

Around Long Island Race

by Jeff Sublett



Last years winner of the ALR was Frequent Flyer

The competitors are milling around in the starting area, the breeze is up, it's 2:00 PM on July 27th 2017, the horn sounds and they are off for a 205 mile race around Long Island. It starts under the watchful eyes of Lady Liberty and ends at the breakwater in Hempstead Harbor. After the finish line it's on to the Sea Cliff Yacht Club to celebrate. The race is known as The Around Long Island Regatta. This race was first run in 1977 making this the 41st annual run. The race is open to sailors of all levels and all sailboats 26 feet and larger handicapped according to PHRF (Performance Handicap Racing Fleet) rules which allow dissimilar classes of boats to race against each other fairly. The race typically last one to three days making a good test for all involved. The race course combines Harbor, ocean and sound racing in unpredictable July weather making it a tactical strategic challenge every mile, not to mention a real test of patience in the light summer winds on Long Island Sound in mid-summer. For you power boaters out there sailing thought the Eastern end of Long Island Sound in the summer means negotiating currents of 4-5 knots in boats making headway in the single digits, in a good wind. If you have ever cruised the Sound in summer you know any kind of reliable breeze is rare.

This year's event actually started with the Captains Meeting Wednesday July 26, 2017 at Liberty Landing Marina and the festivities officially end Sunday afternoon, July 30, at the Awards Ceremony and Beach Party hosted by the Sea Cliff Yacht Club, Sea Cliff, New York.

The idea for the ALIR was brought to the Sea Cliff Yacht Club back in 1976-77 by Frank Braynard, one of the creators of the South Street Seaport and the Bicentennial Tall Ships celebration in 1976. With the start in the harbor against the backdrop of lower Manhattan, the Statue of Liberty and Jersey City, the ALIR will reach a whole new level of popularity.

This year the race starts in the harbor just North of the Statue of Liberty and heads south under the Verrazano Narrows Bridge and out into the Atlantic Ocean. There they head East along the South shore of Long Island passing Long Beach, Jones Beach, Fire Island, the Hamptons and on to Montauk Point. After rounding Montauk Light they will head northwest to Plum Gut or through The Race, into Long Island Sound. Once in the Sound they head due West to Hempstead Harbor and the finish line at the Glen Cove breakwater. After that, it's a great party of music, food, drinks and awards at the Sea Cliff Yacht Club on Sunday afternoon.

Starting the race in the harbor made the actual start

observable to many more spectators than the previous starts off Rockaway Point near Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn.

The new start welcomed spectators and media from New York, Brooklyn and New Jersey. Regetta Chairmen Jim Aikman and Doug Wefer were very excited about this new venue and opportunity to showcase the ALIR Race in the same arena as the Americas Cup races last year. Not only was the start observable from New York City but there were great vantage points at Liberty State Park in New Jersey. There was a picnic like atmosphere in the park where I went to see the start. It was a mix of sailing enthusiast and people boarding the ferries to the Statue of Liberty. It was interesting to hear the exchanges between the tourists and sailors explaining what all these sailboats were doing, seemingly going around in circles awaiting the start. We may have the seeds of a whole new group of sailing enthusiasts.

To support the move to New York Harbor the Liberty Landing Marina in Jersey City will serve as a venue for overnight sailboat dockage prior to the start. Jason Dalli, General Manager at Liberty Landing Marina, loved the idea and made Liberty Landing Marina a co-host for the event and sponsored the



Gemini crew at the awards ceremony

Captains Meeting the night before the start at the Liberty House Restaurant in Liberty State Park. Mr. Dalli said, "We have always had competitors stop over on the way to the start of the ALIR but this year we are delighted to be a more integral part of the event".

I got lucky at the Liberty Landing Marine Center and struck up a conversation with a customer who just happened to be the overall winner of last year's race. Alistair Duke, the

captain of "Frequent Flyer". Alistair invited me down to see the boat and meet the rest of the crew.

Defending overall winners competing in the PERF division. The "Frequent Flyer crew: Tom O'Connell, Tom Keegan, Eric Stanley, Itala Goncalves, Scott Wetzel, Captain, Alistair Duke have been sailing together for many years. They sail out of Saugatuck Yacht Club in Westport Connecticut, and this year were the only member boat in the race. Their boat is a 2003 36 Foot Beneteau 36.7 sail number 52361, one of 250 in the US, about 15 in this area, all built between 02 and 08. It's a one design yacht, a number of boats built to the same specs. A displacement boat as opposed the newer surfing hulls by Beneteau, and one of six in class six for the ALIR this year.

The captains plan was to be Finished by Saturday night, 36-48 hours depending on the wind. The crew would do 4 hour watches, 4 on and the 4 off to rest. Later on after the race, Alistair said they may try 3 on and 3 off next time, he felt it would be easier to maintain concentration.

