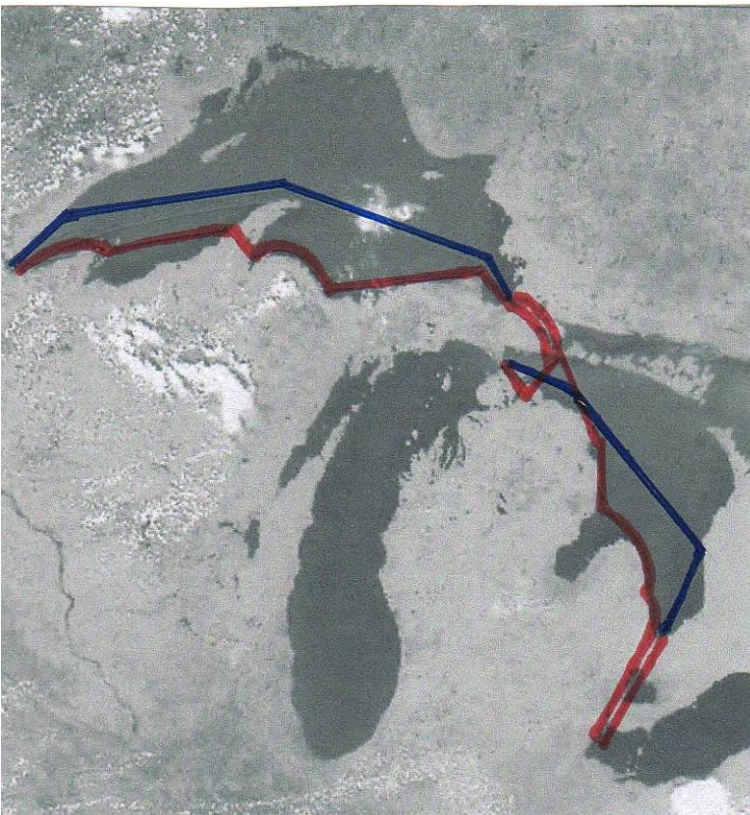


A GREAT LAKES ADVENTURE

The 2005 Travels of the Odyssey
Wally McMinn

The short version of the story is that the *Odyssey* traveled to Duluth, MN and back. As we all know, there is always more to the story than that during a 1500+ nautical mile passage on the Great Lakes. So here is a bit of a tale I hope you will find interesting and amusing. Like all of the ambitious campaigns in the sailing world, I had a committed and tenacious support team. Her name is Ann, and she probably has her own impressions of the *Odyssey's* adventures.



The GLSS Challenges (In Blue) and the Deliveries and Returns (In Red)

This year the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society (GLSS) offered three “Challenges”; the 27th Port Huron and 9th Chicago to Mackinac Island Challenges, the Supermac Challenge (held every three years), and for the first time, a singlehanded challenge in conjunction with the Trans Superior International Yacht Race. Participation in these events was the reason the *Odyssey* headed north from North Cape Yacht Club on Lake Erie in late June. The trip up the rivers is always charming, but long and slow. It does provide an opportunity for

the crew (GLSS=count one) to see what is working and is not working, and to calibrate the mind and body to life on the water. This year the cockpit VHF needed replacing the night before the start of the race. A call from NCYC’s PC’s Skip McCullough and Bill Rogge, who were delivering a boat up the St. Clair River, exposed a broken microphone.

The 2005 GLSS Port Huron to Mackinac Island Solo Challenge

The Port Huron to Mackinac Island Challenge is rated at 230nm with a rounding off Goderich, then on up to the Island. The first leg was an exhilarating close reach in 20+ kn of breeze. The *Odyssey* likes these conditions and arrived near the turning mark near the front of the twenty-three boats that started. This was good since it seems I had jumped the gun by ten minutes at the start and rather than return and restart, I opted to take the thirty minute penalty the race committee offered as an alternative. I still don’t understand all those flags and guns.



Heading Past Sarnia, Ont. for the Start of the Port Huron to Mackinac Solo Challenge

Most of the racers hand steer a good part of this leg as everyone is full of energy and glad to get under way. After a wonderful first leg, and on approaching Goderich, it became apparent something was wrong with the *Odyssey's* autopilot. My intention had been to finish the Challenge to Mackinac Island, and continue on with the second part of the event (the Supermac to Chicago). With confidence the problem could be sorted out and solved, I rounded and headed out into the lake for the long leg to the next turn at Presque Isle.

