

The GLSS Solo Challenger

December 2021



*The Official Newsletter of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society
Spring 2021 – Ken Verhaeren (verhaerk@aol.com) editor
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FROM THE HELM

Dear GLSS Members and Friends:

It's been another successful year for the GLSS, especially for adding new members. We ran successful challenges on all five Great Lakes in 2021 and we added nine new members from four of them. Only Lake Huron failed to add a new member to our roster this year. New members are the life-blood of any organization. They replenish the constituency, add a fresh perspective, provide a place for more experienced members to pass along knowledge and expertise, reenergize existing members, carry on traditions and create new ones, and eventually take on leadership roles. This cycle is necessary to fuel the long-term success and development of the GLSS, and 2021 made a strong showing in this regard. If we were to ask the Magic 8-Ball, the response would be "Outlook Good."

On a personal note, I enjoyed a terrific year of sailing on STORM'S HARBOR. It was one of those years with plenty of wind and almost every day was a good sailing day. STORM'S HARBOR made stops at dozens of Great Lakes ports from Mackinac Island to Erie, Pennsylvania (by way of Seneca Shoal). I missed not having a keg of Oberon waiting for us at the Mackinac Island Yacht Club in 2020, but I didn't miss it this year and I did my part to make it lighter. Thanks to those of you who helped with that (you know who you are).

After the AGM in January, I'll be stepping down as president of the GLSS and relinquishing my spot on the Board. I've been involved in a number of excellent non-profits over the years, and they're all made up of enthusiastic and passionate people. But the GLSS beats them all in terms of camaraderie and cohesiveness. The difference is that the GLSS is bound together by a rare ingredient ... Seamanship. That's Seamanship with a capital "S." It's a practical combination of skills involving sailing, boat-handling, navigation, vessel management, watch-keeping, self-sufficiency... and good judgment. GLSS members don't just talk about seamanship, they demonstrate it during every challenge. So, it's been an absolute privilege for me to have been entrusted with a position on the GLSS Board of Directors. Thank you to my fellow Directors for your dedication and hard work that enables the Board to get things done, and done right. This Society has given me more than I could ever give back, so let me know what else I can do for you.

With highest regards,
Rob Burger

A DIFFERENT KIND OF AGM

Dear GLSS Members and Friends,

We are sorry to report that we haven't received enough advance support for an in-person AGM in Chicago to make it financially viable for the GLSS. Therefore, the 2022 AGM will be held again virtually, **via Zoom**. The date will remain the same, **Saturday, January 15, 2022**, but the meeting will start at **1800 Eastern Standard Time**.

Please remember that **you must have paid your 2022 annual membership dues to be eligible to vote** at the AGM. Membership dues can be paid online via PayPal at:

<https://www.solosailors.org/society/membership-dues/>

For the 2022 AGM, attendees will be required to **register in advance**; however, **registration will be free**. Please watch your email box in early January for registration instructions and further details.

To make the 2022 AGM a bit more interesting and fun, we are going to try to organize **local watch parties**, where small groups of members and friends can gather to join the video meeting together. We are still working out the details to accommodate voting and to designate local organizers, but more information about watch parties will be coming soon.

Finally, the work of the GLSS is accomplished through its Board of Directors. Directors are elected to a 3-year term at the AGM. If any Members are interested in becoming a Director of the GLSS, please let us know by sending an email to info@solosailors.org.

Sincerely,
GLSS Board of Directors

Upcoming Events

- 06/18/2022 – Mackinac Solo Challenges
- 07/16/2022 – Lake Ontario Solo Challenge
- 08/00/2022 – Lake Erie Solo Challenge
- 09/16/2022 – Lake Michigan Solo Scramble
- _____ – St Clair Solo



2022

What is Normal?

After the 2020 GLSS sailing season was followed by the 2021 sailing season I wonder, “What is normal?” In 2020 everything changed. The Solo Mac lost some of its best sailors when our Canadian friends could not cross the border and the Lake Huron course was changed to stay in US waters. The Lake Michigan course was shortened with the start moving from Chicago to Winthrop Harbor. The Lake Ontario 300 was canceled. For the 1st time in years the Lake Michigan Challenge had the lowest entry of the 3 Challenges held and in we only had 31 completions in our Challenges. Weather affected the Solo Macs with less than 50% of the starters completing the event.

