

First Attempt at Texas 200

Will Hemmick sailing a Gulf Coast 18'

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I learned a lot. This was my first time sailing in the Texas 200 and now two weeks after I am not counting the days till next year. I thought it might be hard but it was way harder than I had thought. It was harder on the boat and it was harder on me and my son Mason. When the turnbuckle on the forestay broke in Corpus Christi Bay on the way to Camp 4 it didn't take a lot of time to decide to end the effort after we had motored back to the marina. With a ride to the truck from Mike from Mississippi, thanks Mike, we were back home Friday morning. It was quite an adventure. The people were awesome. The scenery was beautiful. The wind and the waves were un-concerned with what we were trying to do. They weren't against us, we were just not prepared.

After stopping at Snoopy's for lunch under the Island Bridge in Corpus Christi, we bought ice and more gas and got underway heading towards Camp 4. Our plan was to sail the eastern edge of the bay to Stingray hole. All was going well. The night before we had repaired the delaminating rudder with a couple of S.S. plates I had added to the shroud chain plates before the trip and Trimaran John, had some 2"+ bolts and nuts to offer, Thanks John, We also tightened the lower prindle mount to the transom the night before. Those loose bolts were letting water into the boat but the lower nuts were under the cockpit floor and un accessible until we cut an access hole in the bench with a battery powered sawsall that Mark? the surveyor had. Thanks Mark. This rudder repair was all caused by the metal kick up rudder fin not staying vertical but kicking back 45° making the boat very hard to steer putting extra stress on the whole rudder assembly. The bracket to the tiller was bent from pulling so hard the first two days. Skip and John had diagnosed the rudder problem at Hap's Cut. Thanks guys. After tightening the swivel bolt it stayed vertical and was much easier to steer but the damage was already done. So, there we were, sailing to Stingray Hole. The wind and waves were growing again for the fourth day but we were still sailing. Our course was plotted, the tiller felt good and the boat was much dryer. I heard a pop and saw the jib start flapping. At first I thought it was a hank on connector that had broken again but when I saw the forestay turnbuckle flapping at the end of the Jib I knew it was bad. The only thing that was holding the mast up was the down haul line attached to the Jib. I gave Mason the tiller to steer to the wind and dropped the mainsail while supporting the mast the best I could. The Jib is flapping like crazy but it had to stay up to keep the mast supported. Luckily the line to the front cleat for docking was still attached from Snoopy's and I was able to reach forward and grab it to wrap around the mast. Once it was initially secured, I was able to toss the line over the shroud spreaders and secure it to the bow plate. Then finally bring the Jib down. This was a 10+ on the Oh Shit! scale. I really didn't think how dangerous it was until after I was back in the cockpit. I had a life vest on but wasn't tethered. Mason would have had a hard time rescuing me by himself. He did a great job steering when I was on the bow but with the Jib up and mast falling down it would have been Coast Guard time. We got the motor going and headed back to the marina. When we got there we called around to try and find another turnbuckle. West Marine said they might have one but we had to wait till 5:00pm to find out when the salesperson might be able to bring it to us. We weren't even sure it was the right size. Sitting there at Snoopy's with zero reserve energy I decided to stop, not knowing what could go wrong next and where we could find another marina if it did. I'm glad I did. After we got the mast down the poor condition of the mast rigging was more apparent. The boat was beat up. We were beat down but we didn't die. And the idea of doing it again isn't dead either; I'm just not counting the days.

Here is a little of what I learned. Some people make it look easy. I haven't figured that out yet.

Simplify your eating and sleeping tasks that require your energy. Save your energy for the fight.

Do with less stuff. Organize the stuff you do bring. Have handy places for stuff you use all the time, not packed away.

Bring more repair materials and tools according to the complexity and age of your boat. A fore stay won't break if you don't have one. Think about it, I have.

Fortify your boat. Inspect everything and don't accept anything less than bullet proof. Bullet proof is required. Bring extra turnbuckles, hah! It can really be rough out there. Note: Forensic inspection of my broken turnbuckle revealed a hairline crack I missed. It was a clean break on one leg and slightly tarnished on the other.

More than 2 anchors. We lost one.

Ice? It doesn't make it that much better. When you are out there even small comforts are overwhelmed by the harsh environment and intensity of the adventure. Just drink warm water and eat trail food. I was so tired the third day the simplicity of eating it cold out of a bag was welcome.

Do your (map) homework. I always hated it but it really helps when you're out there taking the test. Following someone isn't so good if they don't know where they are going either. Did that.

Learn who doing it singlehanded and watch for them if they need help. Don't be so concerned about getting there. I think I missed a chance to help because I was in survival mode the first day. (Really the whole trip). Maybe a singlehanded burgee?

Make less trash by bringing fewer things that make trash. Once you got it, it doesn't go away. I made way too much.

Shear pins and cotter pins for your outboard. I broke one in the shallows and luckily had a spare on the motor. I had forgotten to bring extras.

Don't cheap out on equipment. It might let you down hard. I bought a cheap outboard and luckily it worked, I was constantly worried about it working when the chips were down. And yes, several times the CHIPS WERE DOWN!!

This was neither a cheap nor relaxing vacation. It was pure adventure.

Hope to see you all again,

Will

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