

Mackinac Race History in the 1990s

IMS, PHRF, and Cove Island's last hurrah

"On the way to the 85th sailing"

During this decade the International Offshore Rule (IOR) was in its last gasps while being replaced by the International Measurement Rule (IMS) and the Performance Handicap Racing Fleet rating (PHRF). The larger boat one design and new level racing classes were becoming popular such as the J-120s, One Design 50s, and the Great Lake 70s. Based on the famous Santa Cruz 70s that were designed for the California to Hawaii Transpac Race, the GL70s epitomized these large size boats with their ability to go fast downwind in heavy air.

In 1990 the last of 250 boats still sailing the Bayview Mackinac Race trickled across the finish Tuesday, wafting home on a westerly zephyr. "It was a great race ; we had a little of everything," said Don Biganeiss, a sailor aboard the 45-footer *Invictus*, which finished 10th in the IOR fleet at 1:01 a.m. Tuesday. "There were no 20-foot rollers, no thunderstorms, no lightning. It was just a great ride. Nobody lost." At nightfall, 23 boats were still trying to finish, but the wind was down to three knots and dying and a number of them spent their fourth night on the water. It was the third straight slow race with the first finisher, *Stripes*, crossing the line at 12:01 p.m. Monday. *Pied Piper*, a Santa Cruz 70 and a sister to *Stripes*, was the only other to finish the 259 nautical mile course inside 48 hours. *Stripes* was the top overall boat in the 25-yacht IOR class, with Oliver Grin's *Collaboration*, a Nelson-Marek 46, topping the 50 IMS entrants. *Dotsy*, Bart Currie's Morgan 36, was top finisher among 184 in the PHRF division. Official scoring logs kept for the race committee by a dozen boats showed the average speed at eight knots. The wind was from dead ahead 30 percent of the time and from an angle 70 percent, with almost no straight downwind work. By Tuesday afternoon, 90 percent of the boats had finished, and several hundred sailors and friends gathered where the band was playing on a lawn near the finish. The party at Mission Point watched stragglers finish while enjoying the traditional postrace delights of beer, rum and rock 'n' roll.



In 1991 the first act was not so hot, but the finish was exciting for the 67th Bayview Mackinac race . After a slow first leg, the first three boats to Mackinac Island, *Cynosure*, *Pied Piper* and *Sassy*, staged a memorable rush to the finish Monday. The rest of the pack mirrored that pattern as the second leg of the 298-mile race turned into a wild sleigh ride on Tuesday. Easterly winds drove the 250 boats, in a wave from Cove Island to the finish. "It's not often you go from Cove Island to Mackinac



Island in 12 hours," said Sandy Thompson, who sailed on the North American 40 *Velero*. "Hey, I've done that in three days." Boats got to finish with their spinnakers, the big billowing sails that drive them to their fastest speeds. "We were so pumped up," said Ric Hess, "It was the most exciting day I've had racing." Hess' *V-Max*, a Taylor 40 from Chicago, covered only 20 miles on Sunday, but went 110 miles on Monday. "It was a perfect sailing day," he said. "It was gusting up to 27 knots....You could actually see the distance being eaten up." There were no reported injuries and no damage to the boats, except for blown sails. The final downwind leg allowed smaller boats to surf up and catch the bigger boats on handicap. *Cynosure* took the title as first-to-finish. *Relentless*, a Farr 37, was first in the single IOR class. She was followed by six one-tonners, boats about 40 feet long. "We heard *Cynosure* finish on the radio, and we figured we needed about a knot-and-a-half more speed to catch them," said Nils Muench, skipper of the third-place boat, *Moonraker*. "But the wind came up, and we had our extra knot-and-a-half." *Heartbeat*, a Wylie 46 that was the fifth boat to finish, continued her strong Mackinac season with a first in IMS A, though she lost IMS overall to *Limerick*, owned by Arthur Cope. In Performance Handicap Racing Fleet, Bill Abbott's *Surprise* rode the waves to a first-place finish over 167 boats. Scarce breezes slowed the last of the field, and the pickle boat, *Sunshine*, didn't finish until 4:06 p.m. Tuesday.

