

We sailed out of Port Mansfield on Monday, June 8th at around 8 am in the company of Dan Rogers' Balboa 16 *Ladybug* and Eric Rybczynski and Corey on *Wind Waker*, another Potter 19. The wind had been blowing steadily from the south veering occasionally to the southeast since we had arrived in Port Mansfield the previous Saturday, and it looked like it would continue through the day. Typical winds along the Texas coast this time of year are 5-10 kts in the morning building to 15-20 kts by the late afternoon, slowly abating somewhat in the hours after sunset. Turning into the channel to the harbor entrance, Byron raised the already reefed main, unfurled the jib, and I pulled up the outboard.



There were a couple of anxious moments as we sailed through the wind shadow of the houses and condos clustered around the harbor area with barely enough speed to keep steerage, but as we reached the mouth of the harbor the wind filled in and we took off behind *Wind Waker* and *Ladybug* on a close reach down the channel to the Intracoastal Waterway intersection about a mile away.



Once we turned north into the ICW, we shook out the reef in the mainsail, winged out the jib and headed almost straight downwind in the already building chop. After 7 or 8 miles the wind veered more to the southeast, and it became difficult to keep the jib winged out. At about 11 am we turned a bit more to the east and entered the Land Cut, a manmade channel that connects the Lower and Upper Laguna Madre. The water immediately smoothed out and for the next day and a



half it was as if we were driving down a freeway. By noon the windspeed was 16 knots gusting to 20 according to my Kestral windmeter. Where we normally sail (Lake Sabine, a large brackish estuary on the upper Texas coast) we have wind like this much of the time, but it is accompanied by heavy, steep chop due to the fetch across the 7 mile by 16 mile lake. This was the most luxurious sailing I had ever experienced. We even ate lunch as we sailed although this turned out to be the only time on the trip that we were able to do so.

Shortly after entering the Land Cut, we passed Jason Nabors in *Tenacious Turtle*, the most tricked out Puddle Duck Racer of all time. PDR's are 8 foot plywood boats with a slew of different layouts and sailing rigs. The hulls were the only common element of these boats. Jason had shown us some of the features of his boat Saturday evening in Port Mansfield. It has a galley (well, ok, a one burner flip-up stove), a portable head, and a berth inside the tiny cabin. There were jokes throughout the week about future upgrades including a flatpanel HDTV and BluRay player.



A bit further up the cut we ran across the rest of the PDRs at their rendezvous point on the windward bank. These guys accomplished some amazing things on this year's trip.

A little after 2:30 pm we pulled up into Hap's Cut, which is a channel between the Land Cut and The Hole, an extremely shallow bay to the east of the Land Cut. There are fishing cabins and a small dock along Hap's Cut, however most of us beached on the southern bank of the cut in some of the messiest, thickest mud you can imagine.

Shortly after we arrived, Dave in *Merlin* had some of us who were standing around go dig up any extra docklines that we had, tied them together, and rowed one end of the line over to the north bank of the cut where Skip Johnson's proa *P52* had been blown. After Skip tied the line off, we pulled the boat across and beached her so that he could join in the socializing that was to be a big part of our evenings.



Evenings in camp were high points of each day-doing any repairs that were needed, comparing notes with the other folks on the trip and checking out an amazing variety of sailing craft, from the PDR's (at 8 feet the smallest) to the Bolger schooner (at 32 feet the largest boat in the fleet). There were lots of wooden homebuilts but a fair number of production fiberglass boats made the trip as well. Most of the boats were beachable, but *Our Way Out*, the Reinell 22, *Goose*, a Vivacity 20, Carl's Horizon Cat and

*Ladybug*, a Balboa 16, were all deeper draft vessels that had to anchor out. There were several proas as well as a few catamarans and at least one trimaran. In all, a pretty varied assortment of cool boats and people.

