

Jim Quinlan Texas 200 account 2018
Hobie Tandem Island with custom spinnaker setup
Clearwater, Florida

I first got interested in the Texas 200 after reading some posts on the Hobie forum from Greg, a Hobie member who posts something about the event every year. Even though it was far from where I live in Florida, it interested me because of the way it was organized. Especially with the shuttle bus.



So in March of 2018 I decided to commit to participating in the challenge. My gear is pretty good for this type of challenge and my boat was already hardened to safely go in the most challenging conditions. I just needed to work on navigation and making the boat a little more comfortable to sail in the hot Texas sun so armrests were added to the seat and a sort of bimini was fashioned using a very sturdy adjustable umbrella. To the armrests I added several pockets to hold items I needed to have nearby. I added a tether for my cell phone which was in a waterproof case. Too many of the stories I heard from veterans of the Texas 200 mentioned lost or ruined cell phones. I also added a nice waterproof bluetooth speaker that paired with my cell phone.

Hobie recently came out with a spinnaker for their island series of boats but in my opinion there were way too many problems with their poor design which often results in a potentially unrecoverable tangle while sailing. These serious tangles would require de-masting at sea to sort out the mess and then re-stepping the mast. I've done it before and it's not fun. Especially in big wind and large waves with a spinnaker partially deployed and/or mainsail partially open. A potentially dangerous situation. So I redesigned the entire setup to minimize the chance of this ever happening with a custom stainless mast topper with a pivoting spring mechanism to hold the lines away from the point of tangle. Not a perfect solution but much safer than the stock Hobie setup. The other Hobie sailor in the Texas 200 this year also has a custom mast topper that was he also modified to prevent unrecoverable tangles.

At the last minute I decided to leave Florida a day early so I could get to Port Isabel with plenty of time to get organized and look forward to the event without rushing around. It's a 1400 mile trip from Florida so I could take my time and enjoy the drive. When I got into Louisiana as I was cruising down I-10 a trailer in front of me started smoking. As I got closer one of the trailer's rear tires came off and rolled into the front of my truck and hit me at about 70 mph. I tried swerving but there wasn't anything I could do. When I pulled up to the truck

pulling the trailer, it was obvious they had no idea that the trailer they were pulling now only had 3 tires on it. When I stopped about a half hour later it didn't appear that the tire did any damage to my truck which was surprising. The serious damage that actually occurred wouldn't be revealed to me until later in the trip. I was one of the early arrivals at the White Sands motel in Port Isabel Texas on Friday late afternoon. This gave me all day Saturday to get my boat in the water to share a slip with the other Hobie and to get all the gear unloaded that was going with me on the Texas 200. And to make sure everything else was in my truck for the shuttle on Sunday.

Saturday was the day most people showed up and there was a lot of activity with everyone working on their boats and getting them in the water. At one point I saw a Catalina struggling with stepping their mast and I offered to help. Just as I was climbing the ladder to get on their boat, they lost control of the mast and it crashed down and stopped a few inches from the center of my head by a line along the rail. If that line hadn't been there I'm sure things would have been serious and I wouldn't be sailing the Texas 200. It took awhile but we eventually got the mast up and rigged the boat. That's the reason I love Hobie's over these bigger boats. So much easier to set up and safer. Where I normally sail and launch my Hobie there are a bunch of catamarans and I've seen a few people get hurt rigging their cats especially putting their masts up or down.



After getting everything organized on Saturday Greg (The other Hobie island sailor) and I decided to take a drive to see South Padre Island and the

surrounding beaches. We had dinner at a good pizza place on Padre island and picked up a few last minute items at a store before driving down to the beaches and checking out the beauty of the area.



Sunday morning was the Captain's meeting and then we had a quick breakfast at the White Sands before driving our vehicles 200+ miles to a location near Mangolia Beach which is where we end up at the end of the week. Throughout the day I would pass or be passed by others pulling their empty trailers. One time there were two vehicles with empty trailers pulled over so I stopped to see if there was something I could do to lend a hand. Sure enough they were Texas 200 participants and one truck had something wrapped around (I think) the driveshaft and they didn't have the right tools with them. By the time I walked back toward my truck to get some tools, they had found a way to dislodge whatever it was and we were all on our way again.