The wind and seas could not have been more cooperative. As sunset approached the seas settled to a comfortable 3-4' roll with a steady wind of 13-15 kn. I was able to balance the sail plan so the boat held course with the wheel locked. Remembering the experience of fellow solo sailor Phil Rubright who got locked in his lazaret when the top closed on him, I secured the cover and headed into the basement to check on the linear drive unit and wiring connections of the Autohelm 6000. Over the next hours of napping, tweeking the sails and wheel, and tracing all of the wiring connections, it became apparent I was not going to be able to find and fix the problem. The *Odyssey's* ambitious aspirations were now in question.

Solo sailors during long passages are good at playing mind games with themselves, mine went something like this. I have to cross the lake anyway, so why not keep going a bit. Once across, there are lots of harbors of refuge. Perhaps the unit will start to work later. I have done this before, let's see how things go. Eventually it was, I am more than half way there, might as well hang in, and so on, and so on. The conditions remained perfect with the usual beautiful sunset, starry night, Milky Way, shooting stars, sunrise, and Ann's tasty pasta salad for dinner, and again for breakfast.

In spite of the distractions, the *Odyssey* was still hanging in competitively and remained in the front half of the fleet sailing pretty much on her own, and on course. However, the wind always changes, and it did the next day. It backed to the southwest and dropped below 10kn. Spinnaker time, and that was a problem. Most of the fleet went through two to four spinnaker changes and jibes during the last half of the event. I had to stick to the cruising spinnaker, occasionally being able to pole it out a bit. Way underpowered for the *Odyssey*. GLSS requirements stipulate we are to be tethered to the jack lines from the time we leave the dock prior to the start until reaching the dock at the finish. There were only so many dashes to the foredeck for sail and pole adjustments possible with tether dragging along. It was frustrating as I slipped back into the middle of the fleet, but I was still making progress heading north, and eventually northwest.

Finally, after an elapsed time of about 54hr (up from 44+hr in 2004) , the *Odyssey* passed the green # 3 buoy opposite the Mackinac Island Yacht Club

and was greeted by the Race Committees' official acknowledgement of "Congratulations *Odyssey*, welcome to Mackinac Island". With mixed emotions, and limp arms, I had to inform the Committee that the *Odyssey* would have to stop at the Island due to gear failure and not continue on to Chicago as part of the Supermac event. It simply would not have been prudent seamanship to attempt another 280nm of hand steering after the roughly 36hrs. and almost 180nm just completed without a functioning autopilot. I was not going to complete the longest freshwater race in the world this year. I would also miss connecting with our good friends Don and Linda Bensing in Chicago who had helped make arrangements for dockage and layover.

The revelry and party on the Island are always an incentive to sail fast and finish the Solo Challenges. Even when participants withdraw from a Challenge they usually find a way to get to the Island for the festivities. This year most of the time was spent, with the help of GLSS resident engineer Bob VanEck, Harold Beaton, and several other sailors who happened to be around the docks, sorting out what was wrong with the autopilot. As so often happens, other North Capers were out and about on the lakes and on the Island. PC Shelly Rosen, PC Mike D'Arcangelo, Terry Brown, Larry Jacob, and Keith Sponer were cruising the Straits area aboard the yacht *Kestrel*.



The Tired Old Autopilot Drive Unit

After testing every connection while spending several hours on the cell phone with the Raytheon techs, the conclusion was that the drive unit (ten years old) had worn out and would need to be overhauled in their shop. Instead of opting for the uncertain prospects of a fix, I ordered a new (and

upgraded) drive unit through Defender. The unit was delivered the next day to Duncan Bay Boat Club in Cheboygan where the boat was to be laid over until time to head for Sault St. Marie and the Trans Superior. Again, with the help of Bob, the unit was installed the day it arrived and passed initial sea trials around Bois Blanc Island. During these trials, we were joined by Tom and Barb Munson who were at Duncan Bay following Tom's blue flag winning performance in the Doublehanded Society's Huron Challenge. We were all entertained on the VHF by the antics and cajoling of the crewed Port Huron to Mackinac fleet as they finished and tried, usually in vain, to talk themselves into an early dock assignment from the Bayview Y.C. docking coordinator.