Tuesday morning, we had breakfast and then headed back to the ICW for another day of mostly smooth sailing. The winds were not initially as strong as they had been on Monday, so we shook out the reef in the mainsail (a move that we would regret later in the morning). About 10 minutes after we re-entered the ICW, the waterway again turned more to the east, making our course more of a broad reach. Within 3 miles, we were out of the Land Cut and into the Upper Laguna Madre. Crossing Baffin Bay (still in the ICW), we were sailing fast in the rapidly rising breeze when right behind me there was a loud "CHUFF" sound and we both about jumped out of our skins - a pod of porpoises had joined us! I grabbed the camera while Byron took the helm and they entertained us for 15 or 20 minutes before getting bored and heading off to parts unknown.



At green light 207 about a mile from the northern edge of Baffin Bay we again turned slightly towards the east to a heading of 020 degrees, putting the southeasterly wind just behind our beam. *Aldebaran* began to show a bit of weatherhelm as she heeled past 15 degrees and I had to head up a couple of times in gusts. About three miles past the turn, we broached.



When the winds are good we enjoy sailing hard. Pushing the boat and pushing ourselves (within reason, of course) is a great way to gain experience and to see how the boat responds in rougher conditions. In our normal sailing grounds, people at the ramp will sometimes question the wisdom of going sailing in a 19 foot boat when the winds are so high. My reasoning is that I want to gain

experience in these conditions at a time and place of my choosing. If I get caught out in bad conditions that are beyond my abilities and need help, I would rather be a mile from the marina (and a mile and a half from the Coast Guard station) than on a trip out in the middle of nowhere. Practically speaking, I try always to recognize when I am at the limits of my or the boat's capabilities and head to smoother waters, under motor power if necessary.

So this is by no means the first time this has happened, and it normally is not much of an event. One of the admirable qualities of the Potter 19 is its tendency when overpowered to round up into the wind, come up and stop. This usually happens at a high angle of heel in gusty winds. The difference here was that we were not in the middle of a lake or bay with no other boats in our immediate vicinity. We were in a fairly narrow channel with 5 or 6 other boats within 100 yards of us. I would like to take this opportunity to apologize to all of those guys right now for foolishly carrying too much sail for conditions and narrowly missing a couple of them (they know who they are) when we went out of control. I really do know better than that, I



just had a lapse in judgment brought on by my competitive nature on a trip that really isn't about competition. I was a jerk and I'm sorry.

We quickly drifted across the channel and ran aground on the leeward side as we put the first reef back in the main. The boat was headed into the wind, so we finished setting the main, rolled up part of the jib, then cranked up the daggerboard a few inches and sailed back into the channel. *Aldebaran* settled right down and I felt more stupid than ever when I realized that putting the first reef back in had no effect whatsoever on our speed. Although we were still making hull speed, we were much more in control.

Continuing down the ICW we were treated to a constantly changing panorama of cool and unusual sailing craft as the faster boats passed us and we caught up to the slower ones. John Wright's *Platypus* was one of the most unusual. John designed and built her with this trip in mind. *Platypus* had a couple of nicknames on the trip ("the floating coffin" and "Tic Tac") due to her unusual shape, but she is a fast boat, and the shape gives her advantages like extremely low windage and a built in sleeping area.



Chris Tomsett finished his Michalak Caroline just in time for the Texas 200. He not only talked his sister Kelli into helping him finish the boat, she crewed for him on the trip. The Caroline is sailed from inside the cabin, which has an opening all of the way down the top. The day before we left Port Mansfield someone (John Turpin, I think) came up with the name *Easy Bake* upon finding out the boat had not been named. This name was quickly adopted by anyone calling Chris on the radio



or talking about his boat. Although we could pass them on a reach, on a run she ran away from most of the monohulls in the fleet. You could see her red sails up ahead for miles.

