Solo Challenger

The Official Newsletter of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society

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Fall Edition 2026

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From the Helm

Ahoy sailors!

The 2026 season was another successful year for the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society (GLSS), with six events hosted by the GLSS and a total of 110 participants.

In addition to our scheduled events, we hosted three safety seminars and three solo shakedowns in the Spring. There were plenty of opportunities for our members to get out on the water and enjoy some solo sailing.

I feel very fortunate to serve as president of an organization with such strong participation and enthusiasm. None of this would be possible without the hard work and dedication of our event organizers. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for all the time, effort, and commitment you give to the organization. Your contributions are what make our events and programs successful.

Thank you to everyone who helped make the 2026 season such a success! I look forward to another great year of sailing and camaraderie in 2027!

Brian VanWieren
President

Great Lakes Singlehanded Society

SAVE THE DATE — Annual General Membership Meeting

January 23, 2027 ⚓ 5:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Andiamo Detroit Riverfront

400 Renaissance Center A-03, Detroit, MI 48243

$90 per person

We have a block of rooms reserved for Friday and Saturday nights ($239/night) at the Marriott Detroit—Renaissance Center

Make your reservations now!



Detroit River at sunrise with the new Gordie Howe International Bridge on the left

Currents — *News and Other Scuttlebutt*

SINGLEHANDED FLEETS - Your Club Needs One!

The future of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society depends on bringing in new members. While we've done a good job welcoming new sailors in recent years, we also lose members each year for various reasons. To keep the Society strong, we need to continue introducing sailors to the challenges and rewards of singlehanded sailing. However, we are not hosting 5K foot races or pickleball tournaments, so it is more about communicating what we do and giving a path to the start line rather than convincing sailors to get involved, as a solo Challenge certainly is not for everyone!

Completing a big lake Challenge is the pinnacle of the experience and the path to becoming a GLSS member. But for sailors who are interested, figuring out how to get started can be intimidating. The Society already offers several ways to introduce people to singlehanded sailing, including Solo Shakedowns out of Muskegon, Sandusky, St Clair, and Erie; day races on on Lakes Huron, Michigan, St. Clair, and Erie; and winter safety meetings at various locations where members discuss equipment, preparation, and the requirements for completing a Challenge. These are all stepping stones to the Challenges and membership in the GLSS.

There's another stone in the river to introduce sailors to our sport at the local level. In 2025, the Sandusky Sailing Club established a singlehanded fleet. Now, in its second year, the fleet has approximately 15 members. For a modest $25 membership fee, sailors participate in a series of selected events, called "counters," throughout the season. The high-point system is used and the events are the Sandusky Solo Shakedown, I-LYA Bayweek, SSC Sandusky Islands Race, and the Sandusky 45005. There are also two shorter, self-directed races that sailors can perform on their own and as many times as they like, which is the epitome of solo sailing.

For a singlehanded fleet at your club, your "counters" can be shorter GLSS events (except the big Challenges), club races, or even an informal solo sail around an island—any event that is easily accessible by your local members. At the end of the season, results are tallied and awards are presented at the club's fall banquet. And expect more members that you didn't know were interested in singlehanded sailing to join your fleet next year.

The idea is simple—establish a local fleet where sailors can meet others with similar interests, get out on the water, develop their skills, and discover the satisfaction of sailing alone. From there, they can progress to Solo Shakedowns, day races, safety meetings, and ultimately a GLSS Challenge. If you're a GLSS member at a club with no singlehanded fleet, consider starting one. It could be a great way to introduce new sailors to the Society and help secure its future, one singlehanded sail at a time.

For more details about the "counters" used at Sandusky Sailing Club, how the singlehanded fleet works, and to explore ideas for events that you can use during the season at your club, contact Russ Krock at rbk42058@gmail.com.

***Russ Krock,* Schock & All *and* Uncivilized**

Sponsorships—Opportunities and Benefits

As costs for each event rise, the organization has the choice either to increase the entry fee for each event or to find outside sources of revenue to off-set these increasing costs. Two years ago, we added a sponsorship to the GLSS. As this is new to the organization, it has been a bit slow in gaining traction, but it's doing well for a program that's just starting. So where do all the fees go?

Let us start at the beginning of the year with the AGM. The Annual General Meeting, is something that all agree should be a nice, classy event and something worthy of all the effort by everyone who has participated in the GLSS in some way. Your board of directors have determined that the price for this event should be kept under $100 per person. Yet even at that price, the AGM loses money. How much can a dinner really cost?

Using this year's pricing, the actual meal catered, is $60 per person. You are not going to find a caterer for less than that.

We have looked. Then add two hours of an open bar at $8.00 per head for two hours. Add an extra hour after the dinner and you add another $8.00 per head. Of course, since we are not cheap skates, there is a gratuity added to the bill for both. So far so good, but we also have to account for the room rental charge of $1,500 for a room capable of entertaining 50 participants, or more for a bigger room to host more people. Now we are over budget.

Starting in 2025, we added YB Tracking ("Yellow Brick") to our big Challenge events, which has been a significant upgrade over Kattack, which had been used in previous years. With the Kattack system, we each had to buy a tracking device and pay an additional $200 for an annual subscription (to Spot or Garmin) to provide tracking data. Kattack is no longer operating, so it's no longer an option, and so the cost for each participant to provide an operating tracking devise is no longer necessary. The switch to Yellow Brick has resulted in the cost of tracking charged at the rate of $45 per boat, per Challenge. Even if you were to participate in three Challenges in one year, you have saved money over using a Spot or Garmin device. This cost could have been passed on to each Challenge participant by increasing the registration fee, but Challenge registration fees remained unchanged because one generous member has stepped forward to offset that cost in the form of a sponsorship.

After several days of battling Mother Nature on the Great Lakes, you really know you've made it when you are being handed your bottle of Rum dockside after the finish. Unfortunately, the good stuff costs money and those costs are going up. This season, both the Mackinac and Erie Challenges had their rum sponsored.

Extras, such as the expensive Chicago skippers' meeting and even this year's Michigan Scramble were sponsored. Very generous members stepping forward to make a difference.

If you would like to step forward and be a sponsor, the GLSS would greatly appreciate it. What we are truly looking for is outside sponsors. We all know, especially on Lake Erie, that we break a lot of stuff on a Challenge. We need outfitters, mechanics and suppliers, just to repair what we broke. Who do you get your sails from? Your rigging? Who does repairs and would like to get their name out to our membership? We are happy to take them on as a sponsor and just as happy to promote them. Shortly, an email will be sent to our email distribution list with the 2027 sponsorship forms. Please forward this to anyone who you think would be interested in sponsoring. Every bit helps to keep the Challenge registration fees down.

We would like to thank our generous sponsors from the 2026 season, as follows: YB Tracking was sponsored by Jeff Urbina and Bodacious Dream Expeditions; the rum for the Mackinac Challenges was sponsored by Quantum Sails; the rum for the Lake Erie Challenge was sponsored by Jake Thomas, Thomas Steel Incorporated; a donation to the Chicago Mac's skippers' meeting was provided by Ken Verhaeren; a donation to the Lake Michigan Scramble was provided by Joe Turns; and Grand Pacific Popcorn Co. provided donations for printing, booklets and banners; and there was even an anonymous donation to cover the flags expense for the Lake Erie Solo.

Thank you all for helping to keep 2026 costs down!

***Jeff Marshall,* Jack Tar**

Thank You To Our Sponsors

Yellow Brick Sponsor Jeff Urbina

BODACIOUS DREAM

QUANTUM SAILS

THOMAS STEEL INCORPORATED

GRAND PACIFIC POPCORN & SWEETS

Special Thank You To Ken Verhaeren

2026 Challenges Results

Port Huron to Mac Solo		
Superior Class		
Serenity	Joey Baker	1
Uncivilized	Russ Krock	2
Avanga	Brian VanWieren	3
Tango	Bob VanEck	4
Michigan Class		
WAFI	Jim Otton	1
Mylo B	William Dembreck	DNS
Quick & Dirty	Noel Brockman	DNF
Ontario Class		
Otis B. Driftwood	Blair Arden	1
God Speed	Andrew Patrias	DNF
Arch Angel	Noel Gingerich	DNF
Super Mac & Back		
Serenity	Joey Baker	1



The Record Will Have to Wait

Getting to Know Serenity *on the 2026 Super Mac & Back*

Story and Photos by Joey Baker

When I started preparing for the 2026 Super Mac & Back, I had a pretty simple goal—break the elapsed-time record.