With the prospects of the Trans Superior now looking good, the *Odyssey* was laid over at Duncan Bay while I headed back to work and the real world for a few weeks. For those who have not been there, Duncan Bay, at Cheboygan is one of the nicest, best run marinas in the area. The management and staff are accommodating and attentive and they seem willing to help with both short and longer stays of transient boaters. The *Odyssey* claimed victory on Lake Huron, with the "Lakes" and gremlins winning Lake Michigan. Lake Superior would be the tie breaker.

The 2005 GLSS Sault St. Marie to Duluth Trans Superior Solo Challenge

The Trans Superior International Yacht Race is rated at 338nm beginning at Gross Cap at the bottom of Whitefish Bay, leaving Copper Harbor to port, and finishing at the lift bridge entrance to Duluth Harbor. It is held every two years, and for the first time allowed singlehanded participants. The Lake Superior Yachting Association was the overall sanctioning entity, but allowed GLSS to select the solo participants and define the boat and equipment requirements. The Algoma Sailing Club of Sault St. Marie, Ont. and the Duluth Y. C. were the joint host clubs doing a great job of coordination, communication, and hosting the pre race skippers and post race parties.

The *Odyssey's* trip from Cheboygan past Detour and up the Saint Marys River was pleasant and uneventful until the alternator belts disintegrated with a loud bang. From the helm it was easy to

figure out what had happened as the engine immediately started to overheat. Suddenly the 600-1000 foot lakers, which were also making the passage in both directions, ceased to be the delightful diversion and entertainment, and looked mighty menacing.



A Fellow Traveler on the St. Marys River

I always make it a policy to have the chart at the ready when on the rivers, which is especially important on the St. Marys as the depths often vary from the dredged 28-30' in the channel, to 2-3' just a few yards outside. A quick look at the chart indicated a nice bar in 8-10' of water just downstream from my position. Using what steerage momentum the boat still had after shutting the engine down, I was able to do an "S" turn to starboard, then back to port and get out of the channel. A quick dash to the foredeck, anchor locker open, retaining pin out, and down went the plough. I had previously taken the time to tidy up the anchor lines, so had no kinks as it played out. Pure luck, and time to pause and reflect on the options. Fortunately, the weather was clear and I had a nice cup of cold coffee left.



Still a Mess even after Cleaning Up and New Belts

The scene in the engine compartment was ugly. Both belts were shattered into bits and pieces, with none longer than a few inches. There was dust everywhere along with spatters of what later turned out to be oil. Belt cord fragments had also wrapped around the shaft between the block and the pulley. After cleaning up the mess and unwinding as many of the belt fragments as I could get to, I decided to install the extra alternator belts I had on board and try to limp on up the rest of the way to the Kemp Marina at the Sault. It was a relief to see the temperature gauge return to, and stay, in the normal range for the rest of the trip.

The Kemp Marina is located in the American Sault just down stream from the locks, and is an excellent place to stay. The only other option for most of our boats is the Bondar Marina just across the river in the Canadian Sault. It is also very good. The *Odyssey's* wine cellar is empty for these events, so it was particularly nice to see Ann arrive and head into town for a victory (of sorts) libation and dinner.



The Kemp Marina at Sault Ste. Marie, MI

After further clean up and belt adjustment everything seemed to be ok with only a small bit of oil leaking. I have no idea what caused the belt failure, perhaps the belts themselves were flawed. The Trans Superior was a week away and I had to return to work again so the *Odyssey* sat comfortably in the Sault. Once through the Lock there was only the trip to Gross Cap and the start of the race.

On Saturday morning, August 6th eighteen crewed and twelve singlehanded boats emerged from the Kemp and Bondar marinas and headed into the MacArthur Lock at the Sault. The gathering is somewhat of a festival as many of the boats send a

crew member up the mast while those on deck celebrate with various good luck rituals, like coffee laced with champagne. This year's event drew a nice group of observers as the Locks celebrated their 150th anniversary. The fleet was as diverse as could be imagined ranging in size from the seventy foot mega crewed Santa Cruz 70s (*Colt 45* and *Stripes*) down to the diminutive Ranger 23 (*Jacelyn*) crewed by one. As the rafted fleet was gingerly raised the twenty feet to the Lake Superior level, a voice from a couple of rows behind hollered "Hey North Cape, say hi to John Greiner". He had seen the hailing port on the *Odyssey's* transom and went on to relate his good experiences at the Club during several regattas.



