

Mackinac Race History 2004 - 2008

A New Course and a New Handicap System

"On the way to the 85th sailing"

The 80th Bayview Mackinac in 2004 was not only a light air race, it was also an upwind race. The winner, *Denali*, a Nelson Marek 68 owned by William McKinley, didn't have a single paid sailor aboard. "A lot of us have been friends since high school," McKinley said of his crew. "That's part of our secret. Plus, we like to be together." In a typical Bayview Mackinac, the 70-foot boats try to finish around midnight Sunday before the island bars close. Most of the bigger boats are in Monday morning, and the last boats are in by Monday evening. This year, the 70-footers arrived at the island in time for breakfast, not the bars. A couple of dozen boats were in the harbor by



2:30 p.m. And as the bars started to get busy late Monday afternoon, more than 150 of the 263-boat fleet were still out on the lake, including much of PHRF A, a fleet of mostly 50-footers. The race annually draws the fastest sailboats on the Great Lakes, but the 80th race on Lake Huron will be remembered most for the windless hole off the tip of the Lower Peninsula. It seemed to last until the boats passed Bois Blanc Island, just east of Mackinac Island. After that, the boats usually picked up a reasonable 10 to 12 knots of wind. But then it tended to be right on the nose. *Allegiance*, a 50-footer owned by Don and Helen Holstein, got all the way to Bois Blanc without putting up a spinnaker. The result was boats that were behind had a chance to catch up in the lull. Any boats that managed to be in front of their competition at the end of the lull got moving first when the westerly winds finally hit.

The lull came so close to the end that after nearly 300 miles, boats in the same fleet sometimes finished within minutes of each other. "Any wind shift in the last five minutes could have changed the order of the boats," said Gary Graham, owner of the C&C 35 *Contender*. The Great Lakes 70 class was so close, the first five boats finished within less than a minute of each other. First place went to *Stripes*, owned by Bill Martin. "Anybody can sail a boat in wind," said Bill Alcott, owner of *Equation*, which finished second in the turbo class. "There's precious few that can sail in light air and we had a lot of the precious few. We sailed better and faster in the light air than any boat I've ever been on." The 90-foot super turbo boat *Genuine Risk*, owned by Randall Pittman, was the first boat to the island, but with handicaps it finished fourth in its class. The secret to sailing through the lull was testing sails and wind direction to squeeze the most out of a little wind. *Saturn*, the first boat to finish in PHRF A, used what sailors call a wind seeker. "We put up the lightest sail, and we used incense to see which way the wind was blowing," said Mike DeLano, *Saturn's* crew chief. For the shorter shore course, which the smaller boats used, John Barbour of Grosse Pointe leased his second NA 40 to John Burke. He gave the 40-foot boat the temporary name of *Scary But Stiff*, picked up a crew of other Cal 25 sailors and ended up beating Barbour's *Velero VII* and taking second place. "I'll have to ask Barbour if he'll charter me the boat again next year," Burke said. OK, it was slow. But it was fun. John Rummel, owner of the NA40 *Morning Star* managed to just skim the Michigan shoreline to catch the puffs. Coming into the straights of Mackinac for a short time they were ahead of *Nitemare*, a GL70. With his great performance he finished 1st overall in the Cruising Class. 2004 results can be found at [this link](#).

This was the last year the entire fleet used PHRF. With many of the problems inherent with PHRF, Bayview became the first club in the Great Lakes to introduce the internationally recognized IRC handicap system for its racing fleet. First established in France and Great Britain, it had spread to different sailing nations of the world. The rule uses a TCC number for each boat. The methods used for the calculation of IRC TCCs are kept secret by the IRC administrators. IRC is a rating rule to handicap different designs of keelboats allowing them to race together. Each boat's rating (her 'handicap') is calculated using measurements of the boat; her length, weight, draft, sail area, etc. The resulting time corrector, the boat's 'TCC', is her handicap. After a race, each boat's elapsed time (the time she has taken to complete the course) is multiplied by her TCC to calculate her corrected time (her race time making allowance for the characteristics of the

boat).