So of course 2021 would be better, right! Well in some cases it was. We were able to run all of our Challenges in 2021. The Lake Michigan Mac started in Chicago as normal and participation jumped from 16 to 25. However, the Lake Huron course was still shortened as border crossing continued to be restricted and our Canadian friends could not participate. The Lake Ontario 300 was back on the schedule though missing the US sailors.

And the Trans Superior was in its regular rotation and had 8 solo sailors participating. Weather took center stage in the Solo Mac Challenges and almost eliminated the Lake Michigan side. Only 3 of 25 sailors finished the Challenge. The west to east weather continued into Lake Huron and 7 of the 16 starters finished it. Lake Ontario only had 3 participants with 2 finishing the Challenge. And again, Lake Erie was the most successful event with 13 starters and 11 finishers.

So in 2020 we had 31 completions in 3 Challenges run that year. In 2021 we ran 5 Challenges and had 30 completions. ??? However, we added 9 new members during the year






What is normal? It is the desire of Solo Sailors to get out there, if at all possible, and take on a Challenge. It’s the planning for the next season and the hope of having the best sail yet. It is the eagerness of our members to see and sail with their friends, and the excitement of welcoming new members into our Society.

Are we perfect? No, but we do strive to get better every year as an organization and sailor.





2021 SOLO MAC CHALLENGE

LAKE MICHIGAN





Michigan

1	 USA 271	Yukon	J 105	Ralph Krauss		84.0	23/Jun/21 - 16:45:45
2	 USA 492	Sea-U	J 105	Brian Crabb	DNF	84.0	
3	 USA 359	Caught in Traffic	J 105	David Pierce	DNF	84.0	
4	 USA 325	Global Nomads	J 105	Michael Hettel	DNF	84.0	
5	 USA 480	Gangbusters	J 105	Mark Gannon	DNF	84.0	






Ontario

1	 USA 100	Wall-E	Olson 30	Luke Brockman		105.0	22/Jun/21 - 02:34:33
2	 USA 59	Nemo	Seascape 27	Michael Tuman	DNF	87.0	
3	 2713	Minnie	C&C Redline 41	Frank Cobb	DNF	102.0	
4	 USA 52845	Tide The Knot	Jeanneau Sunfast 35	Robert Metzen	DNF	105.0	
5	 USA 52872	Strider	Beneteau 46	Mark Mahowald	DNF	96.0	







Erie

1	 60683	Devil's Dance Floor	Beneteau Oceanis 36CC	Curtis Thorin	DNF	147.0	
2	 41715	Lafiya	C&C 35 Mk III	Jonathan Jacobs	DNF	117.0	
3	 6279	Debbie	Catalina 380	Mike Kenny	DNF	126.0	
4	 USA 40769	Zelda	Optima 101 (Dehler)	Duke Mueller	DNF	132.0	

Huron

1	 073 073	foxy	S2 7.9	Blaise Arena	DNF	168.0	
2	 27	Touring Machine	Catalina 275 Sport	Todd Gayley	DNF	171.0	
3	 USA 0398	Kismet	Nonsuch 30	Kenneth Verhaeren	DNF	174.0	
4	 USA 63171	Laura Jane	Gozzard 41	Thomas Cooper	DNF	165.0	
5	 60470	Shadow	Pearson 303	Kris Kimmons	DNF	207.0	

Superior

1	 USA 48006	REJECT	1D48	Matthew Rubsam		-36.0	21/Jun/21 - 15:13:00
2	 USA 18431	Thunder	Express 37	Samuel Keys	DNF	69.0	
3	 70020	Gabriel	Dehler 39 JV	Jeffrey Stack	DNF	78.0	
4	 ON 9027	Black Magic	Beneteau First 10R	Matt Dages	DNF	78.0	
5	 USA 52063	Renaissance	Sabre 426	Joe Turns	DNF	81.0	
6	 USA 51395	Sea Raider	C&C 110	Dirk Kruger	DNF	75.0	

