



The Race to Aloha

2008 Pacific Cup –
San Francisco
to Hawaii

adopt a course that reflects their basic race strategy: rhumb line to minimize distance or a more southerly course to seek stronger wind at the cost of more distance.

The breeze is light for the first day of starts on Monday, July 14th, and *Valis* gets a middle-of-the-fleet start. Over the course of the night, light air and sloppy water keep us from pointing well at all, and we burn many hours in the vicinity of the Farallon islands.

Morning position reports show that the slightly shorter and much lighter Cal 40s have started to pull away from us. We resolve to go faster.

Onboard, we're slowly putting the boat back to rights. The unflinching optimism with which we "stowed" some items proved unfounded, and repacking various miscellaneous items is the day's job. Light comfort food is the order of the day, and the layered look (long johns, warm shirt, foulies, and balaclava) is decidedly in fashion.

THE WINDY REACH

It will be several days after the start before the wind moves far enough behind the beam to allow us, or anyone, to fly the spinnaker. We are close-reaching under cloudy, wet skies, working to get a little south for stronger wind before turning toward Hawaii. One of our competitors,

By Michael Moradzadeh

It's a long way from San Francisco to Hawaii: 2,070 miles through some of the best sailing on the planet on a course that will take you as far from land as you are ever likely to get. It's the 15th Pacific Cup, my fifth trip and first time as crew. I'm aboard *Valis*, a beautiful 2002 Pacific Seacraft 44 skippered by Paul Elliott. Cutter rigged with an easily handled sail plan and a generous cabin below, *Valis* will be a great ride to Hawaii.

The race is run in even-numbered years with a decidedly informal air. Its slogan, "The FUN race to Hawaii," guides the organizers Pacific Cup Yacht Club and Storm Trysail Club and finish line host Kaneohe Yacht Club on Oahu. In this race, fun begins with being prepared. In addition to extensive equipment require-

ments, the race preparation program included four preparation and safety seminars, courtesy inspections and innumerable informal consultations with veteran volunteers.

Valis did the race in 2006 and was fairly well prepared for the trip, with only modest rigging changes and replacement of expired materials needed. For other boats, of course, preparation for the Pacific Cup is nothing short of a shopping spree for offshore safety equipment, food, sunscreen and sails.

THE START—SHAPING THE STRATEGY

"Out the Golden Gate and point at Hawaii" may work for shipping lines, but for a vessel under sail, it's a bit different. It's an upwind leg to begin with. Once out the Gate, racers must

Photo Michael Moradzadeh



Photo David B. Ritchie

No Ka Oi, a Gibsea 43, boasts in the evening check-in that it is already flying the kite. We are jealous and, to preserve our self-respect, conclude that they are fibbing.

One doublehanded participant, *Rain Drop* (Joby Easton and Bill Huseby out of Portland, Ore.), has aimed more sharply south than the rest of the fleet, obtaining a better wind angle, and has made great gains not only on her division but on the fleet overall. Joby and Bill did the race 20 years earlier in Bill's boat, taking first in their division, and it seems that they want to relive the experience.

Other fleets are starting as we slog our way out. It appears that they are benefitting from more favorable wind conditions at the Golden Gate. We are grudgingly happy for them, of course. The final start on Saturday, July 19th includes the fastest boats including *Velos*, a 73-footer with three father-daughter pairs onboard, and *Pegasus*, an Open 50. *Pegasus's* goal is to break the record for a doublehanded boat in the Pacific Cup held by master navigator Stan Honey.

"SLOT CARS"—The Middle Third

Stan Honey calls the middle third of the race, where you finally pop the chute and head toward Hawaii,

"slot cars." That's because you have very few tactical choices. Too far north and you sail into light air. Too far south and you are just going the wrong way. The good news is that the spinnaker is up and, in this fifth day of the race, we are having a bunch of fun 760 miles west of Tijuana. Break out the tortillas.

Position reports show that *Valis* has become the southernmost boat in the division. This was not our plan. "Center of the fleet" was our preferred strategy, but south often spells victory, so we hold course for Hawaii. We amuse ourselves by making up derogatory names for the competitors who are slowly outpacing us.

Hula Girl, sailed by the Paul Cayard family and skippered by son Daniel Cayard, has advanced to first in her fleet and first overall. As a family-run effort (Daniel, Paul and Alexandra Cayard) the boat is eligible for the *Blue Water Sailing* magazine prize for the fastest family afloat.

TRAINING WHEELS

For many, including about half of our crew, the initial downwind run is a crash course in offshore spinnaker work. It seems almost designed to teach spinnaker handling. A steady breeze from a fairly constant bearing

is punctuated—at first—by the lightest of micro-squalls. A chill air across your right cheek is followed by a small, but perceptible wind shift, direction change, and maybe just a drizzle. It's a baby squall. They're so cute when they are that size. It's a shame they have to grow up.

