistics, surprises and unglamorous projects or tasks, not to mention, an overwhelming strain on the average man's wallet. Here's one skipper's journey to get to the starting line, the finish line, and back home safely during the final weeks of his half-year long, Marion to Bermuda, bluewater racing adventure.*

The 20 lbs. backpack I carry around virtually everywhere I go has little in it except a 4-inch wide, three-ring binder and some file folders. They're all stuffed full with plans and paperwork pertaining to the 12-event, 1999 racing campaign I have scheduled for my boat, *DAKOTA*. There are race notices, race instructions, scratch sheets, past results, ratings certificates (both mine and my competitors'), sail specs, boat specs, product brochures, and much more. It's a fairly complete package of yacht racing research and information that pertains to my boat, the boats I compete with and the various racing venues. It travels alongside me just about everywhere I go.

Though there are files for the other 11 big racing events on the season's agenda as well, the one which takes up the largest portion of those 20 lbs. is the Marion-Bermuda Race file. There is more planning and preparation for that one single race than there is for all the others combined.

I'd done this prominent 645-mile, bi-annual ocean race once before, in the previous running, two years earlier. So I had an idea of what to expect and the commitment it would take. That time, the planning started a good nine months prior to the start. For this next attempt, I made the decision to enter only about six months out. I expected the second time around would be a little bit easier, hav-



ing had that recent experience to draw from. Though I'm sure my first nine-month journey can't compare to that of a woman's full-term pregnancy, whether delivering a baby or delivering a boat to the starting line of a large, offshore distance race, immense focus is required. However, there is no question, I'd much rather take on the latter of the two!

There are provisioning lists to write, rules compliance requirements to meet, ORC inspections to pass and safety-at-sea seminars to attend. There are accommodation reservations, car rental reservations, airline reservations for return crew, family and friends. There are Customs and Immigration forms, offshore yacht insurance trip riders, Buzzards Bay and Bermuda slip reservations, crew information guides and all sorts of bureaucratic nonsense required. The list goes on and on. It's a monumental undertaking. And, being the OCD-type that I am, I had to do it my way—thoroughly. Cross every *t* and dot every *i*. All myself. I'm the only one I trust.

My story couldn't possibly touch on every detail. If I tried, I'd surely lose your attention quickly. It's only intended to highlight the fact that the Bermuda Race itself is just one small part of the whole experience. Good planning and preparation from the beginning, and throughout the whole process, are what builds a strong foundation for the long, involved journey. They are the most time-consuming portions of the process. Without them, there will likely be little success. And by success I don't mean winning the race. I am only talking about making a respectable showing and enjoying the entire adventure, from start to finish, then back home, safe and sound.

Those parts of the endeavor—the planning and preparation—receive little appreciation from those who hear of the trip, whether before or after the fact. Most just listen and think of the cool adventure part, but few can truly appreciate the effort required to make it all happen, with very few hitches. And that even includes most of the crew members who race down, or those who help with the delivery back. There are literally thousands of details to handle and I always do my best to remember and plan every one of them. Yet, it never fails, some minor detail always gets missed. Like that one time I forgot to have Snickers bars on board. I thought the crew would mutiny.

To sum it up, clearly, the planning starts many months in advance. And, there are a multitude of forms to file, fees to pay, crews to find, reservations to make, inspections to pass and multi-page lists of boat projects to be completed, all perfectly. So as not to bore you further with those details, I'll skip ahead to the week leading up to the race itself.

## Delivery to Marion

After all those months of planning and prep, the 1999 Marion to Bermuda Race was only a week away. On Saturday, the 12th of June, I departed Milford, Connecticut in Long Island Sound for the 120-mile delivery up to Sippican Harbor, in Buzzards Bay, on which the small seaside town of Marion, Massachusetts sits. In addition to myself, the crew for the trip up consisted of Sam, our regular around-the-buoys racing navigator and sometimes mainsail trimmer; Adam, an 18-year-old kid who has been racing with me for the past two seasons and also works aboard *DAKOTA*,

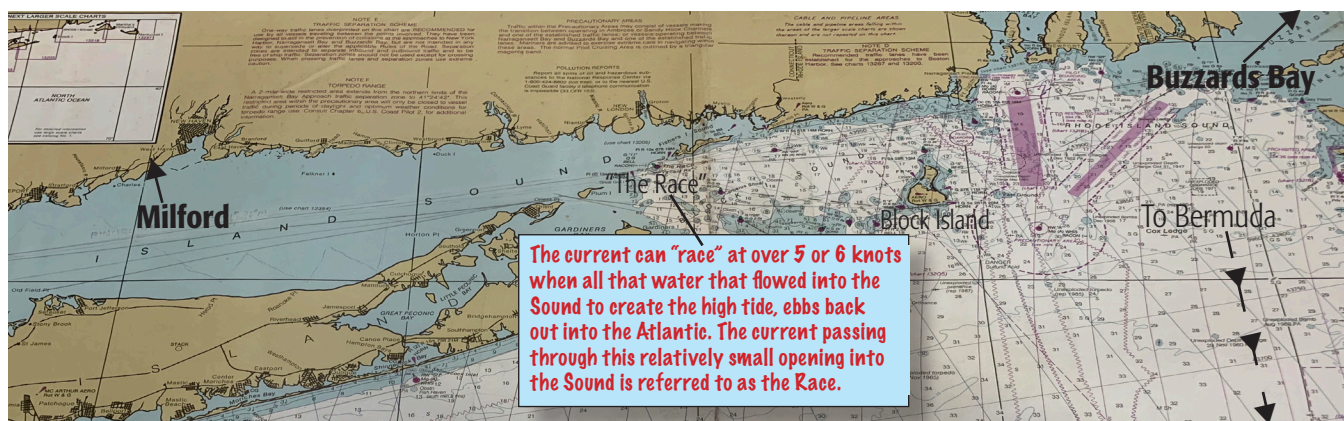
handling various maintenance and cleaning chores; and Daniel, a relatively new sailor looking for an opportunity to come along for the ride and some night sailing experience.

Of these three guys, only Sam would be joining me for the actual race to Bermuda. Though Adam had some previous sail racing experience on *DAKOTA*, he was not ready for a prime spot on next week's big-boy race crew. However, I did enlist him to help with the 675-mile delivery home from Bermuda at the end of the month. That'd still be quite a huge adventure for any young sailor. He knew his way around the boat quite well, was familiar with the gear and systems and followed orders better than most, but his racing instinct was not yet fully developed, so the home delivery seemed a good fit for him.

Daniel, the least experienced of this small crew, was just hoping to prove he could fill-in on *DAKOTA*'s race crew at some point down the road. He'd sailed with me a few times before, but not in competition.

The weather outlook wasn't all that appealing for the delivery. Winds from the east (the direction we had to go, of course), and fog. Lots of it. It sounded like a long night ahead.

I raised the radar reflector to my first set of spreaders, which were positioned about 25 feet above the water, and then left the slip at Milford Boat Works at 6:45 PM, headed out the harbor and into a 10-knot headwind with 120 miles ahead of us to go. The engine was our primary power source, but, in an effort to add a little stability to the ride, we set the delivery mainsail and tacked back and forth over a 40-degree range, into the easterly breeze.



(Fig. 1) The 120-mile delivery to Sippican Harbor began in Milford Harbor and finished well up into Buzzards Bay, nearly a week before the start of the race.

