



Breaking out spinnakers on the Forty-Footers as they cross the line

Racing on a Forty-Footer

By C. G. DAVIS

SOME thirty odd years ago, Chas. H. Tweed brought from England a forty-foot cutter called the *Minerva* and with Capt. Charlie Barr sailing her she put up a fight against all comers that makes the name *Minerva* one that all old yachtsmen respect. Such famous designers as Burgess, Gardner, Mumm, and Wintringham built a whole fleet of "forties" to try to get the best of this beautifully proportioned cutter, but it was not until Burgess had built half a dozen or more that *Minerva's* superiority was even in doubt.

I had the honor of being one of the racing crew on the Gardner cutter *Liris*, a long legged, big displacement craft with an enormous rig, and in her saw considerable of this forty-foot class racing. So, when Frank Strachan invited me, last Summer, to make the New York Yacht Club cruise with him on the *Monsoon*, a modern forty-foot class sloop, one of many de-

signed and built by Herreshoff, I gladly accepted.

Monsoon towed around from City Island behind her tender, the big power boat *Dixie*, and anchored at the rendezvous off Glen Cove on July 26, just after sundown, where I joined her. The following day, the first of the port-to-port runs, dawned warm and hazy and there was little or no wind when the flagship *Corsair* signalled the harbor start at nine o'clock. The sailing fleet consisted of nine schooners, varying in size from the big class C yachts, *Sonnica*, *Vagrant*, and the like, to the tiny sea-going *Sea Scamp* and *Sea Farer*. The big "fifties" were, of course, the main attraction in the single sticker division, and royal racing did they provide, as there were generally six of them starting; but the frolicking, fighting "forties" afforded just as good fun and generally put up as good a race as their larger sisters, six or seven starting as a rule each day.

Seven of the little "thirties" started and hung on well until the wicked conditions met with on the Block Island run discouraged them. Then there were several O boats, one N boat, and during the cruise others joined the fleet while some dropped out.

The first day's race was from Glen Cove to New Haven, a 38-mile run from the starting line between the Matinico buoy and the flagship to the finishing line off the westerly breakwater light at Morris Cove. As usual, there were a hundred and one things to be attended to the first morning. The *Dixie* had just been purchased by Mr. Strachan and had been put into commission hurriedly. The stove wouldn't burn and Noggi, the Jap steward, was frantic; breakfast was late; sails and spars had to be transferred to the *Monsoon*, so, after most of the yachts had gone drifting down with the ebb tide toward the starting line, we hove up and after

getting aboard *Monsoon* passed a towline and had *Dixie* tow us out.

There was only a suspicion of a breeze from the south of west and Long Island Sound was as smooth as a mill pond.

The schooners had started and the "fifties" were maneuvering for position before we got near enough to feel safe. We had cast off from our tow, when we heard the preparatory whistle, and our headway carried us well down towards the line.

Pauline, *Squaw*, *Shawara* and *Pampero* were bunched at the far end of the line as our time for starting narrowed down to seconds, so with balloon jib pulling and mainsail broad off to port we crossed several seconds after the signal for our class and the race was on. All our rivals were ahead of us. One, the *Pauline*, jibed her mainsail to starboard and stood north across the Sound, as most of the schooners had done. The "fifties" split, some hugging the Long Island shore and some standing across for the Connecticut shore and the "forties" did the same. We held a mid-Sound position; not that we wanted to, but by the time we got there it was such a flat calm that we had no alternative.

Monsoon drifted dead before a westerly air, a boiling hot sun made the decks uncomfortably hot, and we set and shifted spinnaker until all hands were disgusted. The hands of the clock went round the dial a couple of times and no relief came. *Pauline* had disappeared in the haze up under the north shore. *Squaw* had hauled across our stern in that direction. The fifty-footer *Acushla*, with her tall sails, found air enough to crawl out from under our bows and go for the north shore but we, and some of the boats astern of us, were in the doldrums. Some of our class were away to the south'ard and about mid-afternoon we had the pleasure of seeing an air hit in close to the Long Island shore and start that fleet moving and of seeing the boats up under the Connecticut shore catch an overshoot of the same southwesterly air and go moving along the beach.

By the time we finally felt this new wind we figured we were hopelessly beaten. But a race is never won until it's over, so when we felt a breath of air we trimmed sail and with wind on starboard quarter started moving through the water, gaining speed as the air hardened until we had a nice brisk sailing breeze.

Pampero and *Shawara* were abeam to the south'ard and we were

running neck, and neck with them; but what had happened in the haze to leeward, we could only surmise by the way the *Acushla* over there was leaving us astern.

