

The 2015 Texas 200

By: Matt Schiemer



Me leaving Paul's Mott at sunrise on Day 4 of the 2015 TX200. Photo by Walter Brown.

Introduction

In early June 2015, I successfully completed my 3rd Texas 200, having completed the first two in 2013 and 2014. After my first Texas 200 in 2013, I wrote a very extensive account of my experience. The reason that I wrote such a long and detailed account is simple: during the months leading up to my first Texas 200, I read every account and forum post from the prior years, and I found the information extremely helpful. It was due to this helpful information that I had such a good first year. When I was finished, I wanted to provide my own account so that potential first timers could have additional information from which to draw upon as they prepared for their own adventure. And I decided to spare no details. Maybe my account was too long and too dry. Maybe it was helpful. Either way, it's out there on the Texas 200 website under the Accounts section from 2013, if you're so inclined.

In 2014, after completing the Florida 120 in May and the TX200 in June, I thought about writing an account that compared and contrasted the two events. For some reason, I just never found the right time and just never got around to it. Now, after completing the 2015 TX200, I found myself in the sharing and writing mood again, and so I've drafted this account of my 2015 TX200 experience. It's not quite as long as the account I wrote in 2013. But it's still too long. Sorry about that.

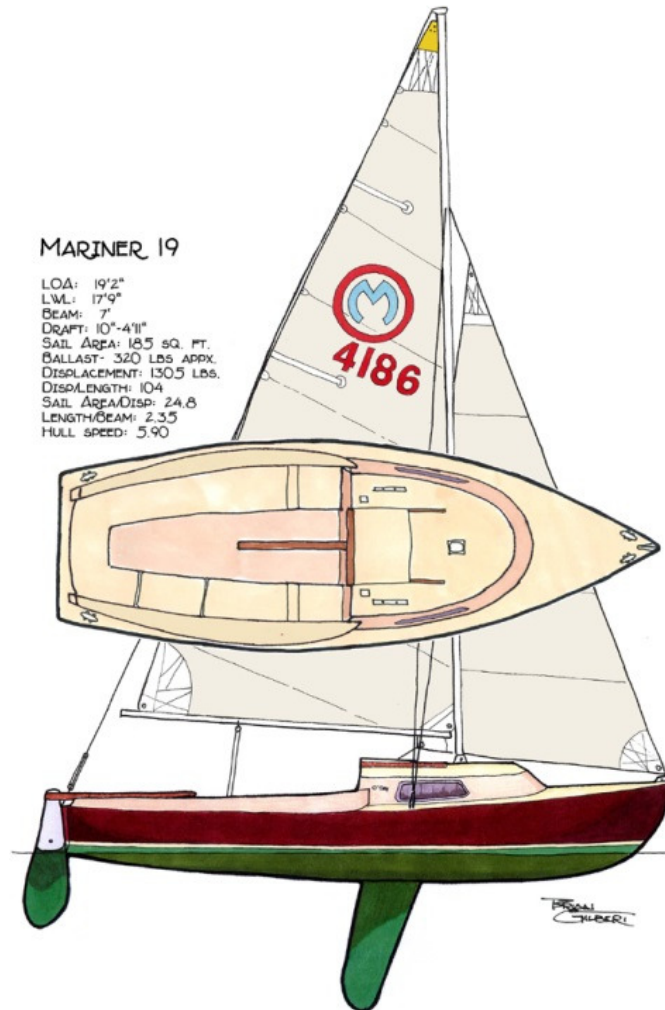
Also, the second part of this document is a section where I share some lessons learned, tips and general small sailboat cruising advice for those who may be thinking of completing the TX200 for the first time.

My Boat

My boat is a 1970 O'Day Mariner, which is a 19' fiberglass sloop. It weighs about 1350 lbs empty, and about 2,000 lbs with motor, gear, food, ice, beer and two people aboard for a cruise such as the TX200. Mine is the swing keel/centerboard version, which has about 350 lbs of ballast, including the 165 lb swing keel. It draws 10" with the keel fully retracted, and about 5 feet with the keel down all the way. Important for the TX200 is that the boat only draws 10" with the keel up, and that the boat can be sailed reasonably well on a beam reach to somewhat close hauled with about 2 to 3 feet of keel down. The rudder draws about 2.5 feet when fully down, and it kicks up and can still be used (somewhat) when kicked, which requires maybe 12" to 14" of water. The rudder can also be fully retracted out of the water, and with the rudder up and the keel fully retracted into the hull, the boat will float in 10" of water with nothing protruding down from the smooth hull to "grab" the mud, oysters, sand, or whatever else you've got yourself stuck on.

The boat has a large cockpit and a small cabin. The cockpit benches are 7 feet long and you can comfortably do the TX200 with two people; In fact, I did the 2013 with three people (including me) and it was still plenty comfortable. The cabin offers great storage space and a very nice sized V berth where I sleep comfortably (I am 6'3" and I can lay fully stretched out in my V berth). There are two quarterberths that can somewhat uncomfortably sleep one adult each. We've done it on my boat. It ain't pretty, but it can be done.

Here's a sketch of the O'Day Mariner and a few pics of my boat to give you a better idea.



The O'Day Mariner (drawing by Brian Gilbert)

My boat... pics from this year's TX200:



Pre-Trip and Port Isabel Preparations

Having done several of these types of events, as well as a number of other multi-day cruises, I have got the pre-trip/packing part down pretty much to a science. I use a two page, 100+ item packing list for all of my cruises now, and I can now be fully packed in less than an hour.

Getting my boat out of its slip on Lake Travis in Austin was a bit of an adventure in the days leading up to this year's TX200, due to the significant rainfall we'd received and the lake's rising over 30 feet in about three weeks' time. The marina where I keep my boat uses floating docks, and they had to let out 30 feet of cable at the 18 points where the docks are anchored to massive concrete blocks at the bottom of the lake. They were able to successfully do this, even during the worst period, where the lake came up 8 feet in about 12 hours or so, but now the docks were about 100 yards from the nearest point of dry land. The marina wound up closing for about a week, so that the staff could work with divers and work boats and cranes to reset the 18 concrete blocks in a new location closer to the new edge of the lake. I have no idea how they pulled this off, with blocks now in about 85 feet of water, all needing to be moved a few hundred yards to the docks' new location, with 18 connection points and the docks all full of boats.

Of course, during this time when the marina was closed, I needed to do some last minute projects, and get my boat out of the water and onto the trailer. I won't get into all the details; let's just say it was an interesting experience that slightly pissed off the marina staff and had me wondering if it would actually be possible.



The docks at the Highland Lakes Marina, on Lake Travis in Austin
(photo taken from the nearest point of land)

The other somewhat major “incident” during the lead-up to this year’s event occurred about a week prior to the start of the Tx200, when Chris, my sailing companion on the prior two TX200s, called me to let me know there was a chance he would not be able to participate this year, as he had planned to do. It was touch and go for a few days, and on Wednesday evening, about 12 hours before he was supposed to board a plane from Boston to Austin, he called me to let me know that he would indeed not be able to make this year’s event. So, with about 36 hours before I needed to start trailering my boat down to the starting point in Port Isabel, I lost my crew and accepted that I’d be singlehanding the 2015 TX200. I thought about putting out a last-minute call for crew, but I really didn’t want to rush into something with a stranger and be stuck on my boat for a week with an incompatible person. So, singlehanding it was. No big deal, it would be a challenge and I was sort of looking forward to it.

There really wasn’t anything I needed to do to the boat or my pre-trip preparations to singlehand, since I had singlehanded my boat on several multi-day cruises in

the past year and it was pretty much set up and ready for singlehanding. The obvious impact of the singlehanding wouldn't be in the prep, rather in the singlehanding itself. More on that later.

The last minute project that I decided to take on, after about 2 years of thinking and planning and doing nothing about it, was adding a bimini to my cockpit. Anyone who is familiar with the south Texas sun and heat in June will know exactly how big a deal this is.

The reason I didn't do this sooner was that the boom on the O'Day Mariner rides very low, and there isn't room for a bimini without raising the boom up a bit. Of course, raising the boom has implications. First, there is a slot in the mast where the boom fitting slides into, and where the sail slides fit into. Normally, the boom sits in the sail track below that slot and the sail slides are then fed into the slot above the boom. Based on my measurements for the clearance needed for the bimini, I'd need to raise the boom up to a point right in the middle of that slot. This of course then requires closing that slot off somehow, and adding a new slot above it. I wasn't really ready for that project, so I just decided to sail with the boom slightly above the slot, a few inches higher up than I'd like, but easier to make happen on short notice.

A raised boom also means the mainsail won't fit, so I'd have to cut maybe 6" or 8" off the foot. That's not something I had the skills or equipment to do. But with Google and YouTube, you can learn just about anything these days, so I spent some time online learning about cutting sails, sewing sails, changing to a loose-footed main, and more. And then, to add insult to injury, by raising the boom up, I determined it would catch on the backstay, so I'd have to shorten the boom a bit. Also easier said than done with the amount of time I had left.

But, with the TX200 looming, and visions of that oppressive Texas sun in my head, I decided to take the plunge and make the bimini happen. I decided to set the boom above the notch on the mast, and that just meant cutting a bit more off the mainsail than I'd like to. But heck, I'm not a racer, and my boat is pretty fast anyway, so I figured it wouldn't affect my cruising too much. After a bunch of measuring, I decided to cut off 18" from the foot. Sounds like a lot, I know. But the sail is about 25' high, so that's not too much in the grand scheme of things. I bit the bullet and bought a sewing machine, a heavy duty Singer model, new for \$200 from JoAnn Fabric. I bought some Dacron sail material, double sided tape, and sailmaker's thread from Duckworks, and got down to business. I did this all, of course, on my spare mainsail, just in case. My primary mainsail would still work with the higher boom if I put in the first reef, so I still had that as a backup sail for the 200.

After about 20 minutes of practicing my zigzag stitching on some old Dacron sail material, I decided I was ready to go. It took quite a bit of time to cut the sail down and cut all the pieces that I'd be using for the new clew, tack and some reinforcement along the foot. I got all them taped in place with the double-sided tape and starting sewing. Overall it was pretty easy, and I think I did a pretty good job actually.