About 2 pm we came upon the channel to the Padre Island Yacht Club. We turned into the wind, which was coming almost straight down the channel, cranked up the Nissan and doused the sails. Coming in we could see a few boats tied off to the seawall, so we headed over there. As



we approached the depth finder showed us getting shallower as I cranked up the daggerboard-I apparently did not crank it up quickly enough and 3 feet off the wall we abruptly stopped.



Turns out that at the seawall the water is only about 2 feet deep! We were on the other side of a fence (running to the seawall's edge) from the other boats, so we got out on the seawall and pulled the boat along while simultaneously fending her off. Crossing the fence was a challenge; I foolishly stepped over into the tall grass to climb it and discovered that the grass was sharp enough to make small cuts on my legs wherever I brushed against it.



John Miller graciously pulled his Dolphin forward another 10 feet to allow *Aldebaran* to straddle the fence and we tied her off to a signpost. After we checked out the other boats, Byron and I both took advantage of the short line at the outside shower to clean up before dinner.

While we were getting things in order, the last shuttle to Snoopy's left, so we took a half hour or so to get together and discuss the next days route with the other Potter skippers, John (P15 *Tetra*), Eric and Corey (P19 *Wind Waker*). Phil and Andrea Lea had missed the bus to Snoopy's too, but instead of resigning themselves to another "boat meal" as the rest of us had, they called around and found an Italian restaurant that delivered to the area around the Yacht Club. When the delivery guy came in hauling several bags of stuff they realized that they had ordered way too much food and offered us a lasagna which we gratefully (and quickly) accepted. I can say without a doubt that it was the best meal of the trip for us.

Wednesday morning it was somewhat overcast and the winds started building earlier than



on the previous days. We got up and had our normal breakfast, and were underway by just after 7 am. We sailed out of the Yacht Club and turned back into the ICW in the company of *Tetra*, *Wind Waker*, and two Cortez 16's, *BluByU*, and *Baby Blue*. After about 2 miles we turned in at the Marker 37 Marina for a couple of 20 pound bags of ice.



We filled both coolers, then headed back out to catch up with the rest of the boats in our little group. We were sailing under main only with a single reef by 8:30 am. The windmeter was showing 15 knots gusting to 20 although it was early in the day.

By 9:45 we had left the ICW and were headed across Corpus Christi Bay with the wind on our beam. Shortly after leaving the ICW we put the second reef in the main and unfurled some of the jib. We had a great sail across the bay in a fair

amount of chop. The winds were getting stronger, but were certainly not unmanageable. At 10:15 we were a quarter of a mile off Shamrock Island - halfway across the Bay. We made 5 to 6 knots all the way across. It was an awesome ride! I was having a great time at the helm and got a bit too complacent and sailed just a little bit past where we should have made the turn into Stingray Hole.



Big mistake. The water on the east side of the pass gets shallow VERY quickly and we ended up on the East Flats, a popular wade fishing area. By the time I saw that we were heading into shallow water, the tiller was twisting in my hand as the rudder's lower pintle popped out of its gudgeon and the force of the water over the rudder forced it sideways, bending the upper gudgeon to the point that we could neither remove the rudder nor reseal it. Byron rolled up the jib and pulled the main down while I held onto the rudder as best as I could, and then Byron and I both wrestled with it trying to keep it from twisting further, with limited success. John was coming up behind us in *Tetra* and could see that we were having problems, and tried a couple of times to raise us on the VHF. Unfortunately, our hands were full and we could not answer him.

I was concerned by this time that the rogue rudder would break the upper gudgeon, which would have been a trip-ending event. The wind was at least blowing us generally toward the channel and so the water under the hull was getting deeper rather than shallower, but no matter what we did we could not control the rudder. By this time *Wind Waker* had headed our way and were hanging around to see if they could help while they tried to figure out what the heck was going on. I was glad to see them, but we still did not dare let go of the rudder and so could not communicate with them. I finally remembered the old ballpeen hammer I had thrown into the tool box on a whim a couple of days before we left for Port Mansfield. Byron got the hammer and we were able to beat the gudgeon flat enough to get the lower pintle lined up and back in. We later discovered that the plates holding the upper and lower halves of the rudder together were bent as well. The whole episode took maybe 10 minutes.

