



## Stories from the Storm Trysail Club

### Storm Trysail Club

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Formed in 1938 after the conclusion of the extremely rough 1936 Bermuda Race, the Storm Trysail Club is dedicated to blue water sailing, and membership is only open to expert offshore sailors who have experienced storm conditions and are capable of commanding a sailing vessel in such conditions.

Headquartered in Larchmont, New York, the club operates through local stations across the

U.S. which individually host a variety of racing, social and junior events for members and other sailors, both on the water and ashore. The club has been in the vanguard of development of new events, handicap rating systems, yacht design, safety procedures, and new rum drinks.

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## STORM TRYSAIL CLUB BECOMES NSHOF FOUNDING MEMBER

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## History

### Storm Trysail The Early Years...



**I have always enjoyed and always will enjoy bad weather.  
There is something about being out there in a storm that  
takes your breath away.**

**Charles Farrell, Jr.**

The first two generations of American ocean racers - the one of the 'twenties that founded the CCA and the one of the 'thirties and 'forties that founded The Storm Trysail Club found the best test of a boats was whether she could blast her way across the Gulf Stream to Bermuda in safety and reasonable ease and then house her crew once she got there. The ultimate challenge under that standard was a two-or three-week Trans-Atlantic race from New England of Bermuda across the North Atlantic to Scandinavia.

Many of the crew aboard the early Bermuda races were dinghy sailors, some of the best young sailors in the world. Those men could take it. In the extremely rough 1936 Bermuda Race that led to the formation of The Storm Trysail Club, one of several sailors who was injured was 53-year-old John Parkinson. He flew stark naked out of windward bunk across the main cabin and smashed, face-first, into the leeward side. "He unhooked his lower lip from his lower teeth," a witness remembered, "spat out a bloody handful of his smashed upper dentures, paid no attention to his son's down-the-hatch exclamation, 'Jesus, the old man's had a tumble' put on his gear (including a knitted blue worsted cap), went on deck (it was 4 am), and took his trick at the helm. He was kept alive for the next few days on a diet of soup and raw eggs, and recovered completely in Hamilton with the aid of other liquid refreshment."

Iron men in wooden ships. There were great and serious limitations in those early days before Dacron sails and rope and aluminum masts came into general use in the late 'fifties. Everything about those boats was natural and none-too-reliable unless carefully nursed by a watchful crew. "Boats were very unsophisticated compared to what they are now," remembers Dick Goennel (a Storm Trysail founder while still a teenager) who later, at the age of 40, crewed on Constellation in the 1964 America's Cup match. "For example, we had this wonderful Italian rope for sheets called balloon rope. It would shrink when it got wet. So if it rained you'd have to slack the halyards so you wouldn't pull the cleats off the mast, and if you didn't shorten down in time you'd lose sails. You'd have to make a sail change quickly or a sail would be blown out or a sheet would let go. Usually it was all hands on deck. Of course, you had to dry a cotton sail or a stitch might rip, and you couldn't always do that. Still, the crews pushed those boats as hard as they could.

While they enjoy telling about the technological primitivism of the creaky, hairy boat of the early days of ocean racing, the older generation is most please to describe the human factor. First of all, like any community on a frontier, it was cheerfully intimate. Recalls Dick Goennel, "We all knew each other in the beginning. I remember going on races and every time we passed another boat I'd recognize somebody on board." STC member Sean O'Connell says that before the 1950 Bermuda Race, the first of the fourteen he sailed, he thumbed through the crew roster and realized that he knew just about everybody sailing on the 54 entrants.



Many STC members and other crew relax aboard Callooh after the 1957 Miami-Nassau Race.



STC Past Commodore Paul Hoffman at the helm of Thunderhead during the 1968 Newport-Bermuda race.

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