As I got out of my truck at J&T's truckstop another Texas 200 person was just "gliding" in to the gas pump. It turns out he ran out of gas just as he was pulling in. The drive here is pretty remote and he pushed it a little too much. He got lucky though. It was a nice break at JT's and the bus ride back to Port Isabel was pleasant. The Texas 200 organizers are to be commended for having this shuttle planned. They do a great job with this event.

Back at Port Isabel with no vehicle meant that this was it, there's no turning back now. As Greg and I were walking to a restaurant for dinner that evening, we passed a room of some Tx200 sailors with the smoke alarm going off and the door wide open with a guy fanning furiously to air the smoke out of his room. As

the alarm relentlessly blared I chuckled to myself and thought here we go

Sunday night I had trouble sleeping with everything on my mind. Eventually I nodded off and Monday morning came pretty quick. Most of my gear was in the room and the mast was laying on the dock by the boat. There was congestion around the boat landing and when I finally was able to squeeze in to load my gear and step the mast the wind blew me into a piling and an ama pin sheared off. Not a big deal but when you have a zillion things running through your head it's frustrating digging out tools and spare parts to make a repair before you even get underway.



c 1: Away we go

Day 1

After Greg and I launched we both experienced problems with our GPS so I ended up using a spare gps. And a big mistake I made was installing the stainless spinnaker mast topper without rigging the halyard since the winds were so intense and it would not be a spinnaker day. I didn't run the halyard to avoid it tangling the Main (which can be a problem). However no halyard on the spinnaker topper made it jerk violently back and forth all day which worried me

because it could be perilous if it flung off impaling me or the boat. The wind indicator eventually flung off the topper but miraculously the topper stayed on the mast all day.



c 6: Greg (looking homeless) getting some religious guidance after day 1.

The winds were quite intense gusting in the mid 30's all day. As long as you paid attention and kept one hand on the sheet ready to spill wind it was pure joy being pushed along through the waves. My boat was loaded right with most of the weight in the stern so my boat skipped over the waves and it was an incredible sleigh ride all day. Several times I've been in similar or worse winds so I knew more or less what to expect. The tandem island is pretty stable but you still have to be vigilant because it can capsize in various scenarios. Plus it will be a very wet ride in these conditions.

To get to the first campsite requires you turn east and tack directly into the wind, something I was hoping to try. But when it got to that stage I knew that was an impossible scenario. There's just no way you are going to be able to go upwind in 25-35 mph winds so we went with Greg's backup plan to camp on the north end of Port Mansfield. As we were navigating the waters around Port Mansfield we noticed several other Texas 200 sailors heading into port because they also couldn't get upwind to Camp 1. Turns out there were quite a few boats that experienced serious issues or capsize on day one and many equipment failures.

We were lucky to pull our boats onto shore at the very edge of Port Mansfield at a park with a bathroom no less. There was quite a few people there and cars throughout the night. The ground was like concrete and difficult to put stakes in

the ground to pitch the tents, even with a mallot. The worst of it was both of our boats were both mired in nasty mud that you had to walk about 15' through to get to your camping gear. Fortunately there was a spigot of running water to rinse your feet nearby. As I was unloading my gear I noticed a guy talking (preaching) to Greg for quite awhile. I joked that the guy probably thought Greg was homeless camping out there, looking a little ragged after a long day on the water. Right around sunset deer came into the park and a few people were out petting and feeding them.

Despite a street light above our tents and cars and fishermen coming and going all night, I slept fairly well. Once I woke up during the night half asleep and thought I saw a rat silhouette chewing through my tent (as it was bathed in light) but it was just part of a weird dream and something to laugh about in the morning.

Day 2

The next morning we packed up and sailed into conditions similar to day one. Wind was the same but the waves were bigger in many areas with the boat going into submarine mode where the bow goes completely underwater. It was a very wet ride. The rudder was also causing some issues and getting worse it seemed. I've been having problems with the rudder for awhile and recently my dealer completely redid the twisted internal rudder lines that the factory screwed up. But another problem was the rudder didn't have quite the range of motion I needed so it was a constant struggle to keep it going in the direction I wanted. But regardless, day two was a blast even with the big waves and rudder issues. Plus the scenery was so interesting to this Floridian. I fired up my new waterproof bluetooth speaker and was able to listen to some good tunes along the way. It doesn't get much better than that.