In 1992 *Stripes'* margin was only 1 hour 17 minutes over *Cynosure* in a wet and wild 68th Mackinac. *Stripes'* elapsed time of 36 hours, five minutes and 39 seconds was far off *Sassy's* 1984 record of 32:13:43. This

Mackinac race had a little of everything -- fog and clear skies, light winds and heavy sailing upwind and down. The largest boats had relatively easy and fast races, but smaller boats were farther down the course when the wind shifted on their noses. The smaller boats had a long, tough slog across Lake Huron. But up front, *Stripes* and *Cynosure* were locked in a close finish that has become the hallmark of the past few Mackinacs. *Stripes*, *Cynosure* and *Pied*



Piper, all Santa Cruz 70s, and the three traded places as first-to-finish over the past four races. *Cynosure* crossed first last year, *Stripes* in 1990. *Pied Piper* was first to the island the year before that. Martin credited the sail, called a jib top, for keeping *Stripes* in front near the end of the race, when winds were 30 knots at times. Closing in on the island, *Cynosure* was more than a mile back before closing on *Stripes* near the finish line. "We must have tacked 20 times in the last three or four miles," said Martin. Earlier in the race, "they did everything better than we did," Martin said. "They changed sails first, they shifted gears faster, they did everything right and we still sailed away from them. It wasn't fair." The two boats were in sight of each other -- except in foggy spots -- for the whole race. But the lead *Stripes* built up was too much to overcome, said Peter Reichelsdorfer, *Cynosure's* co-skipper with Terry Kohler. In one of the flat spots, *Stripes* found a shaft of air that missed *Cynosure*, Reichelsdorfer said. "They got a little puffette, you couldn't even call it a puff, and squirted out ahead," he said. *Sassy*, at 78 feet the

largest boat in the race, was third to finish, followed by another Santa Cruz 70, *Pied Piper*. Jerry Schostak's 50-footer, *Fujimo*, was fifth to finish, followed by another 50, Gene Mondry's *Leading Edge*, and *Equation*, a J44. A top boat in the IMS, *Sensation*, might have had the best race of all. She finished in 43 hours, 28 minutes and 43 seconds, the second boat across in IMS. *Harmony*, a 55-footer, finished 49 minutes ahead. *Sensation*, a North American 40, rounded Cove Island, the approximate halfway point on the long course, with the 50s. Then in the second half of the race, *Sensation* hitched a ride on the J44 *Equation's* wake, a maneuver similar to drafting in auto racing. That brought a question from *Sensation* co-owner Mike Thomas. "We were on their quarter wave for miles," said Terry Hutchinson, *Sensation's* helmsman. "Mike asked me what I would do if he wiped out, and I said I didn't know. Hit him, I guess." *Equation* did momentarily spin out of control, but *Sensation* avoided her. One boat, *Minor Detail* from Port Huron, struck a reef and was abandoned; the crew was rescued without incident. Being a total loss, the boat that replaced her is called *Major Detail*. Sixteen boats withdrew for various failures, human or mechanical. One, *Rehsom*, lost her mast. On the short course, first to finish was *Old Bear*, raced by Chuck Bayer.

In 1993 there wasn't a lot of strategy. For most of the boats in this record-breaking race, the problem was getting dockage at the island rather than the sailing. The 237 finishers arrived so fast that the cruising boats had not been cleared out of the Mackinac harbor. Hundreds of boats had to be shuffled aside until Monday morning. The racing was much simpler. There were few sail changes, only a few sprinkles of rain, and plenty of wind. "There wasn't much you could do but try to get the last little bit of speed out of the boat," said Bob Scoville, who sailed on John Stevens' *Sprint*, the overall winner in the PHRF division. *Sprint* won Class C and edged Larry Ruhland's *Dolphin* for the division title. *Sprint*, a 40-footer, had the conditions she liked best. She was able to keep up with 50-footers for much of the race, Scoville said. "We used the 50s as our benchmark," he said. "We tried to hold on to them as long as possible. They were just inching on us, just inching." *Sprint* managed the division victory without a single sailing professional on board, said owner Stevens, not counting Scoville, a former sailmaker who describes himself as a recreational sailor. Like most boats, *Sprint* sailed nearly the most direct route to Mackinac, straying a little more than five miles from the rhumb line. That also applied to the boats on the shorter shore course. Chuck Dennis' *Audacious*, winner of PHRF Class D and second overall among shore course boats, sailed 211 nautical miles -- two more miles than the direct route. The race was the Mackinac debut for *Audacious*, an Islander 34. Dennis said the boat, which has a cruising-oriented winged keel, had won only a few flags in local competition. "This was ideal weather for this boat," he said. "It was my day out there." Many, if not most, boats in the 69th annual race had no upwind sailing at all. *Audacious* never tacked the entire 209- nautical mile race, and jibed only two or three times. John Johns of Ann Arbor, who sailed on the Santa Cruz 70 *Stripes*, said his boat made three