As soon as we could start sailing again, I called *Tetra* and *Wind Waker* on the radio to let them know what had happened and that we were ok to continue. I was glad to be sailing with these guys, and even as we were struggling with the rudder it was good to know that if we had ended up needing a tow, Eric and Corey were there and ready to assist us.



After passing through Stingray Hole, we turned right into the Corpus Christi Channel on a close reach. Right afterward we spied a large tanker coming up the channel. Fortunately, it was moving slowly and we were able to get all the way over to the side of the channel as it passed. There were a few moments of excitement at the Port Aransas Ferry Landing as well. Those things are CONSTANTLY crossing the channel, one after another. IT NEVER STOPS. We were a bit apprehensive about crossing their path and tried to time our crossing so that we could cross behind

one of them, but they move so quickly and follow one another so closely that it was impossible. As we went across the ferry that was originally coming in off our starboard bow gave us 2 blasts of his horn and went behind us. Watching those guys ease into the landing was amazing-it is always a pleasure to watch pros at work.



About a half mile past the ferries we turned into the Lydia Ann Channel behind *Tetra*. The wind was again on our beam, and we had a nice fast sail past the famous Lydia Ann Lighthouse. At about 1:30 pm we turned northeast at Green Can 75 and headed out of the ICW into Aransas Bay. The winds had picked up to 18 to 22 knots sustained, gusting much

higher. *Tetra* was getting bounced around in the 3-4 foot chop, and after a few minutes John radioed that he was going to head further east into the lee of San Jose Island to see if he could get into smoother water. About that time, Byron went below and got our lifejackets. The normal rule is to wear them anytime we go forward, of course with the lines all run back to the cockpit that is hardly ever necessary except to drop anchor. However, with the conditions in the bay being what they were, we thought that it was a prudent thing to do. We headed east with John, but our paths diverged somewhat and we finally hove to for a while so that we could keep him in sight. Once he and *Tetra* were closer to shore (and in much calmer water), he turned back to the northeast. We could see *Easy Bake* about a half-mile behind him, so we took off for Paul's Mott, arriving at about 3pm.



The water at Paul's Mott was very shallow out to about 150 yards from the beach. We anchored in 3 feet of water so that we could get the boat sorted out and crank everything up before getting out on the crushed oyster shell bottom (no mud!) and pulling the boat to the beach. *Wind Waker* came in right ahead of us, and *Easy Bake* and *Tetra* were not far behind. We had about an inch of water in the cabin, which Byron cleaned up while I finished sorting things out and cleaning up the

cockpit and deck. I had never had that much water in the cabin before, but the gasket on the weighted daggerboard was starting to come off, and Byron had seen a considerable amount spurting out of the gap between the board and trunk in the rough water we had been in earlier in the day, so we didn't worry about it too much. I figured hey, we're in a foot of water; we can't sink too far! The next morning the cabin sole was dry, so we knew that it probably wasn't a hull leak.

We pulled the rudder off its gudgeons before dinner (took a few whacks with the hammer to get it off) and laid it out on the beach.

The metal plates holding together the upper and lower halves had opened up over an inch, resulting in quite a bit of play in the lower half of the rudder. We disassembled it and were able to beat the pieces flat with our trusty ball peen hammer. The first time we reassembled it, there was still some play, so we took it apart and beat it again and this time got it right. The upper pintle was slightly out of true as well, so we squared that back up and then I flattened out the upper gudgeon. At that point the rudder could once again be easily installed and removed. While working on the gudgeon



I noticed a small crack starting in it, which

we watched closely over the next two days. Fortunately, it never got worse. I do plan on replacing both the pintles and gudgeons to be on the safe side. After dinner, we got with Eric and walked down the beach to pick Chuck Leinweber's brain about the route for the next day. Waiting for Chuck to finish his dinner, I heard second hand about the 5 PDR skippers building Mike Monies a whole new rig for his Cartopper on a beach out of spare parts in 10 minutes. The rig was supposed to get him across the bay so that he could withdraw, but it sailed well enough that he turned around and headed for Paul's Mott.



