

**Texas 200 2018: My First Attempt**  
**by: Rod Clark**

I guess you could say that my TX200 began in March as I started the refit of my 1976 O'Day DS2 in earnest that month. The hull on the boat is solid and it has been well cared for over the years. It was a freshwater boat from Oklahoma. I purchased it in September of 2017 and on my first sail, I discovered the 40 year old rivets were not going to stand up to the loads of our strong coastal winds. I lost the boom bail within ten minutes of sailing and had to jury rig the mainsheet in order to continue the outing and make it back to the Isla Blanca boat ramp.

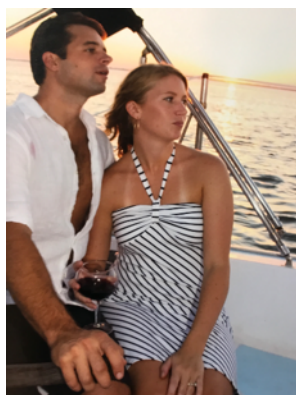
My first task of the refit was relatively easy, I drilled out and replaced every single rivet and screw that held hardware to the spars. For load bearing hardware, I fastened stainless steel rivets. And for all others, I used aluminum. I also replaced all of the standing and running rigging and upgraded to the heavier gauges where it was available. I added backing plates to the gudgeon brackets and fit a bimini over the cockpit. This last task forced me to re-rig the main sheeting. Instead of the mid-boom position of the blocks, I rigged a bridle off of the transom and used end-boom-sheeting. This presented certain issues that I will explain later, but it worked.



I could sail in the shade and that makes all the difference on the Texas Coast in June.



Having a relatively beefed up and shaded version of my boat, I felt confident that I was ready to tackle the TX 200. The last step was to add reef points to my mainsail. My selfless and adventurous wife used her sewing skills to assist me in this endeavor. It was my first time to add reef points to a sail on my own, and I was a little nervous about it. But after the experience, I won't hesitate to do it again in the future... Wifey gets all the credit here!



Andrea (my wife) and I have been sailing together as long as we've known each other. Before we were even engaged we bought a Pearson 26 and had many adventures around the Coastal Bend on our boat "Pressure Drop" (Cue: Toots and the Maytals). Ahh, those were the days: no kids, no deadlines, just wind, a horizon, an ice chest, and a swimsuit. Of course she would be my mate for the TX 200. BUUUUT, our 18 month old daughter (the last of three kids) has been slow to wean and neither one of the grandmothers were interested in watching our 6, 4, and 1 year olds for a week of inevitable fussiness from the youngest. I would have to find other crew or singlehand the event. Being my first time on this cruise and not too familiar with my boat, I opted for the former.



It was an easy choice. I would call Josh Ellis. He's my backpacking partner and we work well together as a team. He has a great sense of humor and a calm disposition when things get dicey. Regardless of his lack of sailing experience, he's a good choice for a companion. He could learn to sail on the way... what's the worst that could happen?

I live in McAllen now and Josh still lives in Corpus Christi. Our plan was for me to put the boat in the water at my slip in Port Isabel (I rent a wet slip right behind the Quik Stop), and I would drive my truck and trailer to Corpus Christi on Sunday afternoon, where I would rendezvous with Josh and do our grocery shopping, and drive back down to Port Isabel early Monday morning. My sister, who lives in Port Lavaca, would come to Corpus Christi, retrieve my truck and drive it to Port Lavaca where it would be waiting for us at the finish line. This plan worked out... mostly. On our way back down to Port Isabel, Josh got a call that would pull us out

of the cruise earlier than we hoped. He had a "can't-miss, work thing" on Thursday morning that he had not anticipated. I left the option open that I might singlehand from PIYC to the finish. I called my sister and advised her not to retrieve my truck until she heard from me on Wednesday. I would make the decision to continue or pull out after three days on the water.