sail changes, and that was probably one more than the other big boats. The fast race was capped by *Windquest's* elapsed time record of 26 hours, 41 minutes and one second. *Windquest* averaged more than 9 1/2 knots. Even the tail-enders had a fast race. *Minor Indiscretion*, the last boat to finish, reached Mackinac at 10:38 a.m. Monday, about a day earlier than most Mackinacs end. The race produced big numbers on the speedometer. Ed Palm said his Farr 37 *Fast Company* set a personal best of 15.2 knots surfing off one wave. "The whole boat was humming," said Palm, who finished third in IMS Class B. "We must have rode that wave for two minutes. I couldn't get off it."

In 1994 like a lot of sailors, Jerry Frabutt felt the decisive leg of the Bayview Mackinac Race began at about the halfway point, near Cove Island. And that's where his 34-footer *Jazzy*, the apparent winner in PHRF Class E, made her move. Three boats were ahead of *Jazzy* at Cove Island. But *Jazzy* went south of her competitors and passed them. "It worked. I'd rather be lucky than good," said Frabutt. *Jazzy*, a J-105, edged one of the lake's best sailors, Dave Irish in his 33-footer *Traveller*. The 70th annual Mackinac was winding down to a fast, though routine, end. By 10 p.m. Monday, all but eight of the 232 boats had finished. Among the big boats, *Windquest* was the first to finish and the preliminary winner on handicap. *Windquest* survived a protest from *Pied Piper*, whose owner, Dick Jennings, claimed *Windquest's* handicap should have been higher. The boats had a relatively easy race . Some of the big ones stopped near Mackinac Island, but winds generally allowed the boats to keep moving. *Windquest* finished in 29 hours, 26 minutes, 58 seconds; her record of 26:41:01 was set last year. In her class, PHRF A, *Windquest* corrected to an easy victory, more than an hour ahead of the second boat to finish, *Renegade*. One of the few surprises was a third by *Pied Piper*, which knocked off the newer and longer *Trader*. "Trader stopped for us. That was nice of them," quipped Jennings, referring to how the boat lost wind near Mackinac . Until the wind stopped, "this was one of the nicest Mackinacs I've sailed," Jennings said. PHRF Class D featured a close race between *Eclipse* and *Natalie J*. The boats were close early Monday morning before *Eclipse* pulled away. "We were in a luffing match way out in the lake, and we said, 'This is nuts,' and sailed away from him," said Phil O'Niel III, who raced *Natalie J* with his father. "He got some wind we didn't and pinwheeled around us. That was the race ." Though showers hit a few boats, no storms were reported.



