

2012 Lower Huron Solo
By Tom Hughes

Watching the weather forecast during the week leading up to race day, it got worse every time I checked. Initially it started at around 15 kts for race day and by race day eve the forecast for the next day was 30 kts from the north with waves up to 11 feet.

There was quite a bit of discussion at the skippers meeting about the weather and how bad it would need to get to cancel/postpone the race. There was tacit agreement that if the race committee boat couldn't make it out to the start line the race would be called off.

The next morning, race day, those of us starting from Bridgeview or Port Huron were a bit fooled as we made our way up river for the start. Hardly a ripple on the water and about 8 knts from the west. I was in a dilemma as whether to put a reef in the main or wait until the wind picked up later. (which it was forecast to do) In the end I decided to put one in before I got out in the lake...thank God!

Once in the lake the wind gradually increased to about 15 knots (WNW) as we approached the start line. I had already partially furled in the headsail, but during the last couple of minutes before the start I realized the boat was still way overpowered. There was too much pressure on the head sail to furl more so I had to turn down wind to do it. By the time I got sorted out I was close to a mile downwind of the start line. Fortunately I was in a position (and the wind was in a direction) where I could make the line on one tack, but crossed the line 9 minutes late! To my amazement, the boat was going far better than I imagined it could into the wind and waves and pretty soon I was overtaking some boats. In all I only did two tacks to get round R12.(the last buoy of the shipping channel) All the time the wind and waves were increasing.

It was a broad reach to Kettle Point, mostly 25 knts on the beam. I saw some 28's and some less than 20's (not many).The weather forecast was for maximum wave heights of 11 feet. I think we experienced some of those and more. As one of the guys from down river put it "It was the first time he had ever looked up to waves the size of an apartment block" !! Fortunately the waves were mostly a reasonable distance apart, making it a "gentle" rise up and over them. Occasionally there were a couple close together which gave the boat a slap bang and me a soaking. I was doing a steady 7 kts with some 8 to 9 kts. My autohelm couldn't handle the tendency to round up so I had to hand steer once past R12.

I was wondering how it was going to be jibing around the Kettle Point buoy with a dicey autohelm, but once I turned down wind to make the turn the A/H managed until I got her around. Then back to hand steering. More of the same on the way back, but the wind was more forward and I couldn't get the boat going the same as before. Some big waves going right over the top of the dodger and filling my open transom with about 3 inches of water until it drained. A lot of water went down below also; under the bottom of the dodger and down the open hatch. I only found this once I was docked.

The first boat to finish was Jim Bennett on Spirit, a C&C 35 at 15:24. The next boat, and overall winner, was Noel Brockman, in his first Lower Huron event, on Quick and Dirty at 15.26. I

finished at 16:21 and was second out of 4 finishers (5 entries) in my division. The last boat to finish did so at 17:06. Overall, out of the 21 entries, 14 finished.

I had several scotches on my boat to get over the race before going to the awards party. Everyone was complaining about the beating they took especially arms and shoulders from hand steering.

Many thanks go to Dave Kember and Kyle Griffin for putting on a great event.

Excellent food was provided by Dave and his wife: juicy burgers, big sausages, all the trimmings and two yummy deserts.

The bar closed down at 10 pm, Dave Evans fell asleep immediately after the awards if you can believe, and everyone went and crashed on their boats.

It was quite a race. One that will be talked about for a long time. Since I started competing in this race in 2000 (and haven't missed one) I can only remember three really heavy wind races. This was the most challenging for sure.