



Preparing and Executing a Successful Lake Ontario 600

by Daniel McKindsey

Despite the similarity in course the LO600, (twice around), is a much different race than the LO600 due to its length. The 300 is a quasi sprint, the 600 is a true distance race for those of us with modest boats. Managing motivation and fatigue over the duration is very important, as is power and weight management, not to mention managing a small holding tank!

Happy Puppy was lucky enough to do very well, winning line honors and overall on corrected in 2016 after getting line honors in 2014 but falling to 3rd overall behind the very well sailed *Pearl* and *Lively*. More importantly, we had a blast and returned better friends than when we left. This is important to us, as sailing is a pastime we enjoy to forget the stress of the real world for us working stiffs, not a profession. I hope sharing what worked for us might be useful to others.



Outstanding Crew on HAPPY PUPPY; Back L to R: Bruce Rand (Kingston), Sue Fraser (Barrie), Bill Reid, (Kingston) and Luc Vallee (Montreal). Front: Dan McKindsey

Preparation - We felt really well prepared coming into the race, allowing us to focus on sailing instead of boat work. We have progressively improved the boat over the years, optimizing her for long distance racing. We have been selective in choosing gear, adding the best we could afford, and carefully planned the changes. The boat works just as we want it to. We have managed to work through most of the reliability issues to the point where we don't worry anymore about breaking things.



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Crew - Crew is the most important element in our success; selecting a group that is both talented and compatible. As for the latter, suffice to say that nary a cross word was spoken during the entire race, we just laughed a lot ('till it hurt!). We had outstanding talent aboard. Critically, all know the boat well and any one of us could handle any position, so we each took turns alternating roles during the race. Having 5 helmsmen meant that concentration could be maintained even during the tough stuff. Although we sail a relatively complex 38-footer, we settled on a small crew of 5 for this race. This gives us enough bodies to complete all maneuvers, (although perhaps somewhat slower than with a full inshore race crew,) while managing weight and space restrictions.

Boat - The base boat, a C&C115, is a moderately proportioned boat with no really bad points and great upwind performance, especially in heavy air, but

has been optimized for our needs. Key changes have included the addition of a sprit for the code zero and A-sails, rebuilding the rudder bearings and fairing the rudder, building an offshore sail inventory, optimizing the running rigging, and a host of smaller, but collectively significant changes to the deck layout, controls and electronics. To lower power draw, we changed over to LED fixtures throughout the boat. Most importantly, we worked diligently over the past 5 years to make the boat "bullet proof," by identifying weaknesses and fixing them. We can now fully rely on the boat even when pushed hard. That creates a huge level of comfort, and does not come from the factory. A log of issues and improvements that usually comprises some 50-100 items, is constantly maintained.

We were not completely without issues of course. We did blow up the J2 part-way around the course



S/V HAPPY PUPPY - a C&C 115

(left one year too long in the change cycle), the head failed, filling the bilge with unmentionables and then the refrigeration stopped working all during the first lap.

Sails - Over the years, we developed a complete inventory adaptable to various conditions. For this race, we carried an offshore race main, 5 jibs, 5 spinnakers and a spinnaker staysail. The offshore main was new this year and featured a deep second reef at 30% of luff length.

Our jib inventory included the usual J1 through J3, but also a J4 heavy air jib (85% LP) and a maximum LP jib top or blast reacher. Our spinnaker inventory included a mix of symmetric (S1, S2 and S4) spinnaker, an asymmetric A3 and a Code Zero. The addition of the J4, S4 and offshore main were new this year, and each played a critical role in the race. Key to the inventory, is that it was designed with large overlaps in order to extend a given sail over a fairly broad range to reduce the number of sail changes. This was huge in reducing fatigue, despite widely variable conditions.

The value of the specialized heavy air sails was evident during the long slog from Main Duck to Niagara on the first lap where the big seas and winds meant that most boats we saw were either grossly overpowered or had to resort to sailing without main or headsail. By having the optimal sail plan, we sailed the leg far faster than our competition and put 2-3 hours over our competitors.

Safety - The heavy weather in this year's race really drove home the safety issue, especially with a smaller crew. The Category 3 requirements have been helpful in wrapping our heads around what is needed, gear-wise.

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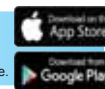
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We also sail with a serious medical kit, put together by a doctor who understands what we are doing and how things can go wrong. While we have never needed it, we are confident that if we do, we will have what we need to deal with most medical situations.

The biggest fear is losing someone overboard. While the tethers help, they can instill a sense of false

security. We have seen recent test results that frankly do not give me much comfort about survival when falling overboard and coming up short on the tether at 10 knots. So we practice prevention, focusing on keeping people on board by being cautious with deck work and taking our time on sail changes, etc. We have set up multiple hard points well away from the deck edge to minimize reliance on the jack lines, which are closer to the deck edge. We have double hard points at the helm so that the helmsman can lock into position with a double tether, and not worry about losing footing. Double tethers are used by all crew.