That set-up seemed to help supplement the engine with a boost of a few additional tenths on the knotmeter, and a slight feeling of satisfaction, knowing we were getting a little something beneficial out of our otherwise useless sail plan. Certainly, I could have pushed the throttle up another 100 rpms and it would have accomplished the same thing, but it was about the principle.

This would be my second delivery to Marion and subsequent race to Bermuda aboard my Swan 46, *DAKOTA*. The first delivery two years earlier for the '97 running of the race presented me with one of the most glorious night sails I can remember. We'd set our sails just outside Milford harbor at 6 pm and did not douse them until approaching Marion a mere 16 hours later, averaging nearly 8 knots of boat speed for the entire trip. We then went on to race to Bermuda, 650 miles away, in only 3 days and 20 hours, with no help allowed from the Perkins motor. For this Marion delivery, we averaged only about 7 knots for the trip. Unfortunately, 95% of that was by diesel power. And worse, the unwelcoming conditions made the night seem even longer. I hoped that wasn't a prelude to what we'd have for the race.

As we motor-sailed into the night, the fog filled in thicker and thicker until we could barely make out Daniel who had been stationed at the bow with a strong fog-cutting spotlight. His job was to watch for prop-grabbing lobster pot buoys. I raised a second radar reflector up the mast for added visibility to the traffic around us. It turned into a long, spooky night.

Fog horns sounded in every direction as we traveled through east and westbound commercial traffic on Long Island Sound. I spent most of my time checking radar, then hailing the boats and ships on VHF channel 13—whose blips I saw on the screen—to make safe passing arrangements. More often than not they turned out to be large commercial vessels of which we clearly needed to stay well clear.

Many times during the night, we passed west-bound tugs towing barges within a 1/4 mile of us, or even less. Though we could hear their engines close by, the only thing we ever saw of them was their left-over wake which

ominously rolled in from under the dense fog and slapped up against our hull. After each tug's wake came through, I'd be on edge, waiting for the wake from its silent tow,.... praying *not* to see the barge itself!

Long Island Sound can be a busy place at times, with New Haven Harbor, Bridgeport Harbor, and on into New York's City's commercial ports. It seems even busier, the darker the night and thicker the fog.

The current was running fairly hard in our favor as we worked our way east toward the Race, and Valiant Rock. (See Fig. 1 on previous page.) For those not familiar with the area, this is where current can "race" at over 5 or 6 knots when all that water that flowed into the Sound to create the high tide, ebbs back out into the Atlantic. The current passing through this relatively small opening into the Sound is called the Race, and it can become quite lively. There's some good fishing in that area due to those fast moving waters. Anyone who has transited the Race during a strong current knows how exciting things can be there, especially when wind and current oppose each other.

As we approached Valiant Rock, sort of the midway point of the Race, between Race Rock to the northeast and Little Gull Island to the southwest, the wind picked up to 15 knots or so, on our nose. The current was running with us at over 5 knots.

Sam had been sitting at the nav station, keeping a close eye on the radar screen for traffic, but hadn't seen anything of consequence only a few seconds earlier. He glanced up again at the monitor and out of nowhere appeared a good-sized smattering of faint echoes right ahead of us, in our path. He yells up to me at the helm. "All of a sudden there's a whole bunch of small blips close by and dead ahead! Where'd they come from?" He thinks maybe it's a fleet of small fishing boats working the Race. I promptly summoned Adam to the wheel while I ran below for a quick glance at the screen. My familiarity with reading radar told me what it was immediately.

I knew the guys on deck were in for a surprise, but it wouldn't be a fleet of fishing boats to work our way around, as Sam had guessed. I quickly got back to the helm and

yelled to the crew "Hold on guys, you are in for a bit of a rough ride in about 30 seconds!" Sam looked at me puzzled as we hit the first of the 6-8 foot standing waves kicked up by the easterly wind working against the strong opposing current passing through the Race.

At that point I explained to Sam that what he had seen was not small fishing boats, but large wave tops being picked up and reflected on radar. We roller-coastered through the Race at nearly 13 knots over the bottom. It was surely the most fun part of the night.

After the wild minute and a half ride over the square waves in the Race, we settled into the calmer swell of the Atlantic Ocean, still benefiting from a 2-knot easterly current push.

By first light, three hours later, we were approaching Point Judith and the shipping channel crossing our path into Narragansett Bay. With fog continuing to be a major factor, we were still on high alert. However, the only traffic we encountered was that of a quite curious, 8-9 foot shark. It came close alongside near dawn, somewhere off Sakonnet Point on Rhode Island's South shore. That was the extent of the excitement for the rest of the delivery.

The fog finally lifted, the early sun burned through and the wind moved a bit to the south about an hour outside of Marion. So we finally set our genny, shut down the diesel and sailed the last seven miles into Sippican Harbor. We picked up our assigned mooring in the Burr Bros. field and began the changeover from cruiser to racer. I think we may have taken a short nap first.

Step one: *Complete!*

## Final Preparations

We removed the 140% furling headsail, roller furling drum, cruising main, oriental rugs and heavyweight non-essentials. We put on the protective table cover, non-slip flooring, slip covers, racing mailsail, three racing headsails, storm sails, drogue, life raft and miscellaneous required safety gear.

My girlfriend, PJ, had driven my Jeep along with my 16' enclosed utility trailer up to Burr's yard early that morning. So it was waiting

for us when we got there. It housed all the racing gear, sails, supplies, parts, and even a small workshop. We also jammed in my 12' hard-bottomed inflatable with 15 HP Yamaha motor, since we'd need to make dozens of trips back and forth from the mooring to the shore over the next few days to get *DAKOTA* ready. Waiting for the launch to ferry us every time we needed to get to or from the boat was not an efficient option.

After doing the bulk of the changeover from cruiser to racer on that Sunday, I ferried Sam, Adam, Daniel and PJ ashore to the Enterprise rental car I'd arranged beforehand so they could get back to Milford in time to be at their jobs on Monday morning. I then headed back to the boat to work on some potential navigation strategies for different weather and wind conditions that were likely for the race.

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## **Tropical Storm Arlene, the first named storm of the hurricane season, had been brewing in the Atlantic, just to the southeast of Bermuda for a week.**

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We were still 4 1/2 days out from the start, with many scenarios of what to expect, but I wanted to be prepared for all of them.

And, I'd just found out there was a little else to worry about.

Tropical Storm Arlene, the first named storm of the hurricane season, had been brewing in the Atlantic, just to the southeast of Bermuda for a week. There was much concern among the entire fleet and race committee. We all checked in on-line multiple times each day for updates, with hopes it would change course away from our path to St. David's Light, the finish line mark off Bermuda's eastern shore. Everyone was anxious. It certainly put a dampener on things leading up to the race for me, and I would assume just about everyone else for that matter who'd be making the trip. Yet, while we worried about TS Arlene,

there was still much to be done.

The provisions list was extensive. For weeks prior to the race, PJ spent nights cooking, preparing and packaging up all the meals for both the race and return leg too. Re-provisioning in Bermuda would be way too expensive, with no reasonable option for pre-making the meals while there, so everything was made and frozen beforehand at my home. I had no room in my kitchen freezer to keep all these pre-made meals, so I purchased a used, stand-up freezer to put in the garage, just for storing all this food. It was packed full two weeks before the race with an overflow filling my kitchen freezer too.