On Friday he finished the trip with the improvised rig! Those PDR guys are something else.

Chuck recommended leaving the ICW early and hugging the shore of Matagorda Island through San Antonio Bay because of the extreme chop they had experienced on the bay the previous year. He told us about a pass about 50 yards off Panther Point that was not shown on the charts and was of the opinion that this route would be better than going straight across the bay to Panther Reef Cut as we had previously decided. We could then take South Pass into Espirito Santos Bay as we had planned. We talked it over between ourselves and with John as well, but he was adamant about going through the shallow water route that had been mapped out to avoid the rough waters in San Antonio Bay. Eric and I decided that we would take the route that Chuck recommended. Byron and I turned in about 9 pm - we were both exhausted.

Thursday morning we started the day with breakfast at 6:30 am and listened as we did every morning to weather forecasts on the VHF. NOAA weather radio had small craft advisories for the bays for the third day in a row (on the Texas coast that means 20 knot and over winds and/or 7 foot or higher waves for at least a two hour period). Winds were expected to be 20-25 knots, waves 3 to 4 feet. We pulled out of camp at about 7 am in 17 knots of wind with *Wind Waker*, *BluByU*, *Baby Blue*, and *Dingleberry*, an O'Day Widgeon sailed by Cathy Wright and her daughter Meredith. At some point (I don't remember exactly when) Stan Roberts in *Peregrine* joined the group as well. We entered the ICW at GC 17 and again turned northeast.

By 8:30 the winds were already hitting 20 knots gusting higher, but the ride in the ICW was smooth. We were sailing with the second reef in the mainsail and about 1/3 of the lapper unfurled, and made 5-6 knots down the ICW all of the way to Rattlesnake Island. At this point we were a bit ahead of the others, so we anchored on the windward edge of the channel to take the sails down and raise the keel a couple of feet. We kicked up the rudder as well. I figured that if we had at least 2 feet of water through the cut, and the chart showed that we did, that we would motor through the spoil area at GC51 with just a foot or so of the keel down for directional stability and we could still steer with the kicked up rudder which does MUCH better than steering with the motor in high winds. The alternative was to continue to FL 31 about 3 and a half miles further down and then cut across to the middle of San Antonio Bay in 6 feet of water. We could have sailed through that, but our goal was to stay as close to Matagorda Island as possible. That ended up being a good decision.

As the group caught up with us we started the motor and raised the anchor, then headed through the cut over the spoil area, calling depths on the VHF as we went so that the others would know what to expect. As the chart showed, the minimum depth that we encountered was 2 feet, and we could see the others following us through, but as we were raising sail we saw *Dingleberry* turning back. There were a couple of radio calls, and they were reported by one of the Cortez 16's to be OK. We found out later that they had been having trouble with their rudder for a couple of days and did not want to get out in the bay with it once they saw how choppy it was. They headed back to the ICW and ended up in Rockport. We didn't know what was going on with their boat, but felt bad later that we did not offer them more assistance when we heard what they went through to get back to Rockport. In any case, they proved quite capable of taking care of themselves and their boat.

As soon as we were in deeper water we raised sail and killed the Nissan. We had been on pretty much a downwind run for the better part of three days and so had rigged the jib sheets outside the shrouds to better allow us to wing the jib. Even after we had headed more to the east the wind was well behind our beam, and the jib performed well rigged that way. We were now hard on the wind and were having problems pointing as high as we needed to, so we untied our stopper knot, uncleated the sheet, pulled the sheet inboard of the shrouds and were trying to get it back through the block when the lines' cover came loose from the core at the end. A previous owner had replaced the jib sheets with 5/8" line, barely able to go through the block in any case - it took several minutes to get the frayed cover through. I am sure that Stan, who was sailing right alongside us at the time, was entertained! Looking at our GPS track it is easy to see when we got it through and started sailing again as we were able to make a full 10 degrees better to windward.