In 1996 the boats emerged from the fog at 6:50 Monday morning. After 40 hours of dueling with shifty, light breezes, the first skipper across the finish line turned out to be more humble carpenter than rich yachtsman. "It was storybook," Ray Howe kept repeating on the dock. "We were all euphoric to see the island and find the buoy through the fog. And when we made our dash, it was wonderful." Howe's

handmade, 60-foot *Earth Voyager* overtook *Trader* just 200 yards from the Mackinac Island finish line, straining at seven knots with its bright pink spinnaker harnessing a precious puff of wind. Dead calms and glassy waters plagued the race, and Howe, who went as fast as 30 knots and as slow as zero, recorded a sluggish time of 40:25:25 at 7:25 a.m. *Trader*, a 70-footer, was 61 seconds behind *Earth Voyager* with an elapsed time of 39:56:26 (the boats started at different times), 12 minutes and 12 seconds ahead of 1995 PHRF Class A runner-up and sister ship *Renegade*. At midnight, 35 boats had finished the race with 207 remaining on Lake Huron. Ten had dropped out, including 1995 PHRF Class A winner *Sassy*. *Tomahawk*, a J44 owned by T.K. Lowry, came in first on the shore course at 2:08 p.m. with a time of 46:58:30. *Trader* was the official first finisher, but Howe could care less. This storybook tale belonged to him. "The monohulls weren't racing against us, but we were racing against them," said Howe, a 54-year-old high school science teacher from Rochester, N.Y. "Where I come from, the biggest boats are 35 feet. We came here for competition, handicaps or not. And we were first." Howe captained the product of 4 1/2 years of work. He did not buy his high-tech vessel -- he built it. And he didn't grow up on the water, either. After withdrawing all of his savings and selling some of his property, Howe had \$380,000 in cash and was ready to begin. Engineering students from Rochester and Massachusetts Institutes of Technology helped him assemble the 60x40 vessel that barely fit in his backyard. "I like students; they are brilliant, and they work cheap," Howe said. "But I'm not a pointer, you know, one of those builders who just tells people what to do. I'm hands-on." Everything was going according to his vision -- until the fire. "Our boathouse burned down in 1990," said Howe, visibly choked up. "I lost a year and a half of work and \$200,000. I don't like to talk about it. It was really, really hard to take." Howe had to borrow more than \$100,000 from a friend to get started again, and he finally got *Earth Voyager* shoved off in 1991. It was difficult to keep sailing. Howe even picked out his light-air sail from a garbage dump while in Toronto, and had it repaired for \$300. He has used that sail to race all over the nation. The wind was moderate at the start Saturday, and when *Earth Voyager* was the first to round Cove Island at 9:57 a.m. Sunday, she was running at 30 knots. "It was so fast, it was dangerous," said Mary Sterling, Howe's girlfriend and shipmate. "I had to watch myself." But the boat hit the doldrums after that, stopping and wearing out Howe. He had to make six sail changes an hour on average, and visibility was so poor he had to tack to find the Cove Island buoy. "I have never been in a race where the wind varied so much," Howe said. "It was so opposite what they said it was going to be, and it rained, too." Standing on the island dock afterward, wearing the same jogging pants and flannel shirt in which he works on his boat, Howe talked about how tired he was despite the thrill of victory. *Earth Voyager* has a crew of just seven, and no one got more than two hours of sleep the entire trip. "I was so exhausted, my head went down and hit the cockpit," Howe said. "The other boats have all kinds of guys for a crew; I've basically got my girlfriend and my kids. What made it worse was there was fog 90 percent of the race, we have no radar and we couldn't see



a thing." *Earth Voyager* didn't see *Trader* or *Renegade* until the end. The crew of *Trader*, captained by owner Fred Detwiler, was happy to hear the cannon at the finish. Detwiler gave his 11-year-old son, Ward, the helm to cross the line but allowed him only an unlit cigar. The rest of the crew cracked open cold ones as the boat entered port. "It was really exciting," Ward Detwiler said. "It was my first race, but it wasn't the first time I got to drive. I'll remember this one, though." *Renegade* skipper Ken Meade, his eyes as droopy as a limp spinnaker, lamented on deck. "What's disappointing is that you have no control over light air," Meade said. "We ran a good race, but it's frustrating when you stop and stop again. We were dead 37 miles from the finish for about seven hours." [1996 Final Results](#)