I had completed the challenge three times before: 11 days aboard my Catalina 38, *Euphoria*, in 2014; 9 days, 10 hours and 47 minutes aboard the Mumm 30, *Peace*, in 2020; and 8 days, 18 hours and 45 minutes aboard my Beneteau First 44.7, *Harmony*, in 2023. The record of 8 days, 14 hours and 25 minutes, set by Mike Spence aboard his C&C 44, *Voyager*, seemed tantalizingly close.

The boat I expected to make that attempt on, however, wasn't the boat that crossed the starting line.

I had spent nearly every night after work and every weekend for six weeks stripping and refinishing *Harmony's* bottom in preparation for the race. I'd owned her since 2020 and sailed her solo in the Super Mac & Back, Trans-Superior and Lake Erie Challenges, among other races. She was comfortable, capable and familiar, although her large sails and heavy loads made her a handful to sail singlehanded.

Then word got around that I was thinking about selling her. *Harmony* sold in May—only a month before the start.

Fortunately, I already owned her replacement.

Learning Serenity

I bought *Serenity*, a Beneteau Figaro 2, in December and brought her to the Great Lakes on a custom-built trailer on March 24. I had been looking for something very specific: designed for solo racing, tiller steered, offshore capable and trailerable. The Figaro 2 checked nearly every box.

Now I just had to get her ready.

There were cabin-top leaks to fix, engine and house batteries to replace, and a new chartplotter, VHF/AIS transceiver and VHF antenna to install. Existing Raymarine instruments had network problems that needed sorting out. I refinished the bottom and worked through a long list of other maintenance.

I was still installing radar reflectors and sorting out reef lines for the new mainsail the night before leaving for Port Huron.

Several times I accepted that *Serenity* probably wasn't going

to be ready for the Super Mac & Back and that I would have to settle for the regular Port Huron to Mackinac Challenge.

Making things more interesting, my new mainsail and J3 arrived just three days before the start.

When I left the dock on race morning, I had sailed a Figaro 2 exactly twice in my life, for perhaps three hours total. I had never raced one. I had never flown *Serenity's* spinnaker. I had never sailed with the new main or J3.

I would eventually cut and fit the battens for the J3 while sailing south on Lake Michigan because the forecast said I was going to need it the next day.

What could go wrong?

The Most Important Piece of Race Equipment

Race morning in Port Huron has become a comforting ritual after doing the challenge several times. Wake up aboard the boat, get cleaned up, make the final preparations and head toward the starting area.

Except this time, as I headed toward the PHYC showers, I discovered that I had forgotten soap.

For some reason, in the midst of everything required to prepare a boat for a solo race across two Great Lakes, the lack of soap briefly felt like a crisis.

I returned to the dock and started asking around. Someone offered liquid soap but didn't have anything to put it in. Then Russ Krock on *Uncivilized* yelled, "I might have something." He disappeared below and emerged with a brand-new bar of Irish Spring, still in the box. He tossed it across the dock and told me I didn't have to return it.

Crisis averted.

Northbound

The start was light and uneventful, which suited me fine. I was nervous about sailing an unfamiliar boat, and light air meant everything happened slowly enough that I had time to figure things out.



I rounded Goderich before 10 p.m. Saturday, with Russ aboard *Uncivilized* ahead of me.

About an hour later, AIS revealed something strange. *WAFI* was sailing roughly 30 degrees higher than the boats around him. The wind was steady and nearly directly upwind along our intended route. The other boats were sailing normal tack angles while *WAFI* appeared to be sailing almost directly along the rhumb line.

This went on for hours.



Noel aboard the Olson 30, *Quick & Dirty*, eventually called him on VHF and jokingly asked if he had thrown a line aboard a passing freighter for a tow.

Whatever voodoo *WAFI* was practicing remains a mystery.

Before sunrise Sunday, I managed to work my way around *Uncivilized* and into the lead. I wasn't treating this as a delivery or simply trying to finish. I was racing at 100% and I wanted to see what *Serenity* could do.

Sunday brought more light air before a shift transformed an upwind beat into a downwind run. Up went a spinnaker I had never flown before.



I sent Beth a photo.

She noticed the Skandia logo and did some searching. I already knew from researching Figaro 2 hull number 27 that Sam Davies had campaigned the boat in the Figaro series. What surprised me was realizing that one of the spinnakers from that campaign, more

than two decades later, was still aboard.

And now I was flying it across Lake Huron.

The Decision at Mackinac

I reached Mackinac Island at 7:58 p.m. Monday.

Under the Super Mac & Back sailing instructions, Mackinac wasn't simply another mark. Competitors pass through the Mackinac finish line and confirm whether they intend to continue toward Chicago.

By then I had already made my decision.



Everything aboard *Serenity* was still working, I felt good, and after all the work required just to get her there, I was ready to continue—so I pointed west.

Southbound on Lake Michigan, I passed boats competing in the Chicago to Mackinac Solo Challenge. I was particularly thankful that AIS transmitters are mandatory for the event. Seeing and identifying traffic made route planning considerably easier.

By Tuesday I was near Ludington when the wind disappeared. For several hours there was little to do except wait for it to return.

Wednesday's forecast promised more than 20 knots from the south. I hoisted the new J3 and put a reef in the main once the breeze passed 14 knots. Eventually we saw sustained winds around 24 knots.



This was the first time I really discovered what the Figaro 2 could do.

Once I found the right trim, *Serenity* simply tracked along happily. The twin rudders kept her remarkably well behaved through puffs, heel and waves. For a boat I barely knew, she inspired a lot of confidence.

The bigger problem was the new mainsail. Its luff slides were sticking badly in the mast track, making reefing and unreefing far more difficult than it should have been. I started reefing early and became reluctant to shake a reef out until I was confident the breeze wouldn't return.

At 10 p.m. Wednesday, Chicago was 47 miles away. I hoped to arrive around sunrise.

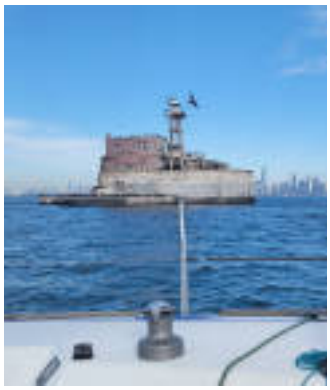
Turn Around and Do It Again

Fog surrounded the approach to Chicago Thursday morning, but eventually the skyline emerged. Chicago from the water is spectacular, and after days alone, reaching it



was immensely satisfying.

At 9:15 a.m. I rounded the Four Mile Crib, turned around and headed north.



The beat into Chicago became a downwind leg north, so up went the spinnaker. The breeze remained light throughout Thursday and disappeared completely again after sunset.

By Friday morning I was moving north, upwind, toward Mackinac.

I had also switched autopilots. The old below-deck Raymarine X-10 worked, but in chop it continuously reacted to every wave. The linear drive would move the tiller a few degrees, realize the correction wasn't necessary, and immediately move it back. Besides wasting power, the constant sawing became maddening to listen to.

Fortunately, I had installed a Simrad TP32 tiller pilot as a backup. Redundant autopilots weren't a luxury on this trip. Without one, I knew I couldn't finish.

Just north of Ludington, AIS delivered a welcome surprise. Mark Gannon, whose J/105, *Gangbusters*, I've crewed aboard for several Chicago Mackinac races, was returning to Chicago with his delivery crew after completing the solo challenge. Mark spotted me on AIS, altered course and

motored over to say hello. After days alone, seeing a friend in the middle of Lake Michigan was a pretty special moment.

The Longest Night

Saturday morning, approaching the Manitou Islands, I chose to go outside and pass between North Manitou and South Fox rather than use the passage. In light air, I didn't want to risk getting trapped by the high shoreline.

That afternoon the wind finally gave me a gift. It shifted onto a reach and for a few glorious hours *Serenity* rolled along at about seven knots.

Around 11 p.m., I passed through Gray's Reef Passage. Sixteen miles remained to the Mackinac Bridge.

Then the wind faded again.

