

A westruck, I looked at the "perfect boat" for the Harvest Moon Regatta, *Mr. Magoo*, a Beneteau 36.7 – a hot racer. Mind you, I had spent months searching for a competitive boat to race in the Harvest Moon Regatta, the largest point-to-point sailing regatta in U.S. coastal waters. For the first time, a trophy was being offered to the all-woman crew with lowest corrected time, provided we sailed in the cruising, non-spinnaker fleet. Our crew consisted of Julie Goetschius, Phyllis Grounds, Pam Chapman, Rhonda Wittig, Joyce Frassanito, and myself – ladies engaged in professions which ran the gamut of software consultant, NASA engineer, doctor, nurse administrator, marketing specialist, and lawyer.

My fellow skipper Julie and I had researched ratings and possibilities, searching for a boat capable of winning not only first in class and the

ladies trophy, but also the cruising, non-spinnaker fleet trophy. *Mr. Magoo* rested in the slip before me. Now it was up to the crew and Mother Nature.

Since my husband and I owned *Moonstruck*, a Pearson 530 that had won the cruising non-spinnaker fleet award for the last two years, I knew the competition. With fewer than four days before the race, we got possession of *Mr. Magoo* and moved her to the inner harbor of Lakewood Yacht Club, the host club for the regatta, to provision her with parts and food and become familiar with her systems. *Mr. Magoo* was being loaned to us for the race by Sea Lake Yacht Sales, a major regatta contributor and sponsor of the all-woman crew trophy. The boat was virtually empty, needing everything from required safety equipment,

charts and binoculars, jack line snatch blocks, extra lines, tools & duct tape to food, drinks and provisions. We borrowed most needed equipment from boats not entered the regatta; the list was lengthy. Early Thursday at 0730 *Mr. Magoo* & her crew of six left the dock for an annual offshore racing adventure, race a distance of 153 nautical miles through the Gulf of Mexico.

I knew I had a world of adjustments to make before even leaving the dock. I am from the cruising world, replete with equipment, safety gear, systems, and Stuff (with a capital "S"). Julie comes from the racing world. As I began making lists of gear to put aboard, Julie advised that we would not be taking tanks of water. My immediate reaction was, "If I find a lightweight Fortress anchor, can we put on extra water?" This would undoubtedly be a test for all concerned!

BY JAMES H. MANNING

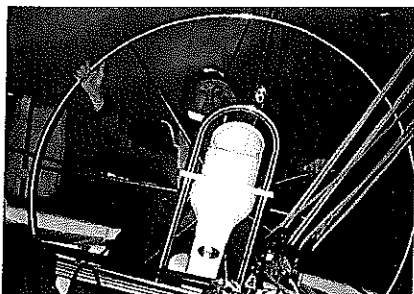
The Harvest Moon Regatta was conceived as a gentleman's race, a regatta with no windward beat. The course reaches southwesterly down the Texas coast from Galveston to Port Aransas when the prevailing winds are southeasterly. 241 boats were expected to start the race in this, the regatta's 17th year.

Mother Nature impacted the race before the start, and before we left the Galveston jetties, with southeasterly winds gusting to 35 knots and thunderstorms limiting visibility to mere feet. Immediately, the chasm between cruise boats and race boats became obvious: *Mr. Magoo* was equipped with no bimini, no dodger, no radar, no weather fax, and no electronic chart plotter! The paper



Mother Nature had gotten our undivided attention.

A distinction between cruising sailors and racing sailors quickly became apparent. We executed a good start at 1430, but needed to change to a larger headsail. Let me say now that we did have racers on board, at least two; I was not one of them. Julie and I had focused on locating helmspersons. Suffice it to say that we were each surprised at our lack of crew with racing foredeck familiarity, a shortage that virtually eliminated our planned watch schedule. Furling headsails from the cockpit (as cruisers do) and changing headsails from the foredeck (as racers do) are two completely different skills. As I listened and watched Julie



tacks we cleared the marker to starboard and sailed into the sounds and the silence of the Gulf waters.

