

## Hello Kitty Sails the Texas200

June 2017

“Not all who wander are lost.” It seems this line from *The Lord of the Rings* has been a common thread in all of my adventures.

As the 2017 Texas200 approached, there was talk of a “Hard Way” and a “Traditional Route.” My husband, Chris, wanted to take the Hard Way but I have sailed upwind enough hours to last a lifetime and preferred to take what I referred to as the “Easy Way.” Because I love sailing the Lower Laguna Madre and didn’t want to pass that up in exchange for the challenge of beating upwind for 3 days, we agreed that we would each take our own boats. Chris, along with our dog, Gus, would take the Hard Way and I would go the Easy Way, meeting them in the middle at Camp 3.

My boat is a Gunter rigged Bolger Featherwind that I have had for several years. It is 16’ long and 4’ wide. Because I planned on taking it on the Texas200, I needed to modify the boat to lessen the volume of water it could hold in the event of a capsizing. With my admittedly poor woodworking skills, I closed in the stern compartment to make it water tight. I also extended the foredeck back about two feet, closing it in to make it water tight, as well. I installed a forward hatch and numerous deck plates for access to the interior. These modifications made the cockpit area a little over 6’ long which would allow enough space for storage of the ice chest, oars, and camp chair and still be adequate for me to sleep in.

I sent my sail off to the sailmaker and had two sets of reef points sewn in. I then added a second mast step, about a foot further aft, for improved balance when sailing with a reduced sail. In the event there was very light wind, I could move the mast to the original, forward mast step.

Painting and decorating were a lot more fun than building. I decided on a teal green and bright pink color scheme in keeping with the Hello Kitty theme. I have never been a Hello Kitty fan, have never really thought about it. When I first got the boat, large flowers were painted all over it and somehow it got dubbed *Hello Kitty*. In sanding the boat for repainting, I discovered other layers of painted on flowers. I then decided the flower theme needed to remain, sort of a karma thing I didn’t want to risk altering, I suppose. My painting skills are only slightly better than my woodworking skills, so I shopped online for flower and Hello Kitty stickers. I painted the mast, spars, and trim a bright pink and the rest of the boat teal green.

In the meantime, Chris built my new rudder and tiller. He used the Michael Storer design and it’s much nicer than the barn door rudder that came with the boat. He also helped me with the rigging for reefing and made decorative wooden cutouts of flowers for the mast holes.

A few weeks before the 200, my daughter, Meridith, asked if she could come along. She sailed the 2009 Texas200 with me on my O’Day Widgeon, *Dingleberry*, and had sailed several other Texas200’s since then. We had not spent much time together in the past few years because of her college schedule and summer jobs, but, as a recent graduate, she had a little time on her hands and could come on the trip.

What makes the Texas200 unique is that, even though it is always sailed along a similar route, each year presents a different challenge due to the weather, heat, gear, or who knows what. For example, in 2016, more than half the fleet dropped out due to high wind and gear failure, among other things. On our drive to Port Mansfield, Meridith and I talked about our first Texas200 in 2009. I have learned a lot about making repairs along the way since then and, if I didn’t learn anything else in 2009, I did learn that it’s a

lot harder to quit than it is to finish. We agreed that, no matter what happened, we would stick it out and finish at Magnolia Beach, even if we had to cobble together repairs to the boat or hunker down along the way and wait for better weather conditions.

We arrived at Port Mansfield and checked into our hotel to get the a/c running before going over to the boat ramp. Luckily, we have a short mast and could spend time rigging the boat across the street from the ramp without concerning ourselves with the power lines that traverse the roadway. Another participant on a catamaran with a tall rig was not so lucky and, in fact, grazed the power line with his mast when launching and put half of Port Mansfield out of power for several hours. The citizens of Port Mansfield seemed to take this in stride and restaurants remained open (although dark), so I suppose it must be a common occurrence.

*Hello Kitty's* rig is more complex and has more strings to pull than I prefer. In addition, any reefing changes have to be done by actually landing the boat and getting out. (This is certainly something I would want to improve upon and I decided I would change to a rig I am more comfortable with, the Balanced Lug, after the Texas200.) I had recently made some modifications to the rig, installing cleats for separate reefing lines called "snotters." Meridith and I decided we didn't like that term and instead referred to them as "kitten tails." We got them sorted out with the aid of some photos Meridith had taken of our practice rigging in the front yard before we left home. We set the boat up double reefed and then took it down and secured it to launch the boat.

The next day, Sunday, was truck and trailer shuttle day. We went to the 7 a.m. Skipper's Meeting and then, while I took the truck and trailer to Magnolia Beach and rode the shuttle bus back to Port Mansfield, Meridith got everything stowed on the boat and went back to the hotel for a nap.

The first 2 days of the Texas200 were wonderfully uneventful, sailing down the ICW with a firm breeze at our backs. The quiet beauty of this remote section of Texas is why I love the Texas200. The usual array of dolphins played around our boat providing endless entertainment. One of the dolphins must have been "texting and driving" because it startled itself when it bounced off the side of our boat. We were having problems with our Vhf and GPS, as they were both burning through batteries at an alarming rate. Apparently, the batteries we bought at Wal-Mart in Kingsville were out of date. We had a large number of them, however, so we simply kept replacing them.

Day 3 happened to be Chris and my wedding anniversary. For those of you who do not know us, we met on the Texas200 at Paul's Mott in 2009. Three years later, we had our wedding ceremony there, performed by Andy Linn in full "Princess Bride" regalia. Meridith and I would be meeting Chris and the others that night at Camp 3, so we stopped at Marker 37 and filled the ice chest with beer and ice for a proper anniversary celebration with friends. After we did our shopping, we had a nice lunch at Marker 37. While we were tied up at the dock, we reefed down to the 2<sup>nd</sup> reef point in preparation for our crossing of Corpus Christi Bay.

