

# Old Brown Dog light winds make for eternal sailing

By Richard Johnson  
W10873

I have always had this hope that when I make that final slide down the big launch ramp, I will be rewarded with an eternity of sailing. I expect it would go something like this:

St. Peter – “Yes Mr Johnson, no worries, we have that arranged for you. Do you happen to remember Nov. 2, 2019? You do? Wonderful! Well, yes you will spend eternity racing those three races, forever!” Followed by evil laughter.

Let me explain.

The Catawba Yacht Club, site of the Old Brown Dog Regatta, is perhaps as delightful and picturesque a boat club as you will find anywhere. Perched on the banks of an inlet, at a wide spot on the Catawba River, it is the perfect inland boat club. Founded in the 1930s as a refuge from the summer heat of Charlotte, it remains a refuge from all that is modern. Rustic enough, well maintained, with members who make you feel like you belong there.

NWS predicted the winds to be light to nothing, but the morning was beautiful, fog rising from the water in the cool fall air and the nuclear power plant humming down the river. We were warned at the skippers meeting to pack up our lunches before we left. We wouldn't be coming back in. Michele and I cracked the new sails onto the mast, avoiding terminal creases and headed out.

We had a fleet of 11 boats, hailing from Oakville, Ontario to Oriental, N.C. and all fleets in between. It started off well, nice breeze, crew comfortable and then I noticed the tell tales. They were limp, lifeless, no flutter. Dead. Leach tell tales the same; they dropped like dead cats. We had pressure but from where. The masthead fly and the magnetic tape on the shrouds disagreed.

It was peculiar but not beyond reason. The race committee set a course. The wind immediately changed. They set a new course, and it changed. They rolled the dice and sent us off on the next new course. A single port tack to the windward mark. Steam rising from the power plant in a single vertical column, the water smooth and oily, a wind desert.

And yet we moved. Some boats much better than others. Those of us left behind were wondering, wracking our brains, searching our souls, for that bit of experience, local knowledge, or magic to make us go. I watched as boats moved away to the mark I so dearly wished to round.

I hope it's clear that this would be no way to spend eternity. But we continued.

I do want to be clear on one point: To visualize the invisible



Al Schonborn (above), crewless in Catawba, went on to an overall first place finish at the Nov. 2-3 Old Brown Dog Regatta. *Photo by Doug Conley* Richard Johnson and crew Michele Parish (left) on the spinnaker run during Sunday's racing. The duo in W10873 enjoyed the better winds on Sunday after Saturday's light-wind torture. The fleet at the annual regatta (below left) featured 11 boats on the beautiful Catawba River in Charlotte, N.C. *Photos by Jack Young*

that is present around us without discernible manifestation, and then to harness that ineffable nothingness to propel a boat is sailing at a higher plane of consciousness. To those who can do it, I am in awe.

The first to be awesome was Uwe Heine & Nancy Collins (W10978). They went left, away from all of us, and finished first. Al Schonborn (W3854), sailing solo, rolled up second.

The race committee, seeing the course was badly skewed, reset to one equally skewed in a new way. In their defense, it was hopeless. There really was no wind. A herd of gerbils breaking wind in unison could have created more of a stir.

And yet we continued. The chosen wonder of Race 2 was Uncle Al. Jim and Alicia Cook (W7372), who hosted the whole weekend, debuted at second.

The course was then reset in preparation for Race 3. Either mark could have been the windward mark. During the Scow starting sequence we sailed over to the committee boat to ask which mark was first. The bewildered response was that we aren't sure but will let you know. My sailing brain was now having a meltdown. But a race demands a start, with or with-

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out your brain, and we continued. My next recollection was nosing into the dock and claiming my space. Not quite sane by that time, I really needed that space. Despite the lack of wind, Phil and Cathy Leonard (W864) placed first in Race 3. Awesome as well, and as we have always known them to be. Uncle Al made another fleeting appearance at the finish in second place. He had quietly settled into a first.

The conditions created scattered results. In three races there were three different 1st place finishes. The same was true for 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 10th. Only 2nd, 9th and 11th had repeats. It's easy to dismiss the results of racing in windless conditions as random. Data seems to support that. But I think it is only that the penalty for a single slightly off kilter decision in windless conditions is severe. Without wind, there is no redemption. It's like a psycho slasher film where characters make a bad decision and just disappear.

But for sailors, Sunday was brisk and sunny. The nuclear power plant still humming away. Steam rolling off the water, and enough wind to put a wave pattern on the lake. It was an early start, 9 a.m. so we headed out. I was pondering a thought expressed at breakfast that I wasn't doing my new sails justice. I kind of felt the opposite, since I had purchased them, and figured they needed to pull their own weight.