2021 SOLO MAC CHALLENGE

LAKE HURON

PHRF Division						
Michigan						
1	 USA 002	Paradise	Hurly 40	James Otton	111.0	21/Jun/21 - 17:41:00
2	 41	Storm's Harbor	Beneteau Oceanis 41	Rob Burger	102.0	21/Jun/21 - 19:52:00
3	 4	Quattuor	Hunter Legend 40	Jeff Neuhalfen	DNF 108.0	
4	 USA 31214	Etagé	C&C 37.5	Al Merrithew	DNF 108.0	
5	 USA 25504	Eym Electric	Jeanneau SF 37	Jeffrey Golding	DNF 111.0	
Ontario						
1	 25034	Erewhon	Tartan 37	John McCallum	135.0	22/Jun/21 - 17:11:01
2	 USA 25341	Otis B. Driftwood	Jeanneau 34 Sunrise	Blair Arden	141.0	23/Jun/21 - 00:18:27
3	 USA 60480	Nomad	Pearson 39-2	Kris Tonn	DNF 120.0	
Erie						
1	 37080	Arch Angel	Hunter 37c	Noel Gingerich	DNF 177.0	
2	 614	Ventura	Beneteau Oceanis 381	Christopher Lentz	DNF 147.0	
3	 15921	Ginger Kay	C&C-27-Mk1-IB-TM	Richard Lappin	DNF 186.0	
4	 USA 42659	Finnair	Tartan 28	John Ollila	DNF 177.0	
Superior						
1	 USA 52818	Harmony	Beneteau First 44.7 SD	Joey Baker	45.0	21/Jun/21 - 11:06:00
2	 USA 83021	Tango	J 40	Bob VanEck	72.0	21/Jun/21 - 18:33:00
3	 42911	Coconut Telegraph	J 33	Dan Pavlat	78.0	21/Jun/21 - 20:41:00
4	 USA 42058	Schock & All	Schock 35	Russell Krock	DNF 72.0	





2021 LAKE ONTARIO CHALLENGE

Division						
RF-FS-SH (Solo)						
	CAN 60077	Aarrow (LO300)	Archmbault 40RC	David Courtney	LSYC	41.0 / 1.2803 13/Jul/21 - 13:56:18
	CAN 008	Star Chaser	Beneteau First 45	Kenneth Martin	PCYC	36.0 / 1.2949 13/Jul/21 - 18:15:23
60	CAN 2397	ARIGATO	Robb 35	andrew reddon	National Yacht Club	DNF 205.0 / 0.9340





2021 LAKE ERIE CHALLENGE

PHRF Division






Superior

1	 USA 42058 Schock & All	Schock 35	Russell Krock	GLSS, Sandusky Sailing Club, Alum Creek Sailing Association	72.0	16/Aug/21 - 13:58:34
2	 41 Storm's Harbor	Beneteau Oceanis 41	Rob Burger	GLSS, Sandusky Sailing Club	102.0	17/Aug/21 - 01:40:20
3	 42911 Coconut Telegraph	J 33	Dan Pavlat	GLSS/Bayview Yacht Club	78.0	17/Aug/21 - 04:02:00
4	 USA 25649 Glass Pony	First 35	Jason Huffman	Sandusky Sailing Club	DNF	75.0

Michigan

1	 Usa 140 AVATAR	Tartan ten	Lease Schock	Sandusky Sailing Club,North Cape Yacht Club	126.0	17/Aug/21 - 02:25:30
2	 USA 40769 Zelda	Optima 101 (Dehler 34)	Duke Mueller	Buffalo Harbor Sailing Club/ GLSS	132.0	17/Aug/21 - 05:26:00
3	 4014 Jack Tar	Tartan 40	Jeff Marshall	GLSS	105.0	17/Aug/21 - 06:48:39
4	 1135398 Pirate Shanty	Hunter 386	Michael Isbell	GLCC	114.0	17/Aug/21 - 09:20:00