On Thursday, the day before the start, the race crew began to arrive in Marion. PJ returned with all those provisions and pre-made meals ice-packed in multiple coolers for the car trip up from Milford. It was a lot of food. Three meals a day, for at least 5 days each way, plus snacks and drinks for seven hungry race crew, and four return crew. That's over 150 individual meals, hundreds of drinks and more snacks than the chip aisle at 7-11.

Now, all that frozen grub and various provisions, plus bags and bags of additional stores, needed to be stowed on board in some semblance of order on this final day before the start of the race.

There was a plan for all gear, including all the food, that I had strategically laid out ahead of time, to keep the boat trimmed as efficiently as possible throughout the race. Even the daily menus were planned out and scheduled so that the heaviest could be stowed down low in the ship's freezer for consumption later in the trip. Lighter fare was stored at the top of the freezer. Overall the storage plan for food and everything else was designed with optimum boat speed in mind.

Typical cold-weather meals like soups and stews, etc., were planned for the nights north of the Gulf Stream, while lighter dishes like Chicken Almondine and stir fry were saved for warmer latitudes. Sodas, juices, bottled water, et al, were stored low in the bilges, while paper towels, napkins and chips were stored on the higher shelves of galley lockers. Designing the plan so it all worked best for

boat speed, functionality and logistics was no easy problem to solve. But, for everything, there was a plan.

I had a 2 PM seminar with Gulf Stream expert

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Jennifer Clarke, then a fleet briefing with the acclaimed Atlantic Ocean weather router, Herb Hilgenberg. The skippers meeting was next, at 5 PM. My afternoon was full. Kevin, one of my two watch captains for the race, helped PJ get all the food out to the boat and stowed according to plan. Meanwhile, Rusty, my regular tactician and other watch captain, attended the skippers meeting with me. We all met up with the remainder of the crew—Sam, Ward, Jeremy and Mike—afterwards for the big pre-race fleet dinner at the Beverly Yacht Club. There was still much to do and not enough time left to do it all.

I'd been briefed on the weather (thankfully Tropical Storm Arlene seemed to be much less of an issue) and reviewed the latest Gulf Stream analysis and updates. I was anxious to start plotting the plan on my paper charts. With so much still to do, I actually thought about sneaking back to the boat and skipping the dinner. I reconsidered however, after realizing it would be best for crew camaraderie. So, I stayed and enjoyed, to my surprise, a most wonderful chicken cordon bleu meal as well as a great time with my guys. By the time I left the dinner it was nearly 10 PM. I got the crew in a cab and sent them off to the cottage I had arranged for them at the Inn at Onset



Bay a couple months earlier. PJ and I went back to *DAKOTA* to tie up a few more loose ends, after which I finally settled in for my last five or six hours of comfortable rest before the craziness began.

## Raceday, Friday, June 18th

There was an air of excitement all over Sippican Harbor. The launch drivers were working double-time, ferrying race crews out to all the boats. We'd already loaded the inflatable tender and outboard back into the trailer first thing in the morning, by no means, a quick or simple task. So now, launch service was our only option if we needed anything on shore before the start.

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**The wind was now 15-20 knots, small white caps were forming on the harbor, the battle flags and club pennants were flapping loudly, standing straight out. The tension was building.**

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The breeze was filling in from the Northeast, not typical for Buzzard's Bay in the Summer. It looked like a downwind start. That's always interesting.

I sent Kevin up the mast for one final rigging inspection. He's a rigger by trade, so was obviously the best crewman for the job. He's also our regular bowman, so he's quite at home in a climbing harness or a bosun's chair. He's climbed to *DAKOTA*'s masthead during more than one race, either to clear a jammed halyard or simply to untangle one, and some other emergencies as well. He was a great guy to have on my crew. Though I'd inspected the rig on a number of occasions myself over the preceding months, another set of more trained eyes was comforting. I did not really expect there'd be a problem, as I'd just had any suspect rigging parts replaced

over the winter after a thorough inspection by one of the top riggers in the Northeast.

Though I would be doing the offshore navigating myself, Sam, our regular around-the-cans navigator would plot us out of Buzzard's Bay as well as handle the final approaches into Bermuda. He was busy plugging in strategic waypoints for those parts of the race. Jeremy and Ward were listening intently to explicit instructions from PJ about how to prepare the meals for each watch. She usually handled galley duties for our over-night distance races, but she'd be flying to Bermuda for this one. Though she made all the meals, we were on our own to make sure we prepared them properly for consumption at sea. So they paid close attention and made notes.

Mike and Rusty were getting the deck ready for the start of the race, adding reef ties to the racing main, preparing the sails for quick changes below and double checking the running rigging. The heavy #1 genny was brought up on deck and the luff was pre-fed. Then the crew ran through the process of setting storm sails and reefing the main, one last time. Everyone was busy. Not just on *DAKOTA*, but it seemed like every boat in the harbor. The hustle and bustle was all around, in every direction.

The wind was now 15-20 knots, small white caps were forming on the harbor, the battle flags and club pennants were flapping loudly, standing straight out. The tension was building. Yes, June 18 was a big day in Marion, Massachusetts..

The launch driver pulled alongside *DAKOTA* for one final time to pick up PJ. She would be headed home with my Jeep and trailer in tow, likely back at Milford Boat Works by the time we were crossing the starting line in a couple hours. She'd meet us in Bermuda in a few days, surely, with champagne in hand.

## Pre-Race Strategies

At this point in my sailing career, I had already made a number of passages to or from Bermuda aboard my own boats in addition to a few others. This race, and the delivery home, would be my 12th and 13th trip through the Gulf Stream. I was the navigator on the first 11

passages through the Stream, so by this time I had a pretty good grasp of the tricky ocean current and what to anticipate in a variety of different weather conditions.

However, no one knew it as well as Jennifer Clarke, the "Gulf Stream Lady." NOAA's oceanographic expert. She'd been doing extensive research on the fast moving ocean current for over 25 years. She briefed the fleet on Thursday, as to the status of the constantly moving northbound/southbound meander relative to the rhumb line to Bermuda, as well as the location and current speeds of any warm or cold eddies which had spun off of it.

Between my own research and actual experience, along with the info and analysis supplied by Jennifer to the entire fleet, I felt I had a good handle on where the most effective currents and eddies would be, what to expect when we reached them and how to maximize those currents to our best advantage.

Though nearly every skipper in the fleet had Jennifer's present-day analysis, I also did my own homework, beginning long before heading up to Marion for the start of the big event. In the weeks and months preceding the race, I had been downloading raw information about the waters of the North Atlantic from a variety of government and private sites available on the internet. Things such as water temperatures, drifting buoy data and daily satellite imagery. I had been tracking the Gulf Stream's movement, speed and intensity over its wandering path between New England and Bermuda along with any eddies that spun off which might affect our course strategy. I had also been soliciting data through Jennifer Clarke's commercial service for weeks, separately from the most recent info she provided to the fleet. I felt I was as well-informed about the Stream as anyone in the fleet. Probably more so than most.

The westerly-to-easterly flowing Gulf Stream had a very pronounced meander that turned in a southerly direction, located very close to the actual rhumb line to Bermuda. This was a common annual occurrence in the late spring/early summer. The whole fleet was well aware of it, I'm sure. Though this meander was about 60 miles wide, with a positive flowing current throughout, there

would only be one section of it that actually had the fastest and most helpful current. I was determined to find it. Guessing correctly, as to where that fast track line was would make all the difference.