1997 - Tuesday morning, bright red socks brought the *Irish Mist* a little fame, but not the kind she wanted. Crossing the finish line at 6:25:37 a.m., *Irish Mist* earned distinction as the pickle boat in the 73rd sailing of the Bayview Mackinac race. David Spiers and his crew of seven wore the same red socks with yellow smiley faces for all 66 hours and 45 minutes it took to complete the race. "I guess the socks didn't really work for us," Spiers said. "They worked in the other way." Actually, a wind instrument that didn't work had more to do with the last-place finish. Spiers discovered the instrument wasn't working while sailing to Port Huron, but he took it apart, smeared it with a little diesel oil and got it to work before the start. "Then we got out on the lake, and it didn't work again," said Spiers, an engineer. In its place, crewman Mark Aitken took over as spotter, keeping an eye on the waves to watch for wind. Any wind. But *Irish Mist*, a 41-footer competing in the PHRF Class I, spent much of the race in one place, including a frustrating 20 minutes near the finish line. "We did well for the first 10 hours," Spiers said. "Then it got very, very slow. We sat and played around Cove Island for a while. "This morning, we could hear several of the boats finishing when we were only about an hour and a half away. But that's when the wind died again, and we just sat there for 20 minutes until it came back. I was pretty relieved when we finally crossed." Actually, *Irish Mist* wasn't a huge straggler among the 17 boats in her division. The first one crossed just after midnight, and the next one at 3:30 a.m. Four other boats came in between 5:15 and 5:39 a.m. And *Irish Mist* did shave six hours off her time from last year. Unfortunately, she may not get a chance to do better. This was the last Cove Island race as the buoy was pulled afterwards of the 259-nautical mile course is uncertain because the Canadian government plans to eliminate the Cove Island lighted buoy used to mark the turning point, and there may not be a Cove Island course after this year. Which would give *Irish Mist* a little piece of sailing lore. "We'll be the pickle boat the last time this course was run," Spiers said, laughing. "Some dubious distinction." *Wahoo*, skippered by Edward Wheatley of Ann Arbor, won the multihull division of the race with a corrected time of 57 hours, 57 minutes, 51 seconds. *Earth Voyager* was first to cross the finish line, but with a corrected time of 69:27:57 did not finish in the top 10 of the handicapped race. [1997 Final Results](#)



In 1998 there were screaming finishes in 40 knots of wind and driving rain, but there were black holes with no wind that left boats bobbing helplessly. The 74th Bayview Mackinac race had it all. The windless holes dotting the course meant that winning took a little luck and a lot of skill playing the wind shifts. By 5:30 p.m. Monday, 139 of the 251 boats had finished. The fluky winds meant plenty of duels. A boat would pass another in its class, only to see that boat catch up in the next wind hole. *Cynosure* and *Equation*, in the IMS-A class, dueled throughout Sunday. "That helped," said David LaMere, an *Equation* crew member. On-the-water duels push crews harder than sailing alone. *Cynosure* got to the line first, but *Equation* was right behind and won the class on corrected time, according to unofficial results. Two other big boats will have to come back next year to set the records they hoped to get. *Stars and Stripes*, the former America's Cup catamaran, not only did not set the record owner Steve Fossett wanted, it didn't even win a flag in its class. *Stars and Stripes* finished in the middle of the 10-boat class, once its minus-272 handicap was calculated into its first-to-the-island finish time. *Stars and Stripes* arrived at 6:23 p.m. Sunday, finishing the 259-nautical-mile Cove Island course in 28 hours, 23 minutes and 42 seconds. The record was 26:41:01, set in 1993 by *Windquest*, a 70-foot monohull. Another boat that hoped to set a record, *RX Sight*, the former Whitbread Round the World racer out of Sweden, didn't even stay at Mackinac Island. It headed to Charlevoix immediately after finishing so it could be pulled from the water to be checked for damage. The 72 footer ran aground north of Port Sanilac on Saturday, but still was first to finish in the IMS-A class. It was third on corrected time, according to preliminary results. The varying winds meant that most boats used almost all of their sail inventories, constantly switching to keep up with the changes. There were periods of great winds that had crews clinging to the rail trying to keep the boats balanced. But then there were the dead spots that all sailors find trying, to say the least. "This Mackinac was mediocre," Tim LaBurge of Windsor said after finishing his 15th Mackinac race crewing on the SC-70 *Stripes*. "I hate the dead spots." But he conceded that even the doldrums have an upside. "It's a heck of a challenge, and that's a good thing," LaBurge said. *The Great Whisper*, a Tartan 42, won the Cruising class last year, but didn't have the same luck this time. It was fourth in the preliminary standings. "We found some holes and the fleet just caught up to us," said owner Todd Jones. "This year, as always, you've got to be in the right place at the right time." *The Great Whisper* races most major races aggressively, but for the second year in a row raced Mackinac in the Cruising A class. Last year it raced that class because Jones' 69-year-old father Warren was on board. "We wanted to stay a little closer to shore," Jones said. The crew had so much fun, they did the cruising class again this year, he said. "Twin barbecues, loud music, good food," Jones said. "It's a nice way to go to Mackinac ." [1998 Final Results](#)



