

# The GLSS Solo Challenger

March, 2024



*The Official Newsletter of the Great Lakes Singlehanded Society  
Winter 2024 – Ken Verhaeren ([verhaerk@aol.com](mailto:verhaerk@aol.com)) editor  
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# From the Helm

President Russ Krock



Solos Sailors, Solo Sailors, Solo Sailors,

Ahoy and hope everyone is doing well. As the weather breaks and we start working on our boats we are thinking about our plans for the upcoming season. I wanted update the membership on what we are planning for 2024.

First of all, I am honored to work with a great Board of Directors. We have a range of experiences and sailing backgrounds bringing thoughts and ideas together for the continued excellence and improvement of the GLSS. We are also well represented across the all of the Great Lakes geographically with Dave Courtney on Lake Ontario, and Brian VanWeiren on Lake Superior. Don't hesitate to reach out with any ideas, questions, or if you would like to volunteer time or just get more involved with your organization.

Looking at the big picture, the GLSS is offering 4 types of solo events for the upcoming year:

Of course, the major Challenges again for this year are the Lake Huron/Lake Michigan Solo Macks, Lake Ontario 300, and the always fun Lake Erie Solo. Lake Superior is only on odd years so will be next up in 2025. These events require a documented qualifier, sailing resume, boat review, and Board approval to enter. To gain membership a Challenge must be successfully completed.

We are proud to offer again this year, several 'day' events in the 40nm range including the fairly new Sandusky 45005, the Southern Lake Huron Solo and the very successful and long running St. Clair Solo. We are working to revive the previous Lake Michigan Scramble most likely in another format and also add a similar event on Lake Ontario and possibly Lake Superior.

Continuing on to the non-GLSS events that have added a single-handed class and we advertise and participate in include I-LYA Bayweek at Put-in-Bay which was popular from the outset and is a great way to get warmed up for the Lake Erie Solo which is held the following weekend. Also the Sandusky Sailing Club added a singlehanded class for us last year and plan to again in the future. Other events will be added this year and listed on the website. If you know of existing events that have a singlehanded class please advise.

Finally, while this will be the 3<sup>rd</sup> year for the Solo Shakedown we also are planning shakedowns for Lake Michigan (Muskegon), Lake St. Clair, and Erie, PA for this year. These are potential qualifiers for aspiring members and a good way for members to get out for 100+ miles and including an overnight early in the year to get ready for upcoming Challenges. No entry fee, no ratings, no flags or t-shirts. Just head out and go for an overnight sail with friends, old and new.

Please take a look at the Calendar, sign up for blast emails if you are not already receiving them, and check back as we will be adding events and information over the next couple of weeks and months.

Standing by on 72,

# Coming events,

*See the GLSS website for event details*

June 1, 2024	Solo shakedowns 3starts - Erie, Muskegon and Sandusky
June 22, 2024	Mackinac solo Challenge
July 13, 2024	Lake Ontario Solo Challenge
August 2, 2024	I-LYA Bayweek Regatta
August 10, 2024	Lake Erie Solo Challenge
August 24, 2024	Sandusky Islands Race
September 21, 2024	Sandusky 45005
September 28, 2024	St Clair Solo Challenge

## **Out Of The Grey: Struck By Lightning In The Lake Ontario 600**

Ironically, and for the very first time, I wasn't nervous at all. So there was a storm coming, there was lightning. Nothing I hadn't dealt with before, and I was only 50 miles from the finish of a 600 mile race. I just had to hunker down, pop out on the other side of this thing, and finish.

But, as I was soon reminded, lightning has always made me a nervous for a reason. Lightning is a wee bit more unpredictable. And *powerful*.

I was prepared for the oncoming front, sailing under double-reefed main, and sitting under my dodger on a wooden seat I have fitted in the companionway that allows me to see everything and run the boat under some protection. It was just as I've done a dozen times before. Winds increased, rain started, and there was lots of lightning, but it was far enough away that I wasn't concerned. Then BOOM!