The skippers all received a copy of a fax made from the most recent satellite imagery on Thursday, the day before the start. It was a thermo-based picture, using water temperature analysis to roughly outline where the Stream's left and right edges were at that moment in time. The big question was, where exactly would it move by the time we got to it, likely on Sunday, three days later? After my own tracking of its daily movement in the months and weeks leading up to the race, I felt like I had a good idea of how far and in which direction it might move over the next three days from the time we were all given those last coordinates. We were not allowed to track it by any other means or get any outside help or satellite info once the skippers meeting had concluded on Thursday evening.

I anticipated a movement of about 10 miles to the ENE from those last coordinates. If that were true, entering the knuckle of the meander 8-10 miles to the west of its northeast wall, in theory, should give us the greatest

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boost of speed for the longest time. I picked my target entry point at the knuckle and marked it on our North Atlantic Ocean paper chart. I thought we could pick up 2.5 knots if the seas weren't too choppy.

After exiting the Stream, I planned to stay

east of the rhumb line until I was confident as to which direction the wind would blow. If it stayed ESE to SE, as was expected, being east of the rhumb line was the place to be. It would allow for a fast angle of sail to the finish line off Bermuda's northeastern coast. If it was going to clock around to the SW, as was also a realistic possibility, a move to the west beforehand would be in order. That, I'd have to wait and see, but I had a plan for either scenario. Just in case.

So much for the navigation strategies, now for our boat speed approach.

It may sound simple, but bottom-line was to sail fast. All the time. Every single second of the race. Not just when it was convenient or the wind was cooperative. I met with the crew just before the start of the race and said, “We can’t think of this as a 645-mile, 90-100 hour race. No, if we want to do well we need to think of it as 50 short around-the-bouys races of two hours or less, where every single second counts in each race. High-intensity. We need to stay focused throughout.” That strategy paid off.

## The Start

While waiting for our class warning—we were in Class B—we observed the C, D, E, F and slower classes start. Having done the race before, I had a good idea of who some of the “smart” boats were. Those were the ones who'd done well in the race in the past, or a few others who made Buzzards Bay their primary racing grounds. Local knowledge. We kept our eyes on those boats to see their starting strategies. Did they go left or right at the start? Or, stay in the middle of the course and head straight for the first mark? How would they play the Buzzards Bay currents? All important info to glean. And glean we did.

As it turned out, the center of the course, with little current and a downwind run to Sow & Pigs buoy at the western end of the bay seemed to be the best route. We saw the early classes going wing and wing, so we set up to do the same. Normally we'd be setting a chute, but that option was not there for this particular race. No spinnakers allowed. That made it different, for sure. Our experience was limited with the cruising race set up. We



*DAKOTA* just after the rare downwind start, broad reaching out of Buzzards Bay on port tack.

weren't used to racing with a wing and wing set up—as was also the case with most of the other serious race crews. We practiced one day a few weeks back, but no one really expected having to start under those conditions, particularly during an afternoon in mid-June. Southwesterly winds normally prevailed in Buzzards Bay.

20 seconds before the start, we reached down the line on starboard tack. At the sound of the gun, we bore off over the line to a deep downwind angle, set our pole, gybed the big #1 genoa to windward, and off we went in 15-18 knots of northeasterly breeze. Within minutes, most of the class was setting twin jibs. We joined the crowd and immediately accelerated out to the front portion of the pack.

Two boats in our class beat us around the first mark (Sow and Pigs buoy) and out into the Atlantic: *Tempress*, a Swan 51 who was a strong contender to win the whole thing; and *Babe*, another Swan 46 like mine, sailed by a crew of Bermudians. *Caribe*, a newly-designed and much faster-rated Swan 48, the scratch boat in our class, was just a few yards off our transom as we rounded the mark.

The first 5 boats out of the Bay that day were the four Frers-designed Swans and *Somerset*,



a Custom Frers 45. German Frers would have smiled proudly were he there.

Okay, now what? Rhumb line or warm eddy? Once we cleared the Bay, the wind got fluky.

By dawn, only two boats were close enough for us to see, and I'm pretty sure there were no others further west over the horizon. One of them was the queen of the fleet, *War Baby*, Warren Brown's 61-foot Custom IOR boat (formerly, media-mogul, Ted Turner's *Tenacious*). She was half a mile astern of us...

It lightened severely and clocked 80-90 degrees. Now we had a very light SSE breeze. Well, "breeze" isn't quite accurate. You can feel a breeze. What we had wasn't enough to move a hair on my head out of place. Staying on the rhumb line was slower than slow. Taking a lay-line course to the warm eddy 100 miles south was very slow, but seemed to me the lesser of two evils.

We lightly beat into it. Our strategy was to keep moving by bearing off the lay-line course to the eddy, even further, to acquire a better angle of sail. VMG was key here. Not many boats cracked off as far as we did. The majority of the fleet stayed closer to the Bermuda rhumb line and went slower. We went further off course, but had better VMG.

Late that night and into Saturday morning, we continued moving the boat in a SSW to S direction. As long as we were moving somewhat towards the south, we were moving closer to the finish. Though we suspected, but didn't know at the time, the fleet of boats that

stayed closer to the rhumb had pretty much stalled out well over the eastern horizon.

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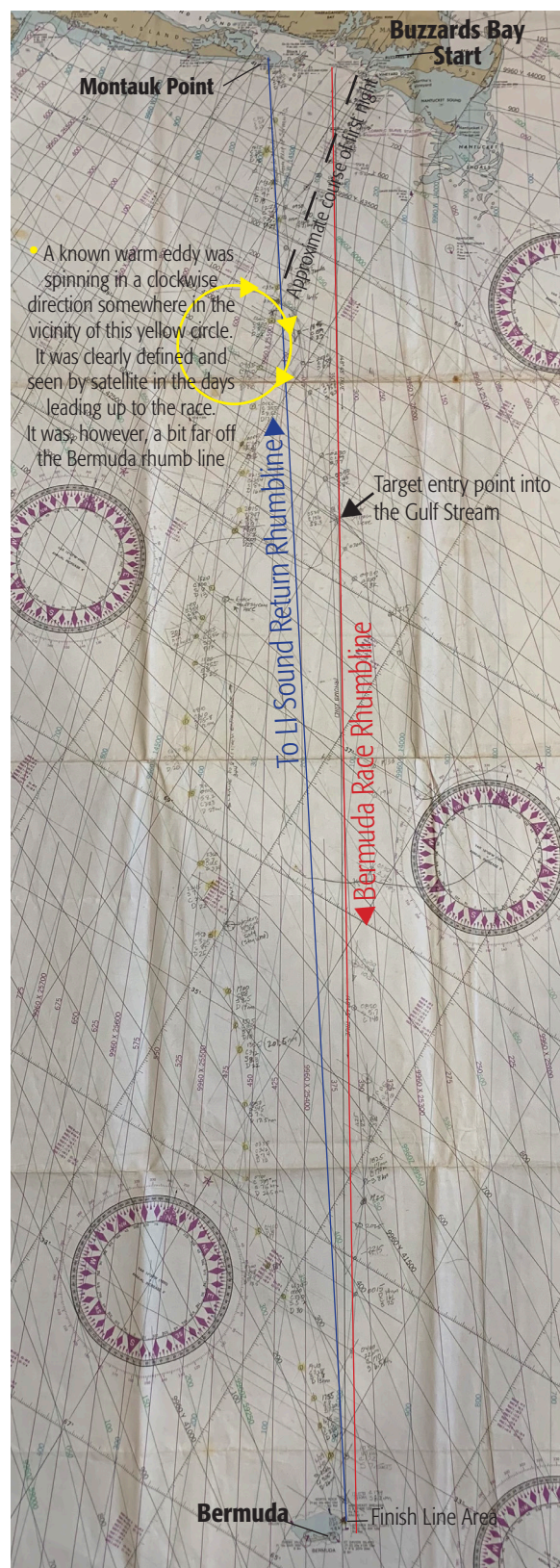
### Saturday

By Saturday at noon the wind had backed to the east. It continued to stay light. About six or seven knots. We had no idea what it was doing back on the rhumb line for the bulk of the fleet. We could only hope it was no better there.

