

The Three-Legged Race to Bermuda

by Carrie Gentile



“It’s all about securing a decent parking spot at the yacht club,” says Annapolis J/35 skipper Bruce Artman about his inaugural race in the 18th bi-annual Bermuda Ocean Race (BOR). His goal is to race hard and aggressively to the dock and then kickback in Bermuda for a short vacation.

This year’s installment of the BOR begins June 11 just off the Eastport YC in Annapolis and finishes 753 nautical miles later near St. David’s Head on Bermuda. Race organizers estimate about 30 boats will be on the starting line.

“I’m hoping for an upwind beat or even a downwind run, anything but a reach,” says Artman, who races his J/35 *T-Bone* in the local one-design fleet. “She doesn’t perform at her best on a reach.” So far, *T-Bone* is the smallest boat entered in the race, besides the Mini 6.5. Artman raced in the 2009 Annapolis to Newport race and used it as a dress rehearsal for the 2010 BOR. “We tasted defeat in the Annapolis to Newport race, and it was bitter and unacceptable.”

T-Bone has benefited from Artman’s care in preparation for the race. He cleaned out the fresh-water system, reinforced the standing rigging, purchased new sails and a secondary bilge pump, and rented a life raft. “I want to avoid anything stupid from going wrong,” he says.

The race course to Bermuda can be broken down into three legs, with most boats finishing in four to six days. The first is the 125-mile inshore leg down the Bay. “It’s usually a beat down the Bay, and sailors must be mindful of the shoals and commercial traffic,” said Beth Berry, one of Eastport YC’s BOR organizers and racers.

According to Alex Zahl, the race safety director, this leg offers a benefit over the Newport to Bermuda race because it allows crews to establish their watches and ensure the equipment is working properly before heading offshore.

“This is where the fleet begins to separate,” says Artman. He said he is happy to have racers with Governor’s Cup experience to help with tactics on this leg. “This

leg can have a big impact on the rest of the regatta.”

The second leg requires navigating the Gulf Stream, which has been likened to sailing in a washing machine. Racers can encounter light winds punctuated by powerful, fast-moving cells bringing breeze and lightning. The Stream itself is often lumpy because of the interaction of the four-knot current and wind.

Artman will be studying the Stream movements to better predict the currents and weather through the Gulf Stream and its eddies. “The big question will be how far north to go to capitalize on the eddies,” he says.

The third leg is the 300-or-so-mile stretch to Bermuda that varies from very light winds to stormy squalls.

“The race doesn’t get the respect it deserves,” says BOR Chairman Mary Ann DeGraw. Although the venerable Newport to Bermuda or even the Marion to Bermuda races may overshadow the BOR and garner more media attention, the BOR is a formidable bluewater race that attracts top-notch area racers and experienced

cruisers. And, the number of competitors has increased over the years.

The race boats will be equipped with transponders this year to allow people to track their progress via the event website, bermudaoceanrace.com.

Artman was steadfast in prepping his crew for emergency situations. Race rules require half of the crew to attend a sanctioned Safety at Sea course, but Artman required attendance by his whole crew of seven. “I don’t want the first time they see the life raft inflated being on the open sea.”

Perhaps even more adventurous than sailing to Bermuda through the Gulf Stream is doing so with a half-dozen teenagers. Captain George Kain, a high school social studies teacher and founder of the York-Adams, PA Sea Scouts chapter, has raced with handful of co-ed Sea Scouts on a Mason 43 Cutter Ketch in the last three BORs. The Sea Scouts work with Kain over the year to prepare for the race, including training on the ketch throughout the year and sailing to various locales around the Bay. A few have raced on the 1979 ketch from Marble- ➤

At sunset in the Atlantic, Joe Duehmig has the helm as he stands watch with Glyn Livermore. Photo by Mark Duehmig/markduehmig.com



➤ head to Nova Scotia with Kain. The young adults take turns trimming, and a few of the more experienced are able to take the wheel and become watch captains. But for most of them, this is the farthest offshore they have been.

"It's so much fun and it's rewarding to work with these kids," says Kain. "They're really motivated." He does admit he and the crew may lag behind the competitors in tactical skills; as he says, "We lack proper interpretation of the impending weather." They're like ski patrol—everyone's ahead of

them. They're the last ones on the hill... Our goal is not to win, but to get there safely and in time for the Friday fish fry at the yacht club."

Kain says the Scouts that race with him are always well-behaved, but he recalled an incident during the last BOR when the ketch was slammed by a microburst in the middle of the night. Water was coming in over the winches. "One of the male Scouts was catapulted off his bunk and landed in the next bunk that was occupied by a female Scout. I don't know which one was more shocked."

Like many BOR racers, Kain and his crew consider this trip an adventure vacation—combining a highly tactical sail with a few days on the handsome island. Kain and the Scouts will stay for a few days, take advantage of freshwater showers at the hotel, and hang out at the pink sands and blue-green waters of Horseshoe Bay before sailing back to Annapolis.



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A Year for Threshing Back to Bermuda

The 100-year-old, biennial Newport Bermuda Race—known to some as the Thrash to the Onion Patch—unfolds June 18 off Newport, RI. The historic 625-mile ocean race, organized by the Cruising Club of America and the Royal Bermuda YC, usually lasts three to six days, as competitors cross a stretch of the Atlantic Ocean known for its challenging weather, especially when it comes to the currents of the Gulf Stream.

The fleet has five divisions to allow seaworthy boats of many sizes and types to be raced fairly and aggressively for an array of trophies awarded in Bermuda at an elegant ceremony at Government House, the residence of the governor of this tropical island.

At print time, 175 boats had registered for the event. Among the Chesapeake contingent are Henry Morgan and his J/42 *Dolphin* crew. It's the 50th anniversary of Morgan's first Newport to Bermuda Race. (Look to the May issue of *SpinSheet* for more about his longtime crew.) Also in the mix will be High Point winner Doug Jurrius and his Cal 40 *Belle Aurore* team, Jim Muldoon's *Donnybrook* crew, and three J/120 teams: Jim Praley's *Shinnecock*, Richard Born's *Windborn*, and Greg Leonard's *Heron*. Two U.S. Naval Academy teams will compete: the TP 52 *Invictus*, skippered by Midshipman Peter Gibbons-Neff and the Navy 44 MKII *Swift*, skippered by Midshipman James Prieto. Peter Gibbons-Neff's Farr 395 *Upgrade* team and Hal Conrad's Morris 40 Shearwater crew will also make the trip.

For a complete history of the race and entry details, visit bermudarace.com.