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How *Dorade* won the Transpac

Can the 1930 S&S yawl *Dorade* win the Bermuda race this June? When her owner Matt Brooks announced his plans to race her in modern offshore races people laughed and brushed it off as madness. Then she won last year's Transpac... So, how did she do it?





Above: with five sails flying, the biggest visual difference between *Dorade* racing in 2013, compared with 1936, was the introduction of a small mizzen sail

She is not exactly an easy boat to sail. Certain wave angles will push her around dramatically, regardless of wind speed or direction. With up to five sails up, there's a lot going on. Apparent wind speeds increase linearly with true wind speed, and so on.

Doing things right and proper is not so much "important", but vital for her and her crew's very survival. The ocean is unforgiving and there are damn good reasons for those traditions," says Eric Chowanski, crewmember aboard *Dorade*, in a letter to the crew after winning the 2013 Transpac race.

Bowman and rigger Eric "Chewy" Chowanski is somewhat of a legend on the West Coast sailing scene. He's seen everything the Pacific can throw at a boat and crew. He is known to climb out onto the "spear", or bowsprit, of the most modern of carbon-fibre ocean racers, in the middle of the night, while thrashing along at 20 knots, to rig up the spinnaker gear. In that light, his observations of Olin Stephens' near-masterpiece yawl, which made history winning all the great ocean races of her day, are all the more shocking. What Chowanski and the rest of

the *Dorade* crew discovered after nearly 10,000 miles of sailing in 2013 was that her worst quality – death rolling from rail to rail when sailing deep off the wind – allowed her to once again slay the giants of the ocean-racing world, 77 years after her first Transpac victory.

With a visionary owner and a driven batch of professional sailors, *Dorade* closed the door on her competition while exiting the Molokai Channel last July and won the overall title and the King Kalakaua Trophy in the biannual Transpac. Why owner Matt Brooks of the San Francisco Yacht Club decided to start racing

Dorade in the ocean again after all these decades has already been explained in the pages of this magazine (CB304). How Brooks and his team were able to unleash one of the world's most significant

racing yachts, and win again, is described here.

Matt Wachowicz, a former America's Cup navigator and *Dorade's* navigator for the 2013 and 2014 seasons, led the team's performance analysis programme with the specific aim to prepare for, and attempt to win, the 2013 Transpac. He is a top specialist in analysing a boat's strengths and weaknesses, and combining technical boat

“You have to win your day and hope your day wins the race”



preparation and weather routing to drive a boat to success on the ocean. When he was asked in late 2012 to join the boat, he was cynical, as many have been, to the idea of racing an ancient artifact across oceans.

“But it’s such a unique opportunity, it makes you pause,” says Wachowicz, who selected a fully professional crew that included global short-handed sailor Hannah Jenner, sailmaker Kevin Miller and top trimmer John Hayes. Even the captain, Welshman Ben Galloway, had led a team around the world in the BT Global Challenge.

Many people thought Wachowicz’s decision to sail a classic in the ocean was not only “stupid and impossible”, but that it would taint his professional career. “We had to be professional and we were. But more than anything else, wouldn’t you want to be a part of this special thing if it actually happens?”

Wachowicz says he selected his team because, though they were all well respected, they were just crazy enough to “believe” in *Dorade*. What followed last winter was a meticulous, no-stone-left-turned approach from rating analysis, sail design and materials testing, and offshore training that included two West Coast ocean races.

To optimise the boat, a new way of thinking was needed. “The performance direction of *Dorade* is the



Above: Matt Brooks (third from left) with his well-drilled race crew, including bowman/rigger Eric “Chewy” Chowanski (fourth from left) and navigator Matt Wachowicz (second from right). **Left:** well-wishers wearing special sailplan T-shirts greet *Dorade* and her crew



ALL THREE PICS: HANNAH JENNA

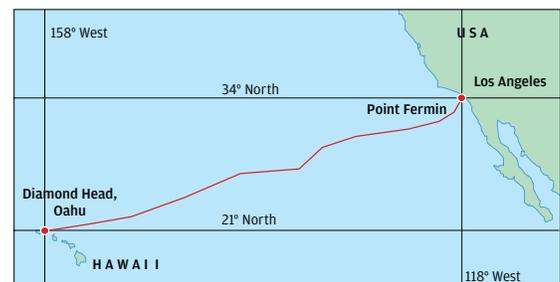
Clockwise from top: captain Brooks leads the team on *Dorade*; in keeping with the boat's 1936 Transpac victory, navigation in the 2013 race was also done by sextant

opposite of what we do today," says Wachowicz. "We were going down roads we would never go down."