During the early morning hours, while moving along at only two or three knots, a school of about 20 dolphins began to play in our bow "ripple." It was far from a bow wake. They moved in slow motion with us for over 15 minutes before they finally got bored and left. We couldn't blame them. I think they wanted to go faster as much as we did.

Our hope now was that our slow progress to the southwest was faster than the rhumb line approach. *War Baby*, surprisingly, had not passed us yet, but was sitting off our starboard hip a half mile or so away. They finally gave up and changed course back towards the rhumb line.

It was hard for us to keep the faith while moving so slowly. However, we continued to wish hard and by 1 PM we were moving at over 7 knots in a 10 knot easterly breeze. This was a real breeze. By 2 PM we were moving at over 8.5 knots in 15 knots of honest to goodness breeze from the ESE. We should have been close to that warm eddy by then, but water temps were staying fairly cold and our speed over the ground never really increased to suggest we were in any favorable current. I decided the eddy had moved even further west than I had anticipated.



This is the actual plotting chart used aboard *DAKOTA* for the race, as well as the return delivery to Milford. I've highlighted specific areas with an overlay of text/graphics to assist with visualizing various descriptions from within the story.

So, at this point I had to make a tough decision. Should I continue west and keep looking for the eddy, or cut my losses and head back towards the rhumb line while I had enough wind from a good direction to do so? Even if the fleet to the east hadn't been moving earlier, it surely was getting some wind by now. If I went further west to find the eddy, would it have enough helpful current in it to make the extra miles traveled to find it pay off?

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**One thing I was sure about was that no one sailed their boat any more efficiently than we did over that period. We'd pushed non-stop since the starting gun, making the absolute most out of every little bit of wind, every moment of the way.**

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I decided to head back east toward the rhumb. I second guessed myself all the way back. But, I needed to get us a bit east of the rhumb line to enter the meander at my target coordinate, so I really had little choice. I had to leave the elusive eddy alone and get moving if I wanted to take full advantage of the meander's current. At 6:30 PM we changed course and sailed a lay-line route toward my planned point of entry into the Stream, about 90 miles to the southwest.

Though I never found that warm eddy, I learned after the race from satellite info that it had lost its momentum and basically fell apart. It was quite likely dying while we were there looking for it. Sure glad I gave up when I did. We might still be there. So, I'd made the right choice.

I was hopeful we'd stayed in front of the fleet on our little overnight excursion out to the west, but I wasn't all that confident. The fact that *War Baby* and *Somerset* also came out

that way gave me a little comfort, but there were a lot of yachts who didn't. Most of the fleet, actually. One thing I was sure about is that no one sailed their boats any more efficiently than we did over that period. We'd pushed non-stop since the starting gun, making the absolute most out of every little bit of wind, every moment of the way. Our plan was to continue that diligence for the remainder of the race.

## **Sunday**

The water temperature was beginning to get much warmer now as we were well off the continental shelf and into the vicinity of the Gulf Stream, its various offshoots and adjacent warm water. By 7 AM the sea temperature was 77 degrees. The air temp was up too. We were closing in on our entry point into the Stream, the knuckle of the Southeastern meander. We were maintaining a good boat speed of over 8 1/2 knots. The breeze was solid at 16+.

By noon we entered the Stream. The sea temp was now 81 degrees. We'd navigated and hit our entry point exactly as planned. We were in a 2 1/2 knot positive current shortly thereafter. We were doing 11-11.5 knots over the bottom. We were flying. The wind moved slightly right, which made the seas quite lumpy as the wind started to oppose the strong current. Wind speeds were now averaging 23-26 knots and the seas had built to 6-8 feet. *DAKOTA* loves these conditions. Some of the lighter yachts, not so much. We were now hoping we could catch some of those boats. Assuming they had been able to sneak ahead of us in the first place in the light air earlier in the race, they should be struggling some in these sloppy seas in the Gulf Stream now. I still had hopes they were all still behind us, but there was no way to know for sure at that point.

We continued to scream for hours in the Stream, often seeing ground speeds 3 knots over our 9 knots of boat speed through the water. We were in the perfect track within the Stream. Just as I had planned. I was quite pleased with my navigation work. I was patting myself on the back when the crew wasn't looking, confident the rest of the fleet was not as accurate in their planning as I was. I wished

the current and wind would hold like this for awhile. Maybe till the finish?

We had too much race still ahead of us to jinx anything at this point, so I kept any positive thoughts I may have had to myself. I poker-faced it. The crew, however, was beginning to think we might be doing well. I wouldn't admit it out loud.

## **Monday**

By 1 AM, everything was saturated. Clothes, cushions, sails, floor, everything. All wet. And boy, did it smell below. Lots of salt water got in during our wild ride through the Stream.

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**In fact, one guy was quite seasick, but he fed the fish from the high side. We needed his 160 pounds up there. If we were going to do well, there'd be no comfort. Push. Push. Push.**

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We took many solid seas across the deck and a few found their way through and down the companionway when the washboard was removed for a few moments so a crew member could get on or below deck. Plus, every time we made a sail change from the #1 to the #3, or back, which happened a number of times during the trip through the Stream, we would fill the forepeak as the bow would dive into a sea while the foredeck hatch was open to get sails up and down. It was crazy at times, and always wet.

Adding to the soggiess below, were numerous squalls with driving rain and heavy downpours. All our foul weather gear, clothes, sneakers and sea boots were drenched, inside and out. We dripped all over whenever we went below contributing more wetness to the cabin. We were developing salt water rashes from being soaked for what seemed like the entire trip. But no one let down for



an instant. The crew pressed on and pushed hard. Nobody complained. Yet, we all felt like drowned rats.

Since we were close reaching in a fairly strong breeze, keeping the boat on her feet and going straight, with the least amount of leeway possible, was imperative. So the weather rail was always full of crew bodies, even those who were off watch. In fact, one guy was quite seasick, but he fed the fish from the high side. We needed his 160 pounds up there. If we were going to do well, there'd be no comfort. Push. Push. Push.

It was a long, rough night, but by 9 AM the wind started to lighten. Boat speed dropped to 6 1/2 knots. We were through the Stream, but still had 200 miles to go. We needed wind again. And by 3 PM, we had it back and were moving along yet again, at over 8 knots.

Great sailing conditions persisted for the rest of the day. We liked our easterly position relative to the rhumb line and decided to stay there until we saw evidence of a shift in wind direction.

We listened to SSB weather guru, Herb Hilgenberg, who updated the whole fleet on a daily basis. Even he was a bit unsure of whether the wind would stay southeast or swing to the southwest the next day. Nothing from his broadcast changed my mind about our position so we stayed east. Just like my original plan.

We had one abnormal warm eddy (warm eddies usually form north of the Gulf Stream) to deal with between us and Bermuda and it didn't seem to be much of an issue. At worst, we might see a touch of current one way or another if we cut right through the center of it. And, if we were lucky, we might get a push from it. We were and we did.

