

Texas 200... Draft Perfect

Translated by Calvin Holt

Ahoy Black Opal, Ensign #1539 here and I've been asked to share a short story about my sail adventure on the Texas Intracoastal Waterway (ICW). About 8 months ago my captain discovered on the Texas200 Sailing Club on Facebook while looking for opportunities to sail beside racing in Fleet 2. You can go there or to www.texas200.com to understand the theme, boats and participants, or just study this photo and form an idea of a 6-day trip from Port Isabel to Port O'Connor on the ICW.



Let's be clear, it's not a race. Really. There are no rules, judges or prizes unless of course you count the event burgee, which I do. Some first timers may balk at the lack of structure and admit being dubious, but it turns out to be the event's strongest feature. No support boat, big fees, long speeches, safety checklists, checking in/out, firm course, or even expectations to show up. You are the captain, decided how, when and where to sail.....and go have fun.

Day One.... we left our rented dockside house at 730am and motored through the only operational swing bridge in Texas and as we approached the 'start' in the ICW, there was only one sailboat, obviously we were one of the few late sleepers...a habit we proudly maintained....fun remember? But before we start, for a moment, lets wind back several months when all the experienced T200 hands are texting rude remarks about my 3' draft and how it's going to be an 'issue' and that whatever I do, 'always stay between the channel markers'. Okay forward to the point where someone has jumped overboard with the anchor ready to kedge me off the shoal that is inside the markers!! not even 20 minutes into the trip and we managed to ground...arghh, what's the rest of the trip going to be like?! I won't repeat the language I heard when I wouldn't budge but I can report that after 15min of pulling frantically, I managed to get going again and boy did we get going. For the remainder of the 35Nm broad reach, I averaged +6.5kts with many long periods of 7-7.5kts and with only my old Genoa up. It was marvelous.....until it came time to turn to the Mansfield Jetties; the wind(+25mph) and waves (3-5') overpowered me. We retreated to Port Mansfield with +13 others, plus 1 on the rocks. Lesson learned....on a run going +2 faster than normal, ask yourself 'why?'

Day Two.....after being regaled at the dock till midnight by a chain-smoking, Whitney Houston singing chef working at the Pelican Groove, we were glad to get up early and set off for Hap's Cut. Another +30Nm broad to beam reach thru the channel markers...boring you say? I was worried to but as the ICW narrows, and the wind is strong it feels like I'm on ice and with such +2-4hrs runs in one direction, my main trimmer was actually giggling and learning. He was actually helpful - for the first time. At camp that evening, the club had a remembrance for its past members. Rumors of a 'commando raid' across the cut to turn off night-fishing flood lights so the sailors enjoy our Milky Way before going to bed were never substantiated.

Day Three.....following the ICW north, it eventually begins to head due east and a starboard beam reach was the order of the day....did I mention I have not tacked once yet? In fact,

come to think of it, I am pretty sure I only tacked 6 times the entire trip. Oh Joy. Today's destination was Padre Island Yacht Club. It is also the only real race day as everyone wants to get one of only 6 slips, otherwise the rest have to tie up to the big ugly wall in the channel. Ugh, no thanks,....I am getting a slip boys. I managed to pass 8 boats that day to 'win' the last slip and for the record, I was never passed the entire 6 days although a Weta and a Sea Pearl did give a good chase....did I mention this is not a race? Evening's entertainment was watching a large coyote forage on the beach across the channel.

Day Four.....today I realized that although I'm the most beautiful, have the quickest lines and could carry a Walmart in my cuddy, my 3' draft does will not allow me to follow the other kids to the shallows. Try as I might to sail close to the beach, it was too far away and my anchor would not hold on the oyster reef beds. So dejectedly, we sailed to Fulton, stayed at the Ritz Carlton equivalent. The town is still in recovery mode from Harvey. As it happens so was a T200 sailor who managed to ground on their jetty rocks....again but this time his mate went to the hospital with fractured collarbone. Other highlights were the sighting of a pirate ship, 3 stacked deep-water semi rigs, our first tug/ barge pass, the Bass family jet taking off Mustang Island and water as clear as the anything you'd see in Caribbean.

Day Five....okay, this story is not so short, and by now my crew is tired, still happy, but moving slower. It does not help we are close hauled, the fetch is building and barge traffic has increased. But the prize is well worth it, as Army Hole camp is the abandoned Matagorda state park, with a huge WWII era runway and a nice dock with beaches. As the last camp, everyone was determined to make the most of the last night, with good cooking, music, stories and new friendships. The photo was taken there. The stars were amazing and the moon was nowhere in sight, it was indeed food for the soul.

Day 6.....A short run to our haul out ramp in Port O'Conner. There was no crane to pick me up, the horror! So, a combination of tow ropes, two vehicles, a gin pole and come-along was required to get me safely on my trailer. I like it when a good plan comes together. Unlike the rock prone T200 boat who managed to fall off her trailer but that's another story. We drove 5miles to complete the trip at Magnolia Beach for the communal shrimp boil and beers, and then made it back to Houston Yacht Club by 10. There the last trip memory occurred, at the bar naturally, when *Andiamo* toasted my safe return with large draught of scotch whiskey. Perfect Ending.