Part of the challenge of the Harvest Moon Regatta is the myriad of obstacles encountered off the Gulf Coast during the night. Cruising boats use radar to pinpoint obstacles and to establish the course and speed of commercial traffic. Absent radar as well as the light of the moon, we relied upon our senses and a keen watch, listening for horns and whistles in excess of the number of lighted oil platforms, to locate the unlit obstacles past which we sailed. Shrimp boats, freighters, and supply vessels added to the nighttime activity. The depth of the darkness, the persistent rain, and the occasional



The all-female crew at various points of the race. Despite deteriorating weather, smiles prevailed.

chart of the Galveston Bay Entrance became wet from dripping foul weather gear, and the crew was looking for an immediate heading. Waypoints for the race course were entered in my handheld Garmin GPS 48; but the race course began outside the jetties. Spotting a familiar Sabre 426 that was in *Mr. Magoo's* start with similar draft and all the latest electronic navigation equipment, I said the only reasonable thing: "Follow that boat!" Fortunately, visibility cleared for the start of the race, but a number of boats dropped out due to the squall or gear damage before they even left the jetties. We were fine, full of competitive spirit, but

and Phyllis manage headsail changes offshore, my appreciation for the latter and its unique language grew as we "jumped the halyard," "peeled the sail", and went "bare-headed."

By 2130 we arrived at the Freeport, Texas course marker, surrounded by many of our competitors. It was still raining, the orange moon for which the regatta is named was totally obscured by the clouds, and, "oops," Pam, our helmsperson, didn't know (and had not been told) to take the now nearly-touchable marker on starboard. No big deal. After a slight discussion, a quick change of course and a couple of

squall with 30-plus knots of wind kept most of us on deck, looking, listening, or camping out for some brief shuteye on the upper rail.

Friday at 0800 brought another squall and another headsail change, a practice at which we had become quite efficient. Yet, within the hour sunshine flooded *Mr. Magoo's* deck, the winds became light and variable, shifting to the north, and music filled the air as we danced through the calming seas. We were on a beat, racing to round the Aransas Pass Ship Channel buoy, designated as R "6". Shorts and t-shirts replaced

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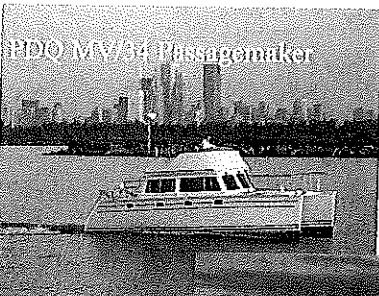


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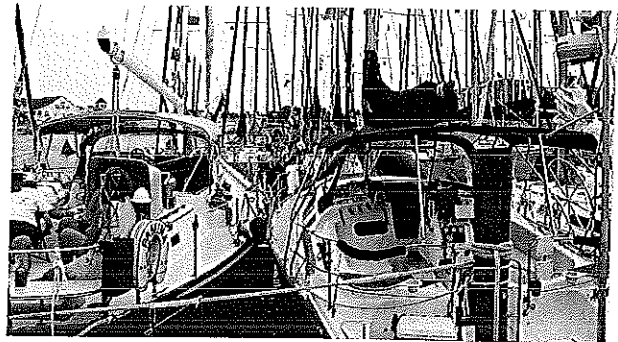
TEXAS REGATTA (Cont'd from page 39)

continual foul weather gear. Smiles all around were the order of the day.

Early Friday evening found us scanning the horizon for the R "6" buoy. The lights of Port Aransas and Aransas Pass, as well as the traffic in the vicinity, made pinpointing the R "6" buoy's location difficult. No doubt, radar and an electronic chart plotter would have made location of the final race buoy easier. Commercial ships were exiting the ship channel; any interference reported by a ship's pilot meant immediate disqualification, at the very least. Other regatta participants surrounded us. Again, our senses were challenged to confirm the location of the R "6" FI R 4s bell. We made a final tack and sailed between the jetties of the Aransas Pass Shipping Channel to the finish line. Less than thirty hours after the start, and many experiences later, *Mr. Magoo* at last crossed the finish line.

Mr. Magoo was one of 156 boats to finish the Harvest Moon Regatta under sail. We did not win a trophy. In hindsight, we know we should have tacked and tacked more often. The cruisers among us missed having the multitude of electronic toys enjoyed and possibly unappreciated by other crews. The racers among us missed having additional foredeck crew. All of us missed having some protection from the elements. Yet, *Mr. Magoo's* crew had an adventure unlike any other. We had it all – the wind, the seas, the moonlight, and an entire palette of weather provided by Mother Nature. We experienced the simple joy of sailing, the exhilaration of gliding through offshore waters, the reliance on personal skill and competence, and an abundance of smiles and giggles. Ultimately, we lacked nothing. We got the whole nine yards!

And, as a bit of lagniappe, we crossed the finish line ahead of *Moonstruck* with my husband at the helm, a small fact not missed by those who know us. ☺



Raft-ups are a big part of "cruiser" races.