## Tuesday, June 22. The Finish.

During the night, we continued to see a slight helping current push and felt it was part of the Northern Labrador current that got trapped south of the Gulf Stream. Herb had mentioned it in passing during his pre-race briefing to the fleet. Whatever it was, it certainly wasn't hurting our progress in any

way. But, by 4 AM, we'd lost the push and were now experiencing an opposing current of over a knot. We had 65 miles left to the finish. I could only hope any other boats in the area were also experiencing that same negative flow.

After dawn, as the day brightened, we could see a sail about three miles to the west of us. It was too far off to make out any sail numbers, but we were pretty sure it was at least 45 feet in length. That could be any number of boats in Class A or B. It could also be one of the larger boats in Class C or D. So, it wasn't all that reassuring.

For the next two hours we stayed neck and neck with this boat. We were sailing *DAKOTA* perfectly, better than even our polars would suggest, so I was confident this mystery boat was rated fast enough to be in our class, or maybe even Class A.

Once we got a little closer to it, and I could make out the shapes and sizes of its crew members, relative to the size of the boat, I was convinced it was probably even larger than us. That was a little encouraging, since it meant we were keeping up with at least one of the big boys this far into the race.

At noon, after dying down to about 12 knots, the wind picked back up a bit and the mystery boat started to slightly gain ground on us. That, we felt, was actually a good thing. It confirmed she was using her length to "waterline" us, which would suggest we were in very good position relative to a boat who could do that to us.

Bermuda was now well in sight. The Kitchen Shoal buoy was the final mark before the finish line off St. David's Light on the northeastern shore of Bermuda. All boats in the race were required to check in with the Finish Line Committee via VHF at Kitchen Shoal, which is about 10 miles north of the island and warns of shallow reefs that extend that far out off its northern shore. Many boats have been lost to the sea by missing that buoy over the years.

We had the VHF radio on the loudest volume possible, all waiting with bated breath for the mystery boat to check in with the committee. They were now less than a mile ahead of us

and just off the Kitchen Shoal buoy. The VHF crackled to life. "Finish Line Committee, Finish Line Committee, Finish Line Committee, this is the racing vessel *American Promise* checking in at Kitchen Shoal. Over."

We all let out a loud hoot and holler cheer, hearing that we were right on the tail of the fastest-rated yacht in the entire fleet,..... *American Promise*! She's the 60-foot custom sloop, designed and built by America's Cup winner Ted Hood, for Dodge Morgan, who held the record with her for the fastest single-handed circumnavigation of the world. She was later donated, refit and now sailed by a crew of Navy midshipmen in this race. Having raced against other Navy crews in a variety of long distances races in the past, we all knew these guys were some of the best and most hard-core sailors out there. They owed us hours of corrected time for the 645-mile race and we were about to finish only a few minutes behind them.

This was really encouraging.

Working our best to gain ground on them after rounding Kitchen Shoal, we short tacked those last 10 miles all the way up to the finish line, while they took longer tacks and covered more ground. Though they still beat us over the line, I'm sure they weren't happy about us being so close, once they realized who we were. That, alone, was extremely satisfying.

We crossed the finish line at 3:36 PM, EDT. Rusty, Kevin, Sam, Jeremy, Ward and Mike had given their all to me and *DAKOTA*, for every single inch of the past 645 nautical miles. I was so proud of my guys no matter what the outcome.

After finishing, we dropped the sails and started up the old mill. The rough ride we had encountered earlier in the Stream must have stirred up the diesel tanks quite a bit and consequently, we had some air in the fuel system. The engine died just before we were about to work our way into the winding channel over to Hamilton, where we were to dock. So, the guys quickly set the main again, while I went below to bleed the system. Once, twice, three times, before I finally cleared the air block out and we were able to motor safely through the channel.

## On Pins and Needles

I radioed ahead to Tom Whayman, the dockmaster at the Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club (RHADC), where we had reservations, to let him know we were on our way in. He was already aware of it, having been tracking us during our final approach to the finish and listening to the race committee boat's communications with on shore committee personnel.

Tom and I started a friendship after *DAKOTA's* last Bermuda Race effort. The two of us, along with my previous crew in that race, spent a fair amount of time socializing together in some of the fine taverns of Bermuda. He and I continued to stay in touch since. So for this race, he gave us a special welcome. He piloted his little 13-foot work-whaler a mile out from the RHADC docks to come and greet us as we navigated the long channel. He tossed two ice cold 6-packs of Heineken aboard to my beer-deprived crew. They liked this guy immediately.

Tom yelled to us that we'd done well, but wasn't specific as to *how* well. He just smiled like the cat that ate the canary. He then pulled ahead and escorted us down the channel towards the RHADC. As we passed by the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club to port (the only other club in Hamilton where boats from the race might be docked), we looked over to see only two boats were in from the race over there. The aforementioned, top-rated

*American Promise*, who'd just finished a few minutes ahead of us, and *Scaramouche*, the 3rd-fastest rated yacht in the fleet. *War Baby*, the 2nd fastest, was nowhere in sight. The last we had seen them, they were behind us, north of the Gulf Stream. Could they still be behind us? "Nah," I thought.

Since the RHADC was the actual Bermuda host club for the race, I figured there'd be many more boats over there at their docks. *War Baby* was surely over there, right? However, as the RHADC came into clear view we could see only one single mast standing at their docks. It was *Temptress*, the Swan 51. She'd crossed the finish line first. Quite an accomplishment for them, beating all the boats in the fleet, including those in the faster Class A, to win line honors and the St. David's Light Trophy.

But wait. This doesn't make sense. There's *Temptress*, and only *Temptress*. We just passed by the yacht club and only *Scaramouche* and *American Promise* were there. Where is everyone? I was trying not to get too excited—it's the realist in me—yet between this sight of only a couple few boats and Tom's hint that we'd done well, I was beginning to believe we actually had.

As we approached the club's marina, some of our significant others and family members were standing on the dock playing it cool with looks on their faces that only implied that they were happy to see us. In reality though, they were ecstatic inside. We tied up along-

side *Temptress*, whose crew did not seem all that happy to see us.

PJ blew her cover as she shrieked with joy and handed me a copy of the most up to date race results, showing us finishing 4th over the line! Better yet, we were firmly sitting in 1st place overall on corrected time, *beating Temptress by less than three minutes!* Everyone's poker faces were gone, cheers rang out and a magnum of Dom Perignon was popped and sprayed upon all crew.

## After the Finish

Unfortunately, the Customs and Immigration officials had left for the evening only 10 minutes before our arrival, so we were quarantined to the RHADC grounds until they returned in the morning. After four days at sea living in close quarters in rough, wet, humid, musty, odorous and generally uncomfortable conditions, we'd have to wait another night to check into our long-reserved, air conditioned rooms with private baths and hot showers. Though our friends and families could take full advantage of them, those of us on the crew were stuck on board for one more night.

By Wednesday morning the results had been updated. A good portion of the fleet had finished by then and we still sat firmly at the top. We finally cleared Customs and Immigration and the crew headed for their hotels. PJ and I spent the rest of the day cleaning up and getting *DAKOTA* presentable again. If our time held up, she'd need to look her absolute best. There'd be lots of pictures and footage shot by the media.

During our clean up, the Race Compliance Committee came aboard to give us a post-race inspection, to be sure that we'd broken no rules and carried all the necessary safety and survival gear. I was required to present my plotting chart work and log book for their review as well. After a satisfactory check out, they went on to board some of the other boats that had already finished, who also might be trophy winners. With some of the fleet not yet over the finish line, nothing was set in stone. We owed lots of time to some of those slower boats still out there.



