

A Little Extra Breeze

By Marion Bartholomew

There were enough of us females regularly crewing in the Wednesday night races at the [Atlantic Highlands Yacht Club](#) in Atlantic Highlands, NJ, to inspire the club to hold an all-female sailing race in August 2005. We called it our "Ms. Race." A fairly seasoned sailor, I was invited to captain the boat that, usually, I crew aboard. It's a 36-foot Beneteau called *My Time*.

The winds in August in Sandy Hook Bay tend to be light, and the weather is usually good, and therein hangs my tale.

The crew came together easily, though it was a fairly inexperienced group. We happily practiced for the race in early August, in the light wind conditions that are typical of Sandy Hook Bay at that time of the year. Even crew members new to sailing seemed comfortable as we went through the maneuvers of tacking and gybing. We practiced reefing, though heaven forbid we should need to.

Saturday, August 27, 2005, dawned sunny, clear, and breezy. *Quite* breezy. We had a solid 15 knots, which in our case approached the upper limit for uneventful racing. We were all a bit intimidated as we dropped *My Time's* mooring, but I wanted my crew to feel confident, and I did my best to look confident, myself.



My Time reefed to the breeze
Photo by Jeff Smith

Then came the start and gusts into the twenties. Where was all this wind coming from?

On the first leg, with gusts now to 25 knots, the boat was overpowered and we reefed. (In all my past seasons as a crew, I cannot remember a single time when we needed to reef *My Time's* main). At this point winning the race was not important to me any more, and while not one of my five crew expressed concern in words for their physical welfare, I saw anxiety creep onboard and try to take charge. I had to stop worrying about losing control of the boat and stay focused on finding the marks, giving directions, inspiring my crew. I didn't feel we were in any imminent danger, but the wind was challenging our confidence, and I had to be the one to bring everybody home. It was just a race, not a test of survival, right?

The story in brief:

Did we finish? Yes, last.

Did we make mistakes? Oh my, so awfully many.



The *My Time* crew
Photo by Jeff Smith

Then, as we crossed the finish line, the committee on the RC boat applauded and called out wonderful words like “Great job!” and “Congratulations” and it felt so very, very heartening to hear those cheers. I saw my crew's faces utterly glowing with pride for just having done it, for having suffered no damages to body or boat. We were all stronger now, and our two hours of rough sailing became a precious and unexpected gift of increased self-confidence on the water and in ourselves.