Ontario

1	 61024 Havannah	Contessa 35	Karim Botros	Edgewater Yacht Club	138.0	16/Aug/21 - 23:12:38
2	 USA 32122 Riptide	Express 27	John Walton	CSYC	138.0	17/Aug/21 - 03:43:55
3	 433 Cheeky	Tarten 37c	Jake Thomas	SSC	135.0	17/Aug/21 - 04:58:00
4	 USA 25341 Otis B. Driftwood	Jeanneau 34 Sunrise	Blair Arden	SSC	144.0	17/Aug/21 - 15:36:15
5	 073 foxy	S2 7.9	Blaise Arena	LMSS, GLSS	DNF	168.0

2021. St. Clair Solo

PHRF Division

JAM

1	377 Lady Luck	Tartan 10	Kenny Parkhurst	138.0	02/Oct/21 - 12:25:50
2	USA 25341 Otis B. Driftwood	Jeanneau 34 Sunrise	Blair Arden	156.0	02/Oct/21 - 12:31:48
3	34392 Bullet	C&C	Doug Allardyce	100.0	02/Oct/21 - 12:23:42
4	1068 Blue Moves	Pearson 30	Patrick McKeever	205.0	02/Oct/21 - 12:59:18

Sail Number	Yacht Name	Yacht Design	Owner/Skipper	Status	Rating	Finish Time
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Lake St. Clair Solo Challenge/PHRF Racing

PHRF Division

PHRF A

1	USA 42058 Schock & All	Schock 35	Russell Krock	72.0	02/Oct/21 - 15:44:00
2	USA 61232 Elevation	J 112e	Tim McGuire	57.0	02/Oct/21 - 15:41:40
3	USA 52818 Harmony	Beneteau First 44.7 SD	Joey Baker	45.0	02/Oct/21 - 15:35:42
4	251 Phoenix	J 109	Matthew Vallus	72.0	02/Oct/21 - 16:00:04
5	42121 Dean's List	J/35	Brian Pribe	72.0	02/Oct/21 - 16:11:40

PHRF B

1	USA 22391 No Rebase	T-10	Bruce Richardson	126.0	02/Oct/21 - 16:15:37
2	4 Quattuor	Hunter Legend 40	Jeff Neuhalfen	114.0	02/Oct/21 - 16:16:18
3	USA 25504 Eyem Electric	Jeanneau SF 37	Jeffrey Golding	111.0	02/Oct/21 - 16:28:16

PHRF C

1	USA 20704 Wyle E. Coyote	Chaser 29	Bill Dembek	171.0	02/Oct/21 - 16:34:10
2	None Miss JoDi	Catalina 350	Kern Smith	156.0	02/Oct/21 - 17:20:14
3	25034 Erewhon	Tartan 37	John McCallum	135.0	02/Oct/21 - 17:10:57
4	159 Polaris	Aloha 34	Dan Stinebring	DNF	147.0

So what happened?

Lake Michigan Solo Mac

This question has been asked of me over and over, particularly from members who have sailed many Solo Macs on Lake Michigan in the past. The answers I gave them, even as I was working my way back after dropping out, are pretty much the same now as what I gave at that time.

But let's start before the BIG decision. First I was sailing with very experienced and excellent sailors, people not given to rash decisions or panic. People who in the past have continued sailing even though advised by the USCG to seek shelter because of adverse conditions. They evaluate conditions and make educated decisions based on their experiences. After a good start winds decreased and the fleet slowed down. In 24 hours I was barely level with Milwaukee about 20 miles offshore and not moving. Everyone was doing about the same though spread out ahead of me. We did have a few drop out because of various equipment problems. One boat dropped out because of a number of different electrical problems and felt it was not good seamanship to continue on with them.

