

Elf

Classic Yacht Race Delivers Thrills and Spills

★ by Craig Ligibel

Ka-boom! Off went the cannon right in the middle of the skipper's briefing, shocking 15 sailors out of the reverie of donuts and coffee and sending them on a mad dash to Eastport YC's dinghy dock where they boarded their tenders for a frenetic row out to their classic sailboats anchored just off shore.

It was an exciting Le Mans-style start to a fun day of racing on the Bay as the fourth annual *Elf* Classic Yacht Race from Annapolis to St. Michaels got underway May 17. This style of start harkens back to the early days of racing at the Corinthian YC in Marblehead, MA, in the waning years of the 19th Century. Then, boat owners raced from their seats on the arriving trains and rowed to their boats on moorings.

Our start was clean, if not comical. *Elf* Captain Rick Carrion accomplished his patented "running start" by jumping into the sole of his tender head-first, and dunked his cell phone in the process. Yachtsman and major race sponsor Peter Kellogg was rowed out to his 67-foot entry, *Blackwatch*, reading the weekend edition of the Wall Street Journal and smiling from ear to ear.

The rest of us sprinted down the dock; quickly untied our dinghies and rowed like mad in an effort to be the "first away" in this challenging 20-mile race across the Bay.

The fleet was a veritable floating armada of maritime history. Rick Carrion estimated the value of the fleet in excess of \$20 million, as if one could place a value on a combined 970 years of nautical heritage.



■ Rick Carrion rows to Elf.

There was *Elf*, a beautifully-restored 58-foot Lawley gaff topsail cutter. Built in 1888, *Elf* is the oldest-known small racing yacht in America. The Classic Yacht Race was started by Carrion as a way to bring together similar vessels and to raise awareness (and money) for continued restoration of classic vessels like *Elf*.

Another 100-year-old sailing vessel was the 54-foot long 1895 Tilghman Island log canoe *Persistence*. She was “found” abandoned in a horse pasture over two decades ago, and has undergone a complete restoration at the hands of the craftsmen at the Philadelphia Maritime Museum. Six pristine Hinckleys were registered as well, including *Huntress*, a Bill Tripp-designed Bermuda 40 yawl [hull #1]. One of the jewels of the fleet was *Silent Maid*, a 2009 edition of the original 33-foot long Bay Head New Jersey catboat by the same name. The smallest boat was the 15-foot long Uffa Fox Albacore, *Exotic Material*.

My little catboat, *Mystic Wind*, a 40-year-old, 20-foot Peter Legnos-designed Mystic 20, was a late entry to the race. We had no illusions about our ability to win the race. With only 250 square feet of sail, our hull speed under ideal condi-



■ Mystic Wind leads the fleet...for a fleeting moment. John Coyle on the bow; Craig Ligibel at the helm. Photo by Dan Phelps

tions maxes out around six knots. But it seemed like a good time could be had, and we thought we would be okay getting off our anchor ahead of the other, more complex boats.

With cries of “set that kite now!” “shake out that reef!” and “heave, boys, heave!” the fleet got underway like an old man getting out of bed, with lots of fits and starts and more than a few creaks and groans, in ideal conditions with a northerly eight- to 10-

knot breeze. All good things must come to an end, however, and as the lead boats rounded Bloody Point, the wind gave out.

We decided to head home and instead drive over to St. Michaels, catching the finish from land with cold beers in our hands. But others in the fleet persevered, making their way haltingly towards St. Michaels.

Brad Johnson’s log canoe was waked

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Harris. "When the wind played out, we were able to catch some zephyrs and move right along. Before the race was called, we had passed every boat in the fleet except *Silent Maid*. Right at the end, a final gust put *Bear* ahead of us. We'll take that. Next year, with steady wind, we'll be right in there."

In the Cruising Class, *Silent Maid* was the declared the winner. In the Day Boat Class, *Bear* came away with the first-place honors. *Elf* was accorded the trophy for the "first off the line." *Persistence* won the Captain's Choice Award. *Mystic Wind* brought home some hardware as well, winning the award for "Best Dressed Yacht," although John, Jimmy and I had a hard time believing that our little craft qualified for the "yacht" designation.

According to organizer Bill Sonntag, the event was an unqualified success. "We raised a little money for the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild and the Maritime Museum, treated participants and spectators to the sight of some glorious yachts under sail, and we had a good time to boot. Not a bad way to spend a spring day on the Bay."

For information about next year's *Elf* Classic Yacht Race, visit cyrq.org.

by a passing power boat as he made the turn, which sent the 10-man and woman crew scampering on the hiking boards to try to prevent the inevitable: a swim in the 65-degree Bay water.

Johnson recalls, "With this rig, once she goes over, we have to unrig the sails while she is on her side; take the masts off and secure them to the boat. Then we can right her and bail her out. It was a cold,

wet process, but not something we didn't anticipate."

At 3 pm, the race was called with only a couple of boats within sight of the finish line. Slowly boats began to filter in, some under sail power, but most with the help of their iron gennys.

The last boat to arrive was the little Albacore, after a sail of more than seven hours. "We don't have an engine, so had to sail her all the way," says skipper Barney

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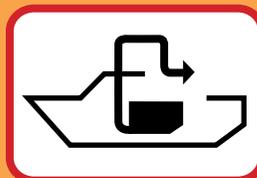
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