When we got to Haps Cut (camp two) I found out that the stories about the famous mud were not exaggerated. What a mess, you sink up to your knees in nasty mud as you try to schlep your camping gear to shore. And right around that time is when you start to realize how tired and hot you are after the last couple days. The soft ground where we set up our tents was too soft to hold my beach umbrella. Fortunately Greg brought a tarp that sheltered us from the sun while we had dinner and rested. Later that evening before sunset there was a memorial where they remembered a few Texas 200 sailors that had passed since the last event. That's when I realized what a great group of people that are part of the Texas 200. It was a beautiful sunset and I slept fantastic under the stars without a cover on my tent.



Day 3 Today the winds were strong but not quite as intense as the first two days. For awhile I had several dolphins following me, almost touching my boat. I also did something incredibly stupid which was sailing much too close to a freighter. I should have backed way off but for some reason I was more interested in taking pictures. It happened so fast that it kind of took me more by surprise as those freighters are moving with a lot more speed than you think. If my rudder had broken at that time and I was blown into the path of that freighter it would have gone very wrong and been my fault. It was a stupid mistake and one I vowed to never make again.



c 6: On the edge of Corpus Christy Bay

Camp three was at the Padre Island Yacht club but we decided to bypass that and

camp on the edge of Corpus Christy Bay after having lunch at Snoopy's restaurant. Beaching our boat on an island is so much better for our boats than tying up at a yacht club. Especially because I was contemplating a pretty big repair to my boat. I needed to pull the boat on a beach to work on it. There's a line attached to the internal rudder assembly called the preventer line or something like that. A friend of mine was having trouble with his in the past and I recalled he told me he cut his with no adverse problems and it fixed the problem of not having a good range of motion with the rudder. I called him while sailing and he kept saying he couldn't hear me when I repeated my question. We finally hung up and a few minutes later I got a text from him with exactly the information I wanted to hear about him cutting his rudder preventer/limiter line. He pieced together the bits of the conversation and then realized what I was asking.

After a delicious meal at Snoopy's with a couple other Texas 200 sailors – and one poor guy who had the flu, Greg and I sailed to the entrance to Corpus Christy Bay and found a nice sandy beach to set up camp. With all the water splashing onto me every day I could barely walk because of some terrible chafing that was affecting sensitive parts of my body. Very painful, especially with the salt water. Thankfully I brought some lotion in case and learned how important it was to dry your body completely off at night and use lotion. I had a battery operated fan that worked well to help get dry. And the lotion was a life saver ... absolutely necessary. Greg also had the same issue and said it's happened before but he forgot about it.

We were roughly half way so as the sun was setting I pulled out a bottle of Blue Chair Bay rum and proceeded to enjoy the beautiful sunset. It was the best night of the trip and a perfect campsite. I didn't sleep well and was up at 1am reading a book. When I finally dozed off I was woken up by a large flood light of a massive freighter sweeping the area as it passed by our campsite. Fortunately there wasn't a big wake from the freighter to affect our anchorage.

Day 4

The next morning we took down camp and I started working on the rudder. After cutting the line something else happened to the rudder as Greg and I were stress testing it out. Another adjustment came undone and made it seem that cutting the rudder line completely messed up the rudder. I was flipping out thinking I screwed up the boat but after 20 minutes finally sorted out what the real problem was. And the rudder seemed to be much better. However, once we sailed off I didn't lock the rudder down so once again crazy thoughts that my changes screwed up the rudder filled my head because it took so much strength to hold the rudder to keep it going in one direction. When I finally realized I hadn't locked it down, it worked beautifully. Some of that rum should have been saved for this morning's stress.



I also rigged my spinnaker and as the morning had light winds and Greg and I both flew our spinnakers. Fun sailing. The winds turned out to be very good and it was a beautiful day sailing. Especially as we came into Port Aransas with the beautiful blue/tourquoise water and lots of dolphins. It was fun sailing through the area where about 4-5 car ferries were shuttling cars back and forth. It was so good that we had pedals to help with the tacking. I don't know how those other barbaric Tx200 sailboats without pedals did it. After getting through that we stopped at Fins restaurant. Food was absolutely terrible but I didn't have much of an appetite either. Also this morning I realized most of the fresh food I brought was ruined by spoilage or salt water. But I had plenty of crackers and peanut butter and snacks so not a big deal.

c 6: Camping on Paul's Mott

We decided to make our way to Paul's Mott which was rumored to not have enough dry campsites available. We figured we would just look for something else if it didn't pan out. As it turns out we found a good place for our tents and it was a beautiful night. There were about 10 boats with us that night. One of the boats was a father / daughter team who had capsized on day one and lost most of their gear. It sounded like a pretty scary situation but fortunately a couple other guys showed up and helped them get righted again. I didn't have much of an appetite so dinner was just a beer. The night was quite windy and I slept pretty good. What a great day.