While I was at it, I decided to add a deep reef in that main too, something I should have done for the TX200 two years ago. I didn't get into measurements and calculations of square footage; rather, I just raised the sail up on the mast and eyeballed it, making sure the battens were OK in the proposed reefing location. It seemed to me that I'd be reducing sail by about 55% or 60% with this new reef point, just by eyeballing it, and I figured that was good. I added in the clew and tack points, as well as the reefing line points. As with the work on the foot of the

sail, the measuring, cutting of Dacron, and taping into place took twice as long as the actual sewing.



After sewing everything into place, I needed to add grommets. I had purchased some heavy duty brass grommets from Duckworks, and added them at each new tack and clew point. For the reef lines, I used smaller, cheaper ones from Home Depot, also brass. It came out quite nice in the end. After it was all done I spent some time at the boat getting reefing lines in place and marking the places on the

boom where I'd need new cheek blocks. Keep in mind, this back-and-forth to the marina where my boat was in the water all happened while Austin was in the midst of two weeks of heavy rains and the lake rising about 35 feet in total. The marina folks were not too pleased about this, since the docks were not accessible and they kept insisting that the marina was closed. I just kept ignoring them and showing up to work on my boat, as if they were open. I begged for some rides out to the docks here and there from passersby on powerboats, and somehow I made it work. I always took my surfboard over to the marina with me, in case I needed to paddle out to the docks, although it was never actually necessary to go that route.

As for the boom, I wound up cutting about 4 ½ inches off the end of the boom and relocating a few cheek blocks to make that work. That wasn't too hard, but my tools are limited and so the cutting and grinding and smoothing was done in a pretty rustic fashion. It worked out though, and the final product looks quite good.

With all of this done, I now had room for the bimini. But.... the bimini that I had ordered online about 5 weeks prior still hadn't arrived. They kept giving me the run-around on the phone, promising it would ship in the next few days, and this went on for over a month. Finally, I drew a line in the sand, cancelled my order, and found another one. That one shipped right out and arrived within a few days. Now I had about 4 days to get the boat out of the water and install the bimini. That was a bit of an adventure, but it worked. The wood blocks the bimini is installed on are just temporary; I need to figure out a more permanent and visually pleasing way to install the bimini, but for now it was totally functional and would get me through the TX200, and that's what mattered.



The newly installed bimini

OK, so now it was Wednesday and the boat was on the trailer and the bimini was installed. Definitely cutting it close this year. I spent Thursday evening packing the boat and I headed out of Austin around 7:30am on Friday morning, headed for Port Isabel. Prior to heading out, I took off the bearing caps on each of the trailer wheels and added grease, as I usually do in preparation for these types of trips. I noticed that the tread on both of the trailer tires was pretty well worn down, and

decided that I'd probably have to replace them soon. They certainly weren't bald, but they were getting close, and I made a mental note to figure that out over the summer. Since my trailer is 45 years old and fairly rusty in a few spots, I always stop about once per hour and give it a quick look-over, including checking the hubs with my hands to see if they are heating up. I did that same routine for the first few hours and then, about 12:30pm, when I was about 40 minutes south of Corpus Christi, I noticed that one of the tires had a spot worn through the tread and I could see white thread/stitching of some sort. I don't know much about tires, but I figured that tire had only a short time before it would blow out, and so I tried to change it. Well, the lug nuts were rusted on so good that I couldn't budge them. About two years prior, I had taken the trailer to a mechanic to loosen the lug nuts for me, and I applied WD-40 to all of them before tightening them with my lug wrench. Unfortunately, they had rusted up again pretty good, and I was not able to loosen them.

I trailered the boat slowly in the shoulder, back up towards Corpus Christi, and eventually found a mechanic about 20 minutes away in a small town outside of Corpus. He helped me change the tire, and in the process, pointed out that my wheels had way too much play in them and that the axle nut needed to be tightened up, on both sides. He did that for me too, and showed me how to do it in the future (quite easy). But now I was headed out with no spare tire and another trailer tire that was balding and could possibly blow out or delaminate or who knows. So I went in search of a store to buy another spare. About 10 minutes up the road I found a store for the spare, and I was set. After about 30 more minutes on the road, I decided to avoid an actual blowout and changed the other tire too, keeping the balding one as my spare (probably not a good idea, should have bought two spares). Anyway, that whole ordeal set me back about 3 hours overall.

I traveled the rest of the way to Port Isabel without incident, and pulled into the parking lot of my motel, the Casa Rosa Inn, in the early evening hours on Friday.

My experience with three TX200s and one FL120 is that there will ALWAYS be a few people who have trailer issues (or even nightmares) on the way to these events. Like me, I think most boat owners focus more on their boats than their trailers, and when we set out to drive a few hundred miles (or more) to one of these events, our trailers get tested like no other time of the year, and inevitably there are issues on a certain number of trailers. I was lucky on my 12-hour drive back from Missouri 3 years ago when I bought the boat, and also on both prior TX200s and the FL 120 (which involved me trailering the boat 15 hours each way to Pensacola, FL). But, this year I got a bit of a taste for trailer issues, and I need to step back now and take a better look at my trailer and fix a few things before I embark on another haul down to the Gulf Coast.

Saturday morning I got up early and launched the boat and got it into my slip at the Tarpon RV Park and Marina, the same place we kept the boat for the 2013 TX200. The reservation "system" at the Tarpon is a bit informal, to say the least, so I wanted to get launched and into the slip as early as possible to ensure I'd actually get a slip. Set-up was uneventful, got a hand from Stan Roberts when raising my mast (this is best done by two people; I've done it myself many times, but it ain't pretty.... or all that safe).

I spent all day Saturday in the slip working on a few last minute projects that I wasn't able to finish ahead of time. I really enjoyed having the entire day to spend on my projects and organizing all my stuff on the boat, but even more rewarding was meeting a bunch of fellow TX200 sailors who were in the adjacent slips, and catching up with a number of folks that I had met on prior events.

Joe Seymour and his friend and crewmate Tim were in the slip next to me in their boat. I had spent a long weekend sailing with Joe about 6 weeks prior to the TX200 and was looking forward to spending more time with him on the event. They were sailing Joe's 16' sloop, DinkerBell.

Next to them was Glyn Buckley, a great guy who I met and interacted with on the TX200 Facebook page and was thrilled to finally meet in person. Glyn was singlehanding his O'Day Daysailor. A few slips down was Ray Whitney in Merlin, with his crewmate Randy. I got invited aboard Merlin by Ray for the nickel tour, which I quite enjoyed, and I enjoyed getting to know Ray and Randy over the next few days at the docks.

On the other side of me was MJ Johnson's MacGregor 25, Ginger Island. MJ was accompanied by his friend and frequent sailing companion, Tripp, who is a USCG licensed captain. Both MJ and Tripp have mostly offshore, big boat experience, and this event was the first major "skinny water" event for them. They were also staying at the Casa Rosa Inn and we spent a lot of time together prior to the start of the 200.

My "Saturday Projects" included adding reefing lines to my newly installed deep 2nd reef in the mainsail, which also included adding a cheek block to the boom, two things that I had only partially finished while still at home in Austin. And I also had to figure out a way to install/hang/mount my homemade side and back curtains for the bimini. I made the curtains at home and installed grommets, but had not really figured out how they'd attach to the bimini and/or bimini frame. That took a bit of time but worked out quite well with a combination of carabineers and shock cord. I also needed to completely repack the boat in a manner that would facilitate singlehanding, which took longer than I expected. I might have had a few beers along the way too, which may have resulted in some inefficiencies as well ☺

Finally, I needed to go to the supermarket and buy my food for the week. I didn't wind up doing that until after dinner, and was shopping for food until nearly midnight.

Sunday morning was the captain's meeting at 7am, and then the 220 mile drive up to Magnolia Beach, to drop off trucks and trailers and catch the charter bus back to Port Isabel. I really do not look forward to this part of the TX200, but the time at the JT One Stop in Maggie Beach and then on the bus back is actually pretty enjoyable, since it's a great chance to socialize with everyone.

Day 1 - Monday

Just like on prior TX200s, I am so excited and anxious to start the event, I don't sleep much the night before. Life lesson: if you have a hobby that you like so much that you literally can't sleep the night before you kick off an event like this, you're probably doing something right.

I woke up long before my alarm went off at 5am. MJ, Tripp and I agreed to get a taxi at 5:30am to get fresh ice and shuttle us over to our boats at the marina. We got ice and few other odds and ends at the supermarket, and were at the marina by about 6am.



My boat ready to go on Monday morning.



MJ and Tripp on Ginger Island, MJ's MacGregor 25.



Joe Seymour on DinkerBell.



Glyn Buckley on his O'Day Daysailer.

Just like in 2013, this year's route allowed for an offshore/coastal leg on Day 1, about 35 miles of sailing, out in the Gulf of Mexico from the Port Isabel jetties to the Port Mansfield jetties, the location of Camp 1. I had been watching the weather forecast for a few days now and talking with a few other participants about this option. As of about 6am on Monday morning, the forecast was nearly a best case scenario for taking what's known as the "outside route." Winds were forecast to be in the 10-15 knot range, out of the SE, with sunny skies and no chance of rain or squalls. Seas were predicted to be 1-3 feet on the Gulf. Heaven. MJ and Tripp were definitely leaning toward the outside route, given their ocean sailing experience and relatively large boat. Kevin Green was also considering the outside route (he sails a MacGregor 26x with a 50hp outboard, so would be well-equipped for it). Chris Breax and his crew were also interested. They sail a 32' folding schooner. Yes, it folds up in half. You'll have to see it to fully appreciate it. For now just trust me.

Chris' boat (Elsie B) doesn't have a motor, so Kevin planned to tow him out of the marina and the approximately 4 miles out to the Gulf. We all headed out together around 7:15am and about an hour or so later we were in the inlet at the Port Isabel jetties, motoring out into the Gulf. And that's when my motor made a loud sputtering noise and quit. I started it back up and it ran for a second or two, and then quit again. I quickly got my mainsail and jib up, and tried tacking out the jetties. However, the current was coming in pretty good, and the wind was right on the nose. I made a few tacks and realized that it was going to take me a long time to tack out into the Gulf through the jetties. Kevin agreed to take me in tow too, behind the Elsie B, and that worked out well. It took a few minutes to get that set up, but it went smoothly and Kevin towed us out. All of this happened right in front of the Coast Guard station, and I can imagine they enjoyed our little show. Normally a disabled boat gets towed in from the Gulf to the safety of the bay. In

our case, my disabled boat was promptly towed OUT, into the Gulf. Makes sense, right?



