



20th Around Long Island Race

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Before I agreed to crew on a boat racing in the Twentieth Annual Around Long Island Regatta, I surveyed everyone I knew about the event. Of my unscientific sample of a couple dozen former participants, not one said they enjoyed it. Nope, not one. Even those who were planning on going this year as they had many times before.

The reasons given were numerous and unarguably rational. There was always either no wind or altogether too much wind, never anything in between. No one ever got much sleep on the three day race and total exhaustion was guaranteed by the end of the weekend. More often than not the food consisted of cold sandwiches, for all meals. The cabin environment was always wet and rank, the two perpetually vying for superiority. Mal de mer often devastated entire crews, leaving the few healthy souls to sail watch on watch. This was not a pretty picture.

The reasons given for going were much fewer and less rational. Based on my unofficial survey, I just could not figure out how they got enough people to sail all of this year's 87 sailboat entries. My neighbors' motivations for going were often ill defined, vague and nonsensical. Unlike the complaints, the positive responses were usually mumbled through embarrassed, sheepish grins. "It's an experience." "Free beer." "Why not?"

With unerring, clear-sighted logic like that, I just had to go. The decision having been made meant the next step was provisioning. According to the regatta notice, the skipper was responsible for the required life raft "capable of carrying the entire crew." Just renting one of those things was a few hundred bucks. The life raft was probably the most expensive item. The

various foodstuffs and large amounts of beverage were also to be supplied by the captain. The fearsome prospect of a mutinous crew rather than any ruling by the race committee provided the incentive for adequate quantities of the latter.

The necessities that each crewmember was responsible for were much less. The aforementioned survey of my neighbors yielded some unexpected recommendations for things one absolutely must have for a race over three days and two nights (see Table 1).

Table 1: List of Provisions for Crew

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Baseball cap<input type="checkbox"/> Change of dry clothing (at least 2 sets)<input type="checkbox"/> Dinghy boots (regular sea boots can be dangerously heavy if you're washed overboard)<input type="checkbox"/> Dry gear bag<input type="checkbox"/> Dry underwear<input type="checkbox"/> Foul weather gear<input type="checkbox"/> Inflatable PFD with harness (only useful if worn), strobe light, whistle, hand flares, and rigging knife<input type="checkbox"/> Neoprene socks (keep your feet warm when wet)<input type="checkbox"/> Power or snack bars<input type="checkbox"/> Quick drying long pants<input type="checkbox"/> Sailing gloves<input type="checkbox"/> Seasickness preventives (meclizine, acupressure wrist bracelets, and ginger root pills)<input type="checkbox"/> Sunblock<input type="checkbox"/> Sunglasses<input type="checkbox"/> Talcum or baby powder |
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One seasoned salt, Torr of the boat September Song, found that a container of baby powder for those sensitive areas subject to chafing was worth more than gold. From Wuestwind, Lorraine from the foredeck suggested a daily change of dry, clean underwear and Greg from the afterguard strongly recommended a dry gear bag. Bob of Rolling Home warned of seasickness. For seasickness I brought Dramamine-2 (meclizine) which, at least for me, really caused less drowsiness than its predecessor, Dramamine-1. I also wore the acupressure wristbands and had a backup bottle of gingerroot pills stashed in my duffle bag. A couple handfuls of power or breakfast snack bars proved useful for breakfast or snacks.

By the way, three of the four previously quoted survey respondents had gone before but had no intention of ever going again. Ever. Not for love or money.

For those of you concerned about boat weight and its contrary effect on boat speed, there are a few sundries that can be left ashore. I never made use of my toothbrush nor did I bathe. Soap, shampoo, toothbrush, dental floss, toothpaste and other implements required for living in a civilized society were just so much excess baggage.

Another tactical advantage to abandoning personal hygiene became apparent. If you were downwind of us, we gave new meaning to the definition of "dirty air." Anyone who tried to pass our stern would take one sniff and be sorry they even thought of passing us.

July 25: Thursday

The great day finally arrived and our Arcadia, skippered by its owner, Quentin Thomas, left at 0700 hours as the tide ebbed. A few of us had been too excited to sleep much the night before and remained so the first morning of the race. Another neighbor, Bill, sailed his Deja Vu, the other regatta entrant from our community. Leaving our own Little Neck Bay, we headed west, slipped under the Throg's Neck and then the Whitestone bridges. Once past the air traffic at LaGuardia Airport, we tailed a garbage barge into Hell Gate down the East River. The odor was an appropriate background scent for this justly named hazardous passage. Ironically, in the original Dutch "hellegat" means "beautiful pass." Obviously, the Dutch never had to sail behind a garbage barge from the 20th century Big Apple. As my family will attest, I smelled even worse upon my return home.

Brooklyn was off to port and Manhattan, with its skyscrapers and famous skyline, was on starboard. We got a view of North Brother Island where Typhoid Mary was incarcerated. I wrote a paper in school about her and felt odd knowing she had looked upon this river from her window so many years before.

Gloating the whole while, we sped past the rush hour motorists stuck on the FDR Expressway, knowing they would rather be sailing then stuck in gridlock. At least that's what most of us were thinking when we were the ones mired in traffic. Beyond the Brooklyn Bridge was New York Harbor, the South Street Seaport and the square-rigger Peking. We glimpsed the Statue of Liberty shrouded in the morning fog as the Staten Island Ferry busily carried commuters to work. The entire city had already awakened and marched itself headlong into another grinding workday. And here we were off on a leisurely sail for a three day weekend.