During our required radio check, skippers were talking about how slow it was but that winds were supposed to pick up. As time passed I made some progress but mostly to the east and as luck would have it I started having autopilot problems. After our afternoon radio check in I decided to fix the autopilot problem and did not hear anything on the radio for about 1.5 hours. When I switched back to 72 I heard all sorts of comments as to where skippers were heading to for safe harbor. As I looked around I didn't know why they were talking about dropping out because conditions hadn't changed. I then got on the radio and asked what had happened since the last check in. It was then that I found out about the new forecast and change in the weather. What was going to be challenging was now predicted to be downright dangerous.

Winds were predicted to be in the mid to upper 40's from the NNE with plus 10' waves and lasting for hours. As we know predicted wave heights are an average. Along with this was a weather system to the south with severe thunderstorms and possible tornados. As I listened, skippers were discussing the possibility of continuing, anchoring out and continuing after it passed or just finding a safe harbor. This discussion went on for quite awhile. As the discussion continued some of our most skilled sailors were saying things like this is the kind of storm that breaks gear and boats. I would add and hurts people. If we continued we would be in it for a long time because we were so far south right. Of the 20 boats that were still in the challenge we had heard from 19 of them. One boat had missed checking in so we knew nothing about his conditions or whereabouts. After missing a couple of required check ins the Race Director called the USCG. All but two skippers said that they were going to continue. Joey Baker is an excellent sailor with an excellent boat and felt that though uncomfortable he would be fine. The other skipper had proven in the past that he could just hang in there and slowly make his way up the lake. The other 17 decided to head to various harbors. As best I could, I reported the decisions to the Race Director as I also headed for a safe harbor. As it turned out I got hit by the southern storm before I got to Racine and ended up in the storm all the way to Chicago.

The 3rd sailor never contacted anyone but did continue in the Challenge. His 1st radio contact was to the race committee after he passed under the bridge. Three sailors finished the Challenge while 22 dropped out. Was there panic? Absolutely not. There was a lot of discussion of what was happening. Could more boats have finished? Possibly. Could boats have been damaged or skippers hurt? Probably. Did skippers make the right decisions? Yes, not only because these are some of the best sailors on the lakes, but because every decision is personal and made by the skipper knowing his boat and skills. Were there problems associated with what happened during the Challenge? Yes, but that is another story.



Chicago chosen to host U.S. Sail Grand Prix at Navy Pier June 18-19, 2022

SailGP announces expanded North American presence



This is the SAME day
as the Solo Mac start

**If you plan to get a slip in a Chicago Harbor,
Particularly DuSable Harbor apply as early as
you can.**

No latter than May 1.

Expect Yacht Clubs to be full



ARE RADIO CHECK IN REQUIRED IN GLSS CHALLENGES?

I've been a member of the GLSS since my 1st Challenge in 2005. At that time I was told that the every 6 hour Radio Check In was required and I had better not miss it. It was clear that there would be a penalty if that happened. My wife also made it clear that this "requirement" made her feel much happier knowing that other sailors would be looking for me. To date I have attempted 17 Solo Macs and completed 12 sailing KISMET a Nonsuch 30. I often spend my time sweeping the back of the fleet as a Cat rigged boat doesn't sail to the wind very well. I have missed Radio Check Ins and called the USCG to let them know I was good in case anyone called looking for me. Other than those times when no one could hear me, I have always made my check in at the appropriate time. Why? Because it is required in the Sailing Instructions.

Mandatory Radio Log and Call-in. Skippers shall attempt to make radio contact with other Skippers on VHF Channel 72 every 6 hours after the start of the challenge. Skippers missing a call-in shall be subject to a penalty. Channel 72 is to be monitored for 30 minutes at the appropriate times. Radio contact with other Skippers is to be logged noting time, position and other pertinent information. And it goes on about turning it in after the finish. BUT why is it required?