View from my foredeck, with Elsie B towing me, and the Elsie B being towed by DragNFly. Ginger Island ahead to port motoring out with us.

Since I was singlehanding, offshore, and without a motor, I decided to play it extremely safe and start out with my third reef in the mainsail. I figured I could shake that out any time I wanted, and felt better starting with it tied in. Our pact was to sail within sight of each other, and within radio range, for the entire 35 mile trek up to Port Mansfield. When we were about a mile offshore, I let the line go from the Elsie B, and the Elsie B in turn let their line go from DragNFly. We all turned to port and headed north. The seas were small, in the 1-2 foot range, and the winds were light, probably about 8-10 knots. As we headed up the coast, MJ and Tripp headed further offshore, eventually sailing about 8 to 10 miles offshore. I could see them all day, but only barely; they were a little white triangular spec on the horizon. The Elsie B and DragNFly stayed about a mile off the beach. I

decided to head out a bit and see if conditions were any different, so I sailed much of the day about 2.5 miles offshore.

After about 2 hours I got up the nerve to shake out the reef, and sailed the remaining 5 hours with full main and jib. I was sailing at around 5.5 to 6 knots all day (once the reef was out) and it was a great sail. The wind and waves were on the starboard quarter, making for a three-dimensional, triaxial sort of motion all day, but it was quite moderate and easy to take. I sat in the shade of my new bimini and enjoyed my second offshore trip from Port Isabel to Port Mansfield.



Kevin and Awdree Green aboard DragNFly, about a mile off the beach in the Gulf.

The Elsie B was the first to sail in the jetties at Port Mansfield, and a few minutes later DragNFly and I arrived at nearly the same time. Kevin dropped his jib and that allowed me to pull ahead (under full sail) and sail in before him. In 2013 we entered the jetties at Port Mansfield under motor, just to be safe. This year, I

didn't have that option. I came in under full sail and it was easy peasy, nice and easy. No breaking waves and not even any rollers. About as easy and benign as it gets. I pulled into the same cove as in 2013, just inside the jetties and to the south/left. I got myself anchored and then laid out in my cockpit in the shade of my bimini for a while, just relaxing and enjoying not being at the tiller.

About an hour later Ginger Island arrived, and they decided to drop their sails out in the Gulf and come in under motor. MJ and Tripp anchored next to me and we watched a few more boats come in from the Gulf over the next few hours, as well as a number of boats motor out the Mansfield cut from Port Mansfield (those who had taken the inside route, in the Laguna Madre). In total, about 15 to 20 boats wound up camping out at the formal first camp at the jetties. As far as I know, the only boat to have tacked out the five miles from Port Mansfield to the jetties was Chuck Pierce on Aldebaran, his West Wight Potter 19 (with his friend, beer brewing buddy and 2015 TX200 crew, Rick). All of the others motored out.



My boat at anchor at the Mansfield Jetties



MJ and Tripp at anchor on Ginger Island at the Mansfield Jetties



Mansfield Jetties anchorage – Camp 1

Day 2 – Tuesday

I woke up around 6am on Tuesday, with no alarm. People were already shuffling around and breaking camp. By sunrise, at 6:30am, several boats were already headed out under sail, in the very light winds, toward Port Mansfield. We had a relatively short day on Day 2, about 34 miles to Camp 2 in the land cut. I decided to enjoy the soft light and beautiful surroundings at the jetties as long as possible, since I was just going to do the same thing in the land cut later in the day, and I much prefer the jetties to the land cut as far as location. I made my coffee and just relaxed for a bit, talking with MJ and Tripp, and wound up being the last boat out of the anchorage; I don't remember what time that was. Just as I remembered from two years prior, the 5 mile sail from the jetties to Port Mansfield in the light morning winds was awesome. Beautiful surroundings, wind coming over the stern, and calm water in the cut.



Mansfield Cut

Once I reached the intersection with the ICW in front of Port Mansfield, I made my only turn of the day, and headed north in the ICW toward the land cut. The day was pretty uneventful as I recall it, with winds maybe in the 12-15 knot range at the highest point of the day.

Below is a picture of Elsie B taken in the Mansfield cut near the ICW. This is the folding schooner that I mentioned earlier.



Chris Breaux's folding schooner, the Elsie B

After a few hours in the ICW I approached Camp 2 on a beam reach. Since I was the last boat out of the anchorage at the jetties, and considering that most of the boats actually stayed in or near Port Mansfield (5 miles closer to Camp 2 than our camp at the jetties), I was one of the last boats in to Camp. I sailed past most of the boats and headed toward the end of the line, and decided to anchor just past the fish camp/house, since I knew that would be a gathering place to get some shade. I pulled in and used my standard anchoring practice of setting two bow anchors, each one about 45 degrees off to one side. I have tried several different ways of anchoring my boat over the past few years, and this one works the best. It sets the bow right into the wind and keeps the boat pointed that way with almost no dancing about at anchor. The 2nd anchor really isn't needed to hold the boat, it's just there to keep it from sailing around at anchor.

This is the same land cut camp that was used in 2014, and it's not too bad. The fishing shack is a nice feature that allows for some shade, and the mud isn't too bad (at least compared to some other places in the land cut). This is one of the most remote places on the TX200, and the only camp that didn't have cell phone service this year.

I hung out for a bit at the shack, since it had good shade and a number of other sailors were gathered there. Later in the day, about an hour or so before sunset, I decided to get a count of the boats. Walking from one end to the other, I counted 41 boats at Camp 2. I'm not sure how many started the event or what the dropout rate was on the first two days, but one person said that they thought about 50 boats had started. Not sure if that is an accurate figure or not.



Camp 2, looking north from the fishing shack



Camp 2, looking south from the fishing shack



Camp 2, looking west at the windmill farms

Day 3 - Wednesday

Wednesday morning we woke to light winds and a long day of sailing ahead of us, about 50 miles in the ICW to the Padre Island Yacht Club. This is not a particularly interesting day of sailing, as it is done 100% in the ICW, pretty much a straight line from Camp 2 to Camp 3 at the PIYC. Now that I've done a few TX200s, I prefer the challenge that is provided by some of the routes later in the week. However, I did have a few things I wanted to do on the boat, and having a straight, easy course for the day would potentially allow me to do those things. First, I wanted to fine tune my tiller tamer system. I bought a bunch of shock cord and line with me on the trip, and I spent a lot of time on Wednesday trying to get it

to work. However, I didn't really have much luck and couldn't consistently get more than 15 or 20 seconds away from the tiller with my shock cord-based system.

The other thing I wanted to do was improve the way the side curtain and back curtain were attached to the bimini. The system I had worked up at the marina in Port Isabel had a flaw. The small carabineers that I used to connect and disconnect the curtains as the sun moved throughout the day were not easy to use with two hands, and nearly impossible with one hand, while underway. They had little hooks on them, so that simply opening the carabineer and pushing it in or out wouldn't work; the line and grommets kept getting hung up on the notches. Anyway, I found a bunch of other carabineers that were smooth and switched them all out, and it was fine after that. Now, this may not sound like much, but when singlehanding and without a good tiller tamer system, all of this took a long time to actually make happen.

Now, it's Day 3 and I haven't really mentioned my new favorite part of the boat much: the bimini. I cannot say enough about the bimini. It is a significant improvement in overall comfort not having to sit in the direct sun in full clothing and sweat for 8 to 12 hours a day. Rather than use the standard clothing from prior TX200s, which was long pants, long sleeve shirt and a hat of some type, I was wearing shorts, short sleeve shirts and no hat all week. I put on sunblock since I was getting reflections off the bay. Under the bimini, I was not sweating at all. Exposed, dry skin, and a shaded and breezy place to sit. Yeah, man. Have I mentioned I love my bimini?

Of course, the bimini alone wasn't providing me with this bliss. The side and back curtains were key players in this deal, for the early and late part of the day when the sun is lower on the horizon. When making the curtains, I decided to try two different types of material. For the side curtain, of which I have one and I switch it

from one side to the other depending where the sun is, I used 10 oz canvas, from a painters dropcloth purchased at Home Depot. I used my new sewing machine to sew in triple layer seams around the edges, each one about 2" wide. In those seams I installed brass grommets. It came out looking quite good and very sturdy. I measured it to cover most of the side of the bimini (from left to right), but only about 90% of the way from top to bottom. I decided to leave about 6" open at the bottom (above the gunwale) so that air could flow into the cockpit. I think that turned out to be a good decision since the canvas definitely blocked 100% of the sideways airflow otherwise. This curtain blocked all sun and visibility, so I had to take the good with the bad, and look around the curtain to see my surroundings.

For the back curtain, I decided to go with burlap, so that I'd have some air flow through it and also some visibility. I bought two yards of it at JoAnn Fabric, and used old Dacron sail material cut off the foot of my old mainsail to create the 2" seams all around, into which I also put brass grommets. It also came out looking quite nice. This one was much larger than the side curtain, and only fit the back of the bimini above the transom. I also left about 6" at the bottom for air to flow through on this one.

Overall, I think I like the burlap curtain the best, since it blocks much of the direct sun but still allows some air to flow through, and pretty good visibility. I might remake the side curtain out of burlap at some point.

So, back to the sailing... The challenge on Wednesday turned out to be a several hour period of very light winds, probably 5 knots or so. This made for a long day on the water and relatively late arrivals at the PIYC. Of course, I know of several boats who motored for a few hours to get through the doldrums, and they arrived at the yacht club hours before the rest of us. I won't mention any names... cheaters ☺



Sailing wing-on-wing in the light breeze in the landcut (photo credit: Edward Einhorn)



“The Pack” sailing in the light breeze in the landcut (photo credit: Edward Einhorn)

As far as my dead motor, I had a few people tell me that they thought it could be a clogged fuel filter, but I know next to nothing about motors, and even less about fuel filters, so I didn't even consider trying to repair it during the week. On Day 1, once I was out in the Gulf, I didn't need the motor at all. Entering the jetties at Port Mansfield under sail alone was quite easy and satisfying, and getting into the anchorage just beyond the jetties was also a piece of cake under sail. Day 2 was

about as easy as it gets, with no motor needed there either. And getting out on Day 3 was also easy. However, getting into the PIYC would prove to be a bit of a challenge, since it involved a turn to starboard, right into the wind, and up a narrow channel, to get to the yacht club. I wasn't sure what type of assistance might be there for me, so my plan was to keep my sails up, and try to start the motor about ½ mile from the PIYC. If it could just run for maybe 3 minutes I could motorsail up the channel and from there if the motor died I could sail downwind into the concrete bulkhead next to the yacht club and walk my boat into the yacht club area pretty easily after that. All of this was easy to visualize since I had cell phone service and Google Maps was there for me.