The starting line was off Rockaway Point. We arrived at about 1000 hours, four hours before the race was to start. The anchor hopped off the shell covered bottom for a while before setting. Those with the first watch took advantage of the break to take a nap. One race veteran reminded us to sleep whenever we were not on watch. This was sound advice. Some of us partial to afternoon siestas find that apt advice off the water as well.

The race committee boat was a working tugboat. Its overwhelming size made it easy to spot and its sheer mass ensured that any sailboat that rammed the committee boat would be the worse off for it. Forget about being disqualified, your boat would simply sink and withdraw from the race. This race committee boat added its incomparable might to buttress its authority.

Our Arcadia, Quentin's 38' Beneteau, started with Division 4 (PHRF, non-spinnaker). The sight of such a huge fleet of vessels under sail was enough to bring joy to the heart of anyone who loves sailing. The work of sailing the 191 nautical mile course began in earnest as a strong southerly blew 15 to 20 knots off the starboard beam. We sailed eastward off the south shore of Long Island. Two trimarans, Toshiba and Transient, whizzed past easily doing 20 plus knots, each with their windward hulls flying. They would finish the race in about half the time we would. While we watched the multihulls rocketing by us, Bob served up a delectable repast of Spanish rice, which proved that not all food during the race had to be cold and/or tasteless.

As the old aphorism goes, you can't sail away from your problems. We were reminded of the real world sometime in the middle of the night when we passed the TWA flight 800-search

vessels several miles south of us. Even after this tragedy, life went on. The distant lights off to starboard were the last I saw before I finished my watch and fell asleep in the forward cabin amidst the sail bags. The sound of the bow wave just inches from me on the other side of the hull was a soothing lullaby.

July 26: Friday

With daylight came fog. We could barely see a boat length beyond the bow. A fishing trawler would emerge from the fog only to disappear into its midst again. We periodically gave warning blasts from our air horn as we heard others doing the same. The foghorn from Montauk Point seemed to be constantly changing direction in the meandering mist, from off the port bow, the starboard bow and then from the port beam. Walter and Manfred, our navigators, kept us on track with the Loran and GPS. Breakers murmured somewhere to port and we finally saw the lighthouse blinking its lone eye and sounding its mournful horn.

As the fog lifted, the wind dropped but the tide ran with us. We entered the Plum Gut, the channel just south of Plum Island. Whirlpools swirled menacingly on both sides of us, separated by chop. We saw two other hapless racers closer to the island swept into a vortex, spinning 720 degrees bow-to-bow just a few feet apart. Luckily, we made it through the Gut and the race unscathed. While waiting for wind we encountered the Neverland Express, a Tartan 30 in Division 3 (PHRF, spinnaker). They marveled at how we had kept pace with them despite our stove, oven, ice locker and other weight. They were tactful enough not to mention the considerable additional ballast our crew provided compared to theirs. One fact seemed certain, when there is no wind; even fast sailboats go nowhere.

A few of us dozed while sitting on the rail. A breeze from the southwest got us moving at four knots through the water while the changing tide pushed back at two knots. The miles started to tick off as the telltales fluttered. The sun shone in a perfectly cloudless azure sky. Great for catching some rays while sitting on the rail but not for making wind and racing. From the cool of dawn, the heat of midday and the falling thermometer in the evening, we went through endless clothing changes. As soon as we struggled out of our foulies or added a Polartec, it seemed like it was time either put them on or peel them off again.

A baked ziti dinner at sunset began my watch. Warm food was a luxury and cause for celebration. Sometime around 2300 hours the Loran started to work erratically and all our shipboard electronics suddenly died. Thanks to a full moon and the lighted buoys we were never in any real danger. We continued to sail the boat as fast as we could. We checked the telltales with our flashlights regularly to adjust course or trim for speed. We neared Stratford Shoals and wanted to stay clear of its shallows. At midnight the wind shifted from the southwest to the northwest. After what seemed an eternity, we finally lost sight of the Stratford lighthouse after 0100 hours and the end of my watch. Still wearing my wet clothes, I fell into the windward berth in the cabin to sleep a deep, dreamless four hour sleep.

July 27, Saturday.

The last morning of the race we were blessed by an outstanding sunrise, splashing highlights over the waves behind our transom. I munched a power bar for breakfast. Quentin tried one

and gagged. They are an acquired taste. As my wife is fond of reminding me, I am a gourmand not a gourmet. Quantity, not quality. It's worked for me so far.

As the sun rose, we got a glimpse of the other racers in our vicinity. Mary Dominique's Glory, a C&C 34 (Division 5, PHRF), was within sight. Mary's an excellent racer and we felt pretty good just knowing we were fast enough to see her stern. The end of the race was not too far off. At about 0800 hours, 41.7 hours from our start, we sailed into Hempstead Harbor, past the Glen Cove Breakwater and race committee boat. The committee fired the shotgun marking our first to cross the finish line in our division status. Though our corrected time put us in second, we got "the bullet," which had us whooping and cheering like little boys.

The next day an official awards ceremony was to be held with warm food and various liquid refreshments. Nevertheless, immediately after the race there was one reward we all looked forward to no matter how we placed, a long, hot shower.

Just the thought of how good that shower first felt sounds like a good enough reason to do the race again next year.