

# THE 2007 TOLEDO NAI

In the view of Tom Collins, Southern California Cruiser Association

I've just returned from the North American Cruiser Association's (NACA) 2007 North American Invitational (NAI) championship predicted log race held this year in Toledo, Ohio. Although it represents the thirty-second NAI I've attended since my first in Boston in 1976, it will be particularly memorable to me because it is only the second one that I have ever won. I suppose that with 32 NAIs under my belt you could say that essentially I've seen them all, which is almost correct as I missed the first three (the first NAI was in 1973 in San Diego). So from my perspective, I thought it might be interesting to review the differences between the various events with particular emphasis on the uniqueness of boating on Western Lake Erie. This year's event was hosted by the Ottawa River Yacht Club located near the Maumee River that flows past Toledo and into Maumee Bay located at the western end of Lake Erie.

To begin with, the most noticeable difference is the boats. On many of the NAIs we typically find the boats supplied by local boaters for our use are in the 40 to 50 foot range and usually diesel powered. That wouldn't be too practical there as the charted depths on the route leading from the Club on the Ottawa River to the Maumee River are typically one to three feet. And with the present water level exceptionally low, the charted depths are in fact the actual depths. Shallow draft boats are certainly necessary, which meant they were 28 to 32 foot gasoline powered boats. I drew a 32' twin engine Wellcraft and the water level was so low that, after departing the slip, we all had to move forward on the boat to lower the bow and raise the stern to try to lift the props out of the mud as we proceeded down the Ottawa River. Even so, we were turning up heavy mud in our wake. This was seriously "skinny water"!

Along with the smaller gas powered boats came faster speeds. Most of us are accustomed to running at seven to ten knots in diesel trawlers. These smaller gas boats need to be run on plane, which is why the Committee specified a predicted speed between 12 and 25 miles-per-hour (no handicap). Note that in inland waters, distances are given in statute rather than nautical miles so speeds are in mph rather than knots. Commensurate with the faster speeds, the distance of the contest was originally 59 miles, which, at 15 mph, is only four hours. However, due to other considerations, the course was shortened to 38 miles at the Skipper's meeting.

On the subject of speed, my predicted speed was 22.8 mph and I'll note that at that speed things are happening mighty fast. As you approach a buoy, you barely have time to check its markings, call the mark and make the turn, let alone try to get a ripple reading on the current. Our predicted time was about one hour and forty minutes and by the end of the course we were exhausted from all that was involved in running what amounted to thirteen legs when intermediate timed runs were considered. I'm glad the contest was shortened.

There was another reason the contest was shortened. In the last few days leading up to the race, some of the volunteered contest boats were withdrawn which left the Committee with a serious shortage. The problem was resolved by assigning two (or more) contestants to each boat and running the same boat multiple times. Although it is certainly preferable to have all contestants run in the same water at the same time, at least in this way everyone was able to run the course.

Navigating the course was a challenge unto itself. Unlike the ocean off of Southern California where we have a real shortage of navigational buoys, (there are only two within Santa Monica Bay) there are so many buoys in the Maumee Entrance Channel that it is crucial that they be carefully kept track of so that the correct one on the course is approached. Using binoculars, even stabilized ones, to identify marks when bouncing along in a small boat at high speed is virtually impossible. Same goes for a handheld compass!

Unlike the currents we found in Lake Michigan (where CYC's Bill Templeman swears there isn't any), there was relatively little in Maumee Bay. However, it was interesting to note that the current in the Maumee River Channel actually flows both ways depending on which end of the lake the water is being stacked up in due to the wind. As I recall, I added RPM's on the first leg to compensate for about 1/3 mph current flowing upriver.

Another important consideration on the smaller fast boats was speed-weight sensitivity. Normally on slow, heavy trawlers, it isn't much of a concern. However it is very much an issue on lightweight fast boats. We tried hard to maintain trim during the contest by maintaining position of everyone during the contest and I built a fuel weight burn-off compensation into my predictions using a formula I developed and published in the Cruiser Log years ago. It is: speed sensitivity equals one-second-per-mile per 2/3% change in total vessel weight. I figured gasoline at 6.3 pounds-per-gallon and fuel consumption at one MPG. It must have worked, as most of our errors were consistent throughout the race. One thing I forgot to compensate for was the speed loss when we encountered rough head seas on two of the legs. Those legs were my worst errors.

So far I have been reflecting on the differences noted on this NAI. Now I want to note some of the similarities. Without exception, everyone we met was welcoming, warm and friendly. It seemed the entire Club pitched in to see that we were comfortable and well taken care of. The drinks at the Wednesday evening cocktail party were hosted and the boat drawing was uniquely simple – skippers were all called up at once, fourteen plain envelopes containing boat names were scattered on a table, and we all grabbed one. The hors d'oeuvres were delicious and plentiful, sufficient for dinner that night. Other times beers were a dollar and mixed drinks were \$1.75- what a bargain!

The Saturday evening awards banquet was held at the Club and during the cocktail hour, the traditional discussion concerning the race, complete with excuses, was enjoyed by the skippers. The meal was a choice of Lake Erie perch or prime rib - both were delicious. As the leg-by-leg results were announced, it was apparent that the “gin clear waters of Maumee Bay” had indeed presented a true navigational challenge to all who participated.