I felt nothing from the strike itself, but it was tremendously loud, cabin lights popped and sprayed their covers, I could smell the distinct scent of fried electronics, and there was simultaneously a fountain of water sprouting from a blown thru-hull just ahead of the compression post. (I can't say exactly how I felt at that moment, but "Seriously?" springs to mind. The punctuation and font of that single word would have changed often and radically in the space of a nano-second, of course. There wasn't a lot of time to think.) I grabbed a foam plug intending to stuff it in the hole, but there were still pieces obstructing the opening that wouldn't allow an easy stuff. So I laid the plug on its side over the opening and stood on it while I looked for ways to call for help.

The VHF was toast (literally), so no help there, and no DSC. But I had my phone and dialled the Coast Guard using star-16. But there was no answer, no connection, nothing. I texted my wife hoping to have her make an emergency call the coastguard but that didn't go through either, nor did another text to Bert Barrett on Upstart who was only 4-5 miles away. That was the moment I truly wondered if I was in deep, deep trouble. I suspected my phone might have suffered in the blast as well. So, last ditch attempt, I dialled 911. And someone mercifully answered.

The operator at 911 had a general idea of where I was, but no direct ping. I told him to hang on, left my position holding down this insistent fountain, and went to a locker at the back of the boat to fetch my ditch bag containing a handheld GPS and VHF radio. Back on station standing on that foam plug, I powered up the the GPS and gave my coordinates. The 911 operator connected me with the coast guard who hailed me on

VHF while I was still on the phone. I could hear the coast guard loud and clear, but they could not hear me. (Note to self and others: a handheld is not necessarily much help 11 miles offshore because it just doesn't have the range.) It was useful, I think, that the 911 operator heard what was happening over the phone and passed that information on to the coast guard.

Though I usually try to keep my phone well charged, when asked about its state, I had to report—of course—the battery was only at about 20%. So the 911 operator told me he'd hang up to save power in case rescuers wanted to contact me that way. The pause gave me a moment to think that there should be a collar on the thru-hull that I can unscrew and clear the debris so I could stuff the plug in. I did that and it worked. But I had no idea how long it would last or how effective it might be. I put on my Mustang survival suit, life jacket over top of that, collected my ditch bag with passport, wallet, flares, and anything else I thought essential, ready to abandon ship.

It seemed only 10 or 15 minutes passed before Olcott Fire Rescue was on scene. But from then on, it was still a bit of a nightmare. Their first question to me was this: "What's the plan?" Well. I thought they might have come with one. I was all dressed up with my travel bag waiting for a safe ride. I confirmed the hull breach was plugged but didn't know how secure that might be, and discovered I still had a working engine, so they told me to head to Olcott. But I had no idea which direction that was. They gave me coordinates. I struggled to remember how to enter a waypoint in this handheld GPS I hadn't used in years, rain was obscuring vision through my glasses, and we were by then in the thick of the storm. With a GPS in one hand, a radio in the other, no working autopilot, it's no surprise my boom swung across the boat and nailed me. I was low in the cockpit and it was all mainsheet that got me, but the GPS went overboard and I only just managed to save the loose radio on deck. I used it then to speak with the Fire Rescue vessel and began, "Gentlemen, we have some issues...."

It was not long after that a US Coast Guard vessel arrived, threw me a messenger line with massive tow ropes I was instructed to attach to each of two bow cleats. Not particularly an easy feat for either me or the Coast Guard in those conditions. But we got it done, got moving, and though I was happy to be secured, that 11 mile tow was particularly miserable. I was at the tiller, mainsheet in hand, trying to steer the boat and feather the sail as best I could with winds that felt like 20-30 knots coming at me behind the coast guard vessel. At one point, that wind was from directly ahead, there was no more feathering to be had, the rig was shaking like crazy, and I radioed the guys to slow down so I could get the main down. A monumental struggle, to be sure—involving a lot of sail ties—but from then on became an easier ride. (It was decidedly rough out there and one of the Coast Guard officers told me that after they hooked me up, he spent the

rest of the trip at the back of the boat tossing his cookies.) Between the spray, rain, and wind, I was glad to be wearing the Mustang suit because, without it, I could easily see myself having arrived thoroughly hypothermic.