*DAKOTA* ties up after the finish alongside the Swan 51, *Temptress*, at the Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club, in Hamilton, Bermuda.



At the end of the day, I finally got to my hotel for a much needed shower and comfort.

We had plans to visit Bermuda and do touristy things during our stay on the island, but sitting in first place was making that difficult. There were reporters from the various local newspapers and TV stations milling around the docks all day, taking photos and interviewing many of the participants. With *DAKOTA* sitting in first place overall though, she seemed to be getting the most attention. I was sought out for comments multiple times throughout the day with a request for an on-camera TV interview with my whole crew included, of which we obliged, of course. There were also pictures with the Governor of Bermuda shaking my hand in front of *DAKOTA*, which appeared along with a feature article about our winning yacht and crew on the front page of the Island's main newspaper the following day. Winning an offshore Bermuda Race is really a big deal in Bermuda. They take their sailing seriously.

As of Thursday morning most of the fleet had finished, though there were still a few stragglers out there. Some were slower, smaller boats which had gotten caught up in some unfriendly weather that moved in north of Bermuda after most of the fleet had already finished. A few others were still racing due to some questionable navigation choices left them without wind, or wind and/or current from the wrong direction. A couple others had mechanical failures and were limping in to the finish.

Though the results weren't complete and official, there was no question about who the winners were by this point. The newspapers, radio and TV stations had all reported that *DAKOTA* was the overall winner, as well as the winner of Class B. Though other Class winners were also mentioned, *Babe*, the Swan 46 sailed by the full crew of Bermudians, was the only other boat pictured on the front page of the newspapers along with crew and boat photos of *DAKOTA*.

That night, I called a couple large van-style cabs to take the crew and their wives/girl-friends into town for my planned crew dinner. There were 13 or 14 of us altogether. When the cab driver realized he was driving the

winning skipper and crew, he first asked for an autograph and then refused payment for the trip! When I tried to pay the 2nd cab driver who transported the other half of us, he refused too. We were celebrities in Bermuda.

## The Awards Ceremony

On Saturday evening at 6 PM, a large cocktail party and awards ceremony was held on the lawn of the Hamilton Princess Hotel, overlooking the harbor. A beautiful background to the most upscale trophy-event I've ever attended. There were hundreds of attendees, all decked out in their yacht club best. There were more media people, lots of cameras flashing and an endless supply of jumbo shrimp! Top-shelf, as sailing award parties go.

Unfortunately, two of my crew members had to fly home beforehand, so weren't able to experience the excitement of the event or bask in the glory. It was quite a thrill for me, my remaining crew and all our guests as *DAKOTA* was announced as the Swan Mini-Class winner, then the winner of Class B, and finally the big one, "First Overall in the Fleet" of 103 yachts. We got a great ovation and I accepted each award with great pride.

Leading up to the race, I had been confident we could be competitive in our class, but frankly, never really entertained the idea of winning the entire event. It ranked as one of, if not the biggest accomplishment I'd attained in my life so far. An experience that will stay clearly etched in the forefront of my mind for the rest of my days on this earth.

## The Exciting Return Delivery

Well, now the fun is over and reality sets back in. I still had some work to do to get *DAKOTA* back home to her dock in Connecticut, safely, and in one piece.

I had an uneasy feeling all week that I might pay on the return passage for winning the race down. The sailing gods can be funny that way. Even so, I couldn't wait to get it over with, one way or the other.

None of my crew who raced to Bermuda

would be aboard for the return delivery. My crew for this ocean trip was smaller (there'd only be four of us) and less experienced. Though all were sailors who raced regularly on *DAKOTA*'s 12-man crew in around-the-buoys regattas on Long Island Sound, two were younger with no real bluewater sea time under their belts...yet.

Adam, the 18 year-old, who you met earlier in the story during the delivery to Marion, and Chris, 24, a first-year racing crew member on *DAKOTA* this season, were my bluewater newbies for the ride home. They both flew into Bermuda on Saturday afternoon with sea bags in hand and a garment bag over their shoulders with sport jacket, tie, dress shirt and slacks inside. Just in time to attend the awards banquet that evening in place of the two crew who'd left early. Consequently they were able to soak up some of the accolades *DAKOTA*'s Bermuda race crew received at the event, without having actually made the rough trip down through the Gulf Stream. But their time would come. Soon enough.

On Sunday afternoon, Adam and Chris helped me make the 10 or 12 mile trip with *DAKOTA* over to St. George's Dinghy and Sports Club on the northeastern side of Bermuda in St. George's Harbour. We planned to spend one more day on the island before our departure. Before leaving Hamilton we changed *DAKOTA* back over from racer to cruiser. We re-installed the furling drum, #2 furling headsail, bagged the racing main, bent on the cruising main, filled the water tanks, etc., etc.

Steve, the fourth crewmember for this trip, arrived Sunday evening. Though older and much more experienced than the youngsters, he warned me ahead of time that he was prone to seasickness offshore. I hoped that wouldn't be an issue, but suggested he wear a scopolomine patch behind his ear to help lessen the effects of any rough weather or conditions we might encounter. I had already *directed* Adam and Chris to do the same.

Steve had filled in on *DAKOTA*'s crew for a number of races in the past, but was not part of her primary, everyday crew. He was a seasoned sailor who knew how to handle himself on an offshore boat, despite his susceptibility

to sea sickness. I was very happy to have him and his experience aboard for the return. We shoved off on Tuesday morning. After a quick fuel stop at Dowlings' Shell, we navigated our way out the Town Cut channel, rounded Mills Breaker Buoy, and set our course for Montauk Point, on the eastern end of Long Island, about 650 miles away. We set the sails and began what would turn out to be some of the most exhilarating and satisfying sailing I'd ever experienced when not actually racing.

As it turned out, that earlier stop for fuel hadn't been necessary. Other than to charge the batteries a few times at sea, we never once needed the engine to get home. When we arrived at the dock in Milford a few days later, we still had virtually full diesel tanks. We averaged over 8 knots all the way home, every bit of it under sail until well into Long Island Sound.

That first day and into the evening we had fairly light air for the offwind angle of sail we needed in order to stay on the rhumb line course to Montauk, about 11-12 knots. Even so, we still had an enjoyable day of sailing on a broad reach averaging over 7 knots of boat speed for the period. A nice comfortable beginning to the offshore adventure yet to come for the novice crew members.

By the next morning the wind was up to about 15 knots and our speed increased as our apparent wind angle moved forward of the beam. We listened in to Herb on SSB to find that a low pressure system was stalled off the coast up north and that there were some concerning conditions we might have to deal with north of the Gulf Stream. It was recommended that any boats headed back to New England stall a bit before entering the Stream, at least until the low moved further north. For now, we continued on, sailing in excellent conditions, hoping things would get better by the time we got there.

We avoided a cold eddy south of the Stream, then adjusted our course slightly west to be sure we cleared that southbound meander we took full advantage of during the race down. Though it had started to lose some current strength, it would still slow us down if we caught any part of it. The course adjustment also gave us a little better angle to the

wind, which picked us up a bit more speed. We reached the Gulf Stream on Thursday at a nice skinny portion and were through it in 40 miles, which took us under 5 hours. It was one of the most comfortable Stream crossings I'd ever had. Hardly even noticed.