I remember the first time someone did not check in. After missing the second radio check the USCG was called and they started their procedures for a missing boat. After completing everything they could do prior to sending out a search team, they finally did so. They knew the general coordinates and spotted the fleet with our lights on. I will never forget the helicopter hovering over me with the spotlight covering my deck. Then the radio boomed "this is the USCG helo please give me the name of your boat". When I answered he moved on to the next boat and asked the same question. Eventually the boat was found and everything was ok. EXCEPT for the black eye the GLSS got with the USCG. During the time from the 1st missed call in, what was going on in the Mac fleet? Everyone was looking for the missing boat, radio calls back and forth. Did you see him? Where, when and was he ok? Everyone is now nervous and worried. This continued until we all finally heard the boat was found. The USCG does an outstanding job and has unbelievable assets to find a boat, but eventually they have to risk their lives and go out on a search, often in bad weather. How did this affect our sailors? Well one in particular cited it as the reason he stopped doing the Solo Mac. It upset him too much to want to take the chance of it happening again.

We all have a responsibility to our other Skippers when we go on these Solo Challenges not to mention the men and women of the USCG. That is also why we require backup to our communication systems, handhelds, secondary antennas and possibly an In-Reach or SPOT with texting capabilities. One of our Skippers once called the USCG from the middle of the Lake Michigan on a handheld radio. They responded and told him "yes we can hear you even with a handheld in the middle of the lake".

Because of recent events the question now is should we require Radio Check Ins and if so should an automatic disqualification, a last place finish or nothing occur if the Radio Check In is missed? Please let me know how you feel about the Radio Call-In requirement. Contact me at verhaerk@AOL.com or call my cell 708 253 7948. I will pass on the comments in future Solo Challenges

Communication always make things go easier for someone if not everyone, so how can Skippers on our Challenges do a better job with it. One of the problems the past Mac brought up was what happens when you drop out of a Challenge.

I would suggest the following. READ THE SAILING INSTRUCTION and do what it says. Ok, I'll admit that I'm just as guilty as virtually everyone else not reading ...

From sections 21.4 and 21.5 of the Sailing Instructions, should a Skipper/Yacht need to withdraw or temporarily suspend itself from the Challenge, the following instructions should be followed.

Before leaving the Sailing area the skipper shall notify other competitors of his intentions and condition. This should include the skipper's physical condition and the condition of the yacht. The skipper should also advise other competitors of the identity of the Harbor or Port the Skipper is heading to and the estimated time of arrival.

Upon Reaching safe harbor the Skipper shall notify the Race Director or designee by telephone on Mackinac Island. My In-Reach has texting capabilities so this is easy for me. Others on the challenge will also have this ability. The new SPOTS also can do this. So possibly contact someone in the fleet to relay the message

In the event that a Skipper temporarily anchors or lays to for more than 8 hours, the skipper must attempt to notify the Race Committee or another Skipper by VHF or telephone"

Cold Water Survival

The first few seconds can be the most dangerous.

By

[Darrell Nicholson](#).

Published in Practical Sailor: February 22, 2019 Updated: January 25, 2021

When we read about a sailor lost overboard in a storm, we think about PFDs and personal locator beacons, and accept the sea is unforgiving. When we read of novice boaters drowning in a local lake, we're sad, but say that will not happen to us because we wear PFDs. But when we read of a PFD-equipped sailor falling overboard and dying within minutes, it's a real eye-opener.

Spring sailing in temperate climates still carries the risk of cold water shock. With the water temperature in the low 50s, true hypothermia sets in at about 30 minutes. Swimming can be difficult after about 20 minutes. However, 50 degrees is well below the accepted threshold of shock. Most likely, when the icy water slams into a person's face it causes an involuntary gasp. It's hard to recover from inhaling water, even for a strong swimmer.

Originally known as sudden disappearance syndrome, cold water shock has been known since the 1970s. Different from true hypothermia, which results from the body core temperature dropping over a period of 20 minutes to hours, cold water shock is immediate. Being cast headfirst into icy water is one of most severe shocks a human can face, with deadly effects. It is estimated that 20 percent of victims die within 2 minutes.

