

NOTES FROM A NEWBIE AT THE TEXAS 200

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SEPTEMBER 2017

1. I read all the advice I could find about preparation – and I'll distill it down a bit. All of it was very useful.
 - a. Plan for continuous sunlight 14 hours a day. Hence you must cover yourself head to foot, and your feet. And use sunscreen. And wear shoes with toes and heavy soles. There are plenty of razor like oyster shells at every campsite.
 - b. Have a way to create shade once you are at the campsite, because you will want it. But note – Beach umbrellas won't work (mine didn't) Campsites back into the wind and face the setting sun. The best thing I saw was a good sized pavilion that properly adjusted gave shade and a breeze. But it had to be tied down well, and did get beat to death.
 - c. Prepare to sail in 20 knots or more of wind for 6 to 8 hours. A few things follow, especially if you are single handing like I was.
 - i. Everything you need must be at hand. In this kind of wind there is no leisure to look for stuff. So make sure you can reach food, water, etc. while keeping a hand on the tiller and probably the mainsheet as well. That includes a floating VHF radio on a lanyard attached to yourself. And a PFD.
 - ii. Seating comfort. My Harpoon has wooden benches with no back rests. I found a way to attach a padded stadium seat that could be moved back and forth from starboard to port and it made a world of difference.
 - iii. Seating comfort 2. Chaffing. "Going commando" is not a bad option. You're going to be wet, or sweaty, or both.
 - iv. Anything that can break will break, so be prepared for repairs while underway or in camp. My tiller extension broke off (stainless steel just snapped under the strain of constant weather helm), my back stay broke, and my boom crutch broke. And it could have been worse. Carry all the basic hand tools (including a hacksaw), replacements for blocks and lines, extra eyepads, all kinds of fasteners, and plenty of heavy duty zip ties and duct tape.
 - v. Double check and replace any weak points. Especially rudder gudgeons and everything associated with your keel. YOU WILL HIT A SANDBAR. The best advice I got was to install quick release cleats on both the rudder lines and the keel lines. BUT – make sure they are adjusted properly. The first two days I hit sand coming into camp and the rudder kicked up but the keel didn't. Meaning I spun around and sailed out while desperately fighting to bring the rudder down. You want to lose the keel before the rudder and not visa versa.
 - vi. Reefs. Need I say more? The first few hours I was suckered into full sail and quickly found myself busier than a one legged man in a butt kicking contest as I lowered and stowed the jib then got reefs in the main. I found that the Harpoon would do hull speed with a single or double reef in the main and no jib. In the future I'll get a storm jib just to balance the helm better. Its not a race, so going

slow for a few hours is a reasonable price to pay for not having to reef in a sudden burst of 25 knot wind.

- vii. Navigation. My Navionics on the Ipad was worthless in the sun. On the smart phone barely better. You can review your charts at night. I found it worked best to make a running list of compass bearings and land marks and sail the old fashioned way with a compass and landmarks.
- viii. Stow and secure. I didn't go over, but I understand the conditions were relatively benign. And I did come close. Fortunately I had everything in waterproof bags, and it was all secured behind cargo nets forward under the cutty cabin or tied down within reach of the tiller.
- ix. Motor? There is at least one place going through Port Aransas where the slightest miscalculation will leave you pretty helpless on a lee shore. I realized quickly that my little trolling motor was worthless in these conditions. I got through by continually pinching on the wind shifts, but I think I'll get a little Honda in the future just in case.
- d. Water and Food – you need to drink a gallon a day. I brought 10 gallons and was grateful to rinse off a couple of times. I brought all cooked food and gave up the first day on pulling out the camp stove. Too much work for too little reward.

Basically I found 5 days of granola bars, V8, and various forms of meat and cheese in tortillas worked for me. Instant coffee can be mixed 2 packets to one pint water bottle with relative ease. Beer can be kept cold for 5 days if you use a good marine ice chest, keep it shaded, and layer in dry ice, a frozen alcohol water mixture, and regular ice. For complex thermo dynamic reasons they will each fail in succession over the 5 days while keeping their successor cold enough. There is a feeling that dry ice attracts mosquitos. Not in the wind we had.

- e. Toilette needs. Under the conditions that prevailed I suggest you abandon all pretense of modesty and hygiene and do what is necessary. A shovel is useful in camp. So are scuppers and a scoop to rinse your deck with bay water.
- f. Landing. What finally worked for me was coming in on a beam reach at full speed, turning toward the beach (and into the wind) letting the keel and rudder kick up while the sail luffed, then dashing forward to heave the anchor toward the shore. With 8 feet of heavy chain rode it never failed to catch. Then I hopped out, waded to the anchor, and dragged the boat closer to shore. Sometimes I slept on the boat at anchor, sometimes on shore. But unless you can sail into the wind and have a 4 inch draft you won't beach it easily.
- g. Did I mention shade? However you can manage it, having both shade and the breeze at the campsite is a good thing. On the boat I used a boom tent made of a cheap tarp. On land – well I looked for new friends. Did I mention the high value of bungee cords in rigging up this kind of stuff? Next year shade will occupy my preparations.
- h. And for us lake sailors. SALT, both air and water. Everything on the Harpoon that wasn't quality stainless steel started rusting before I got the boat in the water the first day. 30 years of repairs (mine and previous owners) that were fine because

they'll never really be in water were well on their way to decomposition after five days of salt air.

2. Just do it. I'm a relatively new sailor (about 7 years), neither young nor athletic. But with adequate preparation of the boat (lots of thanks to others who offered ideas) and safety this was both possible and a great experience.