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Cadillac Van Isle 360

# The Ultimate B.C. Race

by TONY SHERIDAN

**Difficult choices, spectacular sailing  
and lots of partying characterized the  
two-week race around Vancouver Island**

The race started with light winds in Nanaimo Harbour.



JOHN VAN DEN HENGEL PHOTO

**W**hich route to take was the crucial decision on the 10th and final leg—from Victoria to Nanaimo—of the Cadillac Van Isle 360 International Yacht Race. Competitors were free to choose their routes: they could either sail through the Gulf Islands, and, if the wind died, miss the tide and face the possibility of the up to 10-knot adverse current in Dodd Narrows, or sail an extra 30 miles up the Strait of Georgia and hope for better wind.

For the crew of the J-120, *Time Bandit*, the wrong decision could have meant los-

ing the lead they had fought hard to build up over the first nine legs from the start in Nanaimo, around the northern tip of the island, to Victoria. “Barb was the lone voice in our crew of nine, opting for the outside route,” explained Bob Brunius, *Time Bandit*’s skipper and Barb’s husband. “At first I decided to go with the majority, but at the last minute, I changed my mind. We cut through Porlier Pass to find good wind in the Strait.”

It was the right decision, and *Time Bandit* corrected to fourth in the final leg to clinch first place overall in Division One. The skippers who opted for

the inside route were stopped dead by a strong ebb in the narrow Dodd Narrows and finished hours later.

**CHALLENGES GALORE** Difficult strategic choices and a variety of sailing conditions were the essence of the 580-mile race around Vancouver Island. On inside waters, challenging currents swept around rugged headlands, over bars and through narrow passages, and fickle winds bounced off steep mountains. In contrast, the west coast of the island provided true ocean racing, and when the sails were trimmed, there was dramatic



Bill Malone's wooden *Aerial*, a McCurdy-Rhodes 40 built by Jespersion Boatworks, was one of the most admired vessels in the fleet. Designer Ian McCurdy from New York was aboard.

CIM MACDONALD PHOTO



Lunch on the fly. The crew of *Flattery* off Nanaimo.



The Beneteau 45, *Farr-ari* (skipper Bill Walton centre), screams along during the windy Comox-to-Campbell River leg.



*Farr-ari* broaches, even with reefed main and #3 jib on the same leg



DAVE HEATH PHOTO (LX)

It was gusting to 35 knots on the leg to Campbell River, and several monohulls reached speeds of more than 18 knots.



IAN WAINWRIGHT PHOTO

Peter Keller's C & C 40 *Tir na n'Og* broaches at the Campbell River leg finish line.

scenery and wildlife. "When we were close to Ucluelet [the finish of leg eight], grey whales were breaching around us," said Bill Walton, skipper of the Beneteau 45, *Farr-ari*. "It was tough to concentrate on sailtrim."

The race attracted a variety of yachts. The largest was HMCS *Oriole* at 102'; the smallest was Duncan Gladman's *Komera*, a 21.5' Mini-Transat from West Vancouver, out for her first race. In between were 31 monohulls ranging from 30 to 72' that raced in two PHRF divisions, and two catamarans and two trimarans in a multihull division. Twenty-one boats were Canadian; the remainder were from the U.S. The race is invitational and restricted to 35 boats, as marina space is limited at some stops. All yachts must meet stringent safety conditions, and skippers and the majority of crews have to be experienced.

But what makes this race unique is the social life. At each of the 10 stops, the local community holds a reception for the racers, with assistance from race sponsors Save On Foods and Okanagan Spring Brewery. "So much partying is great," commented Jim Redmond, *Farr-ari*'s navigator, "but it sure makes for a tough race!"

**CLOSE CALLS** After a light breeze at the June 11 start in Nanaimo Harbour,



DAVID SUTCLIFFE PHOTO



At the overnight stop at a Pan Fish Canada salmon farm near Hardwicke Island, the BC Salmon Farmers Association served more than 600 salmon steaks to the racers.

The navigator's role is vital in racing around Vancouver Island. Here, Steve Travis' 48' *Flash* picks her way along the beach.

Duncan Gladman's Mini-Transat *Komera* was the smallest vessel in the fleet.

DAVE HEATH PHOTO



Pat McGarry's catamaran *Dragonfly* en route to Port Hardy (Pulteney Point lighthouse in the background). With no room below, her crew slept on deck when necessary.

Duncan Gladman (right) and his brother Dale checking out safety gear aboard *Komera*.

DAVE HEATH PHOTO



The crew of the Beneteau First 47.7 *Kinetic* on a spinnaker run.