The 81st 2005 Mackinac race got off to a slow start Saturday, so slow that there was a 55-minute start delay because of a lack of wind. But by late afternoon the shore course fleet was on a



spinnaker run, with a 10 to 12 knot breeze and a nice, sunny day. Long course boats, crossing Lake Huron to Southampton, Ontario, were beating into a light northerly wind. The wind eventually went to the southwest winds during the rain to northwest winds when the rain moved out. Of course, sailors take weather like that in stride. "It's going to take some luck, and it's going to take some skill," said Michael West, racing his *Split Decision*. "But that's what makes it fun." With all the changes in the weather, "The boats that respond to it fast enough will do well," said Stephen

Hicks, the owner of *Melange*. Other owners were philosophical. "It's a typical Mackinac, a little bit of everything," said Chuck Williams. This is his 25th Mackinac race, but his first time racing his own boat, *Rebel*. His son Chad, 21 and daughter, Wendy, 24, were sailing with him; it was Wendy's first Mackinac. Richard Lambert was another Mackinac veteran racing his own boat, *Laura Lee*, for the first time in a Mackinac race. "I've been in it," Lambert said of the predicted heavy winds. "Thunderstorms go pretty quick, so I don't worry." No matter what the weather, most of the approximately 3,000 sailors in this race just look forward to sailing with friends and the thrill of the race, from the time the boats leave the Black River in Port Huron, to the Mackinac Island awards party on Tuesday. On Wednesday, they'll start looking forward to next year's race. "I'm always looking forward to this," said Ron Whalen, racing his boat, *Notorious*. This race was won overall by *Colt 45*, a Great Lakes 70. When asked on how they managed to win tactician Greg McQueen gave the following 4 points. 1- Have a plan, 2- Know where you want to be at certain times (such as when the sun comes up), 3-Know where you want to be relative to the competition, 4- Do the boats east or west of me have more wind? Greg also attributed to sailing with only a crew of eight where most GL70s carried fourteen. Obviously Greg's strategy works since they also went on to win overall in the Chicago Race to Mackinac. 2005 results can be found at [this link](#).

2006 - Yes, records are made to be broken. But this quickly? Everyone connected with the Bayview Mackinac Race thought the elapsed speed of the 2005 race wouldn't be equaled for a long time. "I thought it would take us about 20 or 25 years," race chairman Lance Smotherman said. Instead, the record stood for exactly one race. *Windquest*,



capitalizing on near-perfect sailing conditions, tore up Lake Huron and arrived at Mackinac Island at 2:57 p.m. Sunday, an elapsed time of 24 hours, 17 minutes, 38 seconds. The wicked pace by *Windquest* only set the tone for the rest of the 240-boat field. "I thought it would take us a while to duplicate what happened last year, but here we go again," Smotherman said. "The wind blew hard, and it blew hard most of the time. It was a great time to sail."

Although *Windquest* crossed the line first, *Equation* had the best corrected time in 40:06:48. Like *Windquest*, *Equation* faced ever-changing conditions, from squalls to lulls to wind dead on its nose, as it came through the Straits of Mackinac. "I'm just glad we're here," Alcott said as his crew tied up his boat. "I've never seen as many sail changes in sailboat racing in my life." What was predicted to be a slow, hot race turned literally overnight into a fast and mild temperatured one. During the first night, winds were between 10 and 15 knots and from the southeast, a perfect direction from the sailors' point of view. That meant all night they could fly their big spinnakers, the big, colorful sails that produce maximum speeds. "Last night was one of the nicest nights ever," said Doug DeVos, owner of the longest boat in the race at 86 feet. Sunday's winds remained strong but variable, with occasional squalls. It made sailing unpredictable, but fast. All the boats on the long