The motor started no problem, about ½ mile from the yacht club. I let it idle for a few minutes, then ran it at half-throttle at idle for a few more, and it was just fine. As I approached the yacht club channel I put it into forward and turned into the wind. It was working! I ran it about half throttle and made it most of the way through the channel, for about 2-3 minutes, and then it died. I restarted it, and it ran for 20 seconds, and then died again. At this point, I was pretty well positioned in the channel to then turn slightly downwind and sail to the bulkhead, which I did fairly easily and gracefully (well, gracefully as crash landings onto a bulkhead on a lee shore go anyway). Once on the bulkhead I walked my boat a few hundred feet to the yacht club, which was actually far more tiring than I had imagined it would be, with the wind and waves pushing the boat onto the bulkhead and me trying to fend off and make forward progress at the same time.

At the yacht club someone helped me with my lines and I got a few fenders in place and tied the boat against the concrete bulkhead. I was a little frustrated with the yacht club staff since the concrete bulkhead did not have a flat/flush surface to lie against, and had no pilings for the boat to sit against either, and it was nearly perfectly designed to rip off my gunwale as the wakes from the powerboats going

by (in spite of the no wake sign) lifted and dropped the boat 5" or so every few minutes. And, the prevailing winds were pushing my boat right onto the bulkhead, exacerbating the situation. I asked the yacht club guy what they normally did for tying up at this part of their facility, and he had no answer, no suggestions, and kind of got annoyed with me, telling me it was an informal situation and I had to figure it out. I gave it back to him a little, telling him that it was his yacht club and his bulkhead and that I'd appreciate any advice he may have given all his experience with his own facility. He had no advice and basically just walked away. Not exactly the best reception, but oh well, I was there and I was happy to have made it in.

One of the things that really helped me get tied up against that bulkhead was some advice on the TX200 Facebook page a few days before the event. Someone mentioned that the bulkhead was concrete and had no cleats, and to bring some type of oversized tent stakes or something else to drive into the grass behind the bulkhead to which you could tie your boat to. I picked up two dog tie down devices, that look like huge metal corkscrews that you screw into the grass. They worked perfectly and allowed me to tie up at the bulkhead. I also made a fender board for my fenders before leaving Austin, but based on the way my boat was lying against the bulkhead I didn't see how the fender board would be much help, so I didn't use it. Anyway, I figured it out after a few minutes, and some help from fellow TX200 sailors, and got her all tied up.

At this point, I was exhausted, and I mean totally wasted. I assume it was the three days of singlehanding, because I don't remember ever being this tired on a TX200 before, even at the end of the entire 5 day event. It wasn't the heat or sun; I had the bimini and was loving it. It wasn't the grueling nature of the course; the first three days of sailing were basically straight lines that required no navigation at all. I think it must have been the singlehanding, being on the tiller 100% of the

time for 8-10 hours a day. Anyway, I wanted to shower and get some air conditioning and food so I could try to start to feel human again. I got right on it, and it helped a lot. I saw Glyn Buckley come in at some point after me, and he also looked totally wasted too. I thought to myself, that's gotta be how I look, cause I'm pooped.

The yacht club was great, and I was happy to be there for the first time. Other than my frustrations at their bulkhead docking plan (they don't have one), the place was great. They had showers for us, and lots of room downstairs and upstairs with air conditioning, tables, places to lay out your sleeping bag and sleep for the night, and food. For \$6, they provided a hot dog, a hamburger and a soda. Additional sodas were \$1 each. There was also some potato salad and coleslaw I think, which was included too. The food hit the spot and I was starting to feel pretty good. And then, to top it off, there were several ladies from the yacht club there who were giving rides to the nearby convenience store to buy ice and beer. I took a ride and got 20 more pounds of ice and a 12-pack of beer for my cooler. That would get me to the finish line in good shape.

During the evening, I had some discussions with the two crew members who were sailing with John Alesch on this Mariner, Dana and Chris. Chris was considering leaving John's boat to crew with me for the remainder of the week, to get a different experience on a different boat (well, not that different of a boat since we both have Mariners), and with a different captain. I told him I was open to the idea since I wasn't totally enjoying the singlehanding, and that he needed to first address this with John, his captain, since I didn't want to be stealing anyone's crew. John was fine with it, but suggested that maybe Chris crew for an older gentleman who was on a GulfCoast 20 and who had just lost his crew that same evening at the yacht club (family medical emergency). So Chris talked to me, and talked to the captain of the GulfCoast 20, and he went back and forth for a while,

trying to make up his mind. I eventually went to sleep and told him we could figure it out in the morning, that it was totally up to him, whatever worked best for him would be fine by me.

After some more socializing I retired to my boat to sleep. Since the bulkhead tie-up situation wasn't ideal, I wanted to sleep on my boat in case it started rubbing against the concrete at night. An evening on the floor in the air conditioning would have been nice, but my boat was positioned pretty much with the bow into the wind, and I got a good breeze through my cabin via the forward hatch and open companionway, as usual.



The famed concrete bulkhead at PIYC



The docks at PIYC



The docks at PIYC

Day 4 - Thursday

On Thursday morning I was awakened at 4:45am by a few sailors who were walking around, getting their boat set up and talking, all within a few feet of my boat. Their boat was the one tied up right behind me on the bulkhead I think, or maybe the one behind it. Anyway, they were close and their voices were loud. I don't think it occurred to them that someone might be sleeping out there. It hadn't occurred to me that this might happen, since at most camps I'm not anchored all that close to other boats. At the PIYC we were all basically on top of one another and I hadn't seen this one coming. I didn't go to bed until after 11:30pm, so this shortened night of sleep was not going to help my exhaustion any. At about 6am I stopped trying to fall back to sleep and just accepted the situation and got up and got moving. Chris came out around sunrise (6:30am) and told me that he had decided to stay the course with John and finish the event on the boat he started on. I told him that was fine by me, that I was totally fine with singlehanding my boat to the end; the crew would have just been a luxury of sorts.

Shortly after I talked with Chris, Glyn Buckley came by my boat and told me that he had decided to pull out due to his exhaustion. He did still look pretty tired, even after a night of sleep in the air conditioning upstairs, and he had decided to pull out. His family was driving down to help him get his trailer and get the boat, and he was going to leave his boat in a slip at the PIYC and get a motel room nearby to get some rest while they drove down to the coast. I never like to see anyone drop out, but I think Glyn made a good call, given his physical condition and the fact that he was singlehanding his boat. It's definitely better to play it safe and pull out at a place like the PIYC than to run into trouble out there somewhere and find yourself physically exhausted or injured, while beached on a spoil island 5 miles from the nearest point of land. Glyn made a good call.

By about 7:15 or so I was ready to go, and MJ and Tripp helped me pull my boat into a position that I could then get out of the yacht club under sail alone, so as to not require a tow out. That worked out quite well and within about 2 minutes I was back out into the ICW again. But only for a short while...

Day 4 is where things get a tad bit interesting on the route, as we no longer sail a simple straight line in the ICW. The first deviation from the ICW occurs a few miles north of the PIYC, after crossing under the causeway from Corpus Christi to North Padre Island. It's a great feeling to finally get out of the ICW and away from the buoys, in deep water, to sail freely wherever you want. In this case, I veered off to starboard after clearing the last spoil island, and was headed for Shamrock Cove en route to Stingray Hole.

On my last two TX200s I sailed around Shamrock Cove (leaving Shamrock Island to starboard), in Corpus Christi bay, since I wasn't sure that the water at the far end of the cove was deep enough to sail through, based on the information from the charts. However, on a recent 3-day cruise in that area, we "circumnavigated" Shamrock Island, and so I was now positive that I could go all the way through Shamrock Cove without running aground.

I was leading a few first timers through the cove and over to Stingray Hole, and so we wound up strung out across CC Bay in a line for a great sail that morning. Once through Stingray Hole, which was uneventful, we turned to starboard and entered the Corpus Christie Ship Channel. This is a very wide shipping channel that leads from the Gulf of Mexico in Port Aransas, into Corpus Christi Bay. The wind direction was perfect, out of the SSE, so it was clear that we weren't going to have to tack up this channel (that's always a possibility if there's too much east in the prevailing SE winds). I stayed outside of the channel, on the starboard side, and held a line pointed at the bend where it becomes the Lydia Ann channel. I do not sail in this channel if I can avoid it, due to the commercial traffic. Toward the

end, as we approached the Port Aransas ferries, I found myself at the front of a pack of seven TX200 sailboats, headed toward the ferry crossing. I got on VHF 16 and advised the ferry captains that there were 7 sailboats about to cross their path in the next few minutes. When they didn't respond, another TX200 sailor did the same thing, and then there was a response that they had seen us and there was no problem. I passed through no problem at all, as in years past, and it seemed to me that the rest of the pack had no issues either.

The issues came a few minutes later, as a massive tanker ship sounded three long blasts as it entered the jetties at Port Aransas, headed toward the other 6 boats in our "fleet". I was already past the jetties and into the Lydia Ann channel, so I was totally free and clear of the path of the tanker. However, the rest of the pack was not. I saw Kevin and Awdree on DragNFly sailing right for the bow of the tanker, and from my location it seemed they were set up for a head on collision. Kevin passed in front of the tanker and continued on, and he later reported that they weren't that close at all, it was just my angle that made it seem that way.

Another boat in that same pack cut it a bit closer though. Peter and Mike on Peter's Flying M were reportedly trying to cross the ship channel in front of the tanker when they realized they weren't going to make it. They tacked and turned to head the other way, to get out of the tanker's path, but the wind wasn't cooperating and they were moving quite slowly. Peter dropped the motor and tried to start it, but nothing. On the second or third attempt, the motor started and they motored full throttle away from the tanker who was bearing down on them at 8 or 10 knots. I did not see all of this; this was reported to me later in the day by Peter. He says when the tanker passed them they were within about 15 feet of the hull of the massive ship. They beached their boat and Peter says they were in total shock and didn't talk for nearly an hour. They just sat there. A Texas Parks and

Wildlife boat had seen this happen, and came over to them to give them a hard time for having almost killed themselves, and nearly giving the park ranger a heart attack in the process.