Finally, we have acquired AIS man overboard beacons for all crew that fit to the deck vests and are triggered automatically when a MOB occurs, sending an AIS signal to all vessels in the region and triggering the DSC on our VHF.



Food - OK, so we like our food and will accept the weight penalty for good meals. The boat is called *Happy Puppy*, after all. Sue did an outstanding job provisioning the boat this year with amazing, varied meals every day. Great planning on land, meant that preparation was easy under sail, even in the heavy weather. (The eating itself, however, was not always so easy!)



Breakfast of Champions

The main meal of the day was prepared in advance, frozen either in a bag which could be placed in a pot, or in a disposable dish that could be placed in the oven. All store packaging was disposed of and everything was repacked in convenient Ziploc bags. This reduces garbage on board and gets rid of paper and cardboard that tend to gather water and bacterial growth.

Watch System and Fatigue Management - We used an unusual watch system that leveraged the deep skills of all on board; sailing two-up in a rotating watch system: 2 hours on trim, 2 hours on helm and 6 hours off during the day, and 1.5-1.5-4.5 hours at night. With five, this moved us by one shift each day so that we each had a go at the tough watches. Navigation and strategy was shared between three of us, with Bill Reid taking the leadership role. This routine meant that we were sailing the boat short-handed most of the time, but it also meant that everyone was well rested and always available for sail changes, etc. when additional bodies were required.

Electronics, Navigation and Performance Management

- The key here, is making sure that the instruments are well calibrated. We use *Expedition* for routing and course management, with *Predict Wind* for weather, backed up with other sources for comparisons. Weather prediction in the confined waters is somewhat limited because of the impact of timing errors (yeah, that first leg was not anything to write home about). We have developed accurate sail selection charts, which allowed us to optimize sail changes. We use the **KND Sailing Performance** suite to maintain these charts and our polars, and now have good confidence in these for planning.



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Execution - So how did it all work out? The first leg to Oswego was a disaster after splitting from the fleet in pursuit of north shore breeze. It was looking good until we realized that the predicted band of wind to allow us to transfer to the south shore never materialized. Fortunately, boat preparation and really great upwind heavy air speed allowed us to make back that time on the brutal beat back to Niagara. We consistently saw 7.5 knots at 25-26 degrees apparent all the way along that beat and just blew by a slew of boats. We ended up crossing the line at Port Credit second in class behind *Lively* (well done guys!), and wondering how things would have been without the three-hour deficit at Oswego.

And that is what is so great about the 600 – you get to learn from your mistakes and put those “lessons learned” into effect right away. The second time we pretty much rhumb-lined it, and after a quiet night working on boat speed, seeing up to 8 knots of boat speed in 5 knots apparent under the S1 chute. With the arrival of the day, the wind progressively built to the mid-20’s with big waves and we peeled from the S1 directly to the S4. We got 70 miles of fantastic sleigh-ride, completing those 70 miles in less than 7 hours with sustained surfs at 13-14 knots. Luc was the speed king, hitting almost 16 knots down a series of particularly large waves. We approached the gybe off Rochester with trepidation, but with Bruce taming the helm (we knew it was

serious when he traded in the bare feet for boots!), Luc on the foredeck and Sue-Bill managing the spinnaker we blasted through the gybe at 13+ knots and flew off towards Oswego.

The second leg from Oswego to Main Duck was uneventful, except for re-iterating to us how effective the blast reacher is in this kind of race. The wind held until just before sunrise, where it fell to zero just off Pointe Petrie and left us chasing zephyrs for the next 16 hours with speeds ranging from 0 to 2 knots most of the day. Unfortunately, as both Bruce and Bill had committed to the Olson 30 nationals in Kingston starting Friday evening, we found ourselves rapidly facing the likelihood of having to abandon and beetle back to Kingston to meet that obligation. We set a cut-off time at 10pm. At 9:55 we were still doing 0.00, but at 10 sharp, there was the faintest whisper of a breeze. We decided to give it another 15 minutes, just because we had come so far, and by 10:15 we were sailing at 7.5 knots again. The rest is history. We finished around 9:00am to the usual great hospitality of Monica and her Shoreline team, enjoyed our traditional lasagna and champagne breakfast, and basked in yet another gorgeous hot, sunny summer morning.

It does take some serious planning and preparation, and a good dose of luck, to do well in this race. Our model may not be for everyone, but it has sure worked for us, and we continue to do it because we have fun doing it! I hope to see more boats at the finish next time! - DM

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