The Straits became the most mentally challenging part of the entire trip. It was straight upwind, forcing me to tack back and forth while staying clear of commercial traffic.



With so little breeze, I couldn't count on being able to maneuver quickly.

At one point the 806-foot bulk carrier *Hon. James L. Oberstar* identified me on AIS and called on VHF. From their perspective, the sailboat tacking back and forth ahead of them presented an understandable question.

I assured them that I would remain safely to the north.



I spent the entire night trying to find pressure, keeping the boat moving and staying out of the shipping lane.

Soon after I passed beneath the Mackinac Bridge, the sun began rising—I was exhausted.

But seeing the sun rise over Mackinac Island ahead gave me enough of a lift to keep going. Once past the island, I finally had open water. I checked sail trim, checked AIS, made a visual traffic scan, set an alarm for 25 minutes and slept.

Wake up. Check everything. Reset the timer. Sleep.

After about three hours of that cycle, I felt human again.

A Different Goal

Somewhere along the way, I had been forced to accept something I didn't want to admit—the record was gone.

The light air and repeated becalming had made Mike Spence's 8-day, 14-hour mark unreachable. That realization was harder than any particular weather condition. I had started with a goal of breaking the record and had been racing *Serenity* as hard as I could.

Eventually I had to accept that finishing the Super Mac & Back aboard a boat I'd barely sailed before the start was enough.

Sunday brought almost no wind, which at least allowed me to catch up on sleep. Monday brought rain and shifty conditions requiring constant attention to sail trim. Then Monday evening delivered one of those experiences that makes all the difficult parts worthwhile.

The horizon was crystal clear, with clouds scattered overhead. The moon rose incredibly bright, illuminating the clouds almost like a muted sunrise. After more than a week alone on the water, it was breathtaking and unexpectedly emotional. For a moment I felt very small, yet somehow part of the whole scene—as though I belonged exactly where I was.

It was easily a 10-out-of-10 moonrise.

Home

Tuesday morning I was finally heading toward Port Huron. This time, thankfully, the breeze stayed with me. In 2023 it had taken me roughly three hours to cover the final three miles. I had no desire to repeat that experience.

I crossed the finish Tuesday afternoon with an elapsed time of 10 days, 5 hours and 55 minutes.

Approaching the Blue Water Bridge, I saw Beth and her sister Carol standing at the park waving. Beth had told me she would meet me in Port Huron, but seeing them at the bridge was a surprise. Suddenly, I couldn't wait to get ashore.

Beth met me at Desmond Marine, where I stopped for fuel before the delivery home. It's difficult to describe how good it felt to finally see her and hold her after being alone for so long.

Then there was one final leg down the St. Clair River and across Lake St. Clair to Great Lakes Yacht Club. It was a pleasant delivery, with one exception—Fishflies.

They were thick enough that, whenever I looked forward, I was getting hit in the face about every five or ten seconds. I resorted to quick glances ahead before turning my face sideways again. After ten days of solo sailing, two Great Lakes, two Mackinac passages, fog, freighters, becalming and sleep deprivation, I found myself wishing my final piece of safety equipment had been a pair of goggles.

I reached GLYC around 10 p.m.

What's Next

The record will have to wait.

But *Serenity* proved something more important.

With only a few hours aboard her before the start, the Super Mac & Back became an accelerated introduction to the Figaro 2. I learned that she is remarkably stable and forgiving singlehanded, particularly when conditions build. I also learned that light-air upwind sailing is a much narrower groove and, at least so far, the condition I find most challenging aboard her.

There is a list of improvements, of course. There always is. The mainsail track was cleaned and treated with Sailkote, which solved the sticky-slide problem. The old Raymarine autopilot has already been replaced with a B&G NAC-2 that steers better while using less power.

More importantly, I came home knowing that *Serenity* is capable of what I bought her to do.

The Super Mac & Back was never intended to be the final destination. I hope eventually to take her to events such as the Bermuda 1-2 and the Singlehanded Transpacific Yacht Race. Ten days across Lakes Huron and Michigan gave me considerably more confidence in both the boat and what I need to do to prepare her, and myself, for those challenges.

And when the Super Mac & Back returns in 2029?

I'll be back—There is still a record I'd like to break.

Joey has a been a member of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society since 2013, when he completed the Port Huron to Mackinac Island Solo Challenge aboard his Catalina 38,* Euphoria. *Since then, he has completed more than 20 Solo Challenges in four different boats. His home port is the Great Lakes Yacht Club on Lake St. Clair in Michigan.

LO300 Summary

The LO300 started on Saturday, July 11th off of Port Credit Yacht Club. Of the 37 PHRF boats that started on the Main Duck course, seven of them were singlehanded boats. Of those seven, three finished. Evan Dinsmore on *Selkies* finished first of those three, crossing the line with an elapsed time of 3d:5h:13m. Colin Brown brought *Oops* home a little more than 5 hours later, and Scott Nichols on *Black Diamond* rounded out the finishers with an elapsed time of 3d:15h:13m.

Congratulations to Evan, Colin and Scott for finishing the Challenge, and a special recognition goes out to Evan, who successfully completed his first Great Lakes Challenge, thereby becoming a lifetime member of the GLSS.

Lake Ontario Solo		
LO 300		
Selkies	Evan Dinsmore*	1
Oops	Colin Brown	2
Black Diamond	Scott Nichols	3
Revival	James Roscoe	RET
Let's Bounce	Chris Bryce	RET
Arriba	Kenneth Martin	RET
Aarrow	David Courtney	RET

New Member

Two Lakes, Many Courses

June 19 to June 23, 2026

Overall

As we do every three years, this was a Super Mac year for those who need more. More what? More everything! This means not only did we have our standard courses from Port Huron and Chicago to Mackinac Island, additionally, we also had long courses. Super Mac from Chicago to Port Huron, and Super Mac and Back Chicago-Port Huron-Chicago, as well as Super Mac and Back Port Huron-Chicago-Port Huron.

This was the second year using YB Tracking ("Yellow Brick") for tracking, which is Great fun not only for the challengers but also for all their family and friends. This year the finish line was permanently changed to accommodate the tracker, adding another type of challenge to the event. It now goes from the Round Island G"7" light to the Mackinac Island East Breakwater red light.

Social

Friday: Dinners & Skippers meetings. The Port Huron Yacht Club kindly hosted the skippers in Port Huron. The Chicago Yacht Club–Belmont hosted them in Chicago. Left over food was taken by some of the skippers for easy sustenance on the trip.

Wednesday: Awards. Best of all was the generosity of the Mackinac Island Yacht Club and the wonderful staff and luncheon.

Weather

Given the weather we sometimes get in June, this year was reasonably decent. Of course that meant a mixture of slow weather, lovely weather and some stormy rainy weather.

Participants

Port Huron start: There were ten challengers, one of whom did the Super Mac and Back. Six boats finished as well as the Super Mac and Back boat (elapsed time 10 days, 5 hours, 55 minutes, 51 seconds) [see *The Record Will Have to Wait, supra*].

Chicago start: There were 24 challengers, one of which was a Super Mac and two were Super Mac and Back. 14 boats finished as well as the Super Mac boat (elapsed time 5 days, 6 Hours, 21 minutes, 14 seconds) and one Super Mac and Back boat (elapsed time 17 days [yes, days], 6 hours, 25 minutes, 10 seconds).

Chicago to Mac Solo

Superior Class		
Rocketman	Kim Downing	1
Thunder	Sam Keys	2
Freyja	Michael Tobey	3
18 Degrees	Joe Turns	4
Razzmatazz	Whitney Kent	DNS
Michigan Class		
Rambler	James Nachtman**	1
Gangbusters	Mark Gannon	2
Gabriel	Jeff Stack	3
Yukon	Ralph Krauss	4
SilverWing	Thomas Cooper	DNF
Takedown 2	Ron Otto	DNF
Ontario Class		
007	Steve Snare	1
Debbia	Mike Kenny	2
Ventura	Christopher Lentz	3
Nemo	Michael Tuman	DNF
The Orange Boat	Mark Tomes	DNS
Minnie	Frank Cobb	DNF
Water Lily	Jack Wolf	DNF
Erie Class		
Touring Machine	Todd Gayley	1
Eternal Optimist	Eric Shradar	2
Shadow	Kris Kimmons	3
KIISMET	Kenneth Verhaeren	DNS
Falcon	Greg Vandenberg	DNF
Hakuna Matata	Jim Goff	DNS
Super Mac		
007	Steve Snare	1
Super Mac & Back		
Shadow	Kris Kimmons	1
SilverWing	Thomas Cooper	DNF

*****New Member and President's Trophy Winner***

Other things

There was an unforeseen event on Lake Huron. Due to weather conditions, one boat did go aground. But other challengers were able to provide information & support. Fortunately, everyone is doing well.

