

Queen of the Great Lakes

Post War Macs, Escapade, & Rule of 5's Return

"On the way to the 85th sailing"

After World War II boat owners and crew started to return from the service back to racing. As a result of the war effort aluminum masts started appearing on the new sailboats. The yachts also started getting bigger with the return to prosperity. There were three 72 footer yawls, John Ford's *Royona III*,

Timkin brother's *Kittyhawk*, and Wendell Anderson's *Escapade*. Also racing in the Great lakes was Bob Schleman's 12 meter *Nyala*, George Sollit's 62 foot *Onakay* and Lloyd Eccelstone's 64 foot *Josephine*. Launched in 1937, *Escapade* came from the drawing board of Philip L. Rhodes and built by the Luders Marine Construction Company of Stamford Connecticut. She was designed to the maximum of the Cruising Club of America rating rule, which governed races such as the Newport to Bermuda Race and limited entries to a maximum length of 73'. *Escapade* was not only built to the maximum length but also one of longest in terms of waterline length with a 55' LWL and the widest with a generous 17' beam. With her centerboard the yacht offered a reduced draft of 8' and 14' with her board down. At 2,630 square feet of sail area her designer pushed the measurement rule to the limit. By all accounts, and even by today's standards, *Escapade* is still considered a big boat.



John B. Ford's 73-ft. ROYONA III.

In 1947 she was purchased by BYC's Wendell Anderson and brought to the Great Lakes. In 1949, she did the Bayview Mackinac Race under skipper Clark Swart. She finished first but was beaten on corrected time by John B. Ford's equally sized *Royono III*. That was when the crew started to refer her as the "The Big Blue Pig". Anderson along with his sons Jack and Wendall Jr., Clark Swart, Eddie Wunsch, Al Thomas, Harry Watson, Ted Buttrick, Tom Lott, and navigator Jack Longley, attacked the 1950 Mackinac race with a vengeance. Although it never blew over 25 knots, she flew up the lake and finished at 3:47 Sunday afternoon on the old short course to set a record of 25:47:19 beating the previous record by two hours. With this she also won first overall on corrected time. The same year she went on to Bermuda and won the Henry C Taylor trophy for the best finish by a Great Lakes yacht. The following year of 1951 she really tore up the Great Lakes. She managed to win overall the Toledo Yacht Club Mills Cup in early June on Lake Erie. She then continued by winning overall the Chicago to Mackinac Race. Although not first to finish, she won the Port



Huron to Mackinac Race on corrected time. Reporting her victory, the Detroit Free Press declared her the "Queen of the Great Lakes." Then in late August she continued her winning streak by placing first overall in the Rochester Cup (Lake Ontario). In 1952 Anderson elected to take the yacht east for the Newport Bermuda Race but passed up the Bayview Mackinac since the Bermuda was every even year. This made it impossible for many boats to participate in both races. Commodore Lynn Stedman and Carter Sales did some negotiating with the Chicago Yacht Club and it was agreed that they would alternate the dates with Bayview having their race first on even years and Chicago first on odd years. This is a tradition that has lasted to this day.

In 1953, Wendell Anderson returned to the Bayview Mackinac to try her hand again. The fleet of 66 starters got off in a light to moderate southerly which lasted until Pointe Aux Barques on the end of the thumb, when a northerly came through and *Escapade* took off, rail down, until she parked off Presque Isle. *Kittyhawk* and *Sabre*, who had chased Anderson all night caught up and a boat for boat battle ensued. But they were not able to pass the queen of the Great Lakes, who drifted across the line at noon on Monday, winning her third overall Mackinac. Due to his appointment of Ambassador to NATO by President Eisenhower, Wendell Anderson turned over the wheel over to his son, Jack, for the 1954 Bayview Mackinac Race. In his quest to beat their 1950 elapsed time record, the boys from Bayview drove her hard. By Saturday night she had lost sight of the entire fleet, running downwind. After a bad knock at 9 am Sunday Jack ordered the spinnaker down and *Escapade* hardened up and took off for Drummond Island. A few miles from the Detour Island Light the strong northwest winds they had anticipated arrived, she tacked onto starboard, and drew a bead for the island. The wind slowly died toward the end of their journey, stranding the rest of the fleet behind them. While the judges were attending a party at the Grand Hotel, *Escapade* surprised them by prancing across the finish line only 27 hours after starting, her fourth consecutive Bayview Mackinac overall and tying *Baccarat's* old record.

1955 brought back the rule of 5's with a vengeance. With small craft warnings the fleet of 68 yachts started in a 15 knot freshening breeze on a broad reach to Mackinac. Shortly after sundown, the wind shifted to the Northeast and started gathering force. By 1 am, the fleet was being battered by gale force winds estimated at 50 mph and waves of 14 feet. The gale subsided early Sunday morning, leaving 25 knot headwinds. By Sunday night the air went completely dead, however the damage had been done with 26 yachts withdrawing from the race. Although many yachts were dismasted or damaged, there were few injuries. Damage to sails and rigging was extensive, caused mostly by the sea state rather than wind. Commodore Howard Girardin sailing on Nick Geib's *Fleetwood*, reported their near escape from disaster as they were hit by lightning, and later found all their beer cans in the bilge fused together. *Fleetwood* won class C in spite of the disaster of fried beer. The race was won overall by James Carlin in his *Glory Bea II*, one of the smaller boats in the fleet.

In 1954, Wendell Anderson sold *Escapade*. In 1967 she was raced again for the last time in the Bayview Mackinac by Peter Grimm and won an unprecedented fifth overall on corrected time. Before most boats had finished, she had raised a broom symbolizing

her clean sweep of the race. She is now on the hard at Keefe Kaplan Maritime at Pointe Richmond, California waiting for the next new owner willing to pony up the money to restore her to former glory.