

# High winds puts skipper in 'thick of it'

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into account a rating (or handicap) was 54 hours, 43 minutes and 39 seconds.

Although 316 yachts started the race early July 20, one-third of the fleet withdrew when heavy winds, ranging from 25-38 miles per hour and waves some as high as 10 feet struck in the early evening July 21 and continued through mid-morning July 22. The unexpected windstorm sent one yacht to Lake Huron's bottom and about 70 others to safe shelter.

"WE WERE in the thick of it. It was the worst I have ever seen," said Gregory, who at first didn't realize the magnitude of the problem even as the wind started picking up speed late July 21.

"On Sunday (July 21) as the sun was going down, the wind started picking up. But there was no indication of anything. The wind just started steadily, steadily building.

"By midnight Sunday, out of seven crew members, four were sick. That left three on board. I figured, well this may be just a two-to-three-hour blow."

But by 3 a.m. July 22, winds "in excess of 40 miles an hour and waves 8-10 feet high" were battering the 30-foot, 10,000-pound Elysium, Gregory said.

"The biggest problem is that we couldn't see the waves. If you can't see the waves, you can't ride over them."

By dawn on July 22, Gregory recalled, the waves were "absolutely the biggest I have ever seen." The peaks of the waves, he said, "were literally being ripped off."

AT THIS point, Gregory and his

crew were just north of Alpena and decided to continue north and head for shelter near Canada's Duck Islands where sailing would be easier in the calmer waters near the shore, Gregory said.

"I had no idea of the magnitude of the problem," he said, until he listened to communications between other yachts in the race and the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Bramble. "It couldn't handle the magnitude of distress calls."

It was the sinking of the Tomahawk "that really opened our eyes," Gregory said.

Unlike the majority of the fleet that sailed south after reaching Cove Island buoy, near Canada's Tombormory, Gregory and Elysium continued north to Duck Islands to make the turn toward Mackinac Island.

"I consider this a major decision in helping to get us to Mackinac," Gregory said. "We were always to the north of the fleet. The other boats took more of a beating."

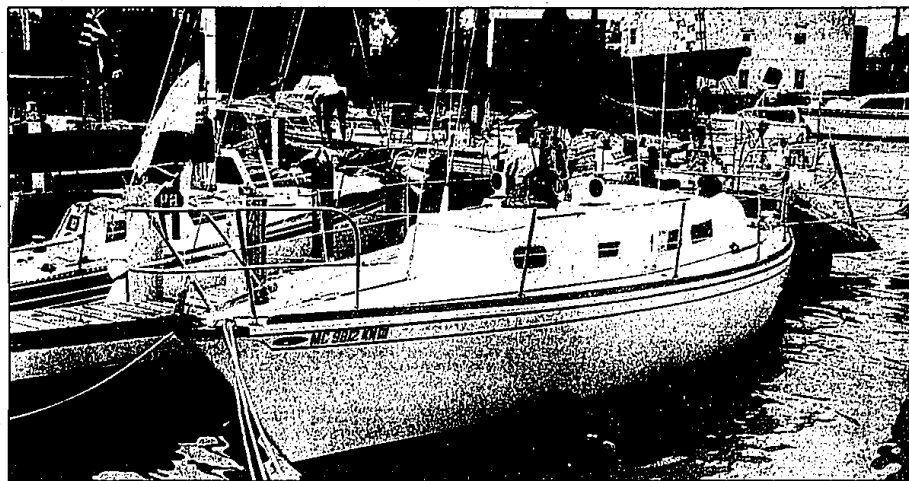
GREGORY ATTRIBUTED Elysium's successful and safe voyage to a prepared and experienced crew.

Gregory admitted he's never seen the kind of storm they endured.

"To do the easiest thing on the boat was a major undertaking," Gregory said.

At one point, Gregory continued, he was thrown from the starboard to port sides of the yacht and believes he may have a cracked rib from the experience.

Instead of riding the waves, the Elysium crashed into them with a force Gregory says he has never experienced. Maneuvering the Elysium, par-



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The Elysium crew readies her for what turned out to be a rougher-than-expected voyage to Mackinac.

ticularly at night, through the wind and waves forced the crew to use every sail on the boat. Of greatest concern was protecting "the long mast."

"A 10,000 pound boat coming out of a five foot wave is really something," Gregory said, adding the crew wore life harnesses to "literally tie them-

selves to the boat."

By late Monday, Gregory's crew began feeling better and the winds began to die down, he said.

