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# One-Design & Offshore



## **YACHTSMAN**

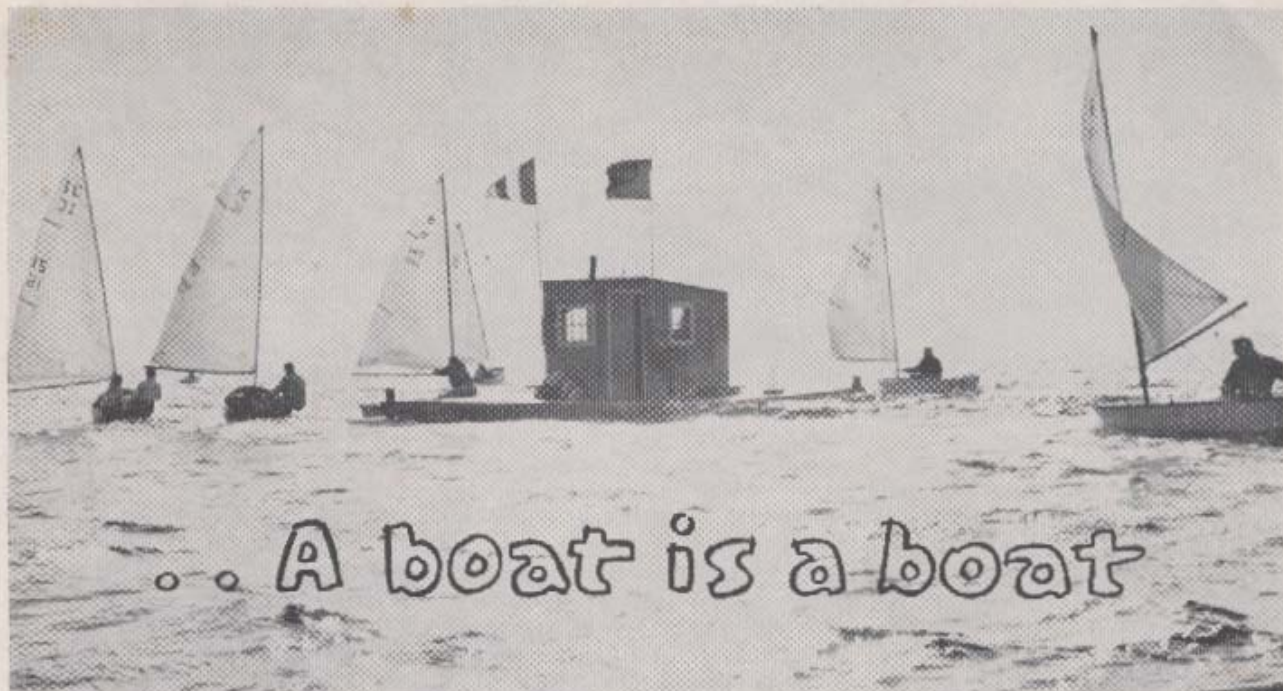
THE MAGAZINE OF SAILBOAT RACING



*Frostbiting at Larchmont*

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## .. A boat is a boat

By BOB SMITH

with Photos by Sue Cummings

### Frostbiting—Antidote for Alcoholism

**A** LONG TIME ago, before girls, advertising and stretch pants made skiing a popular winter social activity, a group of enthusiastic and expert Long Island Sound yachtsmen succeeded in making sailboat racing a year-round sport in their home waters. At first, the thought of going out for a sail in the wintry blasts of the North Atlantic during January and February chilled many hardy souls. However, after closer examination, it proved to be no more terrifying than sliding down a frozen marshmallow-covered hill on one's backside. In addition, it came to light that it was really less uncomfortable to be dunked in chilly water than it was to remove the village oak by the force of one's anatomy at terminal velocity. Should anyone still question the sanity of the addicts connected with either activity, remember that the longer one stays outdoors in any weather, the less drinking time remains; consequently the longer one can stave off alcoholism.

Some years ago, as neophytes, we tried a weekend of this cool-type madness in Penguins ("Boat is a Boat" #1, May 1963) and ended with mixed emotions and frosted derrières. However, since that time, the leaders of our great and glorious *O-D&OY* have applied pressure on the Cold Man of the Sea to try another dinghy hash among

the ice cubes. A pink "or else" slip secreted in a recent communication from said magazine convinced me that something worthwhile could come of it. It also came to pass on a hot summer's day, at the Noroton Yacht Club, that we made a deal with Bus Moshbacher of Starboat fame (12-Meters too!) to share his Inter-Club Dinghy #56 for the coming winter's Frostbite season at Larchmont. Everything worked out so well that, full of confidence and with a feeling of doom, I returned the pink slip to its author.

The Larchmont Frostbite racing schedule started on October 30 and it includes almost all Sundays through April 9. In addition, three Saturdays and most all holidays are thrown in to keep the competitors in good health. A gala three day invitational "freeze-out" is scheduled over the New Year at Manhasset Bay. Well over a hundred dinghies participated (bored with TV football, I'm sure). Races are scrubbed if the harbor becomes solid ice, the wind is blowing the varnish off the mast or there is no wind at all.

