

My First Texas200 by Guy Bratton

I have only completed 1 Texas 200 so far, but I am planning my second in a few weeks. For much of the past year I have been processing my experience and reflecting on its motto "Embrace the Suck!"

I recall heading out of Port Isabel early on the first day and thinking this wasn't so bad. Why all the fuss? It was windy, but manageable and we were off to the races. That optimism shifted by 3am when the tide lifted our boat and we began lightly smashing into the next boat, or when the wind stopped and the mosquitos carried me off on the last night. I won't go into the details of the suck that emerged over the next 5 days because I don't want to spoil it, and I think the suck is different for everyone. It has taken me many months to process why the suck matters--not just in the 200, but in life.

At first it seemed that the Powers that Be were intent on making the Texas 200 more unpleasant than it needs to be. "Why not make it easier?" Surely more people would join in. But in my processing I've come to the realization that our culture has sold us a big lie: that the best things in life are free, easy, and painless. The reality is that the richness of life is often found in the costly, the challenging, and the painful. When you think about the richest seasons of life they are often born of great struggle, and the 200 is a microcosm of this phenomenon.

That said, my wife and I had a tremendous experience of our first 200. I gained such a profound appreciation for the woman I married--one who would sweat it out, put up with my crabbiness, learn the ropes, and keep my water bottle full, all while dealing with the dreaded waste elimination trials. I became a better sailor in a week than in the previous 25 years. Sailing an undersized boat in oversized conditions for a week will bring you to the end of yourself, your equipment, and your capability. I never understood reefing, or weather helm, I'd never had to learn to navigate not just from point A to point B, but to do so in a way that utilized sheltered water and appropriate depths.

I spent the night at Snoopy's, and I'm grateful for it. But now I understand why it didn't become a camp in 2024. You can do the 200 in hotels, or bring a generator and AC, etc., and that might be what you can do. I run a camp, and we use a philosophy called "challenge by choice" that means that people approach challenge from all different points on their journey. I think the 200 has to allow for that continuum, but I am already thinking of how I will hug the barrier islands and find the passes to make it to Army Hole.

The sleep deprivation is so much. The heat is inescapable. I have to work hard to overcome my increasing claustrophobia in the cabin. It is so so hard, but it is so so rich. It also engages me so wholly that I can take my mind off of work and everything else to be fully present and at home on the water.

I've read the hundreds of posts, and written them myself, asking "why not do it at a different time when it isn't so hot?" or "why not choose easier camps?" or "why not do it in Florida on white sand beaches?" But as I modify my rudder design and add a third reef to my sail, I am also setting my mind toward the rigors ahead, and I am grateful to the organizers for their insistence that the 200 not become a beer cruise, even though I enjoy those too.

I look forward to joining you all again in a few short weeks! I look forward to applying the wisdom gained by a year under my belt. I am excited for the first timers, who are prepping with such intense anticipation. I am more grateful than ever to have the best first mate in the world! And I wish you all well as you scramble these last few weeks so that we may all "Embrace the Suck!" together.



Fair winds!

— with **Beth Bratton** in **Lake Livingston**.