**Day 1:** We had a late start leaving Corpus Christi and we did not arrive in Port Isabel until 10 am Monday morning. This gave us exactly one hour to load our food and three Yeti Hoppers, gear, etc. onto the boat and motor out to the swing bridge for the 11 am opening. Otherwise, it would be noon before we were actually under way. We made it to the bridge with about five minutes to spare. My little 1968 British Seagull outboard pushed us noisily but assuredly towards the bridge. We motored around as we waited for the bridge to swing. When it opened, we putted through, pointed into the wind and I hoisted the deeply reefed mainsail, spun the boat around and killed the motor. And just like that, we were sailing the TX 200. By this time it was 11:30 or so, and we were sliding under the Isabella Causeway under 28 kt winds. Before long we had passed several other participants who were having various rigging issues just out of the canals from White Sands. Each time we passed someone, we hailed them on the radio to see if they were under duress. All assured us that they were okay and would be back under sail shortly.

The wind was strong and gusts were approaching 40kts in the mid-afternoon. At times we were overpowered and the boat was trying to turn to the wind, especially as we plowed into the back of waves. The boat would broach a little bit in the gust, and because my sheet was now working off of the transom, the stern of the boat was being lifted and pulled out to the boom end. This effect amplified the overpowered turn to windward. I encouraged Josh, when he was on the tiller, to not fight this effect too much as we didn't need to over stress the tiller, rudder, or pintles, and that as the gust subsided, the boat would power down and control would be far easier. As the laguna narrowed and the chop dissipated, we were clocking some decent speeds for our boat and load. At one point we hit 8 kts, but were averaging 6.5 -7 kts most of the afternoon.

Now, I know that at this point in the day, some of the other participants were experiencing carnage, so I'm almost ashamed to admit this next part... Once I was confident that Josh could steer our loaded down craft, I dug around in the cuddy, pulled out our bluetooth speaker and satellite radio receiver and tuned in the Longhorn's Super-regional game three. I also found a couple cold beers to spell the heat, though, we were already pretty comfy under my new bimini. For several hours, the sail downwind was downright relaxing.

***“Summertime and the livin’ is easy.***

***Mullet are jumpin’ and the Captain is high.”***

We didn't see any catfish or cotton, but we did see a large herd of redfish tailing in the flats next to the ditch. There were easily three hundred fish on that shoreline. Josh and I paused for a moment, considered beaching the boat and getting on some reds. We could've fed the whole fleet with 30 mins of fishing. But we'd had a late start, the Horns were about to clinch a CWS berth, and we were flying downwind. There'd be plenty more fish to catch, we decided, and kept on cruising. The rest of the cruise to Port Mansfield was uneventful.

As we approached the Mansfield channel, we could see a boat that had cut the corner and it appeared to be run aground, we decided to play it safe and stay in the ditch until we met the channel, then we would turn up and start tacking. As soon as we turned to the East, our boat slid across the channel and we were in shallow water within a minute or less. I'd forgotten to put the centerboard down. I gave the pendant a slight tug to get just some edge in the water without extending the entire board and we were able to point, though not very well with only a scrap of the main up and no headsail. We made slow progress up the channel and came upon a larger boat with a wing keel that was hard aground. We circled them for a minute offering help, but they reported that there wasn't much we could do for them. We wished them luck and carried on. At this point we were on our Port tack and about ready to pinch up to Starboard. We found that we were in fairly close quarters with a spoil island lined with metal to our southwest and a tall channel marker light to our northeast. As we turned for the starboard tack, I decided to cut under the marker so as to play it safe and avoid it altogether. As we approached the marker on our starboard side, a gust of wind hit us hard and turned the boat on a collision course with the large marker. Instead of fighting it to pass the marker down wind, I made a split second decision to ride the gust and pass the marker on the upwind side. The boat powered up and surged forward. We missed the marker by less than a yard. Thank God for the deep reefed main, or the boat would have been heeled over and we would have snagged the shrouds on the marker and been dismantled. My heart was pounding as we narrowly escaped destruction. I let out my best YAWLP! and high-fived Josh.



