

Sally under sail on
Lake Michigan.

The "Redoubtable"

SALLY

By PEGGY HICKEY

Sally, a cutter skippered by Jerry Hickey, was the first boat to finish the long distance race from Biloxi last week end. Sally arrived at West End finish line at 5:13.09 Sunday morning. The race started at noon on Saturday in Biloxi.

Sally was designed by Nat Herreshoff and built in 1903. Last year she was brought down from Milwaukee where she had a good racing record on the Great Lakes.

THAT is what the New Orleans Times Picayune reported about Sally—once renowned as the oldest sailboat in Milwaukee—when she captured her first Gulf trophy, a handsome silver ice bucket. The oversimplified statement seems to suggest that the Venerable Lady accomplished her feat not only with ease but with all sails furled. It wasn't exactly like that.

Had the ghost of Nat Herreshoff been around to read this item he might have scratched his head and said, "I don't remember designing a cutter that year." And well he might wonder because the Sally, as originally designed by him, was a ketch. Over the years Sally has been re-rigged and improved until there is very little of the original boat left but the hull. When she is referred to as being "designed and built in 1903," I am reminded of a story my mother told of a relative who wore one pair of woolen hose all her life. In its lifetime the one pair of hose had the feet replaced 14 times and the legs replaced 11 times.

But if Mr. Herreshoff's ghost had difficulty in remembering Sally, when hearing of her trials before winning the Biloxi-New Orleans trophy he would have had cause to chuckle and say, "They don't build them like that any more!"

For 30 years Sally had been a boat to be reckoned with in the Milwaukee area and long distance races. It was with great reluctance that her former owner, Herb Bathke, gathered some of his friends together to build a cradle for her to be trucked off to New Orleans in November, 1959. As Herb explained later all the men helping him had worked on many cradles and knew how to prepare a boat for shipping. When one of them said, "Hey, these nails are too long, what should I do?" Herb blithely replied, "Nail it into the hull."

To his horror and ours that is exactly what the man did and Sally arrived in New Orleans with the cradle securely nailed to her hull with three big spikes. When the damage was repaired she was painted and varnished and carefully set in the water. She



promptly went aground in the boatyard bay. While Lake Pontchartrain does not have a daily tide it has a tide governed by the prevailing wind. When a norther blows the low water may last a week or two. Sally was aground for two weeks. The soft, gooey, clay-like mud in which she was held fast did no damage to her hull—only to her skipper's disposition. Jerry was anxious to get her in sailing shape by Christmas.

Finally the water rose and she was eased out of the mud only to go aground again at the dock when her mast was set. It was late in the afternoon when Dirty Old Sally, as her skipper fondly calls her, made it to the Southern YC. slip after two more brushes with the mud. Surveying her ruefully when she was secured for the night Jerry said, "Well, there she is and no one can say she didn't touch all the bases in getting here!"

Sally's shakedown race on Lake Pontchartrain was to Mandeville, 24 miles across the lake. Following the sailors as we had in Milwaukee, my daughter, Pamela, and I drove across the causeway to be on hand for the finish. Sally was the first boat in but on corrected time she did not place. However, her crew—Jerry, Jay, Burt, Lew, Cass and our son, Sean—was most enthusiastic about Sally's racing possibilities. They met us with smiling faces and immediately set about making plans for Race Week in the Gulf.

Race Week is the highlight of summer sailing for Gulf skippers. It opens with a race from New Orleans to Gulfport, Miss., the first weekend. Skippers then have the choice of racing to Pensacola, Fla., during the week or waiting and sailing the Gulfport-Biloxi

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race the following weekend. The final race, from Biloxi to New Orleans, takes place the third weekend. Jerry chose the Gulfport race as Sally's first venture into the Gulf.

In going from Lake Pontchartrain to Lake Borgne and from Lake Borgne to the Gulf, boats must traverse the Rigolets—pronounced riggoles, like the gum. The Rigolets are narrow channels where the current is swift and drawbridges add to the hazards of racing sailboats. In such races a sailboat is allowed to turn on its motor to pass through the draw but must take a one and a half hour penalty if it does.

Jay and Burt insisted that a young man from Gulfport, Jimmy, be included in the crew. He was well acquainted with the channel and as Jay put it, "I wouldn't take this boat into Gulfport without him aboard to find the channel." Jerry, a 220 pounder himself, didn't bat an eye when Jay explained that Jimmy would make Jerry look small by comparison.

The Gulfport race started at noon on Saturday. Jerry had to be back in New Orleans Sunday afternoon so it was arranged that Pamela and I would meet at the Gulfport YC. early Sunday morning. While we didn't expect the enthusiastic greeting we had re-

ceived at Mandeville—after all that was an afternoon race and only one quarter the distance—we were ill-prepared for the dour welcome given us at seven the following morning.

Sean met us on the dock. "Hi, mama," he said. "We almost sunk. We pumped and bailed all the way."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Yeah, we almost did. Water poured in the deck and we had a man on the pump all the way."

Jay and Burt were on deck wearily hauling cushions into the sun. Their nods were perfunctory and unsmiling as they told us Jerry would be out in a minute. Neither Pam nor I asked if they had placed in the race. It was quite obvious that no one cared. Then the skipper appeared. Eyes half shut, clothes rumpled from sleeping in them, he emerged from the companionway like a hibernating bear waking from his long nap and none too steady on his feet.

Within 10 minutes of our arrival we were back in the car and on our way home. Jerry was asleep on the back seat before we left the parking lot. We were well on our way before I had the courage to put out any conversational feelers.