The races, starting at 1:30 PM, are short (under a 1/2 mile) and the race committee starts a new one just as soon as the last boat crosses the finishing line. On good days, as many as eight races have been recorded before Jack Frost clutched the tiller at sundown.

Six or seven are usual for average weather conditions.

The starting technique used by the race committee at Larchmont is worth noting for anyone interested in promoting Frostbite dinghy racing in their area. It is very effective and makes the carrying of a stop watch unnecessary.

- 1 A number of short blasts on a portable horn is considered the warning before the two minute preparatory signal.
- 2 Preparatory Signal — two long blasts: two minutes to go.
- 3 One long and one short blast: 1 1/2 minutes to go.
- 4 One long blast: one minute to go.
- 5 Three short blasts: 30 seconds to go.
- 6 Two short blasts: 20 seconds to go.
- 7 Count Down: 10 blasts for 10 remaining seconds.
- 8 Start: one long blast.

**E**VEN BEFORE the racing commenced, Sue and I ran afoul of one of the rules. The I.C. Dinghy is a two-man boat and the minimum weight limit for both is 300 pounds. Wearing all the winter woolies that we owned plus a few nautical items like life vest, foul weather gear, boots, etc. we weighed only 290.

As I absolutely refuse to carry, in a capsizable boat, any extra weight that





*These little puddle jumpers can and do capsize without much urging.*

can sink, we brought up our poundage to legal limits by adding a large plastic bottle filled with water. In this way the yacht would not be dragged under if she went over. With due respect to the time of the year, we have since replaced the water with ten beautiful pounds of heat-producing brandy — anti-freeze, you know. This practice is not recommended for summer competition.

Our initiation into the business of soft ice boat racing was as exciting, sinew building and frustrating as any we have experienced. Although the bruises we acquired en route have long since been covered by layer upon layer of newer ones, I will describe it as best I can.

The wind was a gusty (3 to 20 mph) shifty northwester and the temperature was around 40 degrees as we sailed to the starting area in Larchmont's well sheltered harbor. The committee boat consists of a raft about 25 feet square, in the middle of which is mounted a large out-house like structure. (I can assure you, within its walls are all the comforts of home and more!) It is towed and anchored in place by a power boat, usually no more than two hundred yards from the yacht club. Even though 30 to 40 dinghies tried to smother the craft, we had no trouble finding it.

Years of "big" boat racing had made us completely unfamiliar with the nervous, quick motions of a dinghy and the puffy wind didn't help either. Needless-to-say, horns started hooting to get ready for something and we weren't ready for anything that happened thereafter.

The starting line was mixed up somewhere with what looked like a herd of butterflies with very little purpose. So, what I thought might be a crazy wild start, turned into bedlam as the horns hooted some more.

Worried about my safety, the good looks of the Mosbacher dinghy and my not knowing what was coming next, I made every effort known to man to get out of the way. This was a Herculean task as the entire population were on the starboard tack. Panting and exhausted, we found safety on one side of the 150 yard weather leg — I don't remember which. As we stood back to gather our wits and see what was going on, the wind shifted drastically and wouldn't you know it, we were fighting for the lead.

While congratulating ourselves by saying "it is better to be lucky than good", we realized that, in all the excitement of staying upright during our pre-start maneuvers, I had neglected to even notice what course we were supposed to sail. Strangely, I was never more happy to have a few dinghies pass and show me the way. A fourth was my reward for not knowing anything. However, it sure made me willing to learn.

Race after race followed in rapid confusion and our finishes went from the ridiculous to the sublime and back. In any of the seven completed races, I never really located the starting line at the right time and after 433 pinball machine-type tacks, our score was above the middle but many butterflies from the top.

We have since sailed more Sundays and as we learned, our score became worse. Only on rare occasions did we make the hero circle. However, let me say in a firm and unashamed fashion that we are completely "hooked" by this healthy, fun-filled form of winter activity that only slightly resembles yacht racing. We are determined to become great Frostbite dinghy sailors even if it takes the rest of the week.

**I**N MY OPINION the most important "secret" involved in the sport of

Frostbite sailing is the wearing of proper clothing. Once that item is solved and you are comfortable, the rest is a lot of fun, exercise and practice to become a better cockle shell sailor. In a good breeze, the athletics involved do not permit the addition of layer upon layer of overly warm clothes, giving one the invulnerability of a lighthouse. Still, on light "sit still" days, the cold can become bothersome. As far as we can learn, every skipper and crew has his or her own theory.

Ours revolves around a skin diver's wet suit that is not only warm, but is a life preserver considered among the best. Additional sweaters, a light life jacket and foul weather gear worn over the suit adds further warmth to the torso and protects the suit from tearing.

Hands and feet are not only the most vulnerable points but the most difficult to protect. In solving this problem we discovered the Fulton Supply Store in lower Manhattan. For years this fine unfancy store has supplied practical, heavy duty clothing for lobstermen, fishermen, ocean racers and now Frostbiters. Heavy wool mittens under vinyl lobstermen's mittens did the job for the hands in extreme cold weather. In milder conditions, I usually go bare handed or wear a pair of waterproofed leather gloves that enable me to handle the lines better.