MARK MCKIM PHOTO



the fleet rounded Newcastle Island to beat into a 15 to 25 knot nor' easter that dropped in the afternoon. Leg three, from Comox to Campbell River, was a blast. "It was blowing 35, gusting to 40," said an ecstatic Mike Kalahar, skipper of the 30' *Myrrh*, designed and built by Eric Jespersen of Sidney. "We recorded 18.2 knots, sailing wing-on-wing." *Myrrh* went on to win First Place Overall in Division Two. Others were not so fortunate. "Mike McGarry and I were sitting out on the high side when we had an accidental gybe and found ourselves underwater," said Kim Alfred, skipper of the trimaran *Cheekee Monkee*. They were swept overboard. While four yachts stood by, the three remaining crewmembers on board demonstrated exceptional seamanship by rescuing their mates in rough water whipped up by strong winds. *Cheekee Monkee* went on to place second in the leg, and First Overall in Division Three. Leg eight, from Winter Harbour to Ucluelet, provided some spectacular



The fleet under spinnaker in Goletas Channel, north of Port Hardy.



Bowman at work aboard *Lawn Dart*.



Sunset with Bill Allen at the helm of his Santa Cruz 50 *Lawn Dart* during the leg from Port Hardy to Winter Harbour.

DAVE HEATH PHOTO (2X)



*Dragonfly* disappearing behind the swells at the Ucluelet start. Shot from *Cassiopeia*.

DOUG BITTNER PHOTO

## KINETIC'S MIRACLE

It can be a rocky road getting a boat to the start of the Cadillac Van Isle 360, and no one knows that better than David Sutcliffe, owner of the Beneteau First 47.7 *Kinetic*. Five weeks before the start, while being delivered from a race in Seattle by a professional skipper, *Kinetic* slammed into Enterprise Reef, just south of Active Pass, at eight knots. The boat sustained considerable damage and was taking on water. While it looked like the months of planning and preparation would be wasted, Sutcliffe, who is CEO of Sierra Wireless, isn't the kind of fellow to give up easily. His motivation inspired the miracle that followed.

His first break came when his insurers, HUB International TOS and their underwriters, authorized work to begin before the repair bids were in. Next came Phil O'Donoghue and crew of Fraser Fibreglass in North Vancouver. Just two weeks earlier, they'd completed a major keel optimization on *Kinetic*, fairing it to the original architectural specs to increase her performance. The grounding caused the keel to twist and detach slightly from the hull, and it had to be reattached and realigned. To make matters worse, most of the interior furnishings had to be removed to access the frames that had become detached from the hull, and to repair significant delamination.

The Fraser crew worked 16 or more hours per day, seven days a week for a month. It was a huge job, and O'Donoghue was proud and elated that they managed to complete the extremely complex job in less than a month—just in time for the boat to set off for the race. Sutcliffe was extremely pleased with the job being completed on time and on budget, noting that he simply couldn't have asked for a better job.

—Peter Robson



JENS FISCHER PHOTO

On the last leg of the race, there were plenty of broaches during the blustery start off Victoria's Brotchie Ledge.



COURTESY BOB DIEHL

During the final leg, many of the boats transited Dodd Narrows en route to Nanaimo. Shown here is the plot of *Diehler*. There was a five-knot opposing current and a two-knot wind from ahead. It was clearly a hard slog.

open-water sailing. Many commented that the overnight run, flying 'chutes before a 20-knot wind under moonlit skies, was the most memorable sail of their lives. However, *Cassiopeia*, a Davidson 72, and *Flash*, a custom 48-footer, both suffered damaged masts on this leg and had to withdraw.

Pat McGarry, skipper of the 40' catamaran *Dragonfly*, had a close call at the start of the final leg from Victoria to

Nanaimo. "The wind was about 25 knots astern. When I gybed we weren't going very fast. The boom came over and the pressure on the sail drove both bows underwater and the sterns rose about 10 feet in the air. It was pretty scary, but she settled down when we let the main go. It was my fault. I shouldn't have gybed until we were doing about 20 knots, then the apparent wind would have been manageable." *Dragonfly* ended up with

the fastest elapsed time for the circumnavigation: 79 hours and seven minutes. Wayne Gorrie and Janine Bell, founders and organizers of the event, awarded the trophies at Nanaimo on June 26. But the most applause at the ceremony went to the race committee led by principal race officer Shauna Fenwick, who started and finished each leg of the race by land and by sea. For complete results and more about the race, visit [www.vanisle360.com](http://www.vanisle360.com). ●