The Rafted Fleet in the Lock with Crews in the Rafters



A Mellow Eric Thomas Aboard Polar Bear



*Dick Lappin and Bill Tucker
Have a Laugh as Ginger Kay is Inspected*



Tom Agerter Aboard Jacelyn

The starting line is 10-12 miles from the Locks at Gross Cap at the base of Whitefish Bay. The fleet had a leisurely 2-3hr trip up the river and gathered around the starting line for what turned out to be a drifter start at 1:00pm. As a final check, I took a peek at the engine compartment and was dismayed to find a mess of oil spattered everywhere on the front of the engine and compartment. I later found out the alternator belt fragments had forced the shaft seal into the engine and broken the seal. It only leaked when the engine was running, and since the Trans Superior was to be a sailing event, there was no way I was going to turn back. I had eight quarts of oil aboard so figured that would be enough to get me off the lake if needed. The *Odyssey* has about 750 amp hours of battery capacity as well as backup navigation lights. During the event I used three quarts of oil to replenish that lost during charging. The engine compartment continued to get messier.

Fortunately, the engine has a separate pan under it which collected the entire spill, most of which was soaked up into the absorbent matting it was lined with. None of it ended up in the ship's bilge, or was lost overboard. The major battery draws were the autopilot (which worked perfectly), navigation lights, and the occasional use of the radar. The instruments used very little.



A Drifter Start to the Trans Superior

A couple of hours after the light air start the breeze began to fill in and build. It turned out to be a beautiful beam reach with spinnakers to Whitefish Point, then a close reaches toward the Keweenaw. The 70's and 50's were gone, but the rest of the fleet stayed pretty much strung out along the rhumb line. The freighter traffic was light and never a factor as they separated into the up bound and down bound lanes. As breezes built to between 15kn and 20kn we all enjoyed an exhilarating ride into a spectacular sunset, through the night, and the next day. The seas never were a factor in spite of the fresh breezes for over a day and the 40-60 mile fetch from the UP's north shore. What a ride, worth the trip up.



Flying Across Lake Superior

As we approached the Keweenaw the winds began to go away and we were stuck in those inevitable dead zones, with bits of puffs between. On rounding, we finally had to get to work and do some sailing into light variable breezes. Fortunately, there were also several hours of nice wind between the lulls as the fleet began to either tack along the rhumb line, or head toward the west. I chose to skip the tacks and stay on a port tack as far as I could go. That turned out to be a lucky decision as a spectacular monster storm front passed in front of us the night before finishing. The storm included a 6-8hr lightning display as it hammered everything from Duluth to the Apostle Islands. It turned out I was not the only one who slowed the boat down to avoid sailing into it.

The Trans Superior, like most long distance events, has a mandatory call in schedule for participants. This year they placed satellite phones aboard several boats with differing speed potential. We called in every eight hours to our designated contact boat, which in turn relayed all of the positions to the race committee. They then posted the positions on their website. The participants had no idea how much interest the site was generating from all over the U.S. and Canada. It seems several shore side parties became pretty upset when their boat of interest missed a call in or the report did not get posted. They assumed the boat was lost, and in one case reported it missing to the Coast Guard. When finally contacted by the Coast Guard, the skipper, reported to be Dick Lappin, is reported to have politely requested they inform his family "I am ok, and please leave me alone".

The finish of the race turned out to be much like the start for most of the fleet. Most had to sit in calm, windless waters within sight of the lift bridge entrance to Duluth's harbor. After several hours of drifting, several of us were checked out by homeland security patrol boats who wanted to be sure we were race participants, and not some bad guys checking out this critical port. On finally drifting across the finish line, the *Odyssey* got a rousing cheer from the tourists and finish line committee posted at the end of the pier. I think it is safe to say, every boat finishing was warmed by the reception.

The Committee met each boat at the dock at the Duluth Aquarium with a hug and a bottle of rum. Without asking, they seemed to sense our first priorities after securing the boats were to find a beer, a shower, and check in with home. The elapsed times for the fleet ranged from 46hr27min. (Colt 45) to 101hr37min(a singlehander). The *Odyssey* finished in 76hr20min. Ten of the twelve singlehanders who started, finished. The two who withdrew did so on the first day when they had rig failures as the winds freshened.