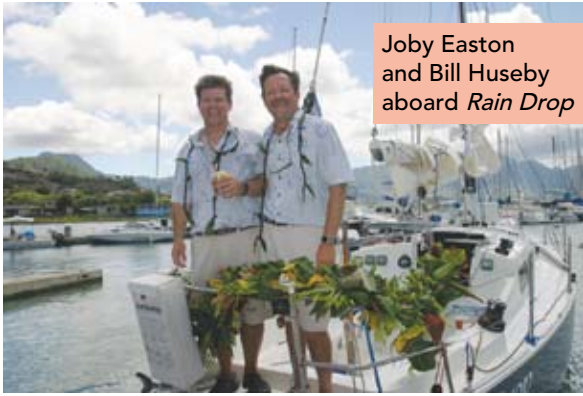
But grow they do. After a few days we are getting increases from an easy 15 to an interesting 25 knots, with the need to exit the squall on the proper side or be faced with a miserable lull. You know the phrase "the calm that follows the storm?" Yeah, nice, but try sailing in it.

In the last few days of the trip, you get your final exam. As a squall typically doubles the ambient wind speed, one views the approach of a squall when it's already blowing 20 with some apprehension. *Valis* only got a few tastes of the mid-30s or above weather, which was fine for the somewhat green crew.

HIGH SPIRITS ON THE HIGH SEAS

Along about day seven of the race, as the whole fleet is in good weather, the joy is evident in everybody's voice. At our evening radio chat time, which I ran this year from *Valis*, the wise-cracking, bragging, humor and good wishes abound. A mystery boat (later revealed to be *Rain Drop*) organizes a daily trivia contest on the air. Boasts of ever-finer meals and fish caught are rampant. The few boats with mechanical or systems problems are helped with unselfish advice during the radio hour.

For many participants, the voices crackling out of the SSB radio are part of the sound track of the race and its memories. Others are waiting for the daily read-back of the stand-



Joby Easton and Bill Huseby aboard *Rain Drop*

ings. “Are we winning?” “How close are we to first place?”

Rain Drop has pulled back into first place, no trivial feat against such a fleet. *Velos* leads the fastest boats, and *Hula Girl* leads her division and is in third overall. We continue to make up ever more cruel names for the boats that lead our division as we slip respectably into seventh place.

RUN TO THE FINISH

As we reel away the miles (193 of them on one day, the most in our end of the fleet) we get to the zone of the trade winds, those steady, balmy breezes that are the dessert to the appetizer and main courses described above. The water is warmer so we see flying fish and mahi-mahi and the graceful white tropicbird, followed a few days later by the magnificent frigate bird. A hooked mahi-mahi quickly becomes fish tacos. Bucket showers clean us all up.

The steady winds make for great

sailing at our latitude. To the south of us, things are much brisker, with reports of blown spinnakers and boats rounding up and rounding down, all gear-busters to be avoided this far from our local chandlery. The training we put in on the way here is paying off, with splendid runs and a little bit of surfing on each wave.

FINISHES

As we surge toward the finish, we learn of the first to cross the line. *Rain Drop* was first followed shortly by *Hula Girl*. *Rain Drop* sewed up first in her division as well as first overall on corrected time. *Hula Girl*, despite a great performance, placed third in division based on handicapping and losing out to *Sabrina*, a Calkins 50 out of San Diego.

Pegasus OP-50 finished with her goal in her pocket. Philippe Kahn and Richard Clarke sailed with the most challenging rating based on expected performance. The duo claimed the “Fastest Passage” trophy and set a new record for a double-handed Pacific Cup passage with a stunning time of 7 days, 15 hours, 17

minutes, 50 seconds. The prior record, long held by Stan Honey and Paul Simonsen in 1992, was a bit over 8 days, 20 hours.

BWS sponsored a trophy specifically directed toward a race effort including close family members. Almost 20 of the entrants qualified for this trophy, includ-

ing *Velos* with three father/daughter pairs, *Green Buffalo* with a family of four, and the Cayard family aboard *Hula Girl*. At the end of the day, it was *Sapphire*, a Synergy 1000 from Richmond, Calif., including David Rasumssen and son, with the best overall corrected time, that took the prize.

Our finish, squarely in seventh place and performed without the benefit of spinnaker pole due to an untimely round down the night before, still had some drama. Skipper had befriended Commander Jack Thomas of the Marine Air Base, and we got a bit of a fly-over from some of the warplanes engaged in exercises that day (“We would have stayed longer, but the games advanced to a state of war just then,” explained the Commander during a later tour of the base).

AND ON TO THE PARTIES

Kaneohe Yacht Club, ever the gracious host, put on a series of great parties culminating in the awards presentation and gala, interrupted briefly as sailors swarmed to the dock to welcome Ed and Erlinda Polkenhorn aboard *Neptune’s Daughter*, a doublehanded Crealock 34. They’d done the trip to celebrate Erlinda’s 60th birthday and had gotten stuck for three days in the light stuff north of the rhumb line. “Happy Birthday to You” we chorused as the boat picked its way into the harbor and tied up.

Erlinda teared up and smiled as if she had set a record. ~

Michael Moradzadeh has served as fleet communications officer for the Pacific Cup three times. He is Rear Commodore of the Pacific Cup Yacht Club and has been nominated as Commodore for the 2010 race.

Photos Lisa Niemczura



The crew of *Valis*