

RACING HERRESHOFF TWELVES

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32 H-12s battle
for the best
starting position!



If you've ever sailed through Woods Hole, you know how unnerving the passage can be, even for large powerboats. In a small boat, under sail power alone, it can be downright frightening.

Once you pass the red gong at the entrance to the channel near Nobska Point, you may feel the current gathering. After you travel a bit farther, it pulls you along so quickly that it feels as though you are skating on ice, with only the careful set of the sail and a steady hand on the tiller keeping you from losing control and crashing into the rocks on either side.

If you've memorized the chart for the Hole, you know exactly where you need to maneuver. With the current pushing you through, you turn left at G "5" and take the shortcut through Broadway, (the passage with the big rocks fouling both sides of the narrow channel), and then left again on to The Strait just after the notoriously dangerous Middle Ledge.

After you have completed the passage, and have been pushed out the other side of the Hole and into the Bay, relief sets in that half the trek from Edgartown to Marion

is now behind you. All told, the voyage home would be a long one: By the time you catch your mooring in Sippican Harbor, you would have been on the water for nearly 10 hours, travelling, with all the tacking, close to 30 miles.



We had sailed to Edgartown a few days beforehand to race in this regatta, and now we had a short window in which to sail back while the weather still held. We had donned our foulies, cast off the mooring in Edgartown, and found ourselves fighting a steadily increasing northerly wind as we reached the outer limits of the harbor where it fed into Nantucket Sound. Wind from this quarter meant almost a dead beat for the entire eleven miles we had to travel through Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds to get to Woods Hole.

Sailing with a soggy, barely readable chart can be a little tricky, especially upon leaving Edgartown Harbor, and trying to figure out where it's safe to start heading



Jon Pope of Beverly Yacht Club at the helm of Water Lady, maneuvers at the offset, ready to hoist the spinnaker.



Jay Fisher of Buzzards Yacht Club, past Championship winner, rides Escape through the swells.

north. There are lots of shallows there, and we'd have to keep an eye out—even with a draft of only 2½ feet—for rocks.

We ventured out on a reach, keeping Middle Flats to port, following the buoys to stay with the deeper water, and then began to head for Woods Hole, turning more northward, sailing close on the wind. We had a long way to travel, and so we settled in and sailed our best course, tried in vain to keep things dry, and prayed that the wind wouldn't let us down.

We were at the mercy of mother nature's schedule, hoping to get to the passage in time for a favorable current, or even better, slack water, to make our way through to Buzzards Bay. Finally, after hours of having sailed hard all morning, we arrived at the entrance to Woods Hole, earlier than expected, to find that the northwest current was still pouring through it from Vineyard Sound into the Bay—as the channel markers straining against their chains very visibly attested.

The Vineyard ferry passed us as we approached, and the only other boats we encountered were a couple of very large ones, who were valiantly steaming away against the flow, heading to

the Vineyard. Despite the current, we decided to make a go for it anyway, rather than wait the two hours until the momentary tidal equilibrium of ebb and flow, otherwise known as slack tide.

This was the H Class Championship, carrying on the beloved tradition of racing the venerable Herreshoff Twelves. And yes, our epic voyage from Edgartown back to Marion was sailed in this little 16-foot boat, with its open cockpit—the very boat famously designed by none other than Nathanael Herreshoff himself. These beautiful boats are sailed and raced religiously at our home port in Marion, and they have a lovely and long tradition on all of Buzzards Bay, most notably at Wing's Neck, Quissett, Marion, and Naushon.

The Herreshoff Twelve was designed by Nathanael Herreshoff in 1914, and delivered to clubs in Buzzards Bay in time for racing during the summer of 1915.

In the Beverly Yacht Club's 1915 yearbook, the names of some of those first Herreshoff Twelves were penciled in, signaling the modest beginnings of Beverly's fabled racing fleet, which would grow to include more than 70 boats in the 1930s.

Today, there are hundreds of Twelves racing all over the country, many of them having been passed down by their families, still cherished generations later. Beverly's fleet continues to flourish, having recently celebrated its 100th year of racing these boats, as well as the 90th anniversary of its legendary Ladies' Racing Series.