We had a brisk breeze when we entered the bay but, with our 2<sup>nd</sup> reef in, were sailing fairly comfortably. We needed to cross the bay to get to Stingray Hole, our entrance to the ICW, and decided to cut straight across the bay rather than try to hug the shore as we had originally planned. With our low freeboard, we were taking in occasional waves which gave Meridith something to do as she continuously bailed out the boat. I was feeling comfortable with our progress and was surprised when we had a near capsize. Meridith wasn't going to let that happen though, and quickly crawled and scratched her way to the high side and parked herself on the rail. We continued on for a bit but, sensing Meridith's discomfort and not

wanting to risk a capsize, I changed course and headed for Shamrock Island, to cut around the back of it and get to Stingray Hole with the protection from the land to our advantage.

As we approached Shamrock Island, Meridith was studying the chart and GPS and suggested we try to make our way to the ICW through the area East of Shamrock Island. Looking at the chart, it appeared to be a shallow area of narrow canals with one small cut through to the ICW. We saw quite a few fishing boats heading in there so we decided to give it a shot. We spent about an hour looking for the cut that was on our chart but not in sight until we decided to ditch the idea and head back across the bay to Stingray Hole. By now the wind had let up a bit and the task did not seem so daunting. We turned around, shot out of the mangroves, and got through Stingray Hole and into the ICW in a short time.

As I mentioned before, to make any reefing changes on *Hello Kitty*, I have to land the boat somewhere, a time consuming process but one that was now necessary. The wind was beginning to get lighter and, because I would need to tack some to get through the Lydia Ann Channel, I was going to need to take out the 2<sup>nd</sup> reef. We stopped to do this and when we started sailing again, I could see we were not going to make it past the ferry landing before dark. Not only do I not have running lights or a motor on *Hello Kitty*, I didn't want to tangle with ferries and commercial traffic in the dark. I made the decision that we would stop for the night, camp on the shore of the ICW, and leave at first light for Camp 3, hopefully catching up with our group.

We secured *Hello Kitty* with a long bow line tied to a tree and I walked out the anchor from the stern to keep her from swinging. As soon as I got the boat secured, I got my phone out of the dry box to call Chris and let him know we were ok. When I turned the phone on, I saw his message: "If you don't call within 15 minutes, I'm calling the Coast Guard." Luckily, the message had just come in and, once he was assured we were in a safe place, Meridith and I got busy getting camp set up. She walked up the beach a short distance and suddenly we heard a coyote yelping in fear and then barking at us. It must have been a very young coyote that was startled by its unexpected visitors. After we got the tent and air mattresses in place, we sat on a log and watched several ships go by. The water would slowly recede, leaving *Hello Kitty* high and dry, and then slowly come back in. The bow line and stern anchor were holding her in place. I knew I had made a good decision to stop for the night and we enjoyed stargazing as we sipped an anniversary beer.

We set our alarm for 4:30 on Day 4 and were under sail at first light. Of course, just as we approached the most narrow part of the Lydia Ann Channel, we were met by an oncoming ship. I grew up sailing in Galveston Bay, so I'm accustomed to sailing in the ship channel. Just the same, I was relieved when we finished this section of our trip, having dodged ferries, ships, and other commercial traffic. We got to Camp 3 about 10:00 and, of course, the group was long gone. Chris and Gus were there, waiting for us, and our good friend, John Goodman, had hung around to make sure we made it. He left right away, hoping to make Army Hole by evening, and we set off shortly thereafter.

As we approached Paul's Mott, where we had been married 5 years before, I saw Chris luff up ahead. Thinking he had some sort of trouble, I altered course to sail closer to him. As I neared, I heard him shout, "I still love you more than shrimp!" I shouted back, "I still love you more than my wiener dog – almost!" Thus, having renewed our vows, I hauled in on the mainsheet and continued on.

We were still having problems with our Vhf and GPS batteries and, late in the afternoon, called Chris on the cell phone to discuss the issue. He suggested we stop at Panther Point. Meridith and I thought he meant we would stop there for the night so, while he was digging through his gear looking for spare

batteries for us, we were unloading our camping gear and setting up camp. In retrospect, we might have been able to make it to Army Hole by dark-thirty but I was pretty tired, having already sailed over 50 miles that day, and the idea of relaxing at camp, eating chicken and sausage gumbo and sipping anniversary beer was very appealing, so that is what we did. Our dog, Gus, was very tired, as well, and the four of us crammed into the tent and slept quite well that night. Everyone but Meredith, that is, as was evident in the morning when she played the recording of our stereophonic snoring from the night before.

Our final day of the 200 was another great sailing day. After we left Panther Point, we headed for the cut to the ICW. Chris was ahead of us and, as we approached the cut at Port O'Connor, he pulled over to let Gus out for a bathroom break. When he got underway again, he tacked and Gus was swept off the boat. He was in very shallow water and Gus, always wearing his Pfd, was able to quickly swim back to the boat and they got underway again. I have always enjoyed this section of the ICW with the houses and businesses, fishing boats, and, of course, a little commercial traffic. It is sort of like a return to civilization from the lower Laguna Madre. We arrived at Magnolia Beach in time for the shrimp boil. It was great to be able to visit with our friends before loading up the boat and heading for air conditioning.

“Not all who wander are lost.”

Cathy Tomsett  
*s/v Hello Kitty*





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