I was not at all surprised to find another North Caper wandering the dock at the Aquarium. Seems Lauren Watkins (*Bright Eyes*) had also participated as crew aboard the yacht *Shanti*. Because the passages were faster than anticipated, most had a few days in Duluth before the race awards party. This was perfect for the *Odyssey* as repairs had to be made prior to its return to Lake Erie. As luck would have it, GLSS member Eric Thomas is the service manager at the Barker's Island Marina within the Duluth / Superior harbor. This marina is an excellent, full service facility, and they were able to expedite the engine repairs. In addition to replacing the shaft seal, a new alternator was installed as it had been damaged by dust, belt fragments, and oil. Even though it continued to work, a number of the contacts inside were melted and distorted by overheating.

Duluth is a vibrant community with many fine activities and restaurants in the downtown area bordering the harbor. There was no problem finding things to do between overseeing the boat repairs,



Tom Munson and Hans Anderson in Duluth

joining the members of the Duluth Yacht Club for their activities, and waiting for Ann to arrive. She and her sister Joyce had come up to join in the fun and deliver GLSS members Tom Munson and Hans Anderson who were joining me for the return trip to Lake Erie.

With the successful completion of the 2005 Trans Superior, the *Odyssey* wins the season's GLSS Challenges, two out of three.

The Return to Lake Erie

On Sunday morning, August 14th Tom, Hans and I departed Barkers Island Marina for the trip back to Lake Erie. Ann and Joyce were there to see us off, and had plans to continue their exploration of the sights in Michigan's UP as they headed home. We had done a sea trial the day before to check out the engine and alternator repairs, and everything was working fine. Duluth had been a pleasure to visit and the Lake Superior sailing community had proven to be excellent sailors as well as wonderful hosts to all of us.

I was eager to make progress so decided to motor sail this first leg eastbound. The conditions were excellent as we settled into a nice routine of watches. What a treat to have two superb sailors as "crew". As we headed toward the Keweenaw Waterway we purposively diverted to pass through the Apostle Islands. These rustic, densely tree covered islands are a prime cruising destination for the boaters, kayakers, and hikers of western Lake Superior. We had an uneventful thirty six or so hours as we approached the Keweenaw. The only other boaters in the area were a couple of other singlehanders, John Ayres and Bill Tucker, who were also returning from the regatta.

The Waterway passage through the Peninsula is a scenic and relaxing ride surrounded by high bluffs lined with cottages separated by areas of forest. We passed under the lift bridge and docked at the county marina in Hancock about forty eight hours after leaving Duluth. After fueling, we walked across the bridge to the Houghton side for breakfast ashore, then a couple of hours of sleep, and we were off again. It was an excellent first leg to our journey.



The Lift Bridge at Houghton-Hancock, MI

Grand Marais was our next destination as we exited the eastern side of the Waterway in clear conditions, but little wind. A few miles along our eastward track the *Odyssey* was shaken by an epileptic like seizure. Tom had the gear shift into neutral in a moment which stopped the shaking instantly. A quick check of the engine compartment revealed no signs of damage, and we were able to rev the engine up in neutral with no problems. When we reengaged the gear, the vibration was again evident so we surmised we either had a transmission or a propeller problem. Someone was going to have to go for a swim. After clearing the dinghy (which was added for the return trip) off of the stern, and securing myself with a tether, I took a dip into the crystal clear, and brisk waters for a look see under the boat. Sure enough, one of the propeller's three blades was missing.

We set sails and somehow my companions were able to get us underway in little or no wind. After some discussion, Marquette seemed to be the most likely destination where we might get access to marine service as we had seen none in the Waterway. As luck would have it, we did have cell phone service so were able to contact Ann and Joyce to share our dilemma. I learned a lot about light air sail trim from Tom and Hans over the next hours as we slowly made out way toward Marquette.

Our shore crew had sprung into action and headed to Marquette. They had made contact with the Cinder Pond Marina in Marquette Harbor, who in turn had contacted friends at the Coast Guard Station Marquette, alerting them that there was a vessel which might require assistance. Much to our

surprise, we received a cell phone call from the Coast Guard advising us that they were aware of our situation, and to contact them at any time if we required help. It seems that they are the only towing service available in the area. Over the next hours we slowly sailed and drifted to within a few miles of the harbor. Finally, in the wee hours of the morning and with no wind for steerage we accepted the offer of a tow and were towed into the harbor and secured to the city wall. I can't remember if I have ever enjoyed a cold beer at 4:00am before, but it sure was good that morning. Needless to say we all slept very well and well into the next morning.

