

Bull Session

News and comment for the El Toro Class

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New El Toro? not quite: Condor's First Flight: The 2010 Pacific Cup

By Jim Antrim, (edited)

All the early entrants in the 2010 Pacific Cup had a head start on El Toro Sailor Buzz Blackett,,they had a boat. Buzz is not one to be intimidated by such a small matter. He just started with "build a boat" as item number one on his "to-do list" and set to the task of building, racing and finishing this premiere West Coast Ocean Race.

Buzz wanted a big boat,,a 40 foot ocean racer. Buzz chose Jim Antrim to design and build a "World Class 40'." The class rules are designed to enable the designers and builders to create a very fast 'high-tec' boat without a swinging keel. It does however have water ballast tanks.

It was an ambitious build schedule and deadlines did slip as they seem to inevitably do in boat building. By the time of the start, the boat was ready. This was, in no small part, due to Buzz's diligence and hard work. Buzz's son David and Max Frazer, an El Toro sailor and 29er North American Champ, also worked on the new boat that would become "California Condor". David Liebenberg, El Toro sailor and Max's 29er partner, hanging from the wire, now working for Pineapple Sails, worked on the very complete sail inventory.

It would have been nice to have more time sailing the new boat. Maybe even race it before going out into the ocean. The first race was to be a 2070 nautical mile ocean race from San Francisco to Hawaii. Several of the sails had barely been out of the bag. But the boat felt very solid and very fast, all the important system were working. Buzz had a great crew. Aside from Buzz, son David, Liz Baylis, Todd Hedin, Tom Paulling and the designer Jim Antrim were aboard.

Jim tells the story that "on race day, Thursday, July 8th, there was a bizarre weather pattern. There was a massive low pressure frozen south of Alaska and the Pacific High was way north of normal. Another small low was centered right over San Francisco. We suspected that the high wasn't quite as far north as the GRIB files and weather maps indicated. The wind we experienced (slightly backed from the predicted direction), and the barometric pressure we measured (slightly higher than the predicted isobars) seemed to confirm our suspicion. But as the hours before our start clicked away a window of opportunity began to form, and it looked like the Thursday starters would escape the light air predicted along the coast of North America."

Finally, the start gun, and California Condor's first race has begun! After passing under the Golden Gate Bridge Condor was staying with the fleet, boat for boat. By Saturday had their small fractional kite up and one of the two starboard water ballast tanks full. Boat speed hit 20 knots on occasion, but average speed is what wins races and they where doing steady 14+! They are ripping. Hours later the entire fleet disappearing from sight off their transom. They where leading and planning their course to be "First boat to Finish" in the 70 boat fleet.

Buzz reports that on "Tuesday, 3:30am and I'm on the helm and suddenly steering gets stiff. A flashlight reveals that lower gudgeon on the port (leeward) rudder has broken. The ¼ x 2” stainless steel strap that wraps around the rudder is broken clean through on one side. We pull the rudder on board. Not a big problem. We are still in the race. A few hours later the other rudders' lower gudgeon has broken completely off!"

Now Condor is rudderless, half way across the Pacific Ocean, it is dark and the wind is blowing in the 20's. After a couple days of hard work they had a repaired rudder ready to re-mount, with gudgeons jury rigged from old cracked and broken pieces and spectra lashing.

Condor and crew arrived at the Kaneohe Yacht Club dock to an unexpectedly warm welcome. Sometimes in life's journeys' your definition of success must change along the way. Sometimes success is measured by "just getting there."

More on Pacific Cup next time.

right coast news,,,

The next regatta is the President's Cup at the Washington Sailing Marina on September 11th. Their summer program seems to be doing well there. I can see all their boats out my office window in Crystal City - (and often I'd rather be down there on the water than in my office).

I haven't had much free time recently, but I'm close to finishing editing up the video of the Tuckahoe Regatta to put on Youtube. I'll let you know when it gets there to see.

Hope to see you all at the Washington Sailing Marina on September 11th.

Bill Schneider

2010 schedule

are we, as a fleet, going to participate, only on Saturday?

Totally Dinghy RYC September 25-26

El Toro Stampede October 3

Cork Screw Redwood City October 9

Running of the Bulls November 14 Elkhorn YC

Mid-winters start on December 5th, RYC