I didn't see any of this, so I can't give specific advice as to what they should have or could have done differently. I will say this though: The large commercial vessels have the right of way in those channels, and most of them cannot stop their vessels and have very limited steerage. If you get in their path, you will be run down and will be killed. They are very large and sometimes it appears that they are moving very slowly, but they typically operate at 8 or 10 knots or more, so they are moving at nearly twice the speed of our little sailboats. My strong recommendation is to sail OUTSIDE of the channel at all times, as long as there is deep enough water to do so. In the Corpus Christi Ship Channel, there is plenty of space with deep water outside of the channel, on both sides. There is no reason to be in that channel at all with the favorable wind direction that we had that day. When you need to cross the channel, make sure you are 100% free and clear of shipping traffic for at least a mile in each direction. If you are not, then don't cross. You can turn the other way and beach your boat, or just tack back and forth outside the channel, or heave to, or throw out your anchor, whatever you want to wait until you have enough room and time to cross that channel. Peter and Mike came very close to a fatal encounter with that tanker that day. We should all learn from their close call.



The tanker (photo credit: Bill Allen)

The sail through the Lydia Ann channel was quite nice. I was tired and I thought about heading toward the barrier island on my right, which looked like a very nice area, and anchoring for a bit to have lunch and kick back. But, I decided against it and pushed on toward Paul's Mott, our camp for that evening. Once I was around Mud Island I turned to starboard and headed for Paul's Mott. Some folks were asking me if it was OK to go "under" Mud Island and through Blind Pass, but I told them I didn't think it was a good idea, as I had heard stories of extremely thin water there and even very small boats having to get out and walk their boats sometimes. I have never tried going that route, so I can't say for sure that it's extremely skinny water. Just reporting what I'd heard from others.

The arrival at Paul's Mott involved staying a few hundred yards off the tip of the small peninsula, to ensure sufficiently deep water. My issue was going to be then making the turn to windward, and tacking toward the anchorage area in the lee of the peninsula. I knew from my 2014 experience here that the water on that side (north side) of the peninsula was extremely shallow even quite far out from land,

and tacking in that condition with nearly no centerboard down and maybe the rudder kicked up, would not be easy. I thought that I had remembered that the water was slightly deeper toward the tip of the peninsula, and so my plan was to head to starboard as soon as I passed in front of the peninsula, and try to get to land as soon as possible. Without a motor for backup, I didn't want a long, slow slog to windward to get to camp after a long day of sailing.

Using the swing keel/centerboard as my depth sounder, I made the turn and headed for land. It was pretty easy to get in actually, and I kept raising the board as it scratched along the bottom. When the rudder kicked, I knew my steerage was going to be shot, and that I was in about 2.5 feet of water, so I just released the sheets, scrambled to the bow, and jumped over with the bow pulpit in one hand. Solid ground, no mud, and only a tad over knee deep. Perfect. I walked my boat for a minute or two, to get it into a good spot for anchoring, and set out to anchor in my preferred fashion – two anchors off the bow, 90 degrees apart. Within a few minutes I was anchored up and sitting pretty. I sat back in the cockpit for a few minutes in the shade and had a cold beer as a welcome to Paul's Mott.

After a few minutes at anchor, I noticed the two guys (Mark House Sr and Jr, I believe) on the Compac 16 anchored next to me were lounging in the water next to their boat drinking a beer, so I decided to join them for another beer. It was nice to swim, sort of, and have a cold beer. We did that for a while, and MJ and Tripp then came in and anchored next to me, and MJ came over and joined us for a bit in the water.

There was a ceremony scheduled for 6pm at the mast that is set at the tip of the peninsula. The mast and spreaders are cut to look like a cross, and the base consists of a large chunk of concrete to hold it in place. I know this because on the 2014 TX200 we saw that this cross was knocked over and laying on its side, and about 12 of us dug a new hole for the foundation and carried the mast/cross

up to its new location and set the concrete foundation in the hole. It was still standing in the same location one year later.

The ceremony was going to be to memorialize three TX200 sailors who had died during the past year: Dave Ware, the builder and previous owner of Merlin (now owned and sailed by Ray Whitney); Mike Monies; and another gentleman whose name I did not catch. I had never met either of these gentlemen, but I did know who Dave Ware was, as I watched him successfully and skillfully sail his beautiful boat on the 2013 and 2014 TX200. I remember hearing the news about a year ago, that he had passed away only a week or two after finishing the 2014 TX200. A gentleman named Dan, who was sailing with us on the TX200, gave the ceremony, and the widows of Messrs. Ware and Monies were in attendance, having been brought over in a powerboat from Rockport. Dan gave a really touching memorial for our fallen brothers. There was a brass ship's bell temporarily mounted to the mast, and it was rung for each of the fallen sailors. There were also three TX200 burgees flying from the mast, one for each of the fallen sailors. The burgees were lowered one by one, and each of the widows in attendance was presented with the burgee for their deceased husband. I assume this will now be a regular feature on the TX200, to memorialize any fallen sailors that we may have from one year to the next.



The ceremony at Paul's Mott (photo credit: Bill Allen)

As usual, there was a good bit of socializing until it got dark, and then I headed back out to my boat. As I was headed out, I stopped to chat with Chuck Pierce and Rick, and Chuck invited me to join him and a few other boats that were planning to buddy-boat their way through the back bays the next day, on our way over to Army Hole. They were planning to be sailing at 6:30am, and I told him I'd love to join and would be ready and sailing and 6:30. I waded out to my boat, got settled very comfortably in my V berth and set my alarm for 5:45am.



The anchorage at Paul's Mott



Sunset at Paul's Mott (photo credit: Bill Allen)

Day 5 - Friday

I slept really well Thursday night, and my alarm woke me up as planned at 5:45am. I set a pot of water to boil for my coffee, and while it was heating up I got

the boat organized, one of my anchors up and stowed, took down my anchor light, and prepared to head out. Once my coffee was made and prepared in my thermos, I put a few breakfast items back in a small bag at the back of the cockpit, and raised the mainsail and jib while still at anchor. A few minutes later, as Stan headed out and Chuck started doing the same, I brought in my remaining anchor and stowed it on the bow pulpit with one hand while standing in the water and holding the boat with the other. Getting all of this stuff right while leaving a crowded anchorage, under sail, singlehanded, with no motor, is a bit of a logistical challenge. I did just fine and was headed out under sail right as the sun came up at 6:30, exactly according to plan.



Me (left) and Chuck Pierce (right) headed out of Paul's Mott at sunrise (photo by Walter Brown)

There were a few other boats headed out at the same time, including Walter Brown on his West Wight Potter 15, who took that awesome photo shown above. A few of the boats headed out further to port, to get into the ICW, while most of us headed a bit more to starboard, toward Carlos Dugout, on what is typically known as the "back bays" route on this leg of the TX200.

On my first TX200, in 2013, I did not take the back bays route, since my iPhone had no power and that left me without any GPS or chartplotting capability. I did not feel comfortable trying the back bay route for the first time with only charts and a compass, since my navigation skills were pretty minimal, and there were a number of oyster reefs just beneath the surface of the water that were quite intimidating. In 2014, with a working iPhone, we took the back bays route and it was great. This year, my plan was to challenge myself to take the back bays route and do it with only charts and compass, but since I was singlehanding and with no motor, I didn't want to risk it, and I decided to "cheat" and use the Navionics GPS/chartplotting app on my iPhone.

We made it through Carlos Dugout, Cedar Dugout and then Ayres Dugout just fine, and as we were headed toward Panther Reef there was some discussion on the radio about whether we wanted to go through Panther Reef Cut, located roughly in the middle of the bay, or around Panther Point, right at the barrier island. I had previously gone through the cut and I wasn't sure how much water there was at the point. The guys assured me it would work, and I told them that I'd follow their lead. I was happy to be trying out a different route.

As we crossed San Antonio Bay and headed toward Panther Point, one of the boats that was sailing with us called out on the radio that they had hit something and broke their leeboard and were disabled. Four or five of us were in the vicinity and all started working the radio to make a plan to help them. Chuck Leinweber initially offered to tow them to the barrier island, so they could beach their boat and make repairs on solid ground. But, within a few minutes, Chris and Cathy on Scuffy, a homebuilt little houseboat powered by a 30hp outboard, offered to make the tow. I told them that without a motor I wasn't going to be beating into the wind to get to the barrier island, but that if they wanted any of my tools, spares or wood, I'd be happy to heave to out in the bay and give them whatever they needed. Of course, they were all well prepared and indicated that they had everything they

needed to make the repairs. The group agreed that a few of them would motor to land to make repairs, and the rest of us would sail on. However, somewhere on their trip to the barrier island, they decided to just motor over to Panther Point to make their repairs there. The rest of us, who were sailing to Panther Point to make our way further north on our route for the day, decided to beach our boats with them at Panther Point and have lunch on the beach, and be available to them should anything be needed during the repair session.

Stan had agreed to be our “scout” boat, and cross the reef out in front of Panther Point, with his leeboard down to check the depth for Chuck and I, who were on 2,000 lb boats and didn’t want to go aground on a shoal. Stan made it through just fine, and then Chuck started to cross the point, with me behind him, and another boat or two behind me. Just as I was about to cross the point, where the water was likely the shallowest, I reached for my centerboard line to pull it up a bit and got a good scare: It was stuck; I couldn’t pull my centerboard up. I gave it a few good tries, and within about 5 seconds grabbed my radio to let the guys behind me know that I was going to have to jibe out of there immediately so as to not go aground. I jibed the boat and headed out into deeper water, thinking to myself, “oh boy, here we go, I’m now going to be one of those stories that people tell on the T200.” However, it only took me a minute or so to realize what had happened (the line had come off the drum/winch and gotten stuck), and I was able to free it up and the board then operated normally. Chuck gave me credit for the fastest boat repair ever over the VHF, and I laughed and jibed my boat again to head back toward Panther Point, having only lost about 90 seconds in the whole ordeal. That was a relief.

After we beached the boats, the guys banged out the repairs in about 45 minutes or so, while the rest of us just walked around eating lunch and chatting. Panther Point is a beautiful place, and I was glad that we took a short break to stretch our legs and get a bite to eat.