While we sail solo, we keep an eye out for each other, not just to sail faster but for safety.

The 2027 Solo Mac will be June 19, 2027. Be sure to make your Mackinac Island marina reservations with the Michigan DNR six months in advance to ensure that you have a slip, as there will be no race committee to help you when you arrive as in the past. See you there.

Elisabeth Reichling, Mac Solo Event Chair

Lake Erie Solo

Superior Class		
Smoke Show	Jacob Thomas	1
Serenity	Joey Baker	2
Wrecking Crew	Duke Mueller	3
Schock & All	Russ Krock	4
Glass Pony	Jason Huffman	5
Zephyr	Tom Butler	RET
Michigan Class		
Wall-E	Luke Brockman	1
Quick & Dirty	Noel Brockman	2
Storm's Harbor	Rob Burger	3
Knottide	Bob Stach	4
Jack Tar	Jeff Marshall	5
Ontario Class		
Arch Angel	Noel Gingerich	1
Walkure 2	Mark Smith	2
Nebesa	Jack Jamison	3
Footloose	John Earhart**	4
Otis B. Driftwood	Blair Arden	RET
Erie Class		
Dulcibella	John Garhart	1
Let's Dance	David Knox*	2
Woolamaloo	Jim Lee	RET
Phaedrus	Bryan Burgess	DNS

New Member **New Member and President's Trophy Winner

If You're Not Happy with the Current Weather, You Won't Have to Wait Long

Lake Erie has a reputation of being the most mercurial of the five Great Lakes. And this year's fleet for the Lake Erie Solo Challenge had a front row seat to witness that reputation.

The start at 1000 on Saturday, August 8th, couldn't have been more beautiful with sunny skies and an easy spinnaker run from North Cape Yacht Club through Pelee Passage. Except for hot temperatures, causing some to dump buckets of water on themselves, and a brief squall, requiring most to douse spinnakers for a short while, most boats cruised along until around sunset when the wind switched from generally southwest to north-northeast.

On Sunday morning, we were greeted with light winds veering to the east and then southeast, and then becoming light and variable in the afternoon. The boats that went north toward Long Point were disappointed to be stuck with no wind for several hours, nearly motionless, except for a half knot of current pushing toward Buffalo. The boats that stayed in the middle of the lake faired much better with a bit more wind and steady, even if slow, progress toward the northeast. By early evening, however, the boats up north picked up a steady southerly breeze, which provided for a terrific close reach the rest of the way to Seneca Shoal.

Wall-E was the first boat to round Seneca Shoal buoy at around 0100 on Monday. The first half of the fleet made its way around Seneca Shoal by 0700, and then there was a gap to the second half of the fleet until *Jack Tar* rounded just before noon. *Dulcibella* rounded at about 1800, which accounted for the entire fleet that was still sailing except for one boat—*Let's Dance*, skippered by rookie solo challenger David Knox.

The leg from Seneca Shoal to the finish at Erie was a sporty beat for the first half of the fleet, and a mix of conditions for the second half. In the vicinity of Dunkirk, most of the fleet encountered gusts into the 40+ knot range, some rain and even a bit of hail, when a squall moved through mid-day on Monday.

Smoke Show completed the final leg in about 11 hours to be the first across the line at around 1230 on Monday. The fleet was pretty spread out by then, as there were still several boats that had not yet rounded Seneca Shoal. With lighter winds on the course in the afternoon on Monday and on Tuesday, it took until around dinner time on Tuesday for most of rest of the fleet to finish. Still on the course were *Dulcibella* and *Let's Dance*, the two smallest boats in the fleet.

> "Despite the excessive heat on Saturday, not much wind on Sunday, and too much wind on Monday, a good time was had by all!"

Dulcibella arrived at the finish and his home port early in the afternoon on Wednesday and David Knox brought *Let's Dance* across the line mid-afternoon on Thursday to complete his first solo challenge. For his sticktoitiveness, David Knox was awarded the newly-minted Wally McMinn Perseverance Award, presented by North Cape Yacht Club. David would call it stubbornness.

There were just three retirements during the event. *Zephyr*, *Woolamaloo*, and *Otis B. Driftwood,* who had an engine compartment fire that prevented him from charging his batteries. All three made it into port safely.

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We also had two new members. President's Trophy winner John Earhart, aboard his Beneteau 311 *Footloose*, and David Knox aboard his Pacific Seacraft Dana 24 *Let's Dance*. Welcome to the GLSS, gentlemen.

As always, the spectacular hospitality and accommodations before the start at North Cape Yacht Club and then after the finish at Erie Yacht Club make the Lake Erie Solo Challenge a real treat for participants.

***Rob Burger,* Storm's Harbor**

A Challenge, Not a Race — and That's a Good Thing

If the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society wants a poster boy for the claim that its events are challenges and not races, I'd be a good choice.

In this year's Lake Erie Solo Challenge ("LESC") and the half-dozen shorter solo events I've entered, I've avoided finishing last only once — and that second-place flag, in the Sandusky Sailing Club's 45005 in 2023, can't be credited to skill.

The wind died, night fell, and the skipper of the only other boat in my class went below for some sack time. I stayed in the cockpit, and when the wind picked up at 2 a.m., I was off and running.

I plead guilty to being slow but offer mitigating circumstances. I didn't start sailing until I was 70, and that was seven years ago. Given my age, I've always put safety ahead of speed.

That attitude is reflected in my choice of relatively heavy, long-keel boats: a 1973 Contessa 26 bought in the fall of 2019 and a 1997 Pacific Seacraft Dana 24 bought in 2024.

The names given the boats are also appropriate. The Contessa was christened *Rocinante* — the name of Don Quixote's old and slow nag. I wanted to name the Dana *Last Dance*, but my wife, Kathy, said that was too morbid. We compromised on *Let's Dance*.

Concern for safety motivated my choice of sails. I bought a genoa and mainsail for the Dana. But instead of adding a spinnaker or other light-wind sail, I opted to convert the boat into a cutter and add a hanked-on staysail on an inner, quick-release stay.

That sail plan was a disadvantage in the LESC. With light winds out of the west, almost all of the 19 boats popped kites at the start. By sundown, I was off the northeast point of Pelee Island, miles behind the other boats.

I don't regret my choices. When I ran into a squall the afternoon of the first day, two reefs in the main and the staysail made for a comfortable ride near my hull speed of 6.1 knots.

The next morning brought frustrating low winds, and I didn't make better than 3 knots the rest of the day.

Monday brought two blows. At about 3:30 a.m., a front hit with steady winds in the high teens and gusts to 25 knots. I went with two reefs and the staysail again and texted a friend: "The Monitor Windvane is handling it without a problem." When the wind eased, I caught up on sleep with my polyphasic routine of 20-minute naps.

Shortly before noon, near the Pennsylvania line, Windy.com's HRRR model showed a pop-up squall with 30-knot gusts headed my way. Out of an abundance of caution, I put in — for the first time — the third reef I had requested when I bought the mainsail. I dropped the staysail and rolled the genoa down to the size of a small kitchen tablecloth. The prep took time, but it paid me back with a comfortable heel at near hull speed.

The winds gradually subsided and died early Tuesday. I spent the next ten hours becalmed off Dunkirk, New York.

I had company. *Dulcibella*, skippered by former Erie County Common Pleas Judge John Garhart, was about a mile away. He had already rounded Buffalo's Seneca Shoal buoy and was headed for the finish in Erie, while I was still heading away from Erie.

John and I chatted on our VHF radios to ease the boredom. When the winds finally returned, John pushed on, crossing the finish line about 1:30 p.m. Wednesday.

The other 14 boats — three of the starters had retired earlier — had already finished.

I was alone and about to learn that the big advantage of fast boats is that they don't have to deal with whatever — storms or no wind — comes after they cross the finish line.