Physical effects

The instantaneous reflex is a violent gasp, totally unlike the one scary movies strive to cause. This results in a massive inrush of air, which can be fatal if you are underwater. Unlike the controlled plunges of the local polar bear club, where participants walk in via a beach and are attended by rescue swimmers in dry suits, MOB sailors plunge in head first, the result of tripping over the lifeline. Even with an automatic vest, your head will plunge 6 feet underwater before popping to the surface. If the first blast of inhaled water doesn't drown you, you'll arrive on the surface gasping and unable to swim and swallowing more. Drowning will typically occur in less than a minute. The initial gasp is followed by several minutes of hyperventilation, making any physical effort nearly impossible. Consequences include the inability to hold your breath or think clearly.

Instantaneous and massive increases in heart rate and blood pressure can cause heart failure in otherwise healthy individuals. Clear thought is impossible. Panic is likely, only serving to increase problems with breathing control and heart rate.

These reactions may appear to an observer as nothing more than panic. Flailing, spastic breathing, muddled thinking, and a racing heart fit the pattern. But victims include experienced sailors and strong swimmers who are not at all prone to panic. If you fall overboard in warm water and reasonable weather, your first concern might be embarrassment over screwing up the race, and later whether the boat would be back in the next half or hour so. It wouldn't have felt life threatening.

If you survive the first critical seconds, then come the more traditional challenges of cold water exposure. Cold incapacitation and swimming failure begins in 5-20 minutes, the result of failed muscle control. In the absence of a PFD, drowning follows. Death from true hypothermia (cold core) takes considerably longer, at least 30 minutes in very cold water up to a few hours in cool water.

How do you keep this from happening to you? First, don't fall in. The first line of defense is careful movement and the use of harness and tether systems as described in PS October 2018. If sailing a smaller boat, prone to capsize or swamping, dress for full water immersion. In cool water either a thin wetsuit or dry suit is effective. Once the water temperature drops below about 50°F, only a dry suit is suitable. (See PS [November 2018](#) and [March 2009](#).)

If performing high risk activities on larger boats (hiking out, working on the bow, or leaning outboard) a dry suit is the smart option. It is our favorite foul weather gear for stormy conditions in cool weather; more agile than heavy foul weather gear and nary a drop of water will go down your neck. Small wonder is increased in popularity with offshore racers and sailors.

Unfortunately, once the air temperature gets above about 55°F, dry suits get steamy, tempting the wearer to open the zipper and defeating the whole purpose. As the water temperature rises into the 50s, we like paddling jackets and dinghy smocks, with snug fitting wrist, neck, and waist seals. Water will sneak in pretty quickly, but shock is reduced and the seals reduce the exchange of cold water. The wearer is also more mobile than in conventional foul weather gear.

Soft shells may also have possibilities. Once our tester found himself in 35°F water, with ice around the edges. He was dressed not in foul weather gear or dry suit, but in Wind Blocker fleece tops and bottoms. The saving factors were that the wrist, waist, ankle, and neck closures were all tightly secured; not all soft shells have effective closures. Although very cold, it was more survivable than ordinary foul weather gear.

Conclusions

The last 12 months have been hard on ocean racers. It is more than coincidence cool or cold water was a common factor. In the UK, cold water shock is considered to be the root cause of most drowning, including non-boating accidents.

We (Practical Sailor) like certain features of manual inflating PFDs; they don't go off inadvertently and climbing back aboard is easier. But cold water is different. Because of the high probability the wearer will be incapable of action for a minute or more, auto-inflation is the way to go.

We would like to see the makers of foul weather gear take a long hard look at what can be done to improve cold water shock resistance. Conventional jackets and soft shells could be fitted with effective internal neck seals. Wrist and waist seals could be upgraded.

We would like to see race committees post cold water warnings. It is common to require PFDs be worn above a certain wind speed. The race committee should at least recommend that protective gear such as a wet suit or drysuit be worn if the water temperature is below about 55° F. Our level of caution around the rail varies with the risk we perceive, and that level of caution goes way up when the water temperatures go down.

Most importantly, sailors need understand what being thrown face first into cold water feels like and how their body will respond to it. A diehard for traditional foul weather gear? Don't fall off the boat in cold water, and don't expect to survive more than a few minutes if you do. Its tough out there.