The first day of our "crisis management" did not go well. We were to find out that there are no travel lifts in Marquette, in fact the closest was back in Duluth. Haul and launch are done by hired crane on specified days. We are really spoiled at Toledo Beach and North Cape, as we have only to look across the harbor or have a talk with our own Lester Lashaway, and we can be out within a short time in an emergency.

Not all was bad though; a long time friend and Marquette resident, Ginger Rutgers, had heard about our problem from Ann and showed up at the dock. She introduced us to the local coffee shop gathering place where we met several of the other locals. By the time we left, we had received offers for two cars for our use and a lead for a private plane if we wanted to fly back to Lake Erie to get replacement equipment. During the rest of the day, her husband Lyle taxied us around as we worked the problem.

We also came across a local scuba diver who happened to be aboard his boat. He was over to the *Odyssey* in no time flat with his gear, and made an unsuccessful attempt to pull the damaged prop. During the day we were able to borrow a couple of other prop pullers, but still no luck. In spite of the remarkable offers of assistance, I was beginning to get a bad feeling about being able to solve the prop problem and continue the trip anytime soon. Ann and Joyce had to return home the next day and I was concerned about how to get my companions home.



The Bladeless Prop

The next day I made the biggest mistake of this season, I insisted Tom and Hans take advantage of the available ride home. I would remain and try to sort out the options. They reluctantly consented and I got on with the process of contacting people. I had contacted Barb Hickey who, with the help of Greg Funk, and PC Skip McCullough, had gotten into my dock box at North Cape, packaged up my spare propeller, and sent it off to a local marine shop we had connected with in Marquette. You may wonder why the spare propeller was not aboard the boat to begin with, good question.

The following day the propeller and diver both showed up. He had found an inconspicuous set screw which had to be removed to get the propeller off. Within an hour the old prop was off, and the replacement installed. A dockside test confirmed all was working, and I was on my way again, albeit, once again singlehanded. The weather was deteriorating, and as I motored east the breezes were slowly turning toward the northeast, right on the nose, and building.

The seas were building to 6-8 feet as the winds built into the low 20kn range, but the ride was not choppy as it would be on Lake Erie in similar conditions. The *Odyssey* was powering over well-spaced swells and making a nice 5-6kn SOG. As I passed the awesome sight of the Grand Sable dunes and soon after Grand Marais just after sunset, the autopilot once again quit. This time the Seatalk display indicated a likely connectivity problem. Unfortunately the sea conditions were not conducive to tracking wiring connections below. I had decided it was time for me to get off of Lake Superior, so I motored on through the night and into

the next day, eventually having to motor sail tack my way into Whitefish Bay, and finally past the light at Whitefish Point.



Grand Sable Dunes with the Weather Going Sour

Lake Superior had provided an exhilarating ride westbound for the Trans Superior Race, but had lived up to its reputation as a potential monster for the return trip. In spite of this, the trip down Whitefish Bay and through the Mac Arthur lock was relaxing; it was nice to finally be heading south. The Kemp marina once again proved to be the perfect refuge, at just the right time. The autopilot problem did turn out to be a loose wiring connection from the original installation ten years ago which I was able to fix while at the marina.

The rest of the return trip continued to be eventful including a radar/GPS guided entrance into a pea soup fog shrouded Presque Isle Harbor; a multi day backdrop of rain with waterspouts; a careless 2:00am grounding while leaving Harrisville Harbor; and another autopilot, connection related, failure while crossing Saginaw Bay in stormy conditions. After stops at Port Sanilac and St. Clair the *Odyssey* was finally back on Lake Erie and arrived at North Cape the night of the Past Commodore's Dinner. It was a real treat to be greeted at the dock by a smiling Kris McCullough, and be informed that it was not too late to enjoy a taste of the meal.



Back Home at North Cape

The season's epilog included a return to Lake St.Clair for the annual GLSS solo and picnic. This is a nice 40nm event and is enjoyed by many as they wind down from the solo sailing season, as well as those who wanted to try singlehanded sailing. It was also a delight to join our North Cape cruising fleet for the annual Labor Day trip to Leamington, Ont., and to hear of the adventures many of the other Club members have had. The *Odyssey* traveled something in excess of 2000nm over the season, a pretty good Great Lakes Adventure.

We all know that something is going to come up when we venture out on the Lakes. We don't know what, or when, or where, but we solve it, often with the help of others, and find a way to continue on. Next year, we will see?

All Photos by Wally McMinn