After rounding the Seneca Shoal buoy about 4 a.m. Wednesday, I had hopes of tacking the more than 60 nautical miles to Erie by early the next day. That was not to be. By 5 p.m., Windy.com was predicting 30-knot winds by 9 p.m. near Dunkirk, where I'd been becalmed the day before. For the

second time, I tied in the third reef and furled the genoa to a small patch.

It was a strange storm. No rain — I saw stars — just winds and angry waves that lasted more than four hours. I got a phone call from Duane Burgoyne, the North Cape Yacht Club's race officer. He had been tracking me on YellowBrick and was concerned that I appeared to be drifting toward shore. I told him I was all right. I had hove to so I would lose as little ground as possible to the winds still blowing out of the west.

After the windstorm ended about 1 a.m. Thursday, my luck changed for the better. The wind shifted more out of the north, meaning I could sail down the coast without tacking.

I shook out the reefs, unfurled the genoa and switched to an electric Raymarine ST2000 auto-tiller. Sailing along a lee shore, I needed an auto-steering device that used a compass heading rather than apparent wind direction.

By this time, I was very tired and badly needed sleep. I resumed the polyphasic routine, adjusting the auto-tiller, which was slipping slightly to port, after each nap. That worked until I failed to properly reset the alarm. The next thing I remember was waking to dawn's early light. I looked at my watch and saw it was almost 6 a.m. — I had been asleep for an hour and a half. I rushed out to the cockpit and stared at a beautiful green shoreline — less than a half mile away.

It was the only moment in the challenge that spooked me.

I quickly got back on course. I crossed the finish line at 3:18 p.m. Thursday. My elapsed time was about 127 hours — more than five days — and my log showed an overall average speed of 2.2 knots.

Will I do the Lake Erie Solo Challenge again or any of the other four trans-lake challenges?

Probably.

Kathy was right about the name. It wasn't the last dance.

***David Knox,* Let's Dance**

David's home port is at the Sandusky Sailing Club in Sandusky, Ohio

Erie Solo Challenge 2026 — First Time

***By John Earhart,* Footloose**

I sailed the Lake Erie Solo Challenge for the first time this year. The official length is 271 nm (312 statute miles). The distance I actually sailed was 354 nm, 31% longer. This year the race was mostly downwind to Buffalo, with thunderstorms and lightning every night, and upwind in strong winds and waves (with a few lulls) after rounding the mark near Buffalo and heading back to Erie.

My boat, a 2000 Beneteau 311 named *Footloose*, is a good performance cruiser from that era. The main and 116% jib are of similar size, and the jib sheets run inside the shrouds but at a pretty wide angle of 14°. To keep the boat going in lighter winds I have a lightweight, asymmetrical, reaching spinnaker (an A1.5), and a Code Zero, which is like a 200% jib in size. The spinnaker maxes out at 10 kts apparent, and requires pretty wide gybing angles in lighter winds. *Footloose* does well in moderate winds, but struggles to make good progress to windward once the wind builds and the waves get to four feet or more. *Footloose* has a bulb keel with a depth of 4′8″, but with a relatively small lateral area, similar to a J-24, so that at more than 15° of heel *Footloose* makes a huge amount of leeway, like 20 yards to the side for 200 yards ahead. On Lake Erie the waves tend to be steep and abrupt, compared to Lake Huron, for example, where waves will eventually lengthen out into a swell. I had previously raced the boat in waves of 10 feet and winds to 34 kts, so I felt I knew what to expect should I have to deal with that.

Nineteen boats made it to the start. One boat had engine problems that started at Bay Week the week before and could not be resolved before the start of the Erie Challenge. The race split into three groups after the first afternoon: a half dozen boats that ran hard from the start, a middle group of boats that did the race more as a marathon and not a sprint, and several boats that didn't fit in either group or split from the two groups. Three boats retired due to various issues, leaving 16 that finished.

After a rainy delivery trip to NCYC on Thursday, Saturday started out sunny, hot, and humid, with gusty winds out of the west at 9-12 knots. The race started at 10:00 a.m. I started on starboard tack but ended up 90 seconds late after a wind lull and misjudging the distance to the line. One boat missed the pin end completely and had to go back and restart.

The course to the north side of Pelee Island was dead downwind. The wind strength was close to the maximum for my asymmetrical (and I didn't want to spend three days gybing back and forth at 115°), so I went wing and wing with my whisker pole and managed to move along at 5.5

kts. This worked pretty well for a while, but as the wind lightened up the spinnaker boats started to pull ahead. By noon I had put up the Code Zero on a broad reach and was moving along pretty well at 114° apparent. Just before 2:00 p.m., I passed Middle Sister Island and saw a huge flock of white pelicans. For those that don't know these birds are huge, with a 9-foot wingspan. These birds have been expanding into our area the last several years. The wind went a little light here, but a little while later my speed was back up to 6 kts. The wind built to 15 kts by mid-afternoon so I took the Code Zero down after being overpowered for a while. A squall was moving up from behind but the boats behind said it was just rain and not more wind.



I passed the abandoned lighthouse on the northeast corner of Pelee Island at 4:40 p.m., which seemed remarkably fast to me. I passed Pelee Point at 6:00 p.m., sailing wing and wing again. I set up my spinnaker tack line as a gybe preventer, and continued to use it as needed all the way to Buffalo. I was pleased to get well clear of the islands, points, and shallows well before dark. I was pleased to see that I could see the freighters and key channel markers on AIS 50–60 nm out, so I was reassured that I could avoid the larger ships. Most mornings there were fisherman out, however, so we had to avoid them visually.

By 8:30 p.m. the wind had picked up to 18 knots from the WNW, so I took down the whisker pole and sailed on a broad reach at around 5.8 kts on a heading of 077°, which was the desired course.

The wind continued to veer overnight so that by 1:30 in the morning on Sunday the wind was out of the NNE. My log says "Beating at 5–6 kn to 78–79 deg [course]. Ugh". I was a little overpowered so I soon put in a reef. The wind immediately dropped to 8 kts but I stayed with the reef until 3:15 a.m. By morning the wind had veered more and I was pushed down to the middle of the lake and was heading 113°. At 10:00 a.m. I finally tacked to the northeast, 6 nm off the US shore at Ashtabula. Looking at YellowBrick I can see that all the boats tacked at about the same time. It's really interesting that all the boats tacked about the same time, and at about the same wind angle, so we all had the same idea about what the best tactic was and the same idea about Sunday's wind direction, although three boats had tacked earlier but tacked back. The waves were much worse on this heading, as they were coming down the lake from the NE on a long fetch.

I had made myself ham and Swiss sandwiches (my normal go-to racing lunch) on Saturday afternoon, and it bothered my stomach a little all afternoon and night. I also bring along tubs of macaroni, potato, and chicken salads. If conditions are rough, I can eat these out of the tubs standing or sitting next to the cooler. They are a lot of calories in a relatively small volume, and I normally can eat them every day and for an overnight extra meal. Normally I am pretty resistant to sea sickness, so I attributed my stomach irritation to the ham, which was extra salty.

At 11:25 a.m. I had a hat-overboard-drill. My favorite hat, a wide-brimmed nylon hat, was blown overboard. I immediately did a QuickStop to circle back, but it sank almost immediately, probably because it was pretty sweat-soaked and salty.

The wind went light at midday but the lumpy seas remained. At this point I had covered 140 nm and had 91 nm to go to Seneca Shoal. Eventually the wind filled in from the NE and I was able to get moving at 2.7 kts on a close-hauled course of 122° but the wind soon died and I was becalmed until 3:20 p.m. when a new breeze filled in from the north. The wind died again after two hours and at 6:00 p.m. I rolled up the jib because it was just flapping. I wrote in my log that the sky was "Getting real hazy to the west. Spooky".

At 8:40 p.m. I rolled out the jib for the second or third time to get going. Before, it had been main only and moving at 0.9 kts at 090°. By 9:30 p.m. I was moving again and by 10:00 p.m. I was making 4.5 kts on a close reach, but I had only covered 5.5 nm since 1:35 in the afternoon.

The wind really picked up after dark, and there were squalls all over the lake and shore. By 11:00 p.m. a squall was approaching so I reefed down to two reefs on the main and two reefs on the jib (two marks on the roller-furled jib, about a 51% reduction in area). Even with this sail reduction I was moving at 6.6 kts on a reach in a 30-knot breeze. I rolled up the jib as far as the jib track would allow (about a 70% reduction in jib area).