We beat upwind for another 20 minutes before we decided not to press our luck, and call it a day. We landed on one of the windward islands lining the channel, walked the anchor out, and



prepared for dinner. We'd brought a pre-cooked brisket that fed us deliciously every night. All it needed was a warm up on the backpacker stove, a little Salt Lick BBQ sauce, and a tortilla. For a balanced diet we opened some canned veggies. Though I brought my small 2-man backpacking tent, we opted to sleep onboard that night. Our Yeti Hoppers, and dry bags crammed perfectly in the cockpit sole, and our backpacking mattresses laid level on top of the seats. We were lulled to sleep by the gentle rocking and cool breeze of the evening.

After handling the wind, chop, and load of that day, I was confident that my refit was time and money well spent, and that my boat was up for whatever challenges the rest of the week might present. Day One's sail was over. We hadn't made it to Camp 1, but we still called it a success.

**Day 2:** Josh slept hard. I did not. I was paranoid that the tide would come in and my anchor might drag, even though I'd walked out the rode and sunk the anchor deep on shore, I still woke up a dozen times and checked our position just to be sure. We woke with the sunrise, warmed up some coffee, and ate fresh fruit for breakfast. The wind had reduced overnight, so I hoisted my jib and main and cut out for the ICW. There were a few boats ahead of us. I did not know if they'd left from Camp 1 or the Mansfield Marina, but we tried to chase them down. The wing-keeled 22 was still in the same spot. I thought they might try to get off in the middle of the night while the tide was full, but it appeared they hadn't or were unsuccessful if they had.

That was fun sailing for the first couple hours. Once in the channel and headed downwind, I fixed a whisker pole to the jib and had a blast surfing down the 2-3 foot waves rolling through the ICW. I was surprised to feel the boat planing for long stretches, loaded down as we were. But, she performed beautifully and we were clocking some fast speeds. It appeared with the help of surfing and good sail area, we were gaining on the larger boats ahead of us. But once we entered the Land Cut, they pulled away from us. We settled in for an easy sail to Hap's Cut. We decided that today we would stop and fish as the opportunities presented themselves. We turned on some tunes, talked sailing, argued politics, philosophized about life, Josh practiced his nautical terminology and boat handling while we scanned the water for signs of trout and redfish. It was a fine morning; blue water, brisk and steady winds, dolphins. At one point, Christopher Cross came on the radio. We sang along un self-consciously.





Just when I thought we'd begin holding hands, we spotted ripples on the water. It was nothing like the action we'd seen the day before, but it was a perfect excuse to break the idyl of: "saaaailing, takes me away to where I've always heard it could beeeee."

We beached about fifty yards up from where we'd seen the fish. Josh was on it pretty quickly. He dragged in a couple dinkers but nothing for the ice chest. By the time I got over there, it was done. No bites for me...typical. As we lounged on the beach we got to see some of the fleet sailing by. It was quite a sight to see all the

different craft that travel these waters as well as the people who are on board. After awhile we were ready to get back under way. A couple hours later, and a sirius station change or two, we pulled over again. Josh was the only one to catch a keeper. We rested in the shade for awhile, ate lunch, and watched more of the fleet sail past.

It just so happened that we had chosen an interesting place to land. We were about two hundred yards south of a rather large pass where the land cut makes a subtle bend to the east and broadens out. All of the boats approaching this bend were on the windward side of the ICW but as they hit this pass and bend, each one got blown across to the lee shore of the channel. Nobody was running aground, but they all had to work back up to windward. I studied the topography as well as the point of sail that everyone was on and tried to see if there was a different approach I could take to stay to the windward side. Nobody was being placed in too precarious a position, but I always prefer to give myself plenty of room for error.

First, I decided I would fully deploy the centerboard so that I would have full upwind maneuverability, and that I would work the sails while giving Josh the tiller. That way, I'd be ready to trim the sails from a broad reach to a close one. This approach worked fairly well, but as I discovered once in the middle of the pass, there was also a pretty decent current flowing out of the pass and across the channel. But having prepared for the wind shift and point of sail, we still stayed far off the lee shore. The direction of travel slowly bent back around to a broad reach and we had a leisurely cruise into camp.



