

From the rule of the New York 32's to the rule of 5's With the advent of World War II the race continued *"On the way to the 85th sailing"*

As the late thirties rolled on, the improved economy enabled sailors to enter larger and more modern boats. The newly built (1936) Sparkman & Stevens 45 foot New York 32 *French Boy* came to the Great Lakes in 1940. That same year as an experimental course Commodore Trent McMath with the cooperation of the U.S. Lighthouse Service had a lighted buoy placed virtually in the geographic center of the center of Lake Huron on Six Fathom Shoals. Leaving it to port the 62 foot S & S yawl *Manitou* covered the course in under 49 hours and won overall.



Boats jockey before the start of the 1942 race.

In 1941 the race had 32 entries and returned to the shoreline course. *Manitou*, owned by Jim Lowe again carried the field again overall by beating Baccarat's 34:45 hour record of 1934 by two hours.

In early 1942, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Commodore Charlie Beck approached the president's office about holding a regatta that year. He received a response from Franklin Roosevelt's personal secretary M. H. McIntyre, "that while supplies, equipment, and facilities for yacht repairs would be very limited, yachtsmen may feel free to continue to the best of their ability." He added that yachting was actually encouraged due to the navigational and boating skills derived from our sport which would certainly help train future Navy personnel. As expected, because many of the young men that joined the service, the entries dropped to 18 yachts. The decision was also made to change the course from the south side of Bois Blanc Island to the north. This was the year that Wilfred "Toot" Gmeiner won his first in class with his newly



Toot Gmeiners's NY32
Apache blasting downwind

purchased New York 32, *Apache*. Ideally designed for the moderate winds of Long Island Sound with her narrow prow and long overhangs she could also handle the rough ocean conditions of sailing to Bermuda. The following year Toot also managed to capture 1st overall for the Detroit Yacht Club again. The next year the New York 32 Cletus Welling's *Viteese II* made it a real sweep of the 32s by taking overall in 1944.

It has always been a myth among the old time sailors about the year of 5 would always be a gagger or a giant blow. 1945 did not dispel that legend. To quote the late George Van Sr. aboard the S & S sloop *Blitzen*, "The skies were overcast and the atmosphere ominous in the Black River at Port Huron....*Blitzen* took the lead in the racing cruising

class, as it was then known, in the first five minutes and sailed through the the cruising and racing divisions which had started earlier. Carrying her famous number 1 genoa on a starboard tack *Blitzen* gradually converged on the shore. We went to our bullet proof jib on a port tack and went back on starboard, jamming her way through mounting seas as the wind rose above 30 miles. The shore was getting close again and the leadline could not be found. R. J. Pouilot rigged a heavy wrench to a light line, tossed it overboard and an instant later screamed to come about. As we did, *Blitzen* bounced on and off the bottom as she went on port tack." Above Point Aux Barques it got worse. George said, "I was below flattened up against a windward bunkboard, looking almost straight down at a guy in the leeward bunk when the steel sheets on the 'bullet proof [sail] let go...It was blowing 45 and I could see the flasher at Harbor Beach, well to leeward through the skylight. Solid water streamed down the decks and flew 30 feet into the air as waves crashed into the doghouse which saved those on deck from being washed overboard" At 6:20 pm on Sunday off of Thunder Bay Island *Blitzen* tacked to port. To the crew's horror the starboard spreader fell off the mast and was dangling from the shroud. Bobby Bryant volunteered to go up the spar to fix it in the 40 knot winds. He was successful but came back bruised up from slamming on the mast in his bosun's chair. John Rummel at 15 years old got bounced from *Blitzen* for being too young for the race although he had been sailing with her earlier that season. However he did manage to catch a ride with *Manitou*. When the wind picked up



Blitzen Russ Pouilot driving in front of Ernie Grates. George Van, Sr. at mast. John Rummel & Bud Swegles aft at coffee grinder. Bill Noah on bow under staysail.

Vitesse II, the previous year's winner, was not so lucky. With her working jib and no main, she went aground near Forester, Michigan. Her crew knew she was near the shore but thought she was in deep water. As she landed on the rocks they fired a flare and could see the trees on shore. The wind and waves drove her further in and later the crew could just walk ashore. The 56 foot *Blitzen* went on to win the race overall with *Apache*

Manitou got a major rip in her mainsail. Because the waves were too powerful on starboard with just their headsail and storm main, they tacked the boat and headed towards Goderich. John and fellow sailors Frank Oneil and Frank McBride spent the entire Saturday night resowing the sail on deck. After putting up the main at Goderich they tacked and sailed the rest of the way to Mackinac Island. Because they had not been seen for a very long time and their radio was out, the Detroit Times had printed in large headlines that *Manitou* was feared to be sunk. When on land John immediately called his family to tell them he made it intact. You can watch John's account on YouTube by clicking [here](#).



Clete Welling's New York 32 *Vitesse* High and Dry Near Forester, MI in 1945

taking Racing Cruising B with only six finishers.

Still competitive, *Apache* went on to win the Bayview Mackinac Race overall in 1959 and won her class in 1963. She continues to be sailed by the Gmeiner family with her distinctive indian head main and currently resides in the lagoon of the Detroit Yacht Club. *Viteese* went through a complete retrofit about 5 years ago and is now available for charter under her new name, *Gaucha*, in Boston. *Manitou* later saw service in the Coast Guard Academy fleet and was periodically sailed by John F. Kennedy during his presidency. In 1999 she was purchased by James Lowe's granddaughter and had a full rib up restoration in Deltaville, VA. She is presently sailing out of Piney Point, Maryland. *Blitzen* currently still sails and is available for charter in Maine.