course were around the rounding mark by 10 a.m. Sunday in the benign southeast winds. All but three boats on the shore course rounded their mark at Alpena by 3 p.m. Usually, the final few boats will crawl past the finish line at Mission Point after today's awards presentation, around the time the party is winding down. Not this year. *Fortune Cookie* was the last boat in, earning the designation as 2006's Pickle Boat crossing the line at 4:32 p.m. Monday in an elapsed time of 53 hours, 2 minutes. "We'll wrap it up with a bow long before (Monday in) the evening," Smotherman said Monday morning, which is exactly what happened. How was that possible? Weather conditions to be sure because winds picked up after a dreary start Saturday morning in Port Huron. Doug DeVos, owner of *Windquest*, said winds ranged from 10-30 knots, fueling his 86-foot Max Z86. "The wind really picked up (Sunday)," DeVos said. "We had to change sails, but you have to adjust in this sport. That's why this race is such a challenging one." But along with the race conditions, technology is having a huge impact on the sport. There is such a staggering amount of information available wind and wave direction, the exact position of a competitor's boat, up-to-the-second weather conditions and forecasts -- plus advances in design and materials, proving "the fast boats are going faster," Smotherman said. The huge, speedy boats such as *Windquest*, *Equation* (which set the 2005 record) and *Trader* continued to smash records and lower finish times. But with so many older, vintage boats still in competition in the race, old-fashioned skill and experience are still necessary. "That's why we still have the handicap system in place, as well," Smotherman said. "It's like golf, where an average golfer can still compete against a Tiger Woods, so to speak. It's the same in this sport." 2006 results can be found at [this link](#).

For the 83rd sailing of the 2007 Bayview Mackinac race a new course was introduced. Instead of using the two courses of the past, the new Thunder Bay course was used that went around weather buoy #45003. This time there was a 15 knot northerly all day Saturday but as a big high



pressure system came in over Saginaw bay the western part of the fleet totally stopped. In many cases these boats had to sail in circles for eight hours looking for the slightest wisps of wind. Boats that chose to sail up the eastern half of Lake Huron were rewarded with steady winds all the way to the weather buoy. One such sailor was rewarded by taking that route. In years past, whenever Frank Kern III would finish a Bayview Mackinac race, he'd be required to call back home to tell his father, Frank Jr., how the crew did. "Dad also was an avid sailor, until passing away four years ago. As soon as we got in, the first thing I did was call him and tell him about the race," Kern said. "He loved it." There would have been a heck of a story to tell Tuesday afternoon. Kern's boat *Carinthia*, a J120 sailing out of the Bayview Yacht Club, was crowned the overall champion at Tuesday's awards party at Mission Point.

Carinthia's elapsed time was 43 hours, 14 minutes, and 28 seconds. After going through the correcting formula, the corrected time was 47:26:07. That edged both *Power Tripp* (James Kraft, Grosse Pointe Sail Club, 47:40:12) and *Velero VII* (John Barbour, Bayview, 48:19:42). It was Kern's first overall title, not to mention his first class championship (in J120 class), in 28 years in the race. "This was very special," he said. "I can't say enough about my crew. We put a lot of preparation into this." The ironic thing about Tuesday's awards party was the fact many boats were missing it.

Approximately 15 boats completed the 252-mile course during the annual party, each cannon fire symbolizing another boat reaching Mackinac, then being robustly cheered by some 3,000 sailors. Approximately 80 boats had arrived by late Monday night, about 30 percent of the fleet.

Considering the previous year, a stunningly fast race, by comparison there were more than 175 boats in by noon Monday. "You've got to have some patience in this game," race chairman Phil Lyon said. "Everybody is on one course." There was some concern strategy was going to be compromised, but several sailors noted that wasn't the case. "The decision-making was very much there," said Bill Peterson, owner of *Chewbacca*. "You're closer to shore, which for us was a little different," Peterson said. "It's a little different look." That also appealed to Phil O'Niel, owner of *Natalie J*. "We saw a lot more of the Michigan shore than we ever have," said O'Niel, who won

his class. "In the past, after the first hour, you'd never see it." Aitken was the owner of *Ariel*, a 33-foot Tartan. Last weekend, *Ariel* competed in its second Mackinac race. But it wasn't the type of race Aitken had hoped for. *Ariel* had to retire after a mechanical failure - about halfway up the mast, one of the spreaders failed - about 5 1/2 hours into the race. The spreader is a major structural part that holds up the mast, so without that, you need to get the sails down before you risk losing the rig. "It was pretty intense," Aitken said. "It was a huge disappointment because we spent all year preparing for that mentally and training for it and getting the crew ready for it. And physically, all the food and money you spend. So now we've got a lot of boat food we've got to eat." 2007 results can be found at [this link](#).

