

MainBrace

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Catalina 22 Adventures Abroad

by Jennifer Brown

Ah, Regatta Time in Abaco...an annual event blending sailboat racing with fun, and the emphasis is certainly on fun. Regatta Time in Abaco, "RTIA," consists of five race days, with a lay day in between most race days. The lay days allow for movement from one island to the next, as the regatta itself does some traveling. Every day, whether it is a race day or a lay day, at least one party revs up around 6:00 p.m. at a local watering hole. One of the regatta's sponsors, Mount Gay Rum, makes quite a few appearances and gives away their rum as well as Mount Gay souvenirs.

For those who are not familiar with the waters of Abaco, Bahamas, please note this forewarning: once one has experienced the crystal clear waters running through these islands, they will beckon you back. There is no point in resisting. Whether sailing, swimming, snorkeling or simply enjoying a sunset, the shallowness of the area (6-16') and the constant water movement provides clarity not easily found elsewhere.

When Frank Brown, decided to take his Catalina 22 from Fort Pierce, Florida to the Abaco Islands in the Bahamas, one question arose: How? His son, Frank "J.R." Brown, quickly answered that question. J. R. is the captain of a Beneteau 47.3 and he offered to tow *True Love* (Catalina 22 hull #10) across the 70 mile expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, and onward through the Bahamas Banks to Abaco.



Dragon Fly towing True Love through the Abacos. Photo by wife and mother Betty Brown.

Not only would *True Love* get a tow over to Abaco, but once there, the Beneteau 47.3, *Dragon Fly*, would prove to be a fantastic mothership for the regatta. (*Dragon Fly* is available for charter in

various warm climate areas: www.saildragonfly.com.)

Plans for the voyage and ensuing regatta were laid out...Frank had regular crew member and daughter Jennifer Brown in place and recruited Gene Cochran, veteran owner/skipper of C-22 *Game Over* (hull #923) to complete the crew ensemble.

Alas, *True Love* would be expanding her horizons by hopping across the Gulf stream! In short time it would be discovered that with a little help, a C-22 could go very fast through large waves. The trip began around midnight, leaving from Fort Lauderdale to cross the Gulf stream. Although the conditions were not favorable, they did not appear to be improving, so the two vessels forged ahead. The night consisted of one person keeping an eye on *True Love* while another stood watch. The seas were 4-6 feet and the 10-14 knot wind was almost on the nose.

During this first towing attempt, *True Love's* keel was left up, but the rudder was pinned in place. Although the boat towed fine, it was discovered later in the trip that having the keel down (with the rudder still in place) helped *True Love* track better while under tow. As we arrived at the first anchorage, a thorough inspection of *True Love* did not show any noticeable wear from the tow.

Over the years of participating in the Abaco regatta, it has been noted that the wind conditions fluctuate greatly and each race day brings with it a variance from the last. Due to the assortment of vessels racing, almost all participants welcome a change in wind conditions so they have a shot at doing well. However, throughout this year's regatta, the conditions remained steady at 10-16 knots and tended to favor most other boats other than *True Love*. This did not deter *True Love* from making every effort to sail fast, trying many sail combinations to maintain control while pursuing speed.

It may never really be known if RTIA racers are more driven to win a race because it gives them bragging rights, or because they want to acquire one of the beautiful trophies, which are true pieces of art. The trophies awarded during RTIA are coveted because of their uniqueness. A local artist makes all of the trophies,

which are sculptures forged in bronze mounted on a mahogany plaque. The sculptures range from sea life such as turtles, sharks, herons, stingrays, and pelicans, to the man made sea structures such as lighthouses and half hull boat models.

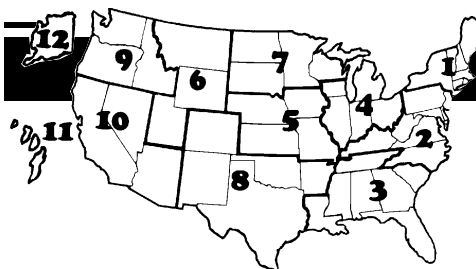


True Love approaches the finish line with a spinnaker class boat hot on their heels. The spinnaker boat, *Contrails*, is a Moorings 38 and was finishing a longer course. Photo by wife and mother Betty Brown.