It took three starts to get the first race off. No longer having to fight to get to the line, we couldn't seem to stay off it. Finally, they just let us go. The course had a slight skew to starboard. We had noticed earlier there were some pretty big oscillations. The changes were

2019 Old Brown Dog Regatta: Wayfarers  
Catawba YC  
Results are final as of 16:48 on November 4, 2019

Overall

Rank	Seed	SailNo	Helm/Crew	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	Total	Notes
1	5* (24)	3854	Al Schonborn (Crewless in Catawba)	2	1	2	3	3	1	12	Most Improved
2	2 (17)	10873	Richard Johnson/Michele Parish	5	8	3	1	2	2	21	
3	4 (19)	10978	Uwe Heine/Nancy Collins	1	4	4	4	4	7	24	
4	3 (18)	1086	Jim & Linda Heffernan	4	3	5	6	5	3	26	
5	7 (34)	864	Phil & Cathy Leonard	6	5	1	2	8	6	28	
6	1 (16)	7372	Jim & Alicia Cook	3	2	7	5	6	5	28	
7	6 (25)	11134	AnnMarie Covington/Al Kishbaugh	8	7	5	8	1	10	39	
8	8 (53)	611	Mike Sigmund/Logan Williams	10	11	8	7	7	4	47	
9	9 (64)	449	Ken Butler/Gail Walters	9	6	9	10	10	8	52	
10	10 (67)	6066	Pete Thorn/Jeanne Allamby	7	9	10	9	9	9	53	
11	11 (99)	276	Annette Grele/George Enell	11	10	11	11	11	11	65	

big but not permanent and did not last long enough to tack on. We started on starboard, and at about three quarters of the way up we took a big header. We were about to tack but hung on when it corrected and put us on course almost directly to the mark. We weren't alone at the mark but we were in a good place. We did a jibe set and reached to the committee boat, then rolled off onto a run to the leeward mark. Al got to the inside as we approached the mark. Being tight to the mark, he rounded wide. We got underneath and we both sailed in parallel toward the pavilion on port tack. I knew there would be a wind joggle as we got closer. If it was a lift we were fine. If it was header, OK. It was an auto tack; we turned left to the line. Al temporarily wallowed in the joggle while Phil and Cathy slid in for 2nd.

The second race was much like the first except twice around. Starboard was favored and the start traffic was tight at the committee boat. The fleet started without incident and headed up the course to the windward mark. We followed our same path to leeward with a port tack reach to the committee boat and a run to the leeward mark then the same path back up wind. At the last leeward mark AnnMarie Covington (W11134) was inside and well ahead. She headed toward the pavillion on port

then tacked off onto starboard toward the committee boat. We held on until we got closer to the pavillion. As we tacked we got lifted by a nice puff and we had a very good line to the finish. AnnMarie, seeing we were a threat, tacked back. She crossed ahead and tacked on us. We had good momentum, headed up and pushed for the line, but she had us. A good race and a really nice win for AnnMarie.

The race committee attempted to square the course as the wind was fainting. After the race I heard horror stories of boats reversing at the start. We escaped, but not well. As will happen, there was a waiting line at the windward mark. We took our turn and, like a dog, we headed down our same path to do our rounds. The leeward mark was a lunchtime Chick-fil-A parking lot. There was no inside option. The fleet consensus was that starboard tack was favored since Al was well ahead, healed to the extreme, gliding to first on starboard. We did the drive through and left on port, contemplated starboard, saw some wrinkled water up ahead, and loped on to the pavillion. The wrinkled water happened to be the last puff of the day. Our heretofore on the bubble sails pulled mightily and turned a small puff into a miraculous lift. They did us justice.

Having lived in Charlotte for over 20 years, I have a real fondness for the Catawba Yacht Club. It is a wonderful group of people. If I could only move them all 5.5 hours east. Also I want to thank Doug, Phil, Sharee and Bob for all the hard work on the race committee. It was an impossible job. The only thing worse than sailing Nov., 2019 for Eternity, would be being race committee on Nov. 2, 2019 for all eternity. But at least we would be together.

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team of Jim Cook (Charlotte, N.C.) and Uncle Al (Oakville, Ontario) who were followed series 7th by our furthest travelled team, Iain Tulloch and his wife, Lesley, from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Iain and Lesley also impressed as they improved on their 9th seed by two places.

After a fine first-race 4th, things went downhill for Lake Townsend's Phil Leonard and his wife, Cathy, who ended up matching their seed with an 8th-place finish, ahead of clubmates Ken Butler with Gail Walters and Pete Thorn with Dawn-Michelle Oliver.

2019 HOT Regatta: Wayfarers  
Lake Townsend YC  
Results are final as of 16:59 on November 4, 2019

Overall

Rank	Seed	SailNo	Helm/Crew	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	Total	Notes
1	1 (7)	11158	Peggy Menzies/Kathy Sanville	5	4	1	2	2	14	
2	6 (18)	2458	Jim & Linda Heffernan	1	5	2	3	3	14	Most Improved
3	2 (9)	971	Paul & Dawn Miller	8	1	4	1	4	18	
4	5 (17)	10978	Uwe Heine/Nancy Collins	2	6	8	5	1	22	
5	7 (26)	11134	AnnMarie Covington/Caroline Sherman	3	2	6	4	7	22	
6	3 (13)	7372	Jim Cook/Al Schonborn	7	3	3	6	6	25	
7	9 (31)	861	Iain & Lesley Tulloch	5	9	5	7	5	31	
8	8 (30)	864	Phil & Cathy Leonard	4	7	9	8	8	36	
9	10 (69)	449	Ken Butler/Gail Walters	9	8	10	9	9	45	
10	11 (59)	6066	Pete Thorn/Dawn-Michelle Oliver	10	10	7	10	10	47	
11	4 (14)	3854	Al Schonborn/Jeanne Allamby	DNC	DNC	DNC	DNC	DNC	60	