1999 - The post race party was in full swing, within view of the Port Huron to Mackinac finish line with nearly 70 boats from the fleet of 293 were still on the lake Tuesday afternoon struggling to finish in light winds. The Cove Island course was the place to be in the 1999 Mackinac . All the boats on the Cove Island course finished by Monday night. But over on the shore course, there was little or no wind. This meant about 600 sailors were stuck on the lake, and countless spouses and friends were frustrated waiting on shore.

The shore course was so slow that the usual two-hour transit across Saginaw Bay took 10 hours, according to Pam Wall, owner of the Tartan 34 *Chippewa*. *Chippewa* took first in PHRF P, one of the few shore-course boats awarded a flag at the post-party. Most shore-course class winners were not announced because there were boats still in contention on the lake. To add insult to injury, a handful of shore-course boats finished during the post- race party, well able to see the partyers onshore and hear a band playing. As the race committee cannon signaled their crossing the finish line, hundreds of people at the post-party cheered the latecomers. The race committee could announce only the overall winners in two divisions. Overall and class winners in the IMS division, the maxi-boat fleet, were *Windancer VI* (first), *Pied Piper* (second) and *Stripes* (third), owned by Bill Martin. *Trader* made it a clean sweep, adding first place overall for the Cove Island course to its first place in PHRF A. *Trader* was owned by Fred Detwiler. *Oracle* and *Insatiable* were second and third overall. *Major Detail*, a J-35 owned by Bill Vogan of Port Huron, won the extremely competitive Level 35 class. There were 21 boats entered and no handicaps. Vogan said his boat rounded Cove Island within four minutes of five other boats in the class and it was a horse race all the way to Mackinac. "We changed leads five times," Vogan said. *Major Detail* had the lead coming into the finish line, got a lift from the wind near Round Island within sight of Mackinac , and widened its lead as it finished. *Wild Ride*, owned by Bill Wilder, and *Griffin* out of Port Huron were second and third. "There wasn't anything bad about it," Vogan said of the race , as his crew draped his first-place flag around his shoulders. The J-120s were another competitive class. For the third year in a row, *Big Kahuna* owned by Jim Tepel, edged out *Hot Ticket*, owned by Bob Kirkman of Bayview Yacht Club, for first place. "We sailed really hard together for about 10 hours," Tepel said. "We were probably about 10 minutes ahead of *Hot Ticket* at the finish." By Tuesday evening, 48 boats still were on the lake. Late Tuesday finishes were common in the 1940s and '50s, said Chuck Bayer Sr, who holds the record for the most Mackinac races finished his 53rd. But in recent years, improved boat and sail designs have made Monday afternoon a reasonable finish time. Tuesday night isn't a record for a long race, however. Bayer said he finished on Thursday one year. "We didn't do it legally, though," he said. "We sent a fisherman into Rogers City for more food, and you're not supposed to do that." [1999 Final Results](#)



The shore course would remain intact, but the Cove Island course was finished. "We're going to shake things up next year," said 2000 race chairman Jon Somes in 1999. The new long course would go north from Port Huron to Southampton and then make a hard

left, and head straight across the lake to Mackinac Island. "No more Ducks," Some said, referring to a group of islands in northern Lake Huron that are notorious wind shadows. Thus, the new decade would begin with a new course that went to the Bruce Peninsula.