Day 5



c 6: Going through Cedar Dugout flying the spinnaker

The talk going around was about the tropical weather heading our way. A few people were concerned that it could be trouble. And storms were predicted for later in the day. After taking down camp we got underway after a late start just taking our time. The winds were a lot calmer and it worked out to use the spinnaker part of the morning. It seemed like a long day today. At one point I saw planes overhead and then a massive amount of white smoke on one of the beaches by the Gulf. Never did figure out what was going on there.



c 2: Army hole taking a walk along the runway

Finally after a lot of tacking we made it to Army Hole which was our final campsite. Cool mothballed military base with runways and old buildings. Nice grassy areas to pitch tents and fire pits and picnic tables. Nice place for our last campsite of the trip. A bunch of us took off and walked the area observing the giant jackrabbits and taking in the beauty of the area. The evening we had a nice campfire and it was so nice staying up later and socializing with everyone around the fire. Just a beautiful evening.

Day 6

Sailing back to civilization today. It's a short day today and was a lot of fun sailing back and racing some of the other boats. I think everyone with a sail is intent on passing everyone else in the vicinity using whatever fancy techniques and sacrifices to the wind gods that are available. That's what makes sailing so much fun. Another good day on the water.



I made it to the finish !!!

As I pulled onto the finish line on the beach I was greeted by a few people and got a picture taken. Then I moved my boat a little further in where I could get it on a trailer. There was a tent set up for the shrimp boil and cold Shiner Beer. I grabbed a beer and found out someone was shuttling people to JT's so we could get our vehicles. Being vegetarian, I opted out of participating in the shrimp boil.

After getting my truck I backed the trailer down to the water and got my boat unloaded and ready to put on the trailer. About this time I saw one of the guys with a worried look on his face running down the beach. And then I noticed the freighter going by just off the coast. I didn't realize what was coming until it was too late. The tidal wave that hit picked up my boat and repeatedly slammed it into the trailer that was at the edge of the water. A few helpful ladies on the beach ran over to assist me as I struggled to keep my boat from slamming into the trailer. After a couple minutes I was able to assess the damage and ended up with both aka shear pins busted and tons of sand in everything. Luckily most of my gear was already in the truck so I didn't lose anything. Kind of ironic that after successfully sailing 200+ miles to the finish is when I got beat up by Texas. Oh well, I was able to put the boat back together and get it on the trailer for the ride home. And from what I gather about 24 out of the original 45 boats made it to the finish.

My wife met me in Houston to share the ride back to Florida with me. We stopped in New Orleans since we had never been there before. For the first time



on the trip I unhitched my trailer and left it in the motel parking lot because we

were driving into New Orleans to visit the WWII museum. After backing into the parking space at the WWII museum I walked over to pay the \$18.00 parking fee. Walking back I glanced over at my truck and noticed a large pool of transmission fluid flowing from the truck. I just counted myself lucky that the damage from the tire that hit my truck (the previous week) waited until now to start leaking. New Orleans isn't a bad place to break down and I'm so glad it happened here and didn't cause a problem until after I finished the Texas 200.

The Texas 200 was a wonderful experience and the fellow sailors were fantastic. I also fell in love with the beautiful state of Texas and the many people I met on my travels. If it wasn't so far from Florida I might be tempted to try it again.

If you're considering attempting the Texas 200 you should plan to be prepared for anything. Especially sailing in crazy seas and extreme wind. Not to mention the deep mud you need to slog through in a few places. That being said, I had so much fun. Best sailing ever. And I had a great fellow sailing companion with Greg on his Hobie AI. He's a very competitive and competent sailor and it was nice having someone else out there watching your back since you sail in some pretty remote areas.