However, about an hour before we finished, all doubts were dispelled as the haze cleared and we could see our rivals to leeward pulling ahead of us. And that's how we finished. *Pauline* first at 3:10:03, *Squaw* second at 3:18:40, *Monsoon* at 3:20:33, having forged ahead of the boats that were to the south of us. Behind us came *Pampero* at 3:26:37 and *Shawara* at 4:00:53.

So on our first day we finished third, but as we luffed up and anchored alongside our tender behind the stone breakwater in Morris Cove we determined to do better next day.

Thursday, July 28, was an ideal day for a yacht race. Our course was from New Haven breakwater to the bell buoy off Sarah's Ledge, New London, a distance of 39 miles. That we sailed this distance in less than five hours proves that we had a good breeze, and it was from the southwest which made it an easy sail with ballooners.

Monsoon got away to a good start when our signal was given at 9:50 a. m. and with balloon jib pulling hard and mainsail with a sprit-topsail set over it broad off, we led the "forties." Two were trying to luff out and get our wind, one was astern and two on our lee quarter. But there was wind enough for all just then and no yacht could gain any advantage over another, so the two windward boats elected to stand diagonally over toward Long Island.

Pampero tried the same tactics as *Pauline* did the day before, and bore away for the Connecticut shore, followed by *Shawara*.

The instructions required us to keep south of Cornfield Lightship and also Bartletts Reef Lightship, so we held a true course with a couple of little O class boats trailing us for miles before we could leave them. Off Faulkner's Island we could see a fifty-footer and our rival forty all but becalmed down there, and ahead, also, was a freak wind condition. There was an area of calm water from mid Sound to the Connecticut shore, while from there to the Long Island shore the wind was harder the farther south one looked. The big, black yawl *Paladin*, dead ahead of us, was all but becalmed and trying to beat out to the south'ard. *Sally Ann*, who had been running even with us under our lee, saw this danger and started to luff us, and did manage

to get ahead. We two ran out to the southward where the *Pauline* was traveling along by herself in a hard wind followed by *Squaw*. We came up just ahead of the former and all three started a luffing match, so we, on *Monsoon*, bore off quickly and left *Pauline* and *Sally Ann* to fight it out, so that, with their fooling, we footed ahead to a substantial lead when they finally decided to get busy and bore off after us.

But to catch us they had to bear away, and so soften the wind, while we could luff a little and harden the wind. The result was that when we go abreast of Plum Gut we had all the wind we wanted and bore off and set our spinnaker with a nice lead.

I don't know just how hard it was blowing but I do know *Monsoon* was traveling through the water as fast as her hull could go, pulling a comber up on each quarter that occasionally broke aboard, and water from aft was pouring a stream forward along her lee rail and meeting a stream coming down from forward that poured over the low rail into a vacuum amidships where the yacht's full bodied bows pushed all the water clear of her hull in two big rolling waves of foam.

We had rigged a topmast backstay and had the hooks of the tackle blocks well moused so they would not straighten out with the strain. It was well we did, for as we got farther to leeward and could see the *Corsair* marking the finish line ahead of us, we ran into a tide-rip that set the big *Monsoon* jumping like a hurdle jumper. How she did lift and jump! Everything was hissing white suds for yards about her and careful stick work was required to keep her from broaching as she rolled and sent her main boom heavenward one minute and her spinnaker soaring the next. We were logging a good ten knots and had both our nearest competitors well astern. It was only a question of keeping the stick in her and while some of us were discussing the advisability of taking in the spinnaker the *Pauline*, astern, broke her topmast, and down ahead of her on the water, like two great balloons, settled her spinnaker to starboard and her balloon jib to port while her top-sail hung flat against her mainsail like a broken wing.

What surprised me was the way the spinnaker carried along, bellied out full of wind, for a good minute after the mast went, before it flattened down on the water and was dragged aboard by her crew. The upper end of the peak halyard let go, being made fast at the topmast



The New York Yacht Club fleet leaving New London and drifting out to the starting line off Sarah's Ledge for the run to Block Island. From a photograph taken by the Fairchild Aerial Camera Corporation

head, and slacked down the peak of the mainsail a little, but she never luffed to clear away but came gamely on to the finish.

A moment later the cry, "There goes the yawl's topmast!" drew all eyes to the *Paladin* that we had passed and was now off on our port quarter. Down came an immense balloon jib with the topsail and wreckage as the big, black yawl luffed up into the wind to save her sail that was overboard. A moment later we saw the spinnaker boom on the *Squaw*, astern and to port of the *Pauline*, snap in two like a pipe stem. Oh! boy! there was some excitement out there in that little jumpy tide-rip, but *Monsoon* came on through it all like a tea clipper in trade winds and never parted a rope yarn, winning in the forty class.