Each day we had listened to Herb, on SSB radio, warn us of the rough weather sitting off the coast to our north, and each day he suggested boats wait until Saturday before going above 40 degrees latitude. At our pace, we'd be to that margin by this evening. We were making great time and weren't about to slow down or hove-to. Besides, the weather that was forecast was nothing that *DAKOTA* hadn't been through many times before: 25-35 knots, with 12-15 foot seas. I knew it would be a little uncomfortable and an eye-opener for my less experienced crew members, but was



I'm on the helm for a 6-hour spell as the seas begin to build and become more confused.

confident this magnificent yacht would keep us safe and in control if we set the proper sail plan. And, of course, put the two more experienced guys on the helm, if and when things really ramped up.

*DAKOTA* had already proven herself so many times in the past. I'd had her in 40-50 knots and big rough seas a number of times before, and was once nearly knocked down at night in a 70-80 knot squall in the Gulf Stream on my delivery home from the '97 Race. (That's another exciting entry from my log book, later turned into a published article.)

By Friday night, the wind was up to a steady 25 knots. We put a single reef in the main and furlled the #2 genoa to the size of a #3. Then

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**...as the quartering, and sometimes following seas continued to build to near 15 feet, with even larger ones scattered in, it was clear it was time to leave the driving to the more experienced crew.**

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we hanked on a staysail to fill in under jib, on the inner forestay and set the running backstays. It was a set up which allowed me to be ready for the next 10 knot increase in wind-speed if it came to that. In 35 knots, I could roll up the jib completely and sail at nine knots under full control with only a reefed main and staysail. In the present 25 knots we were completely comfortable, moving at well over nine and a half knots with the wind on or aft of the beam. Often over 10, even 11 knots as we surfed down the building 10-12 foot seas. Next thing you know, we were doing 12 knots on the backside of big one, maybe 15 feet or so. This was the beginning of it. We were ready.

The seas were getting quite erratic. Up until that point, all four of us were taking spells on the helm. But, as the quartering, and sometimes following seas continued to build to near 15 feet, with even larger ones scattered in, it was clear it was time to leave the driving to the more experienced crew. In addition to the size of the seas, the fickle patterns they presented just exacerbated the difficulty of keeping the boat safely on track. The younger guys, Adam and Chris, were losing control in these large, confused seas. This signaled a long day ahead for Steve and me.

Throughout the day as we continued to move closer to Montauk Point, the seas continued to build. Every now and then, it would look like a football field, which would just begin to tilt up from the far sideline and pivot along the other, creating a huge wave, which grew larger and larger as it approached us. It would slowly pick us up then ease us down so far into a trough below the mean sea level, that



our lower set of spreaders were well beneath the white crests of the waves on either side of us. (For the record, *DAKOTA's* double-spreader rig stands 65 feet above the surface.)

The center of the low had moved a little further east by this point, resulting in more westerly winds in our area. Consequently, we were taking the seas, mostly aft of the port beam on the quarter, thankfully. *DAKOTA* handled beautifully, like the champion she now was. She brought us safely through wave after wave. (There was also some excellent helmsmanship required on many of those waves, if I do say so proudly, myself!)

By 9PM we were rounding Montauk Point, headed for the calmer waters of Long Island Sound. *DAKOTA* had covered 640 miles so far on the return. Just about the same distance as she did in the race. Only this time she did so in 12 hours less. It was quite an exciting ride, both ways!

Steve's warning to me of his proneness to seasickness had proven true. Even though he had on a Scopolomine patch, he did not feel well most of the trip and actually fed the fish on a number of occasions. However, to his credit, he never let it affect his duties, standing all his watches, totally focused on his job at hand, which in this case included four to six-hour stints at the helm in some quite uncomfortable conditions. He was a real trooper. I was glad to have him aboard.

I also wore a patch. I usually do when I anticipate a rough ride offshore, just to be safe. I have never been seasick to the point of losing my lunch, but have certainly felt queasy many times in sloppy seas, when I had no patch on. On this trip I applied one the day before the weather was supposed to get bad. Yet, midway through the big stuff I noticed I wasn't feeling too well when I went below to make log entries. I felt for my patch. It was gone. I don't know when it came off, but it obviously made a difference. So I applied another and stayed on deck for the next 7 hours, even when Steve was on the helm, waiting for the feeling to pass and the new patch to kick in. Though I'd wanted to do some chart plotting and add more to my log, I knew a few seconds below would have had me charging up the companionway, out to the leeward rail. And, I had no intention of supplying lunch to any creature in the sea beneath us that day.

Though Adam and Chris did not handle the helm during the worst of the conditions, they both contributed greatly to getting us through it. They were the ones who had to be nimble and go forward when something needed attention on deck. They trimmed the sails. They kept their eyes peeled for surprises from all directions throughout their respective watches, while Steve and I spent our time focused on each approaching wave, to be set up for it, and the next one. It was a battle of which the crew was in together. Each of us had our jobs. Just like the crew a week earlier, we won this one too. Everyone performed.

Once we finally got into the Sound, the heavy wind began to subside. Our course changed to a more westerly one, making a direct line to home difficult. So, with the lighter air now, we dropped our sails, started the motor, then shifted it into gear for the first time since leaving Bermuda. It was a very dark and hazy night. No lights were visible on shore and there was no moon. I decided we should take it slow up the Sound so we could keep a close eye out for lobster pots and just relax a bit after such a trying day. I finally slept for a couple hours. We quietly moved along at an easy 1300 rpms all night.

By dawn we were near Milford. I called ahead to let friends and family know we were safe and would be home shortly. I expected a few of them would want to be there when we arrived at the dock. First though, we had to wait for the tide to rise a little. Our 8 1/2 foot draft made it impossible to navigate the channel at dead low. So we dropped a hook outside the entrance and the rest of the crew took a short nap, while I attempted to tidy up to make things presentable for any greeters at the marina.

Upon entering the harbor, and all the way through it, we heard congratulatory hoots, cheers and boat horns from the banks and various marina docks along the narrow channel. Well-wishers were everywhere, standing at the water's edge, giving *DAKOTA* a nice ovation and welcome home. Some I knew. Many I didn't. Evidently, more people than I might have expected had heard of our Bermuda Race success. That recognition was nearly as satisfying to me as the win.

As we finally approached our dock at Milford Boat Works, we could see a crowd gathered

with banners and balloons. There were more cheers and boat horns sounding from all over the marina. We came alongside, tied up and celebrated once again, this time with our marina friends and family. There was more champagne sprayed and mimosas all around, imbibed well into the afternoon. It was a fitting finish to an incredible month.

So ended the final three weeks of a six month effort for a four-day race.

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Showing off the Silver upon arrival home.

#### **2020 Update on the Author:**

*Shortly after his win in the Marion-Bermuda Race in 1999, Doug Ely sailed DAKOTA south to the Caribbean, where he worked as a charter captain out of St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands for a few seasons. During that time, he sailed extensively from Puerto Rico to Antigua, visiting and exploring just about every island in the Leeward Island chain. He sold DAKOTA in 2003 and moved back to the States, where he built and ran a highly-respected yacht restoration business for 14 years, on L.I. Sound. No longer having a boat of his own to focus on, he reignited his interest in the game of golf from when he was teen. After a 30-year period of sailing and racing boats seriously, Doug now plays golf at a competitive level. He also writes articles and blogs on the subject, as well as other areas of interest. His new book, **The Country Club** is scheduled for release later in 2021.*

