



30th Annual

Around Long Island Regatta

by Joseph A. Flahive

The 30th Around-Long-Island Regatta (ALIR), Thursday, July 27, was sponsored by the Sea Cliff Yacht Club. More than 80 boats entered to race 190 miles from Rockaway Point to Sea Cliff Yacht Club. The first regatta was set in motion 30 years ago by Frank Braynard, founder of Tall Ship events.

Last year, especially, and various years past, the ALIR was cursed by avid burgee-flyers for having the least wind of any distance race on Long Island Sound. This year proved the exception, since better winds were nowhere to be found except around Long Island. The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy's 77-foot *Alchemy* reported speeds of over 19 knots and set a course record of 17 hours, 45 minutes.

For the second year, *Precious Metal III*, a Beneteau 43-footer, finished in the bottom half of her division, which was a 100 percent better than

"did not finish" last year. Our crew of seven, skippered by Bill Flahive, left Hempstead Harbor at 7 a.m. under power and headed towards Hell Gate, bucking a powerful 3 knot current, to reach the East River. Light tug and barge traffic,



north and south, left behind eddies and swirling whirlpools. Before rounding the bend, we passed over the site where the British frigate *Hussar* hit a submerged reef in 1780, carrying a cargo of gold and silver which has never been recovered.

After the East River we passed through the upper and lower bays, rounded Coney Island, headed east, and approached Bell R2 off Rockaway Point at one o'clock. It was a bright and clear day with four-foot swells, SW 20-knot winds and large white caps. At least 30 boats waited near the prep area, angling start approaches.

Adventurously, we raised our genaker sail, snagging it on a lower mast spreader when a sudden whipping gust caught it. It ripped when we tried to free it, but we finally clawed it down the forward hatch – bad omen. Our start time was 2:20 p.m. and we were second over the line – good omen. It took about 22 hours, at 80 degrees with a starboard reach, averaging 4+ knots, to cover 90 miles and gain Montauk Point Friday at 6:20

a.m. We reveled in the grandeur of the glowing, golden-red sun rising from the dark blue horizon of the Atlantic into to the inviting, salt-tinged air of a wind-free morning full of promise.

For our 16-mile run to Plum Gut, we plotted a course of 320 degrees to the first flashing green bell. We left it to port, swung to 225 degrees to go past Gardiners Island and then changed to 305 degrees to Plum Gut's middle marker and entered Long Island Sound with the current. With SW winds over 12 knots, we listened to the marine forecast calling for rain, strong winds, thunder and lightning, with a 4 p.m. predicted arrival. We decided to delay furling



until later, but we did don our life jackets, tighten storm gear, check hatches and jack lines and ease sails as the frequency of gusts increased.

In the distance we could see the sky turning to grey and feel the cooler air as the dark clouds marred the horizon.

The bombardment of the dazzling brilliance of the lightening commanded our complete awe. The rapidity of the storm's approach took us by surprise; we were furling the genoa and main when the thunderstorm hit us with the moaning sound of legions of Valkyries. The cold, slashing hose-force torrential rain was blinding.

The storm slapped the 43-foot, twenty-thousand pound boat to a 60-degree starboard angle, plunged the lee side under and held it there, as we struggled to finish furling, with the boom-end in the water and a solid white torrent pouring into the cockpit, over the aft winch and shooting over the stern. Helm control became more demanding, with gusts partially lifting the rudder out of the water and the loss of sail power.

The boom-end trailed, porpoising in the waves, as the boat plunged up and down and the topping lift snapped and strummed. The boom vang bent, kinked at mid-point, and was unable to support the boom with the main mast furled. The main sheet was pulled

in and the boom jumped about, looking for a few heads to crack, until the lift line was hauled in. After much effort in the blinding rain, with the boat's gyrating motion, the lee side at extreme heel and knee-high waves washing in, the boom was finally lifted and the main secured. We learned later that the storm, with 50 mph winds and 200 lightning strikes, had caught the area off guard.

Early Saturday morning, as we approached Hempstead Harbor, proved to be the most frustrating. The day was sunny, bright and horizon-clear, with not even a tremor of wind. The

finish line was tantalizing within sight. It was nearly two hours before a faint breeze from the southwest moved us slowly toward it. Sails furled, lines coiled and bumpers out, we motored into the channel, passing boats that had finished, were anchored or moored and draped with wet gear flapping off every available surface – a colorful floating marine bazaar. Our wives and children were on the slip to cheer our arrival. It doesn't get any better than that.

The kids, ages 8 to 11, were acting as local news reporters and, with video camera in hand, interviewing each of us. Alex, at 21 the youngest aboard, vividly and dramatically described the black skies, howling wind, thunder and lightening, drenching rain, near turning over of the boat, how close everyone came to being thrown into the water and how he kept saying, "Mommy, Mommy." When Alex stopped, the kids, their mouths and eyes wide open, said in unison, "Wow!" "Awesome!"

The Winners:

- Overall IRC
- 1st *Christopher Dragon*
- 1st *Alchemy*
- 2nd *Wahoo*
- 2nd *Polaris*
- 3rd *Charlie V*
- 3rd *High Noon*

Discretionary

- Wesley Bailey Trophy – Raritan YC
- John B. Thompson – *Alchemy*
- Hero's Award – *Precious Metal III*