Luckily, the Twelves were designed especially to withstand even the most demanding of Buzzards Bay conditions. In the old days, races were held even in the roughest of weather, and in the long-yellowed press clippings in the Beverly Yacht Club's archives, stories abound with tales of dismastings, and other heavy-weather disasters the racing fleet endured over the years. As recently as 2014, in the Beverly series races, two of our fleet were dismasted in heavy winds and generous seas.

But even amid a dismasting, the Herreshoff Twelve is unwaveringly seaworthy, and she won't capsize, swamp or sink. Having been aboard one of those dismasted boats myself, I can tell you firsthand that for such a dramatic event, it's surprisingly gentle the way the sails, supported by the wind, float the mast down much more slowly than one might imagine. It's the clean-up on the rough water that is the real challenge, gathering and organizing the shrouds and forestay, and all the halyards, and unlacing the sails amid roaring winds and incessant waves.

Near the bar at Beverly, we have a jagged stump of a mast on display, with a plaque bearing the names of the boats that have

suffered such fate. Some would proudly call it a badge of honor. At the very least, it makes a good story told from the comfort of a warm, dry bar stool.

As a fitting tribute to the fleet's 100th anniversary, Beverly Yacht Club hosted the 2015 H Class Championship in Marion, and it was a beautiful sight to see 36 Twelves racing out by Centerboard Shoal, in classic Buzzards Bay tradition. True to form, the Bay offered up one of her trademark, smoky Sou'westers for both days of racing, and the wind built steadily to about 20 knots in the afternoon, gusting higher, enhanced by relentless seas of four to five feet.

The conditions were certainly challenging, testing the skills of even the most experienced of the sailors. It's a challenge to maintain control of a Twelve while getting knocked about in a good blow, thrusting and parrying with the wind gusts, trying to win the fight to keep the boat upright and the coaming out of the water—while still going fast.

It takes a certain nerve to sail her well, maneuvering from wave trough to wave crest, especially on a run with the spinnaker fully loaded, the boat pitching precariously from side to side, and that larger-than-life mainsail threatening a flying gybe at any moment. Our trusty boat proved up to the challenge, and while other boats had equipment failures of one sort or another, we emerged relatively unscathed, save for lots of painful bumps and bruises.

One had to hold on to avoid getting pitched around the

On the leeward leg, team Beverly makes a valiant effort with Lickety Split, Tiger Tale, Swan Song, and Brooznoll in the top six.





Terry Cronburg of Buzzards Yacht Club battles the seas in Lorelei coming in 2nd overall in the regatta and taking home the "Savvy Sailor" award, given to the highest scoring skipper over age 65.

2016 REGATTAS

June 11: Spring 'Round the Bay Regatta, www.mattapoissettyc.org

June 18-19: John Bentley Regatta "2016 Championship of Buzzards Bay," www.nbyc.com

July 16: Beverly Yacht Club Tower Race and Herreshoff Pursuit/Handicap Regatta, www.beverlyyachtclub.org

July 23: Barking Bulldog Regatta, www.mattapoissettyc.org and Van Rensselaer Memorial Trophy Race Day, www.beverlyyachtclub.org

July 29-31: H Class Championship, at Quissett, www.herreshoff12.org

July 30: Edgartown 'Round the Island Race, www.edgartownyc.org

Aug. 5-7: Buzzards Bay Regatta, www.buzzardsbayregatta.com

Aug. 14: Ensign National Championships, www.mattapoissettyc.org

Aug. 27: Sou'Wester Regatta, www.beverlyyachtclub.org

Sept. 10: Quissett 'Round the Bay Race, www.quissettyachtclub.org

This is only a partial listing. For other sailing activities in Buzzards Bay, consult Southern Mass Sailing Association at www.smsailing.org.

inside of the cockpit; staying on the seat was an athletic endeavor in and of itself, never mind hoisting and dousing the spinnaker—or worse—gybing the mainsail. We were drenched and freezing cold for two whole days, with the boat taking endless waves over the bow. Sitting forward as the crew does, it's as though someone is hurling buckets of water into your face, and in no time, sunglasses are rendered useless, sunscreen is washed away, and your hands look as though they've been in a bath for days.

Pumping out the bilge while still more water pours in seems an exercise in futility, though the exercise does help keep one warm. Despite such discomforts, the Championship was a resounding success, with Beverly boats coming in first and third, enabling the Beverly team to win back the coveted team trophy, after many long years of it having resided in the hallowed halls of the Buzzards Yacht Club. 🌊

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