

Mackinac Race History in the 1980s

The rule of 5's come back with a vengeance

"On the way to the 85th sailing"



Maggie Wake New Old Goat

The race was becoming a sprint wherein the racing classes crews were set on the rail to keep the IOR designed boats flat for the duration. Gone were crew positions of having strictly a cook that did nothing else on the heavy wooden boats. Ironically, it was also no longer an all male sport. Maggie Wake became the first female old goat in 1984 with others to follow. Fleet sizes hit the 300 mark in 1980, 1981, and 1985. The IOR handicap rule which began with so much promise was being replaced by the newer IMS rule. Dissatisfaction with any rating rule brought some one design classes in vogue such as the C&C35, Catalina 38s, Tartan 10s, and the North American 40s (NA40). Built in the mid 70s, this Dick Carter designed NA40

racer/cruiser became very popular with sailors in the midwest. By the early 80s there were nearly 18 participating in the race each year and many were winning the race.

1980 kicked off with the slowest race of record with Don McQueen's NA40 Sundance winning IOR overall with 44:09:08. The start was burdened by shifting erratic winds and steamy temperatures. Seas were calm. The breeze died entirely between the Class E and F starts, and a 40 minute delay ensued. Shortly after the start, a violent thunderstorm erupted. The *Golden Goose*, a 45 foot sloop owned by singer Gordon Lightfoot of "Winds of November" fame and the Coast Guard cutter *Bramble* were struck by lightning about 5:30 pm Saturday as the charted northeasterly through Lake Huron. Lightfoot's boat continued without radio power, while the *Bramble* and it's anchor chain was welded together by lightning. At least 5 boats were dismasted and a Coast Guard helicopter airlifted an injured sailor to a hospital.



Don McQueen's Sundance



The next year the 12 meter *Heritage* was the first boat to finish and was the 1981 Class A winner in the one of the roughest Mackinac races. High winds out of the northwest were gusting to 50 knots at times, and waves were up to eight feet that dogged the fleet from 9 pm to 4 am on Sunday in 50 degree temperatures. 18 boats dropped out that year and four boats dismasted.

In 1984 another legend was making its place in the race history books. Sassy, Dutch Schmidt's new 78 footer broke the long course record held be a previous version of the boat in 32 hours, 26 minutes and 43 seconds.

1985 was deluged with applications to enter the race. When all was said, 316 boats were entered in IOR, PHRF and ULDB (multihull) classes. Believe it or not the forecasters called for weather with light to moderate winds, but did not take in account the now famous rule of 5's. Late Sunday the wind built to 25 knots out of the southwest, but as a front came through, a giant shift for the worst hit the fleet. Near Tobermory, the NA40 *Maxitrol* called the doctor on the *Bramble* that they had a crew member with chest pains. Taking all her sails down, the *Bramble* steamed near and sent Fleet Surgeon Calvin Hughes out with a coast guard crewman to assist. Appearing in just a wind breaker the good doctor examined the patient aboard *Maxitrol* and recommended an evacuation to the closest hospital. A launch came from Tobermory and the crew member boarded the launch in ten foot seas. Ironically the patient recovered in the hospital while Doctor Hughes broke his ankle walking ashore from the *Bramble* at Mackinac Island. Later the wind came out of the northwest and the temperature dropped into the 40's. Suddenly there not only dismastings and boats dropping out but a "mayday". On Tom Lowry's C&C35 *Tomahawk's* a crewman went below and found waist deep water inside the boat. It appeared to be coming from a large opening on the starboard side amidship. The sent out numerous Maydays giving their loran position. Finally all 8 members of the crew into the life raft as the decks became awash. They had managed to make contact with the *Bramble* and Com. Charlie Bayer Sr. on *Old Bear*. Charlie was about a mile and a half away and immediately altered course to lend assistance. Joining his crew of 8 on *Old Bear* they proceeded on to Alpena. *Tomahawk* later sank at 11:20 pm 26 miles west of Tobermory, Ontario. The national weather service reported the winds were in the 40 knot range and waves were 10 feet high in the lake. A total of 96 yachts dropped out of the race. 4 yachts were dismasted and several broke their booms. Helicopters lowered fuel to several yachts and one was towed into a Canadian port by a freighter. Because of this, a safety rule was added to have a minimum amount of fuel for such emergencies and is strictly enforced. To this day if you ask many old goats which was the most difficult race they had sailed in they will tell you 1985. The quote from the Detroit Free Press headline was very appropriate, "Mackinac race winner: The lake!"



Com. Charlie Bayer Sr., skipper of *Old Bear* embracing Tom Lowry, skipper of *Tomahawk*

In 1987, the 63rd Mackinac Race was fast, not a record fast, but the big boats finished early. Early finishers included Steve Gagne's *Triump* and Jerry Schostak's *Fujimo* in the the 50 foot class, both from BYC. Doug and Maggie Wake won their 4th consecutive win in their NA40, *Velero VI*. Aboard that year was the venerable John Barbour who continues to campaign the venerable *Velero VI and VII* to this day. Also introduced that year was the International Measuring System (IMS). For the first time a boat's handicap would be determined by the conditions on the race course.



Velero VI in 1987

The 1988 race was the complete opposite of the 1985 race. Being one of the slowest races in 15 years only 47 of the 281 boats entered had finished by midnight Monday. *Fujimo* arrived at Mackinac Island at 12:32 pm and had enough corrected time to finish in front of *Sassy* to lead her in the standings. Eugene Mondray's *Leading Edge*, a Joubert / Nivell 50 foot sloop, finished a little after 1pm but had a competitive match race with *Sassy*. "You couldn't ask for a better race," Mondray said. "I couldn't have asked for a better finish, but not a better race. Just off Bois Blanc Island, about a mile from the finish, she caught a breeze and we didn't. Its incredible how close we were." A very touching story was the performance of Ayers Morrison Sr. in his Pearson 30 sloop, *Sunshine*. She had never placed before and the previous year had been the pickle boat. In 1988 she won overall in IMS and Ayers, who was an old goat and over 70 years old, was reported to be dancing on the tables at Mackinac Island wearing his newly received winner's flag as a cape.



1989 was even slower. Dick Jennings's maxi *Pied Piper* was the first boat to cross the line at 8:33 pm on Monday. Russ Schmidt's *Sassy*, the largest boat at 78 feet crossed at 11:36 pm and was followed by Bill Martin's *Stripes*. The last of the 250 boat fleet finished on Tuesday wafting home on a westerly zephyr.

Jerry Schostack won class 4 times in this decade in his *Fujimo fbf*. The Schostack family chartered the 86 foot yacht *Windquest* also known as *Fujimo* in 2008 to celebrate Jerry's 75th birthday. They won overall in the IRC division one last time. What a birthday present it was!