Three-quarters of the Transpac is downwind, not reaching, but mainly dead downwind. The downwind performance curves for the modern 70-footers (21.3m) *Dorade* was competing against for overall victory call for higher angles and flatter, asymmetrical spinnakers. These "sleds", including Roy Disney's second-placed 70-footer *Pyewacket*, reach closer to the wind, heel over almost to their rails to optimise their waterline length, and generate tremendous speeds tapping into the 30-knot range.

Dorade's best performance, according to Wachowicz, is "super deep". The crew decided to sail *Dorade* as low, or close to dead downwind, as they dare. "We would just attempt to control the helm, though most of the time it was out of control," says Wachowicz. "But we had incredible results. Our learning curve was learning how to steer. It was unorthodox to us but not 70 years ago."

The "low mode" that *Dorade* had in her DNA let the team cut the corners of this traditional race course. Wachowicz says that race veterans can dictate exactly how anyone should sail this course, which is dominated by consistent weather features between Los Angeles and Hawaii. This opened up a few interesting tactical plans.



The Transpac runs from Point Fermin, San Pedro, to the Diamond Head Lighthouse, Honolulu, a distance of around 2,225nm. *Dorade's* finishing time in the 2013 race was 12d 5h 28m 18s, knocking more than a day off her 1936 time

"The boat is so slow," says Wachowicz, "but sailing 25 degrees lower than the fleet allowed us to reconsider a course to the finish that no one else could."

Wachowicz's data was put into Kevin Miller's North Sails' computers. The result was a selection of asymmetric and symmetric spinnakers, and staysails all of modern, laminate materials. Though *Dorade's* downwind profile looked amazingly similar to images of her sailing past



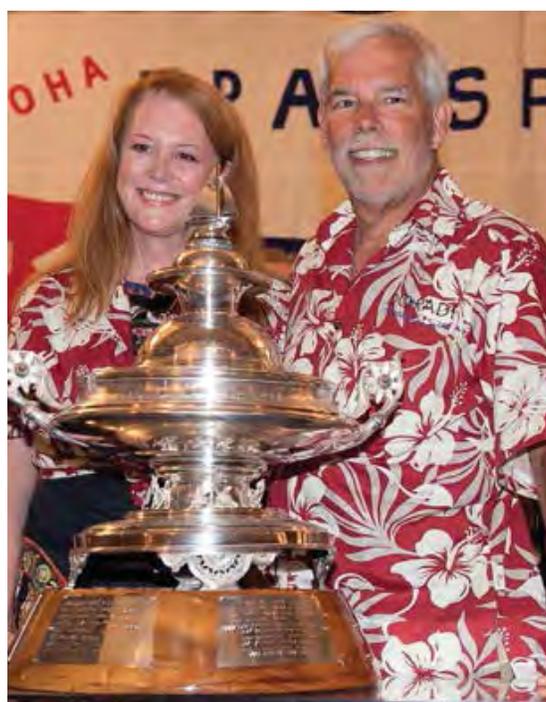
Oahu's Diamond Head in 1936, the striking difference was her new mizzen sail. The handkerchief-sized sail that went only two-thirds up the mizzen, allowed the boat to keep her yawl rating and ability to fly staysails, but the reduced area allowed clean wind to reach the staysails.

The boat was in constant development just as she was under the Stephens' stewardship. "We're looking at every piece of equipment," says Brooks. "Can we make a wooden block that looks classic, but is as strong and safe as a composite block? It turns out, through much trial and error, that the answer is yes." This process led to the fabrication of a more robust bronze gooseneck after the original one cracked on a delivery trip down the coast.

"You have to win your day and hope your day wins the race," says Stan Honey, Jules Verne Trophy-winning navigator, offering advice to *Dorada*.

The format of the 2013 Transpac had the slower boats starting almost a week before the larger boats. The positioning of a high-pressure system that week allowed *Dorada* and her fleet their first opening for the overall trophy, starting in more wind compared with the lighter wind the larger boats faced.