The class designated for cruiser boats, called "Mother Tub," is aptly named because it is geared for cruising boats weighed down with their cruising paraphernalia, and the use of specialty sails is not allowed. *True Love* is not equipped for spinnaker racing, which made the decision easy for choosing a class. The Mother Tub class is designed to allow each participant the opportunity to win a race. This is done by changing a boat's rating after a race, depending on whether they have done poorly or well during that race. As a result of that system, an interesting challenge was presented for *True Love*. As the regatta progressed, *True Love* received a lower rating after each race. Apparently the little Catalina 22 was doing entirely too well, as evidenced by the scratch sheet for the last race. Instead of continuing to drop *True Love's* rating, the race committee bumped *True Love* up two classes. This meant racing against 40+ foot boats. Wow, what a way to finish things out!

At the end of the regatta, the tally reflected an effort to make all Catalina 22 racers proud: two first and two third place trophies. (During the third race, the only jib halyard broke, so *True Love* had to retire.) In short, a trophy was collected in every race completed. This was not well received by some of the other participants. After

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REGIONAL NEWS

the club, I look forward to their leadership and an exciting year leading up to the 2004 nationals.

As the temperatures drop in the southeast this fall, regatta activities will heat up here in region 3. Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina racers can look forward to a full schedule of regattas through November. Down here in Florida, the 2003-04 travel series kicks off on east lake Toho with the state championships on Nov 8-9. I urge all of my fellow racers to check out the region 3 link on the national web-site for regatta schedules and attend and support as many events as possible.

Finally, I ask you all to read about the adventures of Catalina 22 hull #10 "True Love", to be found elsewhere in this issue. Their 500-mile plus journey to the Bahamas and related success on the race course should provide excellent dream material for racers and cruisers of Catalina 22s.

Smooth sailing
Don Lasky

Region 3 - 19 fleets

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Congratulations to Keith Bennett, Reid Collins, and the lake Lanier sailing club on their selection to lead our class and play host to the 2004 nationals respectively. Having formed a friendship with Keith and Reid on and off the racecourse, and attended a Catalina regatta at

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only a couple of the races, there were cries of foul play...seems at least one boat was unhappy with our performance and stated such a racing boat should not be allowed in the cruisers' class. Hmm...could it be they were upset because the previous year their boat had received first place throughout the regatta? An unexpected line of defense surfaced from the race committee chair, who happened to have owned a Catalina 22 many years ago as his first boat. Having had complaints about *True Love's* performance directed at him, he announced at the second awards presentation that the Catalina 22 is definitely not a racing boat, and commended the captain and crew for having sailed the vessel so well.



True Love Crew receiving an RTIA trophy. Photo by wife and mother Betty Brown.

No matter what, cruising through the Abacos has always been a fun time – there

are tons of nice people and it would be difficult to ever tire of the scenery. Sailboats are available for charter if cruisers wish to skip the sail across the Gulfstream, and the climate beckons year round. Abaco, the chain of islands in the upper northeast part of the Bahamas, is quite different than the well-known names of the Bahamas. Places like Nassau are crowded and somewhat dirty, whereas many of the Abaco islands use golf carts instead of cars due to their small populations and land mass. Of course, this changes slightly in the two larger areas where the airports are located. Even then, Marsh Harbour, one of the areas with an airport, only has one traffic light.



True Love Crew cooling off poolside. Photo by wife and mother Betty Brown.

During our stay in Marsh Harbour, the temporary home for *True Love* and *Dragon Fly* was the Jib Room, a marina with an open-air restaurant and bar. On the counter of the bar is a journal which invites guests to write their personal notes about their stay and/or their cruising experiences in the area. The inside cover of this journal has a message from the owners describing their acquisition of the marina and restaurant just a few years

ago and how they have made their dream come true. They state their case in an effort to entice others to follow their dreams as well, especially if it is similar to theirs. Food for thought!

Almost two weeks after beginning the trip to the Bahamas, the trip back home was undertaken. Since there were no pressing time constraints for the return trip, a leisurely sail was enjoyed. A slightly different route was taken, and a favorite passage was reached which is always astonishingly beautiful. The tip of West End (Grand Bahama) has water color unlike any other. It appears to be composed of thousands of sheets of royal blue cellophane layered on top of each other. It is translucent, deep and rich.

Unfortunately, one of the common sites we look for was missing this year. The dolphins that have welcomed us in the past must have been on holiday elsewhere. Other than that, the trip over and back, and the regatta, gave everyone many happy memories of great racing, parties galore, favorite people, and lots of relaxation.