While Enya drifted across the airwaves, we both took mud baths at Hap's Cut. Josh forgot the cucumber slices, so we just placed crusty oyster shells over our eyes for the rest of the Sailor's

Spa Experience. Feeling fully rejuvenated and with our skin glowing from the mineral mud, we ventured onto shore to meet some of the others and listen to stories about two Sailors who had “crossed the bar” at the memorial service for John and By. I didn’t know them, but after hearing about some of their adventures, I wish I had.

After a brisket dinner, a gallon of water, and the last of our cold beers, we settled in for another beautiful evening. Gentle breeze, no mosquitos, and bright stars undiminished by ambient light. I slept soundly this second night. We had pulled into Hap’s Cut and not just landed on the beach facing the channel. I slept worry free with the knowledge that even if by some weird fluke, our boat broke loose during the night, we would just drift across the cut to the opposite shore and not into the ICW.

**Day 3:** Man! Y’all some sneaky m-fers! We woke up at sunrise, and at least a quarter of the fleet was already gone. Either we have some stealthy sailors that don’t want to wake anybody, or I sleep more soundly than I thought I did. We ate some fruit, drank coffee, and were pushing off into the channel before 7:30 am somewhere in the middle of the pack, I guess. The wind was very light for the first hour or two, so I took the opportunity to give the decks a good swabbing. There was sticky, foul mud everywhere, but once I was done with my chore, we had a gleaming white bow to guide our way.

What a sight! Sailboats to the north and south as far as the eye could see. It was fun to study the expressions of the fisherman who would drive by from time to time. They were amazed at this fleet they’d been seeing all day. Just so they’d know they were in good company, we rigged a hand line to trawl a topwater lure behind the boat. It wasn’t an ideal lure for the speed we were traveling, but it was worth a shot.



It was a “Chamber of Commerce Day:” a pod of dolphins cruised in company with us across Baffin Bay. As we made that bend in the coastline, what had been a broad reach was slowly clocking around to more of a beam reach. This new point of sail signaled our entrance to my old stomping grounds. All of the scenery was familiar: the sea pines on all those spoil islands, vacated and reclaimed duck blinds in various levels of disrepair, the King Ranch shoreline closing in on us to the West. We were nearly to our endpoint. We slipped right past the canal for the Padre Island Yacht Club and cruised into the dock at Snoopy’s; a maneuver I’ve piloted

numerous times. I sent Josh in to place my order for a Half Combo and a cold beer while I tied up our trusty craft... that way he'd have to buy. For much of the day, I'd been contemplating my next move. Would I continue on through well known waters tomorrow; across Corpus Christi Bay, up the ship channel and over towards Quarantine shore? This would be the easy part. I've singlehanded that leg plenty of times, though, admittedly in a larger, weighted-keel boat. What really had me thinking was what came after. Beyond Mud Island were waters that I'd only navigated on fishing boats, and never at the helm. Besides all that, after the glorious time we'd just had, the prospect of single handing the rest of the way just seemed lonely. Who would hold my hand when "A Pirate Looks at Forty" came on the radio? Who would apply my mud mask and oyster shells? Caution being the better part of valor, I opted to pull out after lunch. I phoned my dad and asked him to drive my truck and trailer down to Marker 37 so we could load up. Then, I made Josh buy me another beer. He came back with four, and I made him promise to finish this thing with me next year. And, that's the plan!



We took our kids over to PIYC that night to look at all the boats and see what others were up to. There was some concern about bad weather coming in, I heard a couple crews decided to pull out too, but most folks were soldiering on. I'd intended to get up early the next morning and come watch the fleet sail by, but Mom's guest room and Dad's low-set thermostat kept me snoozing.

I hesitate to say that my first TX 200 was a success, because I didn't eat shrimp in Port Lavaca on Day 6. But, I will say that it was a grand time and an adventure I'll happily remember. Besides, now I have an excuse to come back next year.