"So you had a rough time," I said to Sean.

"No, it wasn't rough," he said.

"I thought you said you pumped all the way?"

"Yes, we did but it wasn't rough." There is nothing quite so disarming as a 10-year-old's explanation. "You don't understand, mama," he continued. "It wasn't rough. There weren't any big waves and we didn't hit any troughs like that time we crossed Lake Michigan. The wind was blowing hard and we had her tied down. Her rail was under water most of the time and you know that place along the rail where the deck leaks? Well, that was under water and it poured down into the cabin. But it wasn't rough."

Oh, yes, the deck. Over the five years we have been associated with Sally the deck has been a problem. All the patching, repairing, super-duper gimcracks guaranteed to end leaks have been unavailing. Dirty Old Sally's elastic deck still leaks.

"It wasn't even rough when the spinnaker pole broke," Sean went on.

"Oh, the spinnaker pole was broken?" I said lightly. Two can play at this being detached business I told myself. With 60 miles to go I would no doubt get all the story by the time we reached home.

"Yeah, it broke. Jay and Burt fixed it with the swab and broom handles," Sean said. As an after thought he added.

"That Jimmy is a nice guy. And is he ever strong. You know what he did? When the spinnaker pole broke he stretched his arms out at the side and grabbed the sail. He leaned back with his feet braced against the line and held the sail off the stays until they got the pole fixed."

Gradually the details of the trip came out while Jerry slept. They hadn't turned the motor on in the Rigolets. Sally had managed to get through the drawbridge with the first contingent of boats. She navigated the channel under sail. The fried chicken I had

prepared was very good but it was too difficult to eat salad so they didn't eat the tomatoes and lettuce. They were the third boat in but they did not place. Sally shipped so much water that at times it was necessary to bail with a pail as well as pump. Most of the trip Sean spent in the cabin. He had not read any of his book. Under the circumstances Knute Rockne's adventures paled into insignificance—he'd never sailed in a long distance Gulf race when the boat almost went down. Later Jerry said there wasn't any danger of them sinking but he admitted that it was the first time the bunk cushions had ever oozed water when he stepped on them.

Even when he had slept most of the day it was evident Jerry was not too happy about leaving Sally in Gulfport. He thought she was taking on too much water from the bottom, a problem he thought he had solved a month before. He had a friend looking after Sally and when no call came by Thursday he relaxed a bit.

Friday we drove back to Gulfport for the July 4th weekend. After the race from Gulfport to Biloxi on Saturday the family planned to cruise in the Gulf the rest of the weekend. There was a strong wind blowing as they readied for the race. I was apprehensive and in spite of Jerry's reassuring words Sean's remarks about sinking stuck in my mind.

"It's a reach, honey," Jerry explained. "See that wind? It is going to be behind us all the way and will push us right in. It is only 12 miles to Biloxi and we go straight down the Gulf. We can't possibly have any trouble."

He made it sound so simple I almost suggested that he drive the car and I would sail the boat.

It was a shame-faced skipper and disgusted crew

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that met us in Biloxi. "We had a lot of fun," Jerry said, "and we were doing alright until we went aground in the channel off Biloxi."

"Aground? Where was Jimmy, the channel expert?"

"Right beside me at the stick. It was just one of those things. We were lined up perfectly but your friend, Bart, forced us up and we went aground. The 15 minutes it took us to sail off put us back of the fleet."

Our plans to cruise to Ship and Cat Islands were scuttled by the heavy wind which was still blowing when we left for home on Monday. We spent the entire three days moored behind Deer Island. Saturday night Jerry dropped the big anchor because he was afraid that the Northill wouldn't hold and he put an extra heavy painter on the dinghy, Sal's Pal.

Wednesday night Pamela was reading the paper and asked, "Do you think it would be possible for two boats to have the same name down here?"

"Yes, it's possible," Jerry said. "Why?"

"Well, I've been reading the classified ads and this one says,

LOST--between Biloxi and Ship Island, 8' fiberglass dinghy, named Sal's Pal. Reward.

It was a chagrined skipper who reached for the paper and read the ad himself before he replied, "On second thought, Pamela, I think maybe there are not two dinghies by the same name of Sal's Pal. Gene must have been towing it when the line parted."

A badly leaking deck. A bottom plug taking on water. One spinnaker pole broken. And now a lost dinghy. It began to look more and more like Sally's days in the Gulf were numbered.

The same ad appeared in Thursday and Friday's morning and evening papers and we prepared to go back to Biloxi knowing Sal's Pal would not be making the return trip.

"The Glass Slipper is back from Pensacola," Sean volunteered as he helped his dad tie the reserve spinnaker pole on the car for the trip.

Jerry grunted, "I wish Sally was," was the first indication that maybe he was beginning to doubt the ability of the redoubtable Sally.

On arriving in Biloxi we could see Sally riding freely at her mooring.

"Well, she is still floating," Jerry said. "I'll find someone to get me out to the boat. You had better get started back so you won't be driving after dark. Don't look for us until noon Sunday."

At 7:05 Sunday morning I was wakened by the 'phone.

"Peggy? This is Jerry. We are in. We were the first boat to finish. I don't know how we will do on corrected time but we get a trophy for being first in. We beat Chula by 45 minutes."

"How was the trip? Did the deck leak much?"

"Wonderful. It never leaked a drop. Sally's a great old girl and I wouldn't take a million dollars for her!"

Yep, they don't build them like they used to!