After the repairs were finished, we all headed out and made our way toward South Pass. As we made our way toward the pass, I started to notice that the group (about 3-4 sailboats) was all headed about 15 or 20 degrees further to the right of where I was headed. I didn't think too much of it for a while, but as we got further along, it was clear that they were not headed where I was. I checked my charts and the Navionics software, probably about 5 times each, and then I got on the radio. They assured me that where they were headed was South Pass, and that I was off base somehow. I checked everything again, three more times, and it just didn't add up. I was positive I was headed toward South Pass and they were headed somewhere else. I told them that I would just fall in behind them and follow them, since I clearly had some navigation issues or heat stroke or something going on. However, as we got even closer, I made one last attempt to sort things out on the radio, and told them I really thought we were about to go aground based on our current heading. Within a few minutes, there was some chatter on the radio and they started heading toward where I was originally headed (South Pass!), and we were pointed in the right direction. We made it through South Pass a few minutes later with no issues, and were on our way.

South Pass is the last cut/pass/dugout in the back bays, and we were now in Espirtu Santo bay, headed for Army Hole in wide open, deep water (keep in mind that on the Texas Gulf Coast, "deep water" is anything over 6 feet deep). The wind had more east in it than the last time I came this way, and it was clear that we would not be able to make Army Hole without tacking a few times. Over the course of those last nine miles, I tacked 2 or 3 times, and was then able to point right at Army Hole. There is a very large white warehouse at Army Hole that you can see from miles away, and it looms large on the horizon, leading you in for the last hour or so.

Chuck Pierce had offered to tow me into the docking area at Army Hole, since it really isn't possible to make it in there under sail. I was the first boat to arrive, so I just hove to out in front of the entrance and waited for Chuck to arrive, which took about 20 minutes or so. He dropped his sails and sat still in the water with a tow rope in hand, while I sailed up slowly from behind him. As I approached his stern, just off to the starboard side, I locked my tiller in place and scrambled up to the bow. He threw me the line, I managed to catch it, and in about 10 seconds I had it through the chock, under the bow pulpit and tied off to my bow cleat. I scrambled back to the cockpit and grabbed the tiller so as to avoid a collision. It was pretty impressive how we pulled that off, I thought, and our tow-in was underway. I got my sails down as he towed me into the wind, and the rest of the way into the docks was easy. There were a number of people at the docks to help us get in without crashing, and within a few minutes we were both tied up in the slips.

The rest of the afternoon was fantastic. I just love Army Hole. There are a bunch of picnic tables with shade roofs, and the grass in that area is kept fairly short by the maintenance crews from the state park service. I had been out there a number of times, and had enjoyed walking around the old runways and hiking to the Matagorda Lighthouse on prior visits. There is an abandoned cemetery out next to the lighthouse, where the lighthouse keepers were buried for many years. It is not all that easy to find, and is pretty much overgrown, but it's worth checking it out. This time, I just wanted to walk around for a bit, away from the group, to stretch my legs and hear the silence that I love so much at Army Hole. At some point, on a future visit when I have more energy, I want to hike to the Gulf of Mexico, which is about 2 miles from the docks. If you haven't been to Army Hole, I highly recommend you make it out there sometime. There is no way you'll be disappointed.



The large jackrabbits that are everywhere at Army Hole

Later in the afternoon, I checked my iPhone's weather radar app, and saw a line of storms headed for us, probably set to arrive sometime in the midnight to 3am range. Deja vu, all over again. Anyone who was at Army Hole on the 2014 TX200 will clearly remember the strong storm that came through overnight. During that event, we were awoken by the thunder and lightning in advance of the storms, so we had about 15 minutes advance warning. We all scrambled to tie up our boats better at the docks; specifically, we needed to tie them to withstand the north winds we were expecting, since the boats were mostly tied to handle the prevailing SE winds. The wind and rain and thunder and lightning came at us pretty good in 2014; I think the winds were probably in the 35 to 40 knot range if I remember correctly. Anyway, it was looking like we had a pretty good chance of a similar situation this year. Kevin Green and I were debating whether or not to tie extra lines before we went to sleep, and then we decided that we definitely should. That way, having gone through all that trouble, we'd be guaranteed to not have any storms come through. And so that's what we did, and that's exactly what happened. No storms. Quiet night.

Day 6 – Saturday

As usual at Army Hole, folks seem to get up a little later, and get moving at slightly slower pace. It's the last day, and we only have about 25 miles to sail to get to the finish line at Maggie Beach. Plus, I think we also take our sweet time because, although tired, we don't want the event to end. For me, there's also the fact that I really like Army Hole and I try to spend as much time there as possible.

There was a fair amount of talk about the famed "Saluria Bayou" route in the morning; we had charts in hand and people were sharing their experiences, myself included. I wanted to try the route that goes through Mitchell's Cut, one that I had tried once before, successfully. However, at the last minute I decided I'd better just play it safe and go across Espiritu Santo bay and use the ICW to get out into Matagorda Bay. Again, with no crew and no motor, I didn't want to go aground and have issues. I'd made it this far and I didn't want to screw it up on the last day. However, Bobby Rogers was very interested in taking the Saluria Bayou route, having taken the far less interesting ICW route last year. So, he made me a deal: If I'd be willing to lead him through the Saluria Bayou route, he'd lend me his son Clay for the day to crew with me, that way I'd have help if we went aground. That was all it took; I was in. Anything to avoid the ICW.

Clay and I positioned my boat so that we could head out under sail, and I raised the main and jib and we were off. Getting out under sail was no problem. We made it around to Mitchell's Cut without issues, although Bobby got his boat (a Catalina 22) stuck briefly on a shoal. However, as we approached the entrance to Mitchell's Cut, it was apparent that the wind would be right on the nose in the cut. I was offered a tow through by John Alesch, who was motorsailing through the cut, but I declined. I wanted to try to tack through the cut. Well, that lasted about 5 minutes. The cut is just too narrow and my boat just doesn't point all that well (in

my opinion), so I gave up. I'm sure I could have done it, but it would probably have taken an hour. Bobby had just freed himself from the shoal and was going to motor through, and he offered me a tow. The tow took less than 5 minutes, since the cut is quite short in distance. Once into Saluria Bayou, we had the wind on the beam and got back to sailing. We sailed out of the Bayou and into Matagorda Bay, where we turned to port and started heading for the Port O'Connor jetties. This area has a lot of shoaling and shifting sand bars, since Pass Cavallo is right there, but we made it through without any issues. Once past the jetties, we made a slight turn to port and were headed directly for Maggie Beach. It was a nice downwind run into Maggie Beach, and we arrived at about 1:30pm or so.

For the third time, I had successfully completed a TX200 event. Although it was my third time, it still felt like an accomplishment, especially since I had singlehanded 5 out of the 6 days this year. I was definitely more tired than the past two years, but I was still looking forward to spending the rest of the day celebrating on the beach with the rest of the gang. I got my boat on the trailer and got it all packed up by about 4pm and then settled in to eat shrimp, drink beer and exchange stories with my fellow sailors.

My friend, fellow Austinite, and fellow sailor, Pehr Janssen, was at the beach to receive us and celebrate with us. He wasn't able to complete the event this year due to work commitments, but he did manage to make his way down to Maggie Beach to do some day sailing and celebrating. Pehr was contemplating camping on Maggie Beach, and I decided to join him since I was tired and didn't want to drive 4 hours back to Austin that evening. A few others stayed the night, and we had a nice relaxing evening sitting on the beach, drinking beer and telling stories. It was a great way to end another really great TX200.

Recommendations, Lessons Learned and Random Cruising Tips

Although I've been sailing since I was a young boy, my first real multi-day cruise aboard a sailboat was the 2013 TX200. Since then, I've completed 7 or 8 more multi-day cruises, each in the 3 to 6 day range, including the 2014 TX200 and FL120, and the 2015 TX200. Overall, I've probably got about 1,000 cruising miles under my keel since 2013. I certainly don't consider myself a seasoned cruiser, but I have learned a few things about what works and what doesn't, both from my own experience and by observing dozens of other sailors on these cruises and raid-type events.

If you are a newbie to multi-day small sailboat cruising and are considering doing the TX200 for the first time, here's a few bits of information and advice for your consideration. I know that there are probably some TX200 veterans that will disagree with some of what I have to say here, and you should consider all opinions and experiences as you plan for this event. These are just my own personal experiences and opinions that I'm putting out there for your consideration as part of the overall "body of knowledge" on this type of sailing experience.

- The "right" boat for the TX200: There is no shortage of opinions as to what is the most appropriate boat for the TX200. You could probably debate with the TX200 sailors for days on end, with no consensus. I will not try too hard to convince you of what the "right" boat is, since I think there really is no "right" boat. There are boats from 8 feet to nearly 30 feet that have successfully completed the TX200. They all basically work just fine for this event; it just depends on what type of experience you're looking for. The event was traditionally characterized by a large majority of homebuilt, plywood boats, but that seems to be slowly changing, and in 2014 and 2015 there were probably more production fiberglass boats than homebuilt boats.

What type of sail rig? Sloops and cutters and cats and cat ketches and gaff rigs and balanced lugs and schooners and many other types of rigs have successfully completed this event. Heck, Kelly Davis completed this event in 2015 with no rig at all... he rowed the entire thing. For real. Another couple (Cathy and Chris) completed the 2015 event in a homebuilt houseboat powered by motor alone. So, I think the answer is whatever boat and rig is right for you is the right boat and rig for this event. It depends on a lot of factors, not the least of which is what boat you currently own, and of course what type of experience you want to have on the TX200. Having said that, here are a few thoughts, observations and opinions for your consideration:

Go small (under 14 or 15 feet or so) and you will be in for a relatively barebones, possibly uncomfortable, long week. With few options for sitting, you will quite literally “run out of ass”, as many of those guys will tell you. Small boats generally sail slower, and you can’t store much in the way of “luxury” items like ice, camp stoves, spare parts, etc. Living on Clif Bars and warm water for a week is totally fine for some; others want no part of it. You’ll certainly have a more rewarding, challenging experience if you go small. I think you’ll really feel like you accomplished something. And you won’t have to worry too much about going aground, since you can just push yourself off and get right back to sailing. You can explore and sail in the skinniest of water and that will be really nice, since we got a lot of that on the Texas Gulf Coast. Not likely you can install a bimini for shade, and if the bays are rough, you’ll get beat up a bit, and plenty wet. You’ll also likely have no room for crew, so you need to be ready, willing and able to singlehand for a week. That means 10-12 hours a day on the tiller, sitting on that ass that you’re running out of, slowly but surely. Not likely you’ll

have a motor, which means no help from the iron genny in times of need. This event can absolutely be done in a very small boat. Many would argue the event is the perfect venue for these types of boats. In fact, most of the guys that I know in this category would not even consider doing the event in a “big boat.” You just need to decide if this type of experience is right for you.