Squaw overhauled and passed the crippled *Pauline* and finished second. *Sally Ann* nearly caught *Pauline*, before the latter with her wrecked gear finished.

Rather than crowd in on the limited accommodations of the *Dixie*, young Frank Strachan and I elected to sleep aboard the *Monsoon* as she had four, large, spacious bunks, though we went aboard the motor boat for our meals. Soon after six

o'clock the next morning I awoke, when the alarm clock forward roused out the crew, who were soon sloshing water about overhead as they washed down decks, followed by the thump of the squilgees. I could hear the man who sells New York papers rowing about in his skiff calling "New York and Boston papers!" could hear the cook start his galley fire, and then the smell of fresh cooked grub was too much for me. I got up and had a cup of hot coffee.

When young Frank was up and dressed we went aboard the *Dixie* and all hands, "Bob" Bavier, Will and Frank Strachan and we two had a swim, followed by one of Noggi's famous breakfasts. Then, after giving *Squaw* one of our spare spinnaker booms, we towed out for the start of the race, the course being to Block Island, 23 miles out in the ocean and, as it proved later, the race of the whole cruise.

A dead calm delayed the start until afternoon and it was 12:05 before the "forties" were sent away and even then the air was so light some of the schooners were hardly over the line when we, running along the line, as our starting signal blew, luffed across and stood out to clear Race Rock Light.

What wind there was, was southwest. Most of our class took the western or weatherly end of the line but we were clear of the crowd and in a leading position. Unfortunately for us, however, as we overhauled the schooners a mile or two out we had to go through the lee of them while *Squaw*, our nearest competitor, could go to windward.

We came right up among the schooners near Race Rock and there the wind left us all in the doldrums. With the tide setting us northeast across the shoals at the end of Fisher's Island we let go a light kedge anchor. Some of the schooners anchored, some (to keep off the rocks) had to hold a port tack and force a starboard tack boat to go under their stern—it was no time to argue over rules of the road—as the big deep draught schooners had to keep in deep water.

We found our cable trailed aft, so, although she was making leeway, we hauled up anchor and let her forge ahead. There was a tide rip around the rock the lighthouse was on and we noticed a floating box near it was drifting west so we held on, got into this eddy which shoved us to windward clear of the rocks and stood on with the ocean before us. *Squaw* had also weath-

ered the rock and was leading us, standing east. We held a more southerly course as we noticed the two leading "fifties" down that way were doing well, though one of them was working out east. *Squaw* didn't like the way we pulled ahead and soon hauled up after us and then she ghosted along where we could not find a breath—her very baggy sails were telling in her favor here.

We knew the tide was against us and a swell running in slapped all the air out of our sails in a way to drive one to despair. We tried to work northerly again to find an air—but all we found was calm and a slatting sea. *Squaw* seemed to be stealing ahead, but the rest of our class were all well astern. Then a thick haze shut in and all other yachts disappeared from view. We sang that famous ballad:

"And we stayed in the game
Until Block Island came
Just rolling and banging around."

and that certainly expressed it. Hours went by and matches we threw overboard stayed alongside of us most disgustingly.

Then, about sundown, there came a change in the air. A coolness set in and it was not a haze but a thick blanket of fog which enveloped us. Fog horns, of all tones, were bleating their discordant notes from all quarters. Something was coming. Rain it was, first in drops and then in sheets, then whole clouds dropped en masse and scuppers could not carry off the water. We didn't have oilers for all and so some shivered and shook and let streams of cold water run down our necks.

We took in all light sails, set our running lights and got ready for a squall that was brewing in the northwest. When it hit it laid the *Monsoon* flat for a moment. By our lighted binnacle, when the water ran off it long enough to see the lubber's mark, we found the squall had gone around westerly, so, after the worst was over, we tacked ship and ran before it at steamboat speed through a smooth sea, spattered thick with rain drops. Our horn kept up its warning; and though we could hear nothing when the worst of the squall was raging, it let up so again we could hear foghorns to the south and west of us.

When we ran out of that squall the wind had gone clear around to the southeast. We spied a sail; and who should it prove to be but our friend the *Squaw*? So, side by side, close hauled, we ran with her for some time, until we decided it was about time to lose her, when we split

tacks and stood to the south'ard, losing her in the darkness.

The southeasterly breeze hardened about ten o'clock and cleared the horizon, giving us a glimpse of Montauk's flash. We could just about lay our course for the Salt Pond so tacked and stood for it on the starboard tack with a chorus of horns to the south'ard showing several boats had gone too far that way.

