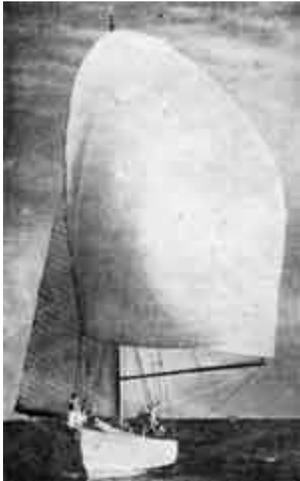


# Blue-Water Yachts in Saltiest Race

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By N. T. Kenney



Naval Academy's *Highland Light* will compete in the Newport-Annapolis contest. Other Academy boats which have been entered are the yawls *Alert* and *Resolute*.

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Up in Brenton Cove off Newport, RI, the salty fraternity of ocean racing is gathering for the start of its big event of this season, the 466 mile blue-water race from Brenton Reef Lightship down the coast to Cape Charles, then up the bay to Annapolis.

At anchor off the Ida Lewis Yacht Club, before the starting gun booms Saturday afternoon at 2 o'clock, will be possibly \$1,000,000 worth of the country's best seagoing sailing yachts, every one of them carefully equipped, rigged and tuned up especially for the race.

Ocean racing is not a game for a poorly found boat. Time spent in outfitting is regarded as insurance and the owners do not begrudge it. Sponsoring clubs are cautious about the condition of craft entering their races.

## ***Sails That Will Stand a Blow***

This year there should not be too much trouble with blown-out sails. Nearly every boat starting in the joint race of the N.Y.Y.C., the United States Naval Academy Yacht Squadron and the Annapolis Yacht Club has new sails aboard. Canvas was impossible to obtain during the war, but recently it has

"Canvas" is hardly the word. The firms specializing in the making of yacht sails have always used the best Egyptian duck for working sails and such exotic materials as parachute silk for light stuff.

The newest thing is Nylon. Not only is it tough and durable but it takes very little breaking in. Skippers can bend a new Nylon genoa jib, a set of working headsails or a big spinnaker without worrying too much about stretching it all out of shape the first time it goes aloft in a good blow.

Expensive? Many a man of moderate means spends just as much on buying, maintaining and furnishing gasoline for a cabin cruiser in which he rarely goes out of the home bay or river. The man who races at sea in sail is not always a wealthy man; many do not own boats, but sail as crew with almost any skipper who will take them.

### **No Sport For Weaklings**

Certainly they are a special breed. They must be men - and women, since sometimes a boat carries a feminine crew member or two - who keep themselves in good physical shape, for this is no sport for a weakling.

The sea is always a tough opponent, and no one who ever puts out upon it ever gets closer to it, in the normal course of events, than the windjammers' men of the ocean racing fleets. A strong back and a sailorman's stomach are prerequisites. Experience counts: the man who has made many races or who has cruised a lot is in demand.

Above all, the ocean racing man must love the sea. He must love it when the stinging spray whips over the rail, and he must love it when it is a brassy sheet of unruffled water, fit for fish and steamships but not for sailing craft.

### **Men Of Marked Contrast**

He must love it when it chuckles blue and friendly and sun-dappled under the bows, and he must love it also at night, when it is an unseen, eerie menace, growling only the thickness of the side planking from his head as he lies in his bunk during his watch below.

There are many famous names in ocean racing. Some of the men who figured in the yachting magazine accounts of last winter's contest in Florida and Cuban waters - Corny Shields, Bill Dodge, Ed Raymond, Eric Ones, Decoursey Fales, Harvey Conover - will be in this summer's race, which in the odd-numbered years is to sailing yachtsman what the Bermuda race is in the even years.

All these people are amateurs, or "Corinthians" as they are called in sailing circles. The Corinthian rule is flexible enough to enclose sailormen like Gordon Raymond, who is a yacht broker, and Rod Stephens, who designs yachts and who naturally enough benefits from orders when he sails a ship of his own design to victory.

But nobody gets a check for sailing, and the prizes are silver cups worth maybe half as much as a new mainsail for Gesture, Howard Fuller's 1946 Bermuda race winner and a favorite in the coming contest out of Newport. The only crew members that get cash are paid hands, who may not be either master or navigator. Only a few of the boats carry any paid hands.

### **Seldom An Idle Moment**

Ocean racing is never comfortable. Day or night, fair weather or foul, the whole life of those aboard a boat is an effort to keep her driving.

Sleep is unimportant, something to be made up in port after the race is over. All the sail the boat can stand is carried at all times. No skipper worth his salt hesitates to pipe all hands on deck, in the middle of the night when the green ones are boiling over the rail and oilskins are cold, stiff monsters, just to flatten his mainsail an inch or set up on a jib halyard gone a little slack in the night's pounding.