I had made ham and Swiss sandwiches again for lunch on Sunday, and by midnight I was sure the meat was bad. I had a pretty good stomach ache all night, and the ham felt like it was burning a hole in my stomach. I had bought my perishable items Friday afternoon and I had managed to keep everything cold, so the spoiled food was disappointing.

By 12:40 a.m. on Monday the rain squalls had dissipated over the lake, but not on shore. I could smell the rain on the land. The wind was down to 6–8 knots from the south, and I was moving on course at 3–4 kts. Erie was nearly abeam, sort of the mental and physical halfway point. I think by this point, three boats had dropped out for various reasons. One had a small oil fire in the engine space due to overheating, I think from a blocked water inlet, but I don't recall the details. I rested for another hour and then went back to a full jib, and reset all the leads and trim. The wind was now blowing 8–10 knots from the SSE so I was able to make 4–5 kts straight to the mark. I could have shaken out the mainsail reefs and/or put up a Code Zero but decided to hold off given the unstable weather and the very dark night. This turned out to be a good decision as the wind returned to 14 kts by 2:30 a.m., just after I shook out the second reef in the mainsail. I shook out the first reef after another 20 minutes. I was making good progress but was now sailing dead downwind so I had to head up to 029° to fill both sails and speed increased to 5 kts. I planned to move the jib leads back to the rail and set the whisker pole if these conditions held until daylight. Long Point came abeam at 3:30 a.m., and the sky cleared enough that the stars started to come out, I think for the only time this trip.

This peaceful set of conditions lasted about an hour, and then the wind increased to 22 kts from behind. I put a reef in the main and rolled up the jib as much as I could. Even so I had to hand steer to avoid rounding up. There was a good amount of surfing. Sailing this way was unsustainable so I dropped the main with some difficulty and tied it down. I unrolled the jib and was able to sail comfortably on a very broad reach at 5.5–5.7 kts. We started passing the lead boats coming the other way back to Erie. I held this configuration until mid-morning until the wind backed down some and waves continued to build from the SW.

With the jib only I was able to easily gybe as needed. By 9:00 a.m. I was nearly to Dunkirk. The boats behind with jib and main were starting to catch up to me, but with the big wind and waves I was reluctant to head up to raise the main, so I waited for a lull. The wind at 10:00 a.m. was still at 17 kts and a squall moved up from behind so I stayed with jib only. At 11:15 a.m. the squall was looking a little more serious so I took a few turns on the jib roller furling just to get it started (in case I had to take in more of the jib in a squall). The boats ahead reported a waterspout near Seneca Shoal, 15 nm ahead.

The storm passed by 12:30 p.m. (Monday), leaving leftover waves and temporarily no wind. I took this opportunity to get the main up because I was going to need it soon once I rounded Seneca Shoal and had to beat upwind 62 nm to the finish at Erie. The wind came back at 17–20 knots, while I was untying and raising the main, so I had my hands full. As soon as I raised the main I was way overpowered and cut back to two reefs, and the maximum reefing/furl on the jib. It took me 40 minutes to accomplish these maneuvers in the big waves and strong wind, with 9 nm to the turn. I also took advantage of this last hour or two before rounding the mark to stow everything I could think of, because I could see that I was going to spend the next 24 hours bashing to windward in waves. Even with this preparation, some surprising things got tossed around. For example, one of the heavy plexiglass companionway hatch boards got thrown out of the rear cabin to the floor in the galley, passing thru a doorway along the way.

There seems to be an acceleration zone on the approach to Buffalo, at least with a strong wind from the SW, the far end of the lake. The lake narrows down at the Buffalo end, and the depth drops. I rounded Seneca Shoal buoy, which was surprisingly hard to see in the waves, at 3:05 p.m. The shoal was 14 feet deep at the shallowest, which was right after rounding the mark. When I rounded the mark the waves were heaping up on the shoal and the wind was blowing the tops off. I remembering yelling "Holy Sh__!" as I turned upwind to the south. My plan was to tack back and forth between the US and Canadian sides, staying behind Pt. Albino on the Canadian side and Sturgeon Pt. on the US side as much as possible, hoping to get some relief from the waves. I was able to fully unroll the jib and keep the two reefs in the main, which allowed me to sail at decent angles upwind (for my boat) at 5.8 kts. Normally these are the worst conditions for my boat, upwind in big waves and higher winds, but in looking at YellowBrick then and afterwards, I did as well as the boats around me, including the heavier cruisers with deep keels.

Coming out of the northeast end of the lake I had to dodge

a US Border drone on multiple tacks. I was close enough to take some pictures, and it showed up clearly on AIS. I imagine they also took some good pictures of me and *Nebesa*, who had passed Seneca Shoal just ahead of me.



At 7:00 p.m. I took down the mainsail. The wind was 23 kts apparent. The waves continued to build and were steep, and I was launching off some of them. With jib alone I was able to do 5 kts despite punching into steep waves. On my boat with jib alone there is minimal lee helm, and even a little weather helm when heeled to 15°. After dark the waves had backed down a little and I was able to do 5.3 kts. I had 47 nm to go, but straight upwind.

Just before midnight, near Dunkirk, there was a big wind shift. I untied the main and raised it fully. Once again there were rain squalls in the area.

After midnight (Tuesday morning) my wheel pilot started to come apart and it had trouble holding a specific course. I was able to keep it working by squeezing the two halves together whenever I thought of it but my ability to hold a good course to windward suffered, and I had to hand steer much of the time. I continued to tack back and forth on long legs to Erie. I put in a reef and took it out multiple times overnight. My general plan was to sail out into the lake, and tack back to within 6 nm of shore. Staying that far off shore would give me at least an hour to come about in case I dozed off. My wind instruments also started to act up so that each tack indicated different angles from the previous tacks, so it took a while after each tack to get dialed in.

I also found out at the end that my knotmeter was reading low by about 30%, so all the true wind speeds I noted after the first day are probably a few knots low (apparent winds were OK).

My log is a little short on details the third night, but I recall a massive lightning display that lasted much of the night.

The thunderstorms never moved east of Erie on the lake, as seen on my phone app, but I remained cautious much of the night.

At dawn I sailed into a big wind hole near shore. It took me a few hours to get going. This was a frustrating development as I could see the few boats ahead and the one behind continuing to make good progress. As *Nebesa* passed me offshore he radioed me that the wind was dead inshore and I should work my way offshore. *Nebesa* and I were rivals most of the race. He passed me just before Seneca Shoal when I was dealing with getting my mainsail up. I passed him soon after Seneca Shoal while he was getting set up for the strong wind beat away from Buffalo. I managed to stay an hour or two ahead of him after that until the wind hole at dawn. Once the weather cleared up, we traded tacks most of the way to Erie. He could sail a little better angle upwind than I in the waves and with my autopilot troubles. He finally pulled ahead when he found an inshore wind shift that allowed him to head almost straight to Erie for a couple hours while I continued tacking away from shore and back.

The finish was more exciting than I had hoped for. *Nebesa* and I headed inshore to try to get some relief from the waves by tucking into the lee behind Presque Isle. After *Nebesa* finished, about an hour ahead of me, he radioed that the wind was blowing hard out of the entrance to the bay and to come in from a wide angle, which turned out to be good advice. As I crossed the channel for the last tack the wind hit me and pushed the boat hard over. I finished at 4:31:40 p.m., took down the sails, and motored the 3 nm to Erie Yacht Club. The race took me 3 days, 6 hours, 31 minutes, and 47 seconds, officially (40 seconds by my GPS).

In reading back over my log, there were periods each night where I cut back in anticipation of thunderstorms and wind gusts, or I delayed going back to full sails. My boat is a little tender so I am careful to reef when needed. The first reef is easy and done quickly from the cockpit. For the second reef, I have to go on deck to secure the tack. In retrospect I could have gone back to more sail area a little sooner and still had sufficient energy for last 24 hours (which turned out to be arduous), but I think I made prudent choices for my first attempt, given the unknown number of squalls approaching in the dark. I have done perhaps a dozen doublehanded races on Lake Huron, both the Mac race in July and the Huron Doublehanded Challenge in June, and when sailing doublehanded I have generally increased sail area more quickly (but not always after really big blows). But had I pushed it a little more in the Erie Solo I would have moved up one or more places in the overall standings, at least in the conditions we had for this challenge.