If you go big (in my opinion, over 22 feet or so) you will have a much different experience. Much different. Plenty of room for ice and beer and caviar and camp stoves and all the gear and luxuries and spare parts you can imagine. You will likely sail faster than the pack in general, so you’ll have slightly shorter sailing days and you’ll be less likely to have a 15-hour marathon day. You can handle pretty much anything the bays can throw at you in relative comfort and safety. On the years when there is an optional “outside” leg (out in the Gulf of Mexico), you will have that as an option. You’ll be dry. You may not have the same type of challenging, rewarding experience as the small boat guys; it’ll be more of a cruise. You can bring one or two crew members to share the load and chew the fat, as they say. You can install a bimini and fancy cockpit cushions and put your feet up and have someone feed you grapes in the shade, with a brisk coastal breeze blowing through. You will have a motor for safety and comfort, and maybe to help power up your electrical system, which allows for all types of fancy-schmancy stuff like chartplotters and cabin fans and the rest of it. One guy (I won’t name names ☺) was even threatening to add a generator to his “large” boat for next year’s event. Those sound like mostly good things, right?

Well the big downside is you may be too big, heavy and/or draw too much water to sail carefree on the Texas Gulf Coast and really, truly enjoy all the TX200 has to offer. It's skinny water and there are lots of shoals. Josh Colvin referred to it as more of an obstacle course on the water than a sailing event. You get your big ol' keel stuck on an oyster reef in 20 knots of wind and 4 foot seas in a 2,500 lb boat, and you'll have just ruined your afternoon, maybe your entire trip.

Bottom line: in my humble opinion, 16 to 19 feet is the way to go, something that draws less than 10" or 12" of water with boards up, weighs as little as possible for its size, allows for at least one crew member to join you, a motor for convenience and safety, a bimini for some oh-so-sweet shade, an ice chest and camp stove for your eating and drinking pleasure, and sufficient storage space for spare parts. That's the sweet spot. Does that mean that I'd suggest the TX200 comprise 50 or 60 boats all in the 16 to 19 foot range. Heck no. That would be no fun at all. As I've said, anything from 8 feet to 30 feet will work and get you through; you just need to be aware of what the implications are if you go small or go big.

So, at 19 feet, my boat is on the upper end of this sweet spot. I've got three TX200s under my belt and I'm thrilled with my boat. But, as I said, many smaller boats have also successfully completed the 200 and their skippers have been just thrilled, and I know many of them wouldn't want to do the 200 in a boat as big and heavy and cumbersome as mine. Similarly, larger boats (in the 22 to 26 foot range) have also done the 200, and many of those folks wouldn't want to go any smaller and compromise comfort. I'll let you decide what's best for you. Whatever you do, don't waste too much

time and miss out on the next TX200 because you're trying to figure out what type of boat to sail. Get yourself a boat and get out there with us!

- Skills/experience: This event is not for beginners or those who are still learning to sail. If you aren't at least a good, solid upper-intermediate-level sailor, you probably shouldn't skipper your own boat in this event. Ideally, you should be a very experienced sailor to even consider this thing. You can definitely serve as crew with no sailing experience at all, as long as your skipper has the right experience. What do I mean by experience? It doesn't need to be cruising/multi-day experience. Just good, solid experience on your boat in wind conditions from 5 to 20+ knots. Know how to self-rescue and recover from a capsize, miles from nowhere. And make sure you have at least the basics of navigation covered. If you are used to sailing around in circles on a lake full of deep water, you are in for a little surprise on the TX200. Get some charts and a compass and a GPS or chartplotter and learn the basics. Even though the event is done in protected bays, some of them are quite large, and your destination most days will be over the horizon, out of sight. Your navigation plan for the TX200 should not be to "follow someone", as I heard from several people on this year's 2015. That's not a navigation plan. One final thought: try your best to have good experience on the boat you'll be sailing in the TX200, even if you've been sailing for many years. There are indeed people who sail the TX200 in a boat they've just purchased or built, and so the 200 is basically their shakedown cruise. I know of at least one person who built their boat on the beach at the starting point a few years back, and he made it to the finish line. So, it can and does work, but you're much better off if you find a way to at least get your boat out and sail it once or

twice prior to the event... cause the TX200 will definitely shake things down a bit ☺

- Electricity: For maximum safety and a bit of comfort, you are going to likely have some devices that require electricity. Have a good plan. And also a backup plan for the really important ones. On my first TX200, I planned to use AA batteries for most things, and that is a great plan that is easy to prepare for, inexpensive, and basically foolproof. However, I had one very important piece of equipment that did not use AA batteries and my plan for that device wasn't a good one. I used (and still do) my iPhone as my GPS and chartplotter. I use the Navionics software and I really like it. It's awesome in my opinion. However, the iPhone uses a considerable amount of battery when Navionics is running. I'd estimate that my battery will get fully used up in about 2 hours of running Navionics. In 2013 I planned to use a small 7 watt hiking/camping solar panel to keep the iPhone charged. I tested it in my driveway on a sunny day and it charged the iPhone fully in about an hour. Great, right? Well, not so fast. I learned (the hard way) that the iPhone is not compatible with my solar panel when there is any type of partial cloud cover at all. It doesn't just charge more slowly; it rejects the solar panel altogether and doesn't work. And, if you are charging in full sun and a cloud passes over, even for 5 seconds, the panel gets rejected and does not become functional again when the sun comes back. You have to disconnect and reconnect the iPhone. Highly annoying and really not functional. Result: I ran out of juice for the iPhone and had no GPS or chartplotter in 2013 for about 2 days on the TX200, and couldn't take the (very interesting) back bays route from Quarantine Shores to Army Hole. I was stuck in the ICW. Now that I know the course and am more experienced with navigating by chart and compass I would do the back

bays, and the entire event in fact, without a GPS. But I wouldn't recommend you do that for your first TX200. (Side note on the iPhone option: they are not hardened for the marine environment, so probably not the best option on a very wet boat. But it's what I have and the app was \$10 so the price was right and I'm making it work).

Anyway, now I still carry that same solar panel, which works great in full sun. But I also purchased a jump pack. It's basically a motorcycle battery that you charge up at home and then can use USB or cigarette lighter ports to charge small devices. I get about 10 or 12 iPhone charges from it. It is relatively small and has worked great for me. There are certainly other ways to go in terms of providing electricity. Lots of guys just buy a 12v car or boat battery and wire up connections for USB or cigarette inputs. The jump pack is what I've chosen and it's worked, and I still have the solar panel as a minimally acceptable backup plan if the jump pack were to fail for some reason. Everything else, including my VHF radio, still runs on AA batteries and that continues to work well for me. In terms of a backup for my iPhone, I usually ask my crew to download the Navionics app for their iPhone or Android phone (\$10 for the app, so not a big cost for a multi-day cruise). This way I'm covered if my iPhone goes in the drink or just decides to call it quits.

- Food/Cooking/Cooler: After a number of these types of events and multi-day cruises, I've basically settled on the following type of menu and approach to cooling and heating food and drinks. There are many folks who do the TX200 with no cooler and no way to cook or heat food. While you can certainly live on warm water and Clif bars for a week, I choose to go a little above and beyond to provide for a more comfortable and

enjoyable experience. There are others who do a much more impressive job than me, with charcoal fires and freshly grilled meats. But this is what I've settled into for now.

Breakfast: Starbucks VIA instant coffee, Clif Bars, granola bars, apples and drinkable/liquid yogurt. Tried bananas, they don't do well on hot boats. Plus I heard it's bad luck or something. I boil the water at anchor before getting underway, and fill my large thermos with my coffee, which lasts me an hour or two as I slowly sip away. I don't brew coffee since I've found the Starbucks VIA instant coffee to be quite good and nearly the same taste as brewed coffee. I carry half & half creamers that don't require refrigeration and also individual sugar packets.

Lunch: on these types of trips, lunch is almost always underway, so it's basically glorified snacking. Trail mix, apples, peanut butter on Ritz crackers, beef jerky, mozzarella string cheese sticks and things like that usually make my list.

Dinner: I always go with a hot dinner now, just feels so much more like dinner. Not a home-cooked meal, just a hot dinner. Lentil soup; hot dogs; pre-cooked chicken breast heated up and then served on flour tortillas with shredded cheese and hot sauce; pre-cooked pulled pork served on flour tortillas, etc..

Drinks: Water, Gatorade, one Coke per day, and about 2 beers per evening in camp. I always buy 16 or 20oz water bottles and the individual packs of Gatorade powder. That way I've got 100% water and I can make any amount of it into Gatorade throughout the day. Since I was

singlehanding this year, I wound up pre-mixing 3 Gatorades each morning at anchor before setting out for the day.

Cooler: I use an Igloo Marine cooler, not too fancy or expensive at all. I generally get 1.5 days of ice, then another day or so of cold water, and by Day 3 I'm into water that's somewhere between cold and cool. It works for me and I don't really carry perishables that I expect to last past the cold water stage. On the TX200 there is always an option about mid-way through the week to get ice at a marina in Corpus Christi or Port Aransas. You don't need a \$400 Yeti cooler to do this event. Many folks will tell you that you don't actually need a cooler at all, and they're right.

Cooking and Eating Gear: I have a single burner camp stove and use the 1 pound Coleman propane tanks. I have a coffee pot that I use to boil water, and also a pot for heating up soup and meats. I use plasticware for eating, and wash both the pot and plasticware with saltwater and soap, with a final rinse with freshwater before stowing. I try not to use disposable plates or bowls since the trash on a 5 or 6 day cruise adds up.

- Boarding ladder: For safety reasons, you need to have a good way to reboard your boat if you fall off or capsize. I didn't really have this on the first TX200. We anchored to swim at one point, and climbing back in the boat over the transom was not easy. If we had been exhausted from a capsize or other issue, it may not have been possible. I have since installed a nice stainless swim ladder on my transom and it works just great.
- Jib Downhaul: If you sail a boat with a headsail, you should really consider installing a jib downhaul (assuming you don't have roller furling). I did this

for the first TX200 and have used it countless times since then. Very much recommended. If things hit the fan, you don't want to have to scramble up onto the foredeck to get the jib down.

