



Tim Shepard, 22, of West Bloomfield says navigating will be the trickiest part as he and his friend, Harvey Hammond, plan to lay claim to a record-breaking sail honor — about 14 times — across Saginaw Bay from Tawas to Caseville this month on their 9½-foot sailboards.

photos by DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Hard sail approach



Shepard has been running, weightlifting and sailboarding in "really high winds" in preparation for the record-breaking sail.

He's going for the world record in windsurfing



Shepard, owner of Windsurf Co. in Keego Harbor, got into sailboarding — or wind surfing — nine years ago when someone threw him out on one in a lake and he played with it.

By Sue Mason
staff writer

SOME ENERGETIC FRENCHMEN may have managed to sailboard 261 miles in 24 hours to set a Guinness world record. But if Tim Shepard has his way, that record will come to a quick demise next week.

The 22-year-old West Bloomfield resident and friend Harvey Hammond, 27, plan to lay claim to the honor with a record-breaking sail — about 14 times — across Saginaw Bay from Tawas to Caseville sometime between May 18 and May 23.

Shepard describes himself and Hammond as "two crazy people," which may be true, considering they will stand on 9½-foot sailboards for 15 hours — weather permitting.

"We should be able to average 25 miles per hour," said Shepard, owner of the Windsurf Co. in Keego Harbor. "We're going to try and do the 300 (miles by sailing both) day and night, so the navigating will be the trickiest part."

THE TWO men believe that during the six-day period, they will be able to get the wind conditions they need to set the new Guinness world record. A attempt was tried in Texas last year but was called off after 11 hours and 120 miles because of wind conditions.

At first, the two men considered sailboarding from Port Huron to Mackinac Island like the annual sailboat race. But they switched to the 30-mile stretch across the bay when they realized that high waves on Lake Huron could pose a serious problem for their chase boat. Sailboards can maneuver quite well in rough water, but a speedboat could be swamped by high waves, Shepard said.

"THIS TIME of the year you have to be a realist about getting the conditions you need," Shepard said. "The conditions are usually horrible when the boats race to Mackinac. Sailboards travel faster in the wind. If they have a 15-mile-per-hour wind, they can travel 25 miles per hour."

Shepard and Hammond are ready for the challenge. Since they will be on their feet so long, they have been running, weightlifting and sailboarding in "really high winds."

But before you wince at the thought of those aching arms struggling to hang on to the sail in the waning moments of the effort, technology will help ease the strain. Both men will be wearing a harness that hooks to a rope on the boom so they won't be using their arms constantly.

"Sailboarding isn't a muscle sport, it's more of a finesse sport," Shepard said.

THEY ALSO will have flares and possibly strobe lights for the nighttime stretch and carry back packs full of food (power bars loaded with carbohydrates and protein) and water. The packs will add weight but will work to the sailboarders' advantage. The heavier they are on top in high winds, the faster they will go, Shepard said.

Shepard and Hammond plan to wear dry suits and a hood, depending on the weather.

The two men will sail the distance prior to going for the record "to see what's there," Shepard estimates they will be in 14 fathoms (about 84 feet) of water and will need to find lighthouses in the area to mark the range.

STILL TO be worked out is how to record the effort for the Guinness Book of World Records. They will probably charter a fishing boat to use as the chase boat and also stow gear along the route for sail changes to accommodate wind shift.

They will not be able to touch shore during the effort but probably will be able to stop in deep water. Support people will be able to ferry any needed items out to the sailboarders, Shepard said.

The idea of setting the record popped into Shepard's head after he returned from a two-month stay in Hawaii where he competed in several sailboarding events. But the idea of doing the Port Huron-Mackinac route was something Hammond had considered a few years ago. He gave up the idea because of a lack of sponsorship.

THIS TIME, he and Shepard are relying on a lot of friends in pulling off the record-breaking attempt.

Shepard got into sailboarding — or wind surfing — nine years ago when someone threw him out on one in a lake and he played with it. He fine-tuned his skills on Orchard Lake.

Shepard learned sailboarding the hard way. He recommends newcomers to the sport invest in a three-hour lesson to learn the basics of the sport.

"It's hard to learn without a lesson," Shepard said. "It's a challenge with a lot of payoff in the end."

There are also several misconceptions about sailboarding — that it is an ocean sport and that it's done mostly by young people. Shepard believes there are more sailboarders on lakes than oceans and that a lot of its enthusiasts are older than 30. The younger crowd is "on jet skis," he said.

"SAILBOARDING IS for people who enjoy a challenge and enjoy the payoff after a challenge."

For Shepard, the payoff has included setting up his own sailboard shop. Situated in the Harbor Pines Mall on Orchard Lake Road, the store is a cornucopia of bright color on boards, sails and clothing.

Shepard, whose store has been open less than two months, is making a niche by dealing in beginner and used boards and catering to the high-tech sailor.

The business isn't new to the area. In fact, it's the fourth such shop to open up in the Lakes area in recent years. Shepard decided to start up the Windsurf Co. to fill the gap created when a similar business, in the same mall, closed a few years ago.

And while word of mouth is getting the business off to a good start, Shepard is confident he and Hammond can land a spot in the Guinness Book of World Records.

"This is crazy enough to attract attention. It shows people how fast of a sport it can be and how free you can be. It's a healthy sport, a good aerobic sport."