More than halfway through the race, Brooks' dream of winning the 2013 Transpac started to materialise.



Above: Dorade passing the finishing line at Diamond Head, Honolulu, in the 2013 Transpac.

Left: Matt Brooks with partner Pam Rorke Levy celebrate winning the 2013 Transpac



C/O MATT BROOKS

Above: Dorade sailing past Diamond Head in the 1936 Transpac. Below: Full-page coverage in the New York Herald Tribune for Dorade's win in the 1931 Fastnet

"We realised the winner of the race could come from our group," said Wachowicz. "We had to be clever tactically. We had to maintain our position in our class but had to race the 70-footers to the south. There's always hope that something really special is going to happen, and that came three days from Hawaii."

Dorade raced across the Pacific in a professional manner, the crew adjusting sails constantly and pushing her hard. Only the occasional glass of wine and the daily commitment to taking celestial navigation sights drew thoughts of her past.

The thought of an overall win was left to the gods for the first nine days of the race but when winning came into focus, sleep was not an option. In the last 36 hours, *Dorade* went for a shift, separating from her class. The team clung to a 15-minute lead in class and if the shift didn't come, they would lose the top group.

"We saw a hint of the shift and decided to gybe," says Wachowicz. As the sun rose that final morning and the position reports came up on the computer, *Dorade* had added seven miles to their lead and not only locked in their class win, but a miraculous overall victory. "I can't describe to you that moment, at 9am," says Wachowicz. "We pulled off that gybe in perfect fashion. I still get emotional thinking about it."

What now is labelled as "Matt's Crazy Idea", Brooks' ambition to race *Dorade* in all the great ocean races of her day is much more than an idea – it's a movement. After one Bermuda Race and a Transpac, the boat is now on the US East Coast preparing for the 2014 Bermuda Race. The Rolex Middle Sea Race in Europe is next and, hopefully, the 2015 Fastnet and a transatlantic race.

Wachowicz says the team is not resting on their laurels and continues to develop sails and sailing techniques. "Historically the Bermuda Race is reaching, not our strength," says Wachowicz. "One grand caveat is the Gulf Stream and that can compensate."

The clear decision-making in the Transpac highlights the team's strengths in navigation. Brooks has high hopes for his second race down to Bermuda's Onion Patch. "Rod and Olin did the Bermuda Race twice, in part because they weren't satisfied with their performance the first time," says Brooks, "and the same is true for us. The last Bermuda Race was our first ocean race on *Dorade* after the refit, and while the boat and crew did extremely well, all of the modern electronics failed. We want a chance to show what the boat can do with everything in proper working order."

Dorade's legendary Transpac win last year not only led the *New York Times* sports page, but was the most viewed sports story on its website for two days. The same headline was inked 77 years before in papers across the country. Though the future for *Dorade* is bright, the passion for ocean racing aboard a boat with so much history is possibly the greatest take away from "Matt's Crazy Idea".

In Chewonski's heartfelt letter of gratitude to Matt Brooks and *Dorade's* crew, he sums up the value of such an experience: "Without crazy visionary projects, nothing in this world would amount to much. At some level, this is the most fundamental aspect or facet of *Dorade* and what she can teach us, which is that a crazy, visionary project combined with the hard work to see it through, and a little luck, can change history." 🐦

For all the latest news, blogs, history, pictures and videos on *Dorade*, go to dorade.org

Key race dates in 2014 and 2015



49th Newport Bermuda Race, 20 June 2014

More than 150 boats compete in five classes, starting from the Castle Hill Lighthouse near Newport, Rhode Island, and racing down a 635nM stretch of the Atlantic to the finish in Bermuda.



36th Les Voiles de Saint-Tropez, 27 September 2014

Team *Dorade* is planning to compete in the traditional end-of-season showdown in the glistening Mediterranean waters off the French Riviera. Expect some fireworks as more than 300 classic and modern boats compete for honours.



45th Rolex Fastnet 2015, 16 August 2015

Dorade scored back-to-back victories in this biannual race in 1931 and 1933, so Brooks' team have something to live up to! Run over a 608nM course from Cowes to the Fastnet Rock, via the Scilly Isles, then back to Plymouth.