I was a little surprised and disappointed that I was not able to enjoy the race more while actually doing it. I really enjoy sailing at night in good weather, even if it's a drifter. This year it was mostly cloudy and stormy at night, and warm, hot, and hazy during the day. The lake was 78° so it never cooled off, even at night. When it rained, I put on a light wind jacket and only occasionally rain pants, preferring just to let my shorts get a little wet rather than don heavier foul weather gear. The delivery and return trips were mostly rainy. The last day, Tuesday, however, was clear and the US shoreline from Buffalo to Erie was pleasant to watch. There is a low mountain parallel to the shoreline that is covered in woods and farms. Conditions were rough with a long beat upwind in wind and waves, but I was able to enjoy the view.



John with the President's Trophy for best-placed first time challenger

The sailors of the GLSS were extremely helpful in helping me prepare, and I'd like to thank everyone. I had been doing the Lake Erie solo races and classes for about five years before entering the Lake Erie Solo Challenge, and got some good advice each time. Russ Krock has acted as my mentor for the last year or so. At Bay Week, held the week before the LESC, I asked many people many questions. The Saturday race of Bay Week turned out to be long and arduous, and I was advised not to emulate that all-out effort for the Lake Erie Solo Challenge. I also received some good advice on managing rest from Noel Brockman. Rob Burger and Jake Thomas also provided some good insights, as well as others.

John and *Footloose* make their home port at the Port Clinton Yacht Club in Port Clinton, Ohio



2026 Lake Erie Solo Challengers (left to right) Luke Brockman, Rob Burger, Jake Thomas, Jason Huffman, Duke Mueller, Bob Stach, Blair Arden, Joey Baker, John Earhart, Tom Butler, Jack Jamison, Noel Gingerich, Russ Krock, Mark Smith, Jeff Marshall, (kneeling) Noel Brockman [*photo courtesy of John Earhart*]

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2026 Non-Challenge Events Results

I-LYA Bay Week Regatta		
Singlehanded A		
Schock & All	Russ Krock	1
Smoke Show	Jacob Thomas	2
Serenity	Joey Baker	3
Quick & Dirty	Noel Brockman	4
Southbound	Lease Schock	DNC
Jack Tar	Jeff Marshall	DNC
Singlehanded B		
Storm's Harbor	Rob Burger	1
Valhalla	Mark Hutchinson	2
WAFI	Jim Otton	3
Footloose	John Earhart	4
Phaedrus	Bryan Burgess	5
Red Rocket	Jeff Neuhalfen	DNC

One Race, Myriad Conditions

Bay Week ran from Friday, July 31st, to Sunday, August 2nd, among the Lake Erie Islands and was hosted by Put-in-Bay Yacht Club. Among the approximately 100 boats, nine of them were singlehanded. The race committee does a great job of giving the singlehanders their own courses and their own starts; nicely separating us from the various crewed classes.

While we had planned to sail all three days, the conditions were too light on Friday and too threatening on Sunday, so Saturday proved to be our one and only race of the weekend. Saturday's 27.9 nm course ran from the start/finish area a little north of Rattlesnake Island, out to the west-northwest to West Sister Island, southeast to Green Island, then north around Rattlesnake Island and back to the finish line. The first three boats finished between the committee boat and the pin, however, the remaining boats took their own finish times at the pin buoy, as the committee boat headed back to the dock around 15:45.

The weather started off fantastic, with an easy spinnaker reach toward West Sister Island. But as we approached the first mark on the course, things started changing. First, the winds got light and a little shifty, and the clouds started filling in. On the way to the second mark around Green Island, the winds picked up, making for a lively beat. The fleet also saw some rain and some rather big wind shifts as we approached closer to the leeward side of the Bass Islands.

Rounding Green Island for the final leg north to the finish put the fleet on a fast reach on starboard tack with winds in the mid-teens. Rattlesnake Island was in the rumb line to the finish, which we had to keep to starboard.

Jake Thomas, on *Smoke Show*, took line honors, but Russ Krock, on *Schock & All*, was hot on his heals and corrected to 1st place. Joey Baker, on *Serenity*, rounded out the top three in the Singlehanded A division.

The Singlehanded B division was lead home by Rob Burger, on *Storm's Harbor*, with Mark Hutchinson, on *Valhalla*, and Jim Otton, on *WAFI*, rounding out the top three.

We appreciate that the I-LYA race committee made special accommodations for the singlehanders. Most of us stay on the mooring balls, instead of taking up space at the city docks, and we don't have crews consuming free beer and hamburgers at the Yacht Club. So, in addition to giving us our own starts and courses, they gave us a break on the registration fee.

Thanks, I-LYA!



I-LYA burgee

The Inter-Lake Yachting Association ("I-LYA") was created in 1885 and its first official major regatta ("Bay Week") was held at Put-in-Bay in 1894. [*credit* National Museum of the Great Lakes] The I-LYA is organized to "encourage, advance, promote, and perpetuate among amateurs, yachting, sail, powerboat, and other amateur aquatic competition …" among other purposes. [*see* I-LYA Code of Regulations] Founded in 1886, Put-in-Bay Yacht Club has been hosting the I-LYA regatta for more than 100 years.

Lake Michigan Solo/Double Scramble

Chicago Solo Start		
Freyja	Michael Tobey	1
REJECT	Matthew Rubsam	2
Apostrophe	Dan Cooley	3
Chicago Doublehanded Start		
Roots Woman	Dean Doman	1
YUKON	Ralph Krauss	2
Holland Solo Start		
18 Degrees	Joe Turns	1
Speed O	Brian Swem	2
Holland Doublehanded Start		
Primal Scream	Luke Brockman	1
Rambler	James Nachtman	2
Water Lily	Jack Wolf	3

Lake Michigan Solo/Doublehanded Scramble

The Lake Michigan Solo/Doublehanded Scramble is held in late August. The race offers three starting locations (Chicago IL, Holland MI, and Racine MI) all finishing in Michigan City, IN. This year saw ten boats start (five singlehanded and five doublehanded) and all finished.

Many sailors have used this event as a way to complete their 100 mile solo qualifier, which is required for entry into the Solo Mackinac Challenge. While the race was originally only a solo race, it has been expanded to include doublehanded entrants as well. This was envisioned as a way for our solo members to bring other individuals interested in solo sailing into our group by providing an event where they could ride along with them as a training race. Having essentially a coach on board assessing their strengths and weaknesses during the race.

For me, spending time on my boat doublehanded was a great way to truly assess the opportunity available to go solo. However, most have used the race as a great experience of overnight port to port sailing with a family member or selecting one of their regular crew to participate with them.

This year's race offered some great sailing conditions with 10–15 kts from the southeast, clocking to south about the time everyone was on the last leg, creating an up wind beat to the finish.

Matt Rubsam, Event Chair

Lower Lake Huron Solo Challenge

PHRF 1		
Good Lookin'	Mark DenUyl	1
Serenity	Joey Baker	2
El Burro	Kyle Griffin	3
Mylo B	William Dembek	4
PHRF 2		
Trader	Dave Kember	1
Bliss	Alan Morris	2
Liquid Fix	William Fretwell	3
Windy Blue	Pete Aalbers	RET

Lower Lake Huron Solo Race

The Lower Lake Huron Solo was held on Saturday, September 12th this year. It is a 43 nm race that starts from a set mark 1.25 nm from the entrance to the Sarnia Yacht Club, proceeds north to the #12 channel buoy, rounds to the east to the V4 buoy off Kettle Pt., Ontario, and returns to the #2 channel buoy at Sarnia. The wind was 10–12 kts with gusts to 16 kts from the south and the sea ranged from flat to 2-foot waves. There were eight entrants split into two fleets based on PHRF ratings. Don Farrar and his boat, *Lucia*, were the Race Committee and started the fleets.