According to Alistair Duke, last year's winning captain, "by starting in the lower harbor they added a little more excitement to the event this year". He later related how exciting it was to sail through the harbor traffic and down under the Verrazano Bridge to reach the open ocean.

Alistair recounted that they had a thrilling sail down under the Verrazano Narrows Bridge and headed for deep water and a better breeze but it cost them some time against the boats that took the riskier inshore route better known to the local boats. They did well to catch up for the next 6 to 8 hours until the wind went light Thursday night. By then the inshore boats had a definite advantage, and they kept it Friday was spent flopping around with no wind just past Fire Island barely moving at 1 and 1/2 knots. Wind picked up around Plum Island and we had a sleigh ride to the finish. At the start the crew volunteered "We will eat well until Sat night, and a bit hungry after that when provisions get thin". And they did, deli sandwiches after the start, lasagna the first night, breakfast burritos the next morning, risotto Friday night and breakfast sandwiches Saturday morning. I'm guessing none of the crew lost any weight that weekend.

They finished the race in 1 day, 16 hours, 52 mins and 15 seconds, and respectable time but not a winning time this year. With no major awards waiting they headed back to Saugatuck after crossing the finish line. Despite not having the repeat success they had hope for, the entire crew hailed the race as a huge success, well organized, well run, and they are definitely planning to be back next year for the 42nd ALIR. Alistair said, "Although we didn't come home with the win again he was happy the victory stayed in the neighborhood, the winning boat and crew this year were from the Cedar Point Yacht Club a mile or so South of the Saugatuck Yacht Club on the Saugatuck River.

James Coffman, the winning captain of this year's ALIR said "I would definitely characterize the relationship between the clubs as a very 'friendly' rivalry. Alistair is a great sailor and his team has enjoyed a lot of success as well. While we compete hard, we also celebrate each other's wins. Alistair is



Frequent Flyer on station for the start.



The horn sounds and the games begin.

a class act and I appreciate that he radioed me shortly after the finish to congratulate us".

Team Gemini pulled off an impressive win in the 41st Around Long Island Race sailing their 2010 broad beam 37 foot Hanse 375 number USA 60468. As summarized by Cedar Point Yacht Club skipper/owner James Coffman, "We had an epic start, beating our way out of NY Harbor dodging the ferries and

container ships. We got stuck in the doldrums off the southern coast of Long Island near the Hamptons and rounded Montauk Point in the fog. We anchored in 2 knots of adverse current and no wind off Orient Point while watching 5 boats drift past us. After that we had the spinnaker ride of our lives as the winds built to over 20 knots from the NE overnight with the boat hitting a record 13.5

knots surfing down a wave. One last dramatic jibe took us on a perfect lay to the finish in Hempstead Harbor after 1 day, 16 hours, 13 mins and 29 secs of racing. Through great teamwork and constant focus, we managed to win Division 4, win overall PHRF Spinnaker fleet, receive the Bohemia award for best performance of a 1st time competitor, and receive the Jack Tar Crew trophy for the bowman of the winning boat (John Cavooges). This skipper couldn't be more proud of the whole crew - Trevor Uhl (Watch Captain), Brian Higgins (Navigator), Colby Jennings (Foredeck), Gavin Pommernelle (Foredeck and Trimmer), Ray Martin (Trimmer), John P Cavooges Jr (Bowman extraordinaire), and Kyle Riviezzo (Foredeck and Trimmer). Looking forward to the ALIR next year!"

I expect another exciting start in the harbor next year with more spectators, parties and events, we'll be there, hope you will as well. I'll be watching Gemini and Frequent Flyer, two different boat types, skippers and crews from neighboring yacht clubs, each with an ALIR win, I think we have the makings of great rivalry here. Both teams are planning to return so it sounds like there will be some good racing.

A note to the power boat readers. You may be thinking, 41 hours to go 205 miles, works out to about 5 miles per hour. Is that a race? A cigarette boat could do that in four hours, in smooth water, maybe even stop for lunch. Even for your average 20 -25 knot cruiser that would only be a long day trip. The boats and crews in the ALIR have to prepare a boat to support a crew's food, rest, and hygiene for at least three days of peak performance without stops. The crew has to calculate the route, the currents, wind



Gemini heading for the finish.



Newer broad stern boats.

and weather for every minute and mile of the race. When you and your team have done all of this better than all the other competition the feeling of satisfaction is indescribable, that's why they spend 41 hours to travel 205 miles.

Hope you will join us next year for the 42nd ALIR, as a spectator, a participant or just a fan. Have a happy, healthy and safe fall boating season.