When the Elysium crossed the Mackinac Island finish line early July 23, the sailing sloop was traveling at one knot, Gregory said.

## Surviving is all in the preparation

By Jean Adamczak  
staff writer

As a young college graduate in 1988, Charles Gregory, lured by the mystery of the sea and the adventures it promised, bought his first sailboat.

Ten years later, the Farmington Hills resident bought his second boat, a sleek, 30-foot sailing sloop named, appropriately enough, the Elysium II.

The name Elysium has its origins in Greek mythology and means ideal bliss or complete happiness. For Gregory, the name personified his feelings about sailing.

"I love it," Gregory said of his hobby, "there's just nothing else like it."

The hobby turned into competitive racing after Gregory began his job as a design engineer for Ford Motor Co.

"My co-workers talked me into racing competitively," Gregory said, "and I've been racing for the past five years."

This year, Gregory was proud to be the skipper of one of 316 yachts entered in the Bayview Yacht Club's 61st Port Huron-to-Mackinac Island sailing race.

"Nervous, am I nervous?" Gregory joked aboard his boat in Port Huron the day before the big race.

"Ask me tomorrow morning if I'm nervous about the race."

GREGORY AND two of his seven-man crew were preparing the sloop for the next day's 298 statute mile race. Bags of groceries were being loaded below deck in preparation for the race which Gregory estimated would take about three days and two nights.

Five of his crew have raced with Gregory on the Elysium II for the past five years, and that, said Gregory, makes all the difference in the world in competitive racing.

"Consistency of crew is one of the reasons we've done so well in past races," Gregory said. The many blue, red and yellow flags adorning the ship's rigging are evidence of the first, second and third place wins Gregory and crew garnered in the past five years.

As a warm-up to the Port Huron-to-Mackinac Island race the Elysium crew took first in their class in the Mills Trophy Race in June and also competed in the Windsor Yacht Club Overnight Race held in Lake Erie.

"The Mills Trophy race is specifically designed

to gain night racing experience," Gregory explained.

The night racing is probably the most critical part of the Port Huron race, according to Gregory.

"We're really going to concentrate on our night sailing," Gregory said between checking the sloop's rigging.

"A lot of boats (crews) get tired and cold at night and get sloppy. We hope to capitalize on that and on weather-working."

Weather-working refers to beating the weather, specifically the wind, and using this tactic to advance the ship's position in the race.

"If there is any type of weather-work or beating the winds to be done, we have an extremely good chance of winning the race," Gregory said.

AND GREGORY PLANNED on giving the other boats in his class a run for the money. He even went so far as to hire two scuba divers to scrape the hull of the boat, cleaning all the accumulated algae off for a cleaner, faster speed.

"See those divers?" Gregory asked.

"They wouldn't be doing that if I didn't think I had a good chance of winning this race."

But it takes more than just a fast boat to win the race, and Gregory knows it.

Besides luck, there are three things necessary to win the race, according to the skipper.

Number one is a good boat, Gregory said.

"Olin Stevens designed this boat and Tartan Marine in Cleveland built it, so it comes from a very good bloodline."

Number two is the sails, said Gregory.

"We have the latest sails, made of a synthetic material called mylar, and considered to be very fast," he said.

Number three, comprising 50 percent of the winning combination, is the crew, according to Gregory.

"Having aboard people who have been sailing on the boat together for five years, that's the most important thing. We've got a real strong shot at it (winning the race)," Gregory added.

AS SKIPPER of the boat, Gregory makes all the decisions, such as navigational tactics, on the boat along with co-skipper Richard Synowiec.

"The exact course we will follow depends on which way the winds go," Gregory said before the race.

"The Elysium is a heavy air boat — the more wind we have the better we'll like it," he said.

Depending on the wind speed and direction, Gregory estimated the Elysium would cross the Mackinac Island finish line 50-60 hours after leaving Port Huron.

All things considered, Gregory said the toughest part of the race would be the nights.

"The nights are very cold on the lake. You lose your competitive edge at night," the skipper said.

"It's hard to get everyone sleeping on a regular basis so when you need them to go to work they're fresh."

Gregory's wife, Bonnie, and children Matthew, 8, and Caroline, 6, planned to sit the race out in their Farmington Hills home.

"I love sailing too," Gregory's wife said. "But I just can't imagine seven men on one boat for three days and two nights," she laughed.

"I'm just glad I didn't have to do any of the cooking for them."



Charles Gregory and son Matthew go over the charts before taking setting sail.

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Kevin Piechwiak prepared the Elysium for the big race by cleaning off the bottom of the craft.