Finally tied at the wall of Olcott Yacht Club, I was awaited by about eight officers all needing to speak with me: Sheriff's office, Fire Rescue, Coast Guard, Homeland Security, and Immigration. (I was a Canadian citizen suddenly on American shores and had to be processed somehow.) This was all handled fairly expediently, but deciding the right paperwork I required involved some serious discussion between the officers there, and I was glad to have had my passport on hand. Because there was a lot of water sloshing around the bottom my boat, I asked if there was a hotel nearby where I could stay the night. One of the Fire guys, on my behalf, made a call (this was about 2 in the morning) and drove me to a motel just up the street—where (in the middle of the night) the manager met me, gave me a room without charge, organized breakfast and dinner for me the next day without charge, and gave me a cell phone to use for the duration of my stay, again, without obligation. (Mine wouldn't work there because it's an older 3G model—which probably explains the difficulty I had calling for help when the boat was first struck.)

I can't say enough about the help and hospitality I received from the people of Olcott, both in and outside the yacht club. I was housed and fed for three days, had my boat lifted, put up on borrowed jack stands, where it sat for another month, and I hadn't spent a dime on any of it. All of it was offered, and all of it was done, with an incredible spirit of generosity.

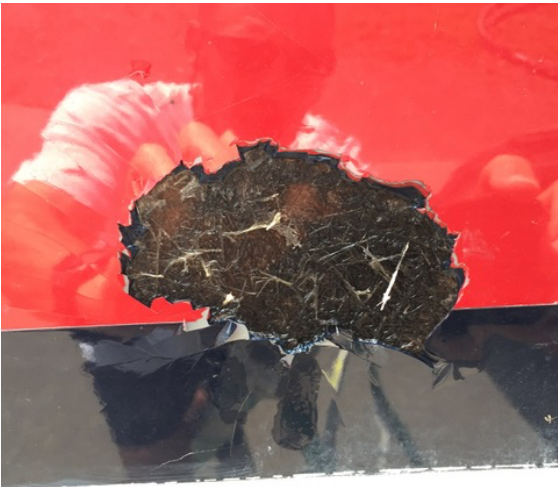
But the story is still without ending. All of this happened mid July. It is now almost mid November, and I have no clear idea yet about the fate of my boat. It was trucked back to Canada (to Niagara) where it still awaits final numbers for repair. These final numbers must then be adjudicated by insurance for a final decision about whether to repair the boat or write it off.

Fingers crossed. It's the same way we deal with lightning.

Brian Mitchell  
Areion, Quest 33



Some of the damage to the boat!



# Updates for the Solo Mac Challenge

The Board met last night to review and tweak the REL, NOR & SI for this year's Challenge.

## REQUIRED EQUIPMENT LIST:

Item #13 Flares is changed to "13. A boat shall carry three (3) SOLAS red hand flares not older than the expiration date or shall carry both the USCG approved non-Pyrotechnic electric distress light, marked with an indication that it meets 46 CFR 161.013 and is operational, and an orange distress flag, marked with an indication that it meets 46 CFR 160.072. Flares must be kept in a readily accessible location. On multihulls, they are to be kept in the crashbox."

This should be a little less onerous and it is what the Bayview Mac requires.

Items #26 & 27 the addition of the sentence "It must be turned on and transmitting for the entirety of the event." this applies to both AIS and Tracking device.

## NOTICE OF RACE:

Unfortunately, due to rising costs of everything, the entry fee for paid GLSS members is now \$350.00US and \$375.00 for non-members.