To keep my feet warm I start with a pair of light wool socks under my skin diver's booties. A pair of heavy wool fisherman's socks over the booties come next and finally my Top Sider boots over the lot for traction and waterproofing. Sometimes I put a felt sole in the boots before I put them on. The whole outfit works great as I can vary the amount of outer clothing to the temperature of the day.

The thought that constantly lurks in the mind of a neophyte Frostbite sailor is the possibility of capsizing in the winterized bay. Make no mistake about it, these little puddle jumpers can and do capsize without much urging. It was on our third or fourth Sunday that we became "hooked up" with another boat and with great beauty and little dignity we went over.

From first hand experience we can truly say that the dunking was not nearly as horrifying physically as we had pictured it to be. Of course, the wet suits helped, but the air is always a lot colder in the winter than the water underneath it — otherwise you could walk home. Larchmont's top flight patrol boats can fish a person out within



minutes and we managed the entire episode with no more discomfort than wounded pride, as have a great many others during the years of winter sailing competition. I must repeat, that the thought of capsizing is much more frightening than the physical experience.

**T**HE YEAR was 1930 when the late Bill Taylor of *Yachting Magazine* introduced winter dinghy racing to the boating public on Manhasset Bay in Long Island Sound. It was promptly named "Frostbiting" and another group was soon formed at the Larchmont Yacht Club. Involved at this time in the many facets of this great new movement to widen the horizon of summer yacht racing were some of the greatest names in yachting. Here are some of them: John Alden, Bob Bavier Sr., Clinton Crane, Bill Crosby, Fred Goeller, Alex Guest, Dick Hill, Ray Hunt, Arthur Knapp, Charlie Mower, Nick Potter, George Ratsey, Ed Raymond, Walter Rowe, Corney Shields, Olin Stevens, Jack Sutphen and Sam Weatherall. I'm sure there are more because the whole idea captured the imagination of most yachtsmen.

Here was an opportunity to learn all the intricacies of racing such as rules, tactics and the feel of a boat and to be ready for those early summer races. There is no question that it trains a helmsman to be quick and alert — or swim. If his decisions are hesitant, he can lose eight or ten places in the bat of an eye. It can also develop the lung power of any skipper to the pitch of a wounded moose when he thinks that he is being or going to be fouled, which is almost constant on a heavily overcrowded race course. It's a fascinating business that pays off in the summer and in muscles.

### The Boat

In the early days, dinghies in competition were as individual as any a development class could muster. All initial attempts to attain one-design principles were met with little cooperation. It took the efforts, will and determination of the "Great White Yachting Father" Cornelius (Corny) Shields to finally accomplish this end. In 1934 he successfully "put over" the Nick Potter-designed B One-Design (BO) dinghy as the first Frostbite one-design class on Long Island Sound.

In 1945, Corny, with amazing dedication and with the help of some "name" experts pioneered the newer plywood Inter-Club Dinghy, designed

specifically for winter competition by Olin Stevens. This craft not only replaced the older BO's, but grew to over 50 boats at Larchmont alone. After some resistance, Manhasset responded with some 25 and a sizable fleet sails during the Marblehead winters. The Inter-Club is now being made of fiberglass by the O'Day Corp. and to quote Corny, "there conceivably could be as many as a thousand spread across the country."

The Inter-Club Dinghy is 11 feet, 6 inches overall and has a beam of 4 feet, 7½ inches. Her 72 square feet of sail on an aluminum extruded mast features a loose foot. She is one of the prettiest small boats I have ever seen and is most sturdily built. Consequently she is heavy for her size. Her main feature, to my mind, is in being quite dry in a chop. This is most important for winter sailing because a hockey game between helmsman and crew could result in a spray (turning to ice) filled bilge.

The Inter-Club does not have high-performance characteristics and does not plane readily. However, I do not think this is important for winter sailing. She could be a better boat with flatter after sections and firmer bilges for additional stability but make no mistake about it, she is a good boat for her chilly purpose.

**T**HE RACING GROUP at Larchmont features the hottest, fiercest and most knowledgeable group of large and small boat sailors I have ever seen assembled under one snow drift. The boat shows, here and there, the results of their keen sailing brains. At present, dominating the point scores with a few exceptions, is a group of top flight Finn sailors. In my opinion, if you sail a Finn well, you will sail anything else better and in the long run, you can eat up a dinghy class. I must remember to put my Finn in commission this summer so I can be a better Frostbiter next winter.

Next to staying comfortable, organization makes a winter program successful. The Larchmont race committee is one of the best. Led by Clint Bell who has started literally thousands of dinghy races during many long winter years has the knowledge and experience necessary to do the job well.

This Frostbite stuff is here to stay and is in the process of spreading throughout the U.S. at a rapid rate. The Inter-Club Dinghy will stay too because she is so much better than some of the popular blunt nosed row boats that many Long Island Sound sailors race all winter. I also know that all who race any kind of sailing craft during the winter will be better and stronger summer sailors. □

*Larchmont Frostbiters: a hot, fierce, and knowledgeable group.*