2008- It was inconceivable that Bruce Geffen and his boat *Nice Pair* could have had a better finish in the Mackinac race. Multi-hulled boats like Geffen's catamaran wasn't eligible to be declared the race's overall winner. But the 38-footer's 20-hour, 40-minute trip to the island means it finished behind only the 60-foot trimaran *Earth Voyager* (a record 14 hours, 57 minutes) and the 86-foot single-hulled *Fujimo/Windquest* (16 hours, 50 minutes). *Fujimo/Windquest* was the overall race winner, while *Nice Pair* won the multi-hulled division on handicap time. "The race was absolutely the best you can imagine," Geffen said, "For a (38-foot) boat to be the third boat of (223) boats, I can't even describe the feeling." Geffen said strong winds made for a fast but difficult race. "At times it was really, really tough - especially at the top of the lake and the top of the Mitt," he said. "But the boat kept on going really fast, and we were doing the best we could." Despite the fast race, the finish was slow going, Geffen said. "The last 10 miles, the wind kicked up to 25-35 mph, and three-foot waves were directly in our face," he said. "The last 10 miles took about two hours. It was very, very difficult and all we could do to keep moving." A boat that didn't get to Mackinac Island Sunday attracted much of the attention in the Race. *Stars and Stripes*, a former America's Cup winner, lost a mast early Sunday morning and nearly sank in Lake Huron.



Stars and Stripes doing 25 knots before losing her mast

A strut failed on *Stars and Stripes*, causing the rig of the boat to come apart from the stern. The 11-person crew, none of whom was hurt, was able to attach the buoy before the rig sank into the water. "The fortunate thing was, no one got hurt," race chairman Burke said. "Evidently the struts broke that support the mast. But we're just thankful no one was injured." A powerboat which was trailing *Stars and Stripes* towed it to nearby Presque Isle. *Stars and Stripes* was only approximately 55 miles from Mackinac Island when its race ended. There was plenty of rain early Saturday, but other than that the sailing conditions were almost perfect. Nearly 30 boats were already on Mackinac early Sunday evening, a near-record pace, and 101 were in by 10 p.m. with 125 still out. "Extremely fast, they've smashed some records big

time," Burke said. "Early on it was very windy, visibly it was tough at times, but everyone was moving." None more so than *Earth Voyager* owned by Ray Howe, 60 foot trimaran, was the first boat to finish the 252-mile course at 4:57 a.m. (elapsed time of 14 hours, 50 minutes). "Ideal conditions are different for different boats, but I would say a lot of boats enjoyed racing in these conditions," said Bob Wiesen, who was aboard *Pied Piper*, the GL-70 Class winner (22 hours, 17 minutes elapsed). "It was a fun race to compete in, but everything on the boat is absolutely soaked," said Ron White, owner and skipper of *Cheekee Monkee*, who finished third in the multihull class (22:32:15). "It's been a good race, things have been mixed up and I like that," Burke said. "That's good, it doesn't favor any one type of boat in particular." Jim Rodgers, who was aboard *Night Train*, was treated for bruises and released from an Alpena hospital early Sunday morning after falling into the water while being hoisted up to the mast in a boatswain's chair. Rodgers was attempting to fix a mechanical problem when he fell into the water. Brothers Robert, With Jerry Schostak as skipper, a series of boats named *Fujimo* crossed the finish line first several times in nearly 40 Bayview Yacht Club's Mackinac races. For this year's competition, his sons leased the DeVos family's *Windquest*, an 86-foot maxi racing yacht with an additional 10-foot bow spread. They entered it under the name *Fujimo AKA Windquest*. Half of the 26 crew members were experienced racers. They include Jerry and his wife, Elyse, three of four sons

(one son lives in Israel), daughters Lindsey and Stefanie, three of 14 grandchildren, former *Fujimo* crew members and businessman Dick DeVos' son, Ryan. "Our family has raced together since my boys were little," said Jerry Schostak, whose goal is to finish it in 24 hours, cross the line first and, with any luck, win the overall competition. "When the wind starts blowing, we go toward it, not against it. We are a family that sails together, plays together, works together and loves each other." 2008 results can be found at [this link](#).