Registration is due May 21, 2024

Required documents may not be land mailed but must be sent electronically.

## SAILING INSTRUCTIONS:

Inspections will be random. You may or may not be inspected.

Shepherd radio call ins will be done. You will be notified of your Shepherd at the Skippers' Meeting.

During Call In, radio contact, if heard, with other Skippers, regardless of their section, is to be logged noting time, position, and other pertinent information.

Yacht Scoring should be up soon, hopefully by the weekend. Depends on them

## Editors comment:

It is my opinion that these changes are very valid. I've carried a non-Pyrotechnic electric distress light since they became approved by the USCG. Still have all my flares but they are not as safe, particularly if in a raft. And as far as items #26 & 27, this not only helps in the running of the Challenge but prevents love ones who are watching from worrying as much.

The cost going up!! Will isn't everything! We are sailing to a primer island resort destination and using the facilities of the Mackinac Island Yacht Club. Not to mention the luncheon we have enjoy. I'm guessing just that would cost at least \$100 in any good restaurant.





This is an article from the  
Great Lakes Cruising Club



# Low water is likely to go lower

*Authored by Cindy Badley  
March 6, 2024*

This is our third monthly issue of the new, online *Lifeline*. We'd like to know what you think. We are sending out the *Lifeline* to about 1,800 email addresses, and about 65% of those are opened within a day or two of receipt.

Nearly 20% of those who opened the email are clicking links to access additional information on our website. Please email me any thoughts, criticisms, or suggestions at my address below..

Each issue of the *Lifeline* will have a featured article, many of them about cruising locations on the Great Lakes. We are a cruising club after all. For example, in this issue is a great article about cruising Georgian Bay written by Rear Commodore David Spencer, an experienced Georgian Bay sailor.

In the April issue, look for a spring outfitting article.

As you work on your cruising plans for the summer, I hope you consider joining the GLCC for one of the many events, particularly the annual Rendezvous in Escanaba, Mich. ([M-101](#)), July 14-18.

Check out the website's [event calendar](#) for a full list of rallies and events, and information about how to register for them.

Another item affecting your summer cruising plans will be lower water levels for the Great Lakes. As of Jan. 1, only 0.35% of the Great Lakes had ice cover, vs. the normal 10%. This lower ice level means more evaporation on the Great Lakes. As a result, the forecast for water levels in 2024 will be less than that of 2023.

The [GLCCSchool](#) continues its many one-evening seminars. Remember, these classes are now free to GLCC members, a great benefit that started this year. With the free school, we are experiencing a nice uptick in member participation. Check out the link to the *GLCCSchool* elsewhere in this issue, or go directly to the *GLCCSchool* tab on the website.

# It's time to look at LAKE LEVELS again!



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® **US Army Corps of Engineers** Detroit District Website

	SUPERIOR	MICH-HURON	ST. CLAIR	ERIE	ONTARIO
Forecasted Water Level for Mar 1, 2024 (feet)	601.21	578.54	574.54	572.05	245.08
Chart Datum (feet)	601.10	577.50	572.30	569.20	243.30
Difference from chart datum (inches)	+1	+12	+27	+34	+21
Difference from average water level for Feb 1, 2024 (inches*)	-1	-3	-9	-3	0
Difference from average water level for Mar 1, 2023 (inches*)	-8	-3	-5	-4	-5
Difference from long-term monthly average of Mar (inches)	0	+1	+7	+10	0
Difference from highest monthly average of record for Mar (inches)	-14	-35	-28	-23	-26
Year of highest recorded monthly mean	1986	2020	2020	2020	1952
Difference from lowest monthly average of record for Mar (inches)	+20	+30	+42	+46	+30
Year of lowest recorded monthly mean	1926	1964	1934	1934	1935
Projected net change in levels by Apr 1, 2024 (inches)	0	+1	+4	+2	+5

ALL DATA SHOWN IN THIS SUMMARY ARE REFERENCED TO IGLD 1985