You can't pick up the Island until Montauk light disappears astern and, sure enough, when the flash was gone, square over our taffrail, we thought we saw a glare in the low-lying clouds dead ahead. This we found later was the glare of the *Corsair's* searchlight thrown up as a guide to direct the yachtsmen to the finish line. It was pitch black. We made out a port light on our weather quarter but that was all we could see until we picked up the breakwater wink-light ahead. Then it cleared up as we drew near and we made out the *Corsair's* lights clearly and all but fetched the line just as we were going. To make sure of clearing the flagship we tacked to port for a moment and then came for the line; the judges threw their searchlight on the buoy and as we neared the line called through a megaphone "Bear down closer to the flagship." We did so, beating out the fellow whose port light we had seen to windward of us for the last half hour, and received a toot of the steam yacht's whistle announcing our finish at 11:11:12 P. M.

Then came a hail "What yacht is that?"

"*Monsoon!*" bellowed Frank, who needs no megaphone when he hails. "How many of the 'forties' have finished?" he then hailed and when the reply came, "None, you are the first" there was some thumping of backs and congratulating.

Later, we found out it was the "fifty" *Virginia* that finished right behind us, she and the *Monsoon* being only 26 seconds apart. The "forties" finished as follows:

Squaw at 11:16:00, *Shawara* at 11:31:43 and *Sally Ann* at 11:53:06.

Only one schooner made the island and that was the *Dervish*. She finished about 1 A. M. at Block Island.

Never yet have I made Block Island dry, and as it proved the race just completed was no exception. But when we awoke the next morning there was promise of a nice day. We draped the yachts with wet clothing but the air was so damp with fog the sun didn't do much drying until about ten o'clock, when

the fog cleared and we got under way with the fleet and stood out into Block Island Sound, when a nice, gentle southwesterly breeze set in, but soon died out to a flat, hot calm.

At 10 o'clock the flagship set a postponement signal. Notices had been sent around announcing a change in this day's course. Instead of going south around the southerly end of Block Island we were ordered to go north, straight away for Newport, R. I. Nothing was said about passing the buoys on the north end of the island, so when a nice, brisk southeasterly wind ruffed the water, coming out in a dark line from the Block Island shore, we ran close to the *Corsair* and asked about these buoys and were told to leave them to starboard—to keep west of them. We hailed several of our class rivals and they all understood it; all, as it turned out later, except *Pampero*.

Six schooners with ballooners started first, then the six "fifties" made a start and five minutes later, at 12:51, our starting whistle blew. All but *Shawara* and *Monsoon* carried balloon jibs and all crossed the line well bunched with *Monsoon* to leeward under jib and baby jib topsail, mainsail and sprit topsail. It was a reach to the wink buoy off the north end of Block Island but we figured the headsail we carried would do for the short run to the buoy and do better work from there on.

Our rivals all held a luffing match which carried them so close up under the island they went inside, or east, of a can buoy there which we kept west of, but later we learned that this was not a government buoy but was originally a white can buoy put down for submarine practice but which was now badly discolored. From there they bore away and ran a little ahead of us and went west of the wink light, all except *Pampero*, who hauled up with wind abeam and established a substantial lead and weather berth by doing so.

We were last around the "wink," and hauling up on a close reach we overhauled *Sally Ann* and *Shawara*. *Squaw*, with her full cut sails, held her lead dead ahead and *Shawara* by hauling up and hardening her wind regained the lead on us.

Pampero, out to windward, we considered out of the race and we lashed a protest flag in our lee rigging so the committee on *Corsair* could see it as they passed us to leeward.

Half way across the wind faired a little and we all set spinnakers.

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Racing On a "Forty"

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Just a few miles from the finish the wind hauled a bit more easterly and by trimming our mainsail in a little and letting our spinnaker boom go well forward we ran right past the *Shawara*, though her crew tried all kinds of sail trimming except the right kind to prevent us, and took second place—eliminating *Pampero*. We could not catch *Squaw*. She crossed the finish line at 3:17:40, *Pampero* at 3:19:59, we on *Monsoon* at 3:20:35, *Shawara* at 3:20:56 and *Sally Ann* at 3:21:55.

To go back to my remarks at the beginning of this article. Having sailed in both the old and the new 40-foot classes, I will say that the sport is just as keen and the present fleet of frolicking, fighting "forties" is every bit as good as it was in the old days away back in the 90's when the old "forties" hammered it out in many a hard fought race just as this new class of Herreshoff "forties" is doing today.