At this point *Peregrin* and *Aldebaran* headed east-southeast towards Matagorda Island while *Wind Waker* and the Cortez 16's headed straight for Panther Reef. We all converged on



Panther Reef at about the same time and started looking for the cut. *BluByU* took the lead and hit shallow water almost immediately. We tried a bit closer in, and soon hit shallow water ourselves, at which point we immediately executed The Plan. After the rudder problems the previous day we had come up with a shallow water drill-Byron took sails down, while I cranked the keel up a couple of feet, then I removed the rudder, we pulled it into the cockpit and the motor was started. This took maybe 45 seconds. We motored across the reef, steering with the motor-by the way, the Potter 19

steers like an absolute pig under those circumstances...within about five minutes we were back under sail as we watched *Wind Waker* motor across. I believe that *Baby Blue* was the only boat in our group to actually sail through the pass, which was considerably closer in to Panther Point than we had thought.

We headed northeast towards South Pass about 3/4 of a mile off the island, making good time. It was about this time that we noticed that our leak was back. We had an inch of water in the cabin again, and even more disturbing, the good camera was lying in it! My first thought was "Kathy's gonna KILL me!" (she didn't even act upset about it-apparently she was just relieved that I came back alive). But-no more pictures except for the cell phone variety, and I sure wasn't going to risk the phone by taking pictures on the water with it, especially in rough conditions.

We made the turn into South Pass from a fair distance out, wanting to be sure that we got nowhere near the shallow water. I'll point out here that our GPS had only 16 waypoints entered into it that covered the entire trip. They got us to the general location of a pass, and then we navigated through using the chart and compass. This meant that we were not always able to sail directly to the mouth of a pass, as we would get to our waypoint and then sail a compass heading to and through the pass. In all of the instances where the passes were charted, this worked pretty well as long as I was paying attention. This did mean that sometimes it took a little longer to get where we were going.

As it turned out, there were ranging poles at the entrance to South Pass, and cabins and docks alongside the pass itself, which made it hard to miss. As we were coming out of the pass, we scraped the edge of an unmarked oyster reef with the daggerboard, but turned quickly and were able to sail away from it. A few minutes later *Wind Waker* hit the same reef and her rudder popped





up, out, and into the water. Eric recovered it so quickly that we did not even know what had happened until they reached Army Hole couple of hours later. This brings up an interesting point about sailing these waters. There are oyster reefs EVERYWHERE. Many of them are not charted either on the NOAA charts or the Hook-N-Line fishing maps that we used, having been formed since the last surveys were done. They seem to slope up from the bay floors fairly steeply, too-there is not a lot of warning on the depth finder that you are about to hit one. Definitely some interesting sailing.

The rest of the day's sailing was a 5 to 6-knot beam reach to Army Hole. We had passed between Josephine Mott and Josephine Reef by 4 pm and were tossing our dock lines to Mr. Votaw by 4:30, after dropping sail and motoring directly into the wind up the channel to the slips. *Pilgrim*, *Peregrin*, and a Sea Pearl were the only boats in the slips when we arrived, with maybe 7 or 8 boats on the beach across the campsite, so there were a considerable number that had not yet made it in. As we watched the others in our group come in and helped them get tied off, we started hearing from some of the folks who were already there about problems at Ayers Dugout. At this point we had no concrete information about what had happened to *Dingleberry*, *Easy Bake*, *Tetra*, or Bobby Chilek's San Juan 21, but there were rumors that *Tetra* had been capsized and that several boats had been damaged. We waited and worried.