*Vamarie*, big Naval Academy ketch, will be among the Maryland yachts in race. She was many times "first to finish" in races in European and American waters.

Food is important, of course, but if the boat is driving hard into a head sea the cook can't keep his gear on the galley stove, and the crew member who complains because there is salt water in this cold coffee never gets invited to take part in a second race.

On light airs, it is worse, if anything. The boat pitches and rolls. The sun beats down. The skipper, the crew will swear, takes fiendish delight in keeping everybody on the jump changing sail around to catch imaginary vagrant puffs.

### ***Anything For A Breeze***

Any ocean racer will tell you that the most maddening thing in the world is to be forced to stand on the deck of a becalmed boat, unable to get out and push or row or do a thing that will help, while a competitor a mile away is charging away, lee rail down, with a breeze whistling through her shrouds.

In short, the business of racing a boat at sea is a matter of putting everything out of one's life but the boat, from the time the skipper first calls his crew around him and starts planning his race strategy, to the moment the committee boat at the finish line signals "over".

Why they keep coming back for more is something even a racing man has difficulty in explaining to a landlubber; but the fact is. A good sailor keeps it up until he can no longer stand a stormy trick at the wheel or swing his weight on a staysail sheet.

The race to the Chesapeake from Newport or New London - it has been started from both these sailing centers - is generally regarded by yachtsmen as favoring the light weather boat. At least, most of the races since the first one in 1929 have been sailed in predominately light airs.

Skippers who have sailed in these races have always divided into two groups. One went offshore to look for a northerly wind of the sea that would bring them down this, the shortest way to the finish, though none has ever yet gone out as far as the Gulf Stream, that bumpy bugbear of the fleet that races to Bermuda.

### ***Smaller Craft Hug Coast***

The other group has hugged the coast, hoping that offshore slants of wind which their competitors standing out to sea will not get will make up for the longer distance they must sail. In this latter group can usually be found the centerborders and little fellows, who are at a disadvantage in the big seas with which the larger ones, with heavy keels and huge spreads of sail, can cope.

Racing luck being what it is, races have been won both ways, so the skipper who elects either course has justification for his decision.

Historically, the Newport-Annapolis of this year is the outgrowth of that first New London - Gibson Island, sailed in 1929. The Gibson Island Club of those days, with a yacht squadron sailing in several different classes and plans for two eighteen-hole championship golf courses on the island, was far more a sporting organization than it is now.

Its racing men, vying with its golfers and its tennis fans, went all out to create a brand new sailing fixture the equal in importance, if not in tradition, of the Bermuda contest. They succeeded.

But as the years went by, the island became more and more a summer colony and less a country club. The result has been that the Annapolis Yacht Club and the Naval Academy have supplanted the Gibson Island Yacht Squadron as sponsoring organizations, although one island boat, the *Elda*, will sail in the contest and the islanders will entertain the visiting yachtsmen after the race.

### **"Love Of True Seamanship"**

The "general conditions" clause in the N.Y.Y.C. race prospectus - the New York club is handling the start, the other two groups the finish off Tolly Point in the Chesapeake - tells why the race is being sailed. At the same time, it gives the purpose of all ocean racing. Here it is:

"...The object of this race is to encourage the designing, building and sailing of small seaworthy yachts suitable for off-shore racing and cruising, and to develop in the amateur sailor a love of true seamanship and proficiency in the art of navigation...."

The navies of the world - British, American, Scandinavian, French and German - have long encouraged ocean racing, for they found it produced a breed of sailorman that not only knew but loved the sea.

There has been little change since before the war in boat design or equipment, and no change in the art of sailing offshore since the square rig gave way to the fore-and-aft.

### **Airmen's Rafts Replace Dinghies**

Nylon sails and stainless steel rigging are fairly new. Masthead rigs, meaning headsails that go clear to the top of the mast, also are comparatively recent. Many of this summer's racers will carry inflatable rafts, that once were packed into military aircraft, in lieu of dinghies.

Modern boats carry inboard rigs, which is a way of saying that none of their canvas extends aft of the boat or forward of the stem on bowsprits.

Masts are tall, usually higher than the boat is long in the case of a sloop or cutter. While some of the new boats carry the latest in navigational aids, the use of loran, radar, and the like during the race is prohibited.

Radiophone must not be used for the same reason that the other scientific gadgets are banned: Skippers could employ it for checking on the positions of competitors. It goes without saying that the skipper of an auxiliary who started his motor would be disqualified immediately.