- Sleeping cushion/pad/mattress: My cabin cushions were a bit dirty and moldy when I bought my boat and I didn't have time to clean them up prior to the first TX200. I figured we could just sleep on small yoga-mat-like camp pads. I was wrong. Fiberglass is hard. I have since cleaned up my cushions, which work in the cabin and also out in the cockpit for sleeping out there, and it is a very different experience. I sleep extremely comfortably in my V berth on these cushions and I appreciate the good nights sleep. Make sure you have some type of sleep pad, cushions or air mattress to get a comfortable nights sleep on your boat or in your tent. If you are not already aware, the camps on the TX200 where you will tent camp, if you go that route, are not powdery sand. This isn't Cancun. Sometimes they are hard packed mud and there are a few that consist entirely of broken oyster shells. Find a way to pack an air mattress or a good camp pad. It's worth it.
- Whisker Pole: If you have a headsail on a sloop rig or similar, make sure you have a way to pole out your headsail. Although the TX200 is a relatively high wind event, there seem to always be periods where the wind is very low, particularly in the mornings. With the wind typically abaft the beam, you have good opportunities to fly the jib out on the opposite side of the mainsail (wing and wing, as they say). If you can pole out your jib, you get a bit more speed, which will allow you to reach camp before dark and not have a 15 hour sailing day. I've had a whisker pole on all my TX200s and have used it more than once on each event, often for many hours at a

time. Get one. Or make one. You can make one cheap if you don't want to spend West Marine cash on one. Mine is made from a wooden closet rod from Home Depot, with some shaping done at both ends, a stainless lag screw at one end with the head cut off, and 5 or 6 coats of varnish. It works great.

- Shade: Oh, this one is big. Not just big, Texas-sized. The TX200 is in June in deep south Texas, with temps in the low 90s, and there is about 14 hours of sunlight each day. The best one-word description I can find for it is oppressive. Some say that with the right clothing (head to toe, including hat and face cover) you are fine. In terms of UV exposure and sunburn, they are right. But I've now spent many days out in the summer Texas sun with long pants, long sleeve shirt, and a hat, and it sucks. You sweat your fanny off. In preparation for the 2015 TX200 I decided to invest in a bimini for my boat. Oh what a great decision that was. Wow. Game changer. The motor died in the first hour of the event, and I didn't even try to fix it all week. I just ignored it. But if you took my bimini away I'd probably have gotten pretty upset. At a minimum, bring a golf umbrella that you can use if winds go light or otherwise permit its usage. Several guys have done that and it reportedly works well. But seriously consider a bimini. It is day and night as an experience.
- Spare parts and plans for jury rigging: Before the event, set your boat up and take an hour or two and walk all around it, looking at and analyzing every part and system that is needed to sail the boat. Decide how you would continue to sail if that part/system broke. Could you fix it? Could you jury rig it? Find some way to bring as many spare parts and tools and spare sails, line, wood, etc., so that you have nearly every possible situation

covered. Once you're out on the TX200, as you probably know by now, you are miles from nowhere in many cases, and what you have with you is what you'll have to work with to try to keep your boat sailing. In reality, most other boats carry lots of spares and tools, and this group will rally to help you. But, you should be self-sufficient and assume your breakdown will occur far from other boats and out of VHF radio range (both of which can indeed happen on this event). One thing you're sure to hear from the TX200 veterans is that this event is tough on rudders. It's true; listen to them. They're not just messing with you. Make sure your rudder is up to the task. That means rudder head, rudder blade, tiller, gudgeons and pintles. Go overboard on them, it's worth it. My stock rudder is very beefy and has been just fine, but I still bring spares to replace it if needed. Another thing I did this year was obtain a spare set of sails, both main and jib. Now I have a plan for how to sail on and finish the event if my mainsail blows out and becomes worthless. I got these sails for free, and they are old and tired; but they work and would very much get me across the finish line if needed.

- Ability to significantly shorten sail: As I'm sure you'll read in many other places, make sure you can reduce sail in a major way and sail your boat on different points of sail in winds in excess of 20 knots, even up to 30 knots. You may see winds over 30 knots, but at that point it may be part of a squall or front line moving through and you may choose to drop sail, anchor, beach in the lee of the land, etc. But you will definitely need to be able to sail your boat safely for extended periods of time in 20-30 knots of wind. 25 knots of wind is not a squall that you need to wait out; it's the Texas Gulf Coast and you might need to sail 50 miles in that type of wind on any given day. Back home at the marina or the boat ramp, most of us would simply

just not head out onto the water in 25 knots of wind. And if you were already on the water and the wind built to 25 knots, you'd most likely get off the water and call it a day. Not on the TX200. You need to keep going. So make sure you are prepared to do so.

I had two reef points in my main for my first two TX200s, but the second reef wasn't all that deep. For this most recent event I sewed in my own third set of reef points, and it gives me a deeply reefed main. Luckily, this year was a very benign year and I don't know that we ever had winds over 15 knots all week. But last year we had 30 knots for a few hours on the afternoon of the first day. So be prepared.

- Kick up rudder and swing keel/centerboard: Make sure you can get your rudder and centerboard/leeboard to kick up in shallow water and for beaching the boat. The more "fixed" your rudder or keel is, the worse off you are, and the more headaches you're asking for. My swing keel swings up to 100% inside the hull, and my rudder kicks and swings up so the blade is totally out of the water when needed. This is a big help when anchored and when walking the boat across a shoal. Nothing to touch bottom and get caught up. My boat draws 10" with the boards up, and nearly 5 feet with the centerboard down, so I often use the centerboard as my depthsounder.
- Fan: About a year ago I bought a camp fan that runs on D batteries. I use it in the cabin when sleeping in the V berth in the summer. To be honest, it's not really needed, since I anchor my boat with the bow into the wind and I open my forehatch, which gets nice air flow through the cabin. But I have

used it and will likely continue to bring it along just in case. If I ran out of storage space it would be the first thing to go, but for now I'll keep it.

- Jib tack pendant/leader: One minor modification I did for the 2015 event was to add a 24" leader/pendant to my jib tack, so that the jib sits up higher, above the bow pulpit. I did this to accommodate the anchor, which I now hang up on the pulpit (see below), but also for visibility. It makes a huge difference in being able to see what's out in front of me from the helm, and I have not noticed any negative impacts on performance while sailing. This is a minor thing, but I really liked the added visibility so I figured I'd mention it.
- Anchor storage and deployment: I carry two anchors. Both are 8 lb Danforths with 6 feet of chain. One has 50' of 3/8" rode and the other has 100' of the same line. I think two anchors is wise in case one gets caught on the bottom and you have to cut it free, or if you find yourself in a storm situation and need two anchors to stay safe while anchored in "deep" water. However, one additional thing to consider is where to store it and how you'll deploy it. For the past few years I've kept both anchors in the storage area back in the cockpit, accessible from the hatches in the cockpit benches. This means carrying the anchor up to the bow each time we approach an anchorage. Most boats just beach on the TX200, but I do not. I anchor out so my centerboard trunk doesn't get jammed full of mud or oyster shells and disable by centerboard. A few months ago I installed anchor hangers on my bow pulpit and one of my anchors now hangs up there while sailing. I run the line back along the deck to the cockpit, then around a cleat and up to the bow, around a bow pulpit stanchion, and back the cockpit to a cleat, so it is not all tangled up in a ball (which always seemed to happen when

stored under the cockpit). Now deploying the anchor is much easier and the line is never fouled or wrapped around itself in a ball.

- Motor: Many TX200 participants, even those on relatively small boats, utilize a small auxiliary outboard motor. On my boat I have a Nissan (Tohatsu) 3.5 hp motor that I bought new in 2013. I bought it new so that it would be reliable, as a safety feature and for comfort. Well, one thing I've learned is that motors, even new ones, are not reliable. Plan to sail the entire event without a motor if you need to, even if your motor is in good working order. On the 2013 and 2014 TX200s my motor worked fine. I used it very little, since I like to enter and exit anchorages under sail, and generally try to challenge myself to do everything under sail. But it was there for maneuvering around the marinas in Port Isabel and Port Mansfield, and for entering and exiting the dock area at Army Hole. However, at the other two major events I've done recently, the 2014 FL120 and 2015 TX200, my motor did not work. On the FL120 it didn't work at all, from what turned out to be water in the fuel (I figured this out at home, after the event). On the 2015 TX200 it worked for the first hour or so, and then died as I was motoring out of the Port Isabel jetties into the Gulf of Mexico, against a fairly strong current. Not good timing. Lesson number 1 is be prepared to sail the entire event, and lesson number 2 is learn as much as possible about outboards and bring the right tools and spares to fix it along the way. I'm not good with motors and need to learn more. It's on my list of things to do. My boat is 45 years old, but the only thing that doesn't work reliably is my brand new motor. Go figure.
- Single handing: I have done two TX200s and one FL120 with crew, and one TX200 (this year) singlehanding. Along with the bimini, this is the other

thing that can drastically alter the event for you. The good thing about singlehanding is that you will become a better sailor and you'll challenge yourself to do things you wouldn't otherwise do. And, you'll feel a great sense of accomplishment when you successfully finish the event. You'll also get a lot of "me time" to just sit and ponder life. The downside is that it is significantly more tiring and a less social experience. With crew, quite honestly, the TX200 can be downright relaxing and enjoyable much of the time (Please don't tell Andy Linn, he prefers misery). When singlehanding, you are on the tiller 100% of the time and your ability to kick back and relax is basically non-existent. I'm glad that I singled-handed the event in 2015, to have the experience and feel the satisfaction at having successfully done it. But I would not choose to singlehand the event again, simply because I prefer to be with friends and laugh and talk and make jokes and kick back. I also like to get up off my ass (literally) from time to time, and stand at the mast to stretch my legs. Even if you have a big, padded, cruising-friendly ass, I guarantee you it won't be big enough if you need to sit on it for 12 hours a day for a week, on a hard wood or fiberglass surface. If I have to singlehand again I will most certainly do it. It's not awful. But I don't see myself planning to singlehand as my first choice.

So, those are my thoughts on a few of the major topic areas of discussion. If you want to ask questions on any of these topics, or something I didn't mention, just get on the TX200 Facebook page and post your question. You will find no shortage of opinions and likely a spirited debate from the gang. Before you do that though, make sure you go to www.texas200.com and read through the old forums. There are about 5 years of really good information there. And also the accounts like this one from each year. Invest the time and

read the entire forum and all of the accounts. Yes, all of it. It will be quite enjoyable I'm sure, and I know it will help you greatly.

Good luck and hope to see you out there next year!!