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## TRANSPAC

BY JOHN WILSON

Seventy-seven years after she first won the Transpacific Yacht Race, *Dorada*, an 83-year-old wood yacht competing against a fleet of modern composite sleds designed for downwind speed, sailed again to victory last July in the 47th edition of the bluewater challenge. The storied 52-foot yawl, designed by Olin Stephens in 1929 and raced in the following years to remarkable success under the hands of Olin and his brother, Rod, won its division in the 2,225-nautical-mile race from Long Beach to Honolulu, Hawaii, and also took home the King Kalakaua Trophy for overall corrected time honors.

One British sailing magazine said that *Dorada's* victory in the 2013 Transpac "might be the greatest-ever racing achievement by a classic yacht."

NYYC member Matt Brooks and his wife, Pam Rorke Levy, bought *Dorada* in 2010 and began an extensive refit designed to prepare the boat for an ambitious campaign to race again in the signal events of her youth: the Newport Bermuda Race, the Transatlantic Race, the Transpac, and the Fastnet. Naysayers derided the notion. "Many, many people told me that the boat should never go on an ocean race," Brooks said. "That it would ruin the boat. That she's a fine piece of antique furniture, and I'd wreck her."

Still, victory was more than Brooks expected. "My goal has always been to complete the repeats of all these early races in good order and not to embarrass ourselves," he said. Doing just that, he said, "would've been immensely pleasing. But winning was unbelievable."

Under cloudless skies on Monday, July 8, *Dorada* made a clean start off the coast of Long Beach, Calif., in 13.5 knots of breeze carrying a single reef and the No. 2 jib. A couple of tacks brought them clear of Catalina Island. *Dorada* adhered to general Transpac wisdom that says that Day 1 is all about getting far enough offshore and into the gradient wind before the breeze shuts down in the evening. After a little more than 24 hours, *Dorada*, averaging 8 knots in 12 to 17 knots of breeze under overcast skies while working her wet way upwind, was the most northerly boat.

The onboard ambience was definitely more Classic Yachting than Pipeberth Brut: "Every evening at the watch change," Brooks said, "we'd have wine, cheese, salami, and crackers. We'd all get together and talk about the day and talk about what's coming up, almost like a crew meeting. It was a marvelous experience."

Day 4 found the boat pushing hard under spinnaker in trade winds, sailing in sight of her classic rival, Sam and Willie Bell's Lapworth 50 *Westward*. By Day 5, *Dorada* was what the crew called "one and one": first in class and first in fleet on corrected time. However, the fleet position would drop as the later-starting big boats surged ahead in pursuit. As the wind for the Division 8 boats shifted farther east, they jibed to port, the favored jibe to Hawaii.

When Brooks replays the action in his head, he remembers one night in the middle of the race in particular. "I was driving, and the



sea and wind conditions were such that we were able to surf the boat. We'd get on these waves and surf, trying to connect one wave set to another. This quickly became a contest to set a world record for how fast we could get the boat going. Ben Galloway got it up for a moment to the unbelievable speed—and we actually checked the log because we didn't believe it—of 15.9 knots. I only got it up to 12 or 13 knots. Those moments of getting the boat to surf—a 1930s design that isn't meant to be surfing—well, it was very, very exciting."

When the anticipated slowdown for the pursuing fleet arrived—the 2013 Transpac used a staggered start with the faster boats starting five days after the slowest ones—*Dorada* began to inch up the overall standings, to 15th, then 12th, and then, with three long days still remaining in the race, to 4th.

Matt Brooks' *Dorada*, a 1929 Olin Stephens design, surfs past Diamond Head toward the finish of the 2013 Transpac. Seventy-seven years after winning the 1936 Transpac, *Dorada* repeated the feat.

With 600 miles to go, the challenge for *Dorada* was to stay on the best jibe in the shifty winds around the squalls. In the gusts, the crew experienced several of *Dorada's* famous death rolls, which happen around winds of 23 knots. The crew had prepared by watching footage of Olin Stephens himself at the helm during the boat's 1931 Transatlantic win. "We had to look backwards," Brooks said, "to relearn how to sail a classic boat."

Brooks explained the general strategy of the race's final days: "We went north of the rhumb line because we thought the winds were there and to position ourselves so that when we needed to turn down for the run to Honolulu, we'd be at a good angle with good wind so we could go fast to the finish."

However, on the charge toward Molokai, when an anticipated wind shift didn't develop, *Dorada* lost the right advantage to her nearest rival, *Sleeper*, Ron Simonson's Jeanneau 44. A well-timed jibe at night saw *Dorada* put four miles on *Sleeper* in three hours, locking in the victor's final advantage on the positioning.

In recognition of his successes with both *Dorada* and *Lucie*, his 6-Meter, Brooks was awarded the Mosbacher Trophy as the New York Yacht Club's Yachtsman of the Year.