### **Sailed On Time Allowance**

Boats still sail in classes and each boat has a time allowance, figured on a complicated formula dealing with hull size and design, rig and sail area. This is in recognition of the fact that ocean racers differ greatly, and there must be some way to equalize them for competitive purposes.

But the skipper who drives over the finish line first, no matter how large or how small his ship, is rewarded. Either with a "first-to-finish" prize or with the acclaim of his fellows. [Vamarie](#), the Naval Academy's big staysail ketch now on her way to Newport for the coming race, never missed capturing that prize in all the races she sailed, in American and European waters, under Vadim Makaroff.

Besides *Elda* and *Vamarie*, several other Chesapeake boats are to make the race. *Highland Light* has been entered by the academy, along with *Alert* and *Resolute*, two fine yawls.

There will be *Alsumar*, Frank P. Greenman's 44-foot sloop flying the black and orange burgee of the Annapolis Yacht Club. Also from that club is *Gaetina II*, a cutter going a little over 41 feet on deck. She is owned by Charles Dell, a member of the Annapolis group's race committee.

### **Forty Owners Show Interest**

When the N.Y.Y.C. closed the entries on June 7, 40 boats had signed on. This is not a record number, but it will assure a good race even if a few of those who signed the papers do not go.

*Baruna*, Henry C. Taylor's yawl built to the top of the Bermuda race rule, is the largest entrant. She is 72 feet on deck. Either she, *Vamarie*, or *Ticonderoga* will be scratch boat, meaning the one boat in the fleet that must give all the others time.

*Vamarie* and *Ticonderoga* are both more than 70 feet overall. The latter, by the way, is a lovely clipper-bowed ketch, designed by L. Francis Herreshoff, which was dismantled in last year's Miami-Nassau race.

Boats this size carry large crews, possibly up to twenty, of whom four or five might be "afterguard" or the group corresponding to the officers. In the remainder, probably could be found a paid hand or two, since the large vessels often carry the professionals who look after them the year around.

The smallest boat entered is *Lucky Star*, a cutter not quite 36½ feet long. Even if they are cramped, four sailormen will be aboard her in order to meet the race conditions.

The top limit on size, in the Newport, is 120 feet overall. Two yawls more than 100 feet long, *Manxman* and *Thistle*, were regarded for a time as possible starters, but their owners decided finally not to race. Had there been any boats over 73 feet, they would have competed in a special class, known as Class C, in which also are placed boats measured under the N.Y.Y.C. Universal rule.

Such ships do not meet the Cruising Rule - dealing with ratio of ballast to displacement and length of forward and after overhangs - under which sail the A and B class boats.

### **Chee Chee IV Only 41 Feet**

*Chee Chee IV* is only 41 feet and will be among the smaller started. Despite her small size this yawl took third in Class B in the 1946 Bermuda, in which she was sailed by Phil Handelman. He will sail her this time, too.

The presence of a number of new boats adds to the difficulties of the forecasters. Now much is known - in Maryland, at least - of *Gaffer*, Millard F. Smith's 46 foot sloop, *Homaro*, A. Freeman Gray's yawl, and *Flirt*, a sloop owned by George R. Swift.

*Revonoc II*, Harvey Conover's yawl which took the last Miami-Nassau under conditions so tough that a Cuban yawl lost her doghouse - tiny shelter for the man at the wheel - overside with one of her paid hands in it, is well liked by sailors.

There are a large number of prizes. The main one is the Blue Water Bowl, offered by the Academy's Yacht Squadron for the boat that makes the best corrected time in Classes A and B combined. The Commodore P. H. Magruder Memorial Trophy, donated by the Annapolis Yacht Club, is the first-to-finish prize for A and B Class boats.

### ***Governor Long Puts Up Trophy***

Chesapeake Bay sailors will be competing for the Governor's Trophy, put up by Governor Lane, of Maryland, for the local boat winning, on corrected time, in Classes A and B, the city of Newport is offering a prize, the New York Yacht Club has donated several and there are others, the gifts of Northern yacht enthusiasts.

The United States Navy is furnishing an escort vessel, *U.S.S. Power*, a destroyer. She will accompany the racers to carry members of race committees and the press and to take care of any yacht running into trouble.

All along the coasts and up the Bay, Coast Guard planes, boats and lighthouses will keep eyes peeled for the fleet. Chesapeake Lightship will report each boat sighted rounding into the mouth of the Bay. From the lightship on up, Naval Academy planes will patrol the course.

The race should take three and a half days - more, if it is calm, if it blows a gale or if the racers meet head winds.

Now let 'em pull the lanyard on that starting gun, and may there be wind and clear sailing and good racing luck for the fleet.