

## Finishing the Texas 200

*by Eric Dahlkamp*

Finishing the Texas 200 is an accomplishment. Granted it's not the EC300 or the R2AK, but it has its own unique set of Murphy and Mayhem to overcome. And believe me, that old pair will ride your tail or lay in wait the whole way! By day three or four they could well have scattered the fleet 50 to 100 miles up and down that coast and knocked out 40% to 50% of you.

I've sailed it four times and finished at Magnolia Beach each time. Every time was different. I've loved each trip. It is a journey!

Each time I've had to embrace some of that suck stuff one hears about. I hate suck, so I bring shade, and a few items to help offset the worst of it. But it's not a cruise, no matter how sweet a ride or careful you plan.

No, I'm not a veteran by any means, but I thought I'd share a word or two about finishing. And yes, I've been fortunate to have had wind in the right direction each time. Plenty of it! It's true, good fortune does play a part in finishing.

I love wind. I've really enjoyed using my third reef on every event. But I will admit, I've been nervous a few times, a tad scared even - and I've sailed a bunch.

On the other hand, I have been becalmed nearly four hours on the last day. Arrived too late for the shrimp boil, darn. But the anticipation of that treat kept me going all day!

Fortunately, though, I have never had to endure the dreaded "bob-and-bake". That misery would really test one's resolve! Give me wind or give me death.

As I said, I've enjoyed wind in the right direction each time I've gone.

Heaven help me if I ever encounter that fickle north windless demon with miles and miles to beat forcing tack-after-tack-after-tack-after-tack. I don't carry a motor. Twenty thousand tacks would literally drive me insane.

A few mishaps have occurred though. I've had crew receive a nasty cut on day one and helped them power on for five more. I've even dragged a sailor ashore who fell overboard and had their boat sail away. I've been disorientated, yes lost. I've had to scout out alternate camps and routes due to mishap, weather, or fatigue. I've even lost the use of my rudder on the second to the last day and motor-sailed the remainder. Twice I've loaned my second anchor to a fellow sailor who lost theirs in capsizes.

These aren't huge hurdles, but enough challenge to know good prep and packing the right stuff, and the buddy system are important. Prep for me starts months in advance.

And there it is. It's simple really. Study it out, prep and plan and then commit. Above all, expect to finish once you set off on Day One!

When I shove off my mindset is just that. Fortunately, so far, I've been able to do so. I won't push it past reason or safety. That line is hard to recognize if the sun or dehydration messes too much with your mind though. There certainly is grit involved. Lots of it. There is risk too. Lots of it. And, there are a lot of decisions to be made on the fly. There's worry and pondering and trust in your craft. There's seamanship and experience needed. The Texas 200 is not for novices.

Remember to reef early and reef deep. The same canvass that's keeping you slow in the morning will often drive a sleigh ride by midafternoon. The wind will build! And can whip up fast! Watch the sky to windward. Squalls will announce themselves, although not their ferocity.

Above all there is cumulative fatigue! Especially the older one is, and especially sailing solo. Ten thousand words aren't enough to convey how to finish. The simple adage is DO IT despite your pain and trepidation and fear if you possibly can. When it seems impossible, or the going gets tough, stop, assess, even call it quits for the day. Get rest and eat and above all stay hydrated. Find shade every chance you get. Stay covered. That sun is brutal.

You may surprise yourself just how resourceful you can be out there alone. And you will be alone, or your boat will be at any rate. Hours passed without another sail in sight every time I sailed it. I was surprised how often there is little or no land in sight too. There aren't many landmarks. It's desolate in many places. Plan on it.

Reaching the finish is well worth that alternative route, that change of plan, that extra effort, that push through exhaustion and pain. Be creative. Be bold. But be sensible. Know the signs of dehydration and of heat stroke. Know when to rest! And, inspect your boat regularly. Lastly, take a few pictures. I take time to simply slow down, look around, savor the joy and the beauty of it all. It's mesmerizing and captivating. It draws me back again and again, despite the cost, the distance, the effort. There's really nothing else quite like it anywhere else.

Cheers.

Safe sailing.