About 8 pm we saw *Easy Bake's* red sails in the distance and everyone lined up to see her come in. We were very relieved to see that John was with Chris and Kelli. He was sunburned and his feet were in pretty bad shape, but he was OK. He filled us in on the loss of *Tetra* and the damage to the San Juan, and their

subsequent salvage/rescue by the PDR guys, Chris and some of the others who were on the scene. The San Juan showed up about then after motorsailing all evening with just her jib up and a damaged centerboard. No one knew what had happened to the PDR's, but we figured correctly that they had found a suitable spot to beach for the night. We visited with Bobby, Chris and Kelli until late and drank the rest of Chris' beer with the goal of



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reducing the boat's weight for the run to Magnolia Beach. Some of the smaller boats had been trickling in at the beach on the other side of the camp-the last to arrive were the two Hobie Adventure Islands, at about 1:30 the next morning. In all, 29 boats made Army Hole out of the 48 that left Port Mansfield 4 days earlier.

Friday morning we slept in. After breakfast (around 9 am I think), we got things together, shook out the reefs in the mainsail, and headed downwind in the channel towards the ICW. The wind was only 10 or 12 knots-easily the lightest winds we had all week. *Easy Bake* passed us on the run down the channel, and then we caught back up after turning into a beam reach at the ICW. Of course, she again left us in the dust after turning into Matagorda Bay for the run to Magnolia Beach. We had a pleasant downwind sail after turning out of the



ICW, although we were still taking on a considerable amount of water from the bad weatherstripping around the daggerboard trunk. An easy day!

We pulled up at the Indianola Public Park about 1:30 pm. It was a bittersweet end to the week. We had looked forward to the trip for so long that although we were happy to have finished, it was over, and that was a sad thing for us. After beaching the boat, we caught a ride with some friends into Indianola and had hamburgers and cold beer for lunch. The rest of the

afternoon was spent visiting and looking over boats as they came in. We got *Aldebaran* back on her trailer and spent one last night aboard in the parking lot before heading for home the next morning.



I had watched the Texas 200's birth the previous year through the Duckworks website, and later on the site that Chuck put up that was dedicated to the cruise. After reading the accounts of the first year, I knew that I wanted to make the trip if the events' organizers decided to do it again. It took the cancer diagnosis to actually make me commit. In October after the biopsy I got an envelope to put gig money in to help pay for the trip, and officially signed myself up along with Byron Walker, my brother-in-law (and one of my best friends). Through the next 9 months of surgery, radiation treatments and recovery, the Texas 200 website was always at the top of the list of recently visited sites on our web browser. I believe that planning the trip and reading the advice and comments of the others who were planning on going were instrumental to my recovery, both mentally and physically. It inspired me to start exercising as early as possible in the weeks after the treatments ended and to push myself harder than I would have otherwise. Choking down as many calories as possible to gain back some of the weight I lost was a lot easier with the motivation that the trip planning provided.

It was Something To Look Forward To, and I am grateful to everyone who participated in any way. I am especially thankful for my wife Kathy, who acted as Head Nurse and Chief Encourager through the whole cancer thing and never said a single negative word about all of the preparations for the trip, although I know that she had some doubts as to whether I would be up to it, and for Byron, who put up with me aboard a 19 foot boat for six days although there were times when I "hit the wall" and he had to cut me a considerable amount of slack. I also need to mention that although the trip itself was a powerful motivator, without the support of quite a few family members and friends (many of whom took turns driving the four hour round trip to the hospital's radiation clinic every day for six weeks) it could not have happened.

It has been 2 months since the 2009 Texas 200. It is in my thoughts at some point pretty much every day. I have already committed to do it next year, health permitting. As I told my wife on Saturday when we arrived back home, "If they were doing this again next week, I'd be there!" I meant every word. Sailing with these folks was a terrific (and humbling) experience. This year's trip started 128 days after the last radiation treatment; so next year should be easier. Maybe.

Chuck Pierce 8/18/09