The first leg was a run to the #12 buoy. Most boats set spinnakers off the line and proceeded at full speed to the mark. *Good Lookin*', the J/105, was first to the #12 buoy, followed closely by, *Serenity*, the Figaro 2. The second leg to Kettle Pt. was a beam reach. While the J/105 carried its kite around #12, most of the rest of the fleet dropped spinnakers at the first mark. The fleet eventually put kites back up. Myself, I switch from an A2 on the first leg run to an A3 for the second leg reach. *Good Lookin*' led the fleet around V4 followed closely by *Serenity*. *Trader* was the first boat from the PHRF2 division, clearly in the mix with the PHRF1 boats. The final leg home was a 20 nm fetch biased on the port tack. The wind stayed in the low teens for the PHRF1 boats, with *Good Lookin*' crossing the finish at 16:06 and the final PHRF1 boat crossing at 17:09. The PHRF2 boats were not quite as lucky, as the wind started to fail as the evening moved on. With *Trader* being first across the line at 17:22 and *Liquid Fix* finding the finish at 19:56. *Windy Blue* was the only boat to retire from the race.

I would like to thank my wife, Tara, for being finish line RC and Don Farrar and crew for doing the start line. I'm also grateful to all the participants for making it another great day of sailing.

Kyle Griffin, Event Chair

Sandusky 45005		
Singlehanded A		
Knottide	Bob Stach	1
Schock & All	Russ Krock	2
Storm's Harbor	Rob Burger	3
Glass Pony	Jason Huffman	RET
Tumbleweed	Larry Cadman Jr.	RET
Southbound	Lease Schock	DNC
Singlehanded B		
Hunter S	Sam Snellenberger	1
Phaedrus	Bryan Burgess	2
Dulcibella	John Garhart	3
Let's Dance	David Knox	4
Footloose	John Earhart	DNC
Nebesa	Jack Jamison	DNC

Rain and Wind Ruled the Day

The weather forecast continually changed in the week leading up to the race. Both wind direction and speed varied widely, but one thing remained constant—there would be rain. And there was rain, for much of the race.

On the morning of Saturday, September 19th, the horn blew for the start at 0800 sharp, but apparently no one was in a hurry because it took nearly 15 minutes for all of the boats to cross the start line. *Storm's Harbor* acted as committee boat, so after everyone else started, she picked up her anchor, then the pin (an inflatable toy in the shape of a sprinkle donut with a bite out of it), then set the main and headed toward the first mark – that was 19m50s after the start. At least everyone was finally on their way to NOAA 45005, except that *Glass Pony* parted its jib halyard during the starting sequence and ended up retiring shortly after the start.

The first leg was upwind to NOAA 45005 in lumpy conditions, but with enough wind in the low to mid-teens to power through. Most of us made it to the first mark on a single starboard tack with the wind coming from a generally easterly direction, but with some significant oscillations at the northern end of the course. While it was dry at the start, the rain came shortly thereafter, and it continued to rain in one form or another until early in the afternoon.

There were some flukey winds on the second leg from 45005 to the entrance buoy at Huron, but as the boats approached the southern shore of Lake Erie, the winds steadied and increased to provide somewhat sporty conditions for the third and final leg to the finish.

Russ Krock, on *Schock & All*, finished first at around 1430, while David Knox, on *Let's Dance*, crossed the line last at around 2000. Everyone got back to the Sandusky Sailing Club and secured at the dock by 2100, so we had time for dinner and flags on Saturday night.



Russ Krock and David Knox (Photo by Robbie Stone)

Special recognition goes to David Knox for completing his first Solo Challenge (Lake Erie) aboard his Pacific Seacraft Dana 24, *Let's Dance*, thereby becoming a lifetime member of the GLSS. With a relatively small, slow boat, it took David a little more than five days to complete the Lake Erie Solo in August; so we were all impressed when he jumped right back in to sail in the 45005 in September! At the skippers' meeting for the 45005, David was presented with the inaugural Wally McMinn Perseverance Trophy (for his tenacity in completing the Lake Erie Solo Challenge) in the presence of many of his new singlehanded sailor friends.

Rob Burger, Event Chair

St. Clair Solo Challenge & Big Al's Steak Roast

As the final event of the GLSS season, the St. Clair Solo is always well attended by skippers from Lake Huron, Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River, and Lake Erie. As with all challenges, weather was a major concern for the participants.

Forecasts were for light air to begin, dropping midafternoon, before filling in slightly through the evening. At the start, skippers were treated to winds 8 – 10 knots, allowing most boats to reach the far mark by 1 pm. After turning the 2nd mark, most found winds beginning to drop, making it a long afternoon for the 3rd leg of the diamond shaped course. The PHRF A boats headed south of the rhumb line, appearing to head to the Detroit sky line. While the PHRF B & C boats worked their way along the north side of the rhumb line. By the time the fleet reached the 3rd mark, the R-28 channel buoy, the water had turned to glass. Skippers drifted around for a little over an hour before the winds began to fill in and build for the last six mile leg.

Twenty-seven boats started between the two courses—A 19 mile JAM course and a 39 mile PHRF course. The fleet was split into five classes with two JAM classes and three PHRF classes. Joey Baker on his Quest 33, *Goldilocks*, took overall honors, earning his place on the Dave Evans Award Plaque. After completion, everyone gathered at Great Lakes Yacht Club for "Big Al's Steak Roast" and awards.

Jeff Neuhalfen, Event Chair

Lake St. Clair Solo Challenge

JAM A		
Lady Luck	Kenny Parkhurst	1
Tashmoo	Eric Schiebold	2
J WAVE	Mike Varsava	3
Sherasa	Rob Fleming	4
Renatus	Jon Nevedal	5
Essential	Gerald King	DNS
JAM B		
Windspiel	Gary Nichols	1
Islander	Andrew Wagoner	2
Cheres!	Dan Guendelsberger	3
Marisia	Patrick McKeever	4
Rhumb Runner	Jonathan Ureel	5
PHRF A		
Goldilocks	Joey Baker	1
El Burro	Kyle Griffin	2
Phoenix	Matt Vallus	3
Kailani	Kris Tonn	4
Uncivilized	Russ Krock	5
PHRF B		
Mylo B	William Dembek	1
Quick & Dirty	Noel Brockman	2
Knottide	Bob Stach	3
Mary Lou	Kern Smith	4
Coconut Telegraph	Dan Pavlat	RET
PHRF C		
No Rebase	Bruce Richardson	1
Red Rocket	Jeff Neuhalfen	2
Tader	Dave Kember	3
Mungo Tiki	Tony Berends	4
Otis B. Driftwood	Blair Arden	5
Maahji-Re	Robbie Stone	RET



Photo by John McCallum

New Members

Congratulations to the following sailors who completed their first Challenge in 2026!

Skipper	Boat Name	Make and Model	Lake
James Nachtman*	*Rambler*	J 99	Michigan
Evan Dinsmore	*Selkies*	J 99	Ontario
John Earhart*	*Footloose*	Beneteau 311	Erie
David Knox	*Let's Dance*	Pacific Seacraft Dana 24	Erie

*Denotes President's Cup Winner — best placed finisher of first time Challenge entrants — *see* Trophies for more details.

Website Spotlight

To see a list of GLSS members (those sailors who have completed at least one Challenge), goto the Members Registry page on the GLSS website. To see the list of the group of singlehanders who finished the very first Port Huron to Mackinac Island Solo Challenge in 1979, visit the Charter Members page.

Coast Pilots and Sailing Directions

In the United States, NOAA's Office of Coast Survey publishes Coast Pilots. Coast Pilots supplement the navigation charts and contain a multitude of important information about U.S. coasts and the Great Lakes, including descriptions of channels and anchorages, currents, water levels, prominent features, weather conditions, wharves and small vessel facilities, etc. The volume covering the Great Lakes is Coast Pilot 6. PDF versions are free to download, and you can download the entire book or just the chapters you're interested in. For Canadian waters, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans publishes Canadian Sailing Directions. Sailing Directions similarly provide a vast amount of information that can't be shown on a navigational chart. PDF versions for the Great Lakes can be downloaded for free under the Central Canada tab on the Sailing Directions website. Coast Pilots and Sailing Directions are indispensable resources when voyage planning or for those times when you need to pull into a strange port unexpectedly.

Editor's Note

Rob Burger, Editor

Rob became a member of the GLSS when he completed the 2014 Lake Erie Solo Challenge in his Beneteau Oceanis 41, *Storm's Harbor*. If you have any content, questions, corrections, etc., for the *Solo Challenger*, please email Rob at gr8laksalr@me.com.