

Harvest Moon Regatta great, late race winds light

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The first 110 miles or so that we sailed seemed to go by pretty fast. The rest took some time.

We were headed for Port Aransas from Galveston on the annual Harvest Moon Regatta. A total of 176 boats had begun the 150-mile sailboat race on a Thursday afternoon crossing the starting line off the Flagship Hotel Pier in groups every five minutes.

We could still see a number of those boats the next morning, most of them inshore from us, though a few of them were farther out than we were.

BEAUTIFULLY CLEAR START

As the morning became a still-beautifully clear Friday afternoon and then evening, a forecast onshore breeze did not appear in the strength we thought it should. Our sails, the jib polled out to port and the main held by a preventer to starboard, seemed to take turns filling and flapping, as if to protest of the lack of meaningful wind.

Four of us were aboard Indian Summer, a robust 41-foot Downeast owned and skippered by Pat Cunningham, a veteran of the refrigerated container business. Kay Bramlett, a former boat owner and participant in the occasionally bruising Wednesday night races on Clear Lake, David Diehl, a hard-working quick learner making his first offshore sailing trip, and I made up the crew.

Brisk breezes at the start were promising for Indian Summer, which needs a lot of wind to go fast. As darkness gathered Friday evening, we weren't going fast at all.

LIGHTS OF PORT ARANSAS

The nearly full moon rose not long after sunset. Its beauty and brightness cast a whole new light on things, literally and psychologically. Eventually the lights of Port Aransas and then those marking its channel came into view.

The channel is not difficult, but entering any harbor at night demands attention. Mercifully a mild current helped push us up the channel, though the wind was still very light. Finally we crossed the finish line. It was early Saturday morning.



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Moving fast, this boat moves down the coast just after the starting gun.

Indian Summer tied up at the City of Port Aransas Municipal Marina, side to the side with the end boat on an impressive row of boats tied to one another. Before long another boat tied up to us. After straightening things up on board and gathering our gear, we headed for a motel.

Sleeping in a bed that didn't rock and bounce certainly felt good.

Saturday regatta events including a Welcome Sailor Rum Party with Bacardi (a major race sponsor along with Bay Access Inc.) supplying various variations of its product. One of the rums, I was told later, was 151-proof. The awards banquet followed a welcome, fine and substantial meal.

NO REGRETS

Alas, Indian Summer's name was not called among the award winners. We had finished sixth among the eight boats in our class. Still, we'd done our best, and had no regrets, especially after the rum and the meal.

Andrea Todaro, co-chair of the Lakewood Yacht Club regatta, said 186 boats had registered for the Harvest Moon. All but 10 started the race. Of those, 23 withdrew from the competition, though some of them motored on to Port Aransas for the post-race festivities.

The event was well-organized and well-executed. "We couldn't have done it without the hundreds of volunteers," Todaro said.

Some of those volunteers, as well as young volunteers from Lakewood's Junior Boatmen and marina personnel, helped arrivals tie up. A lot of boats wound up in raft-ups, with one boat tied to a pier and others tied up outside it. Some of the raft-ups had 10 or more boats tied up side-to side extending out from the pier.

All in all, things went well, Todaro said. "We had great weather, though the winds got a little light toward the end. The beautiful big moon was like we always hope for." Port Aransas people treated us very well, she said.

"We had a good time."

Charlie Fisher is harbor master at the Municipal Marina where the post-race banquet and awards ceremony were held. He said 128 of the participating boats tied up there.

"Everything went great," he said. "The people were wonderful and the event was well organized." He added that this 25th Harvests Moon Regatta was, like its predecessors, "a big plus for Port Aransas."

Other boats tied up at Island Moorings Marina, off the Intracoastal Waterway about three miles south of the city marina.

Corrected time winners of major trophies presented at the banquet included Musica, an Aerdyne 38 skippered by Cliff Haddox, the Bacardi Cup as the spinnaker fleet winner, and C-Time, a Whitby 42

ketch with Osmond Young as skipper took the Cameron Cannon for winning the cruising non-spinnaker fleet.

La Isla, a C&C Custom with Al Poindexter as captain won the cruising non-spinnaker fleet's Commodore's Trophy and Abandoned Assets, a Corsair 31 trimaran skippered by Jim Van Fleet took home the Founder's Trophy as the multi-hull winner.

GULF ROUTE TO CLEAR LAKE

Our trip from home to Clear Lake was enlivened by the engine quitting at unpredictable intervals.

As soon as we could leave the marina – as soon as the boat tied up outside us left -- we motored up the Intracoastal Waterway to Port O'Connor and then out the Matagorda Channel into the Gulf. Part of the idea was to not have to deal with the Intracoastal and its locks in darkness.

We stayed mostly in water 40 or 45 feet deep. The wind was almost, but not quite, on the nose. We had the main up and sheeted in tight, and it generally stayed full.

Progress was good, until the engine sputtered, paused and then quit. Diehl and I were in the cockpit and Cunningham was below. (Bramlett had taken the bus back to Houston to be at work Monday morning.)

Cunningham, who knows enough about diesels to be almost part of their family, got it going. After a couple of similar pauses and fixes, we were just off the Freeport channel when it stopped again. The wind was too light to sail Indian Summer and the Freeport Channel, even at 4 a.m., is no place to be without propulsion

We apparently had a fuel problem. Indian Summer has two largish fuel tanks. Cunningham, who had changed fuel filters, blown out fuel lines and done goodness knows what else, selected one of them. That apparently solved the problem. At least the engine pushed us up the channel and eventually all the way home to Marina del Sol.

It's strange how many of us who sail long to reach our destination, but then when we're about to get there it dawns on us that the trip is about over. For me a little sadness kicked in even before we got to the marina. Despite a glitch or two, it was a fun, exciting time. I'd do the Harvest Moon again (for about the 10th time) in a minute.