



Catalina 22 Nationals—A Family Vacation?

Article and photographs by Stuart Weist

This year team Lake Shark decided to embark on what would be an epic family vacation, the Catalina 22 Nationals! Planning started over a year earlier when I first floated the idea to the family. We had been racing locally (about 5 times) and I thought it might be fun to see what the “big guys” do. Everyone I talked to or could find online said it would be a great time and fun for the family. They could not have been more right.

We started by having the family plan the route and extra activities for the week. Waterslides, sailing, mini-golf, and even a few museum tours were all on the list. The hotel was booked, and everything was all set for Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, in June! But then as spring arrived the rain began to fall, and fall, and fall. Fort Gibson Lake was up over 30 feet and the club to host the event had to postpone it until later in the summer. Although disappointed we were able to

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cancel our reservations and adjust our family schedule for the new date. However, in the weeks before the event the waters were still too high so the venue was changed to Oklahoma City! This sent the family scrambling to find a new hotel, activities, etc. The kids were disappointed and there was even talk of skipping it as none of us really wanted to go to another large city for vacation (we live in a rural town). However we decided to make it an adventure and go anyway. The hotel was booked and new activities were found. Water slides had been exchanged for a science museum and mini-golf became bumper boats, arcade games, and more mini-golf! It was set to be a great week.

We set off from Minnesota to Oklahoma just after midnight and to save cost we decided to drive straight through. We arrived in the later afternoon after a few stops and paying a number of tolls on the roadways. I must say of all the states I have driven through in my life Oklahoma sure does love their toll roads. As we arrived at the yacht club we were greeted by friendly parking attendants who told us

where to go. We parked and went inside to pick up our registration information. The association did a great job! Both the Oklahoma City boat club and the TSA-LA-GI yacht club worked together to host the event. There were banners, flags, and plenty of beverages to drink. It was a great time. As we checked in we were given our bow number for the front of the boat and a welcome packet in a cool bag. Joe Waters made small zippered Mylar sail cloths bags for all the competitors to have at check in so we could keep our papers safely in them. Inside our welcome packet was a sticker explaining the flags for racing (I still don't understand them all but more on that later) and a cool C22 belt along with the racing instructions. We were told where to park and where to bring our sails for measurements.



This is where I was sweating bullets. We had just driven over 800 miles one way and since I had never raced in anything other than PHRF I had never been through the measurement process. In the weeks before the race I pored through the class rules committing many of the sail measurements to memory and triple checking everything on the boat. I even had an electronic copy on hand in case there were any questions. After parking I grabbed the

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sails and headed back to have them measured. The class rules said no rigging until we were measured so the family sat down with some water and to relax. As I talked with the measurer my fears were quickly relieved as the sails measured in just fine. Surprisingly, he didn't need to check the boat as we were in the silver fleet and I had all the banding and things in place when we arrived. I had recently purchased sails for the boat to replace the original 30-year old set and I had checked them over myself a number of times so I was glad to see them measure within class specifications. The whole measurement process was relaxed and fun. In fact, some of our other family arrived, just for a quick visit and meal, while we were going through the process. The measurer even answered their questions as well since they have never been sailing let alone in a

national race. We got the official "OK" and I signed the measurement sheet so we were ready to go. The only snag was that my 110 Jib which was older was not made for a C22 and was not allowed.

Following measurements we went to supper with family and came back later in the evening to rig the boat hoping it would cool down a bit. The temps all week were in the mid-90's to low 100's and for a bunch of Northerners it was HOT! Thankfully, the club provided all the water and Gatorade we could drink, which was a lot, through the week. In fact, they not only provided drinks but lunches as well. Each day there was a make your own sandwich table that worked awesome for the family. There was plenty of ice for the ice chests and even slips for all the racers. We were treated like royalty all week! After the days racing was done or while we were waiting for the race to begin the club had yard games like corn hole (bean bags) and giant jenga, connect 4 etc... The 1st Catalina 22 ever made was on display with the mast up for all to see and even climb aboard to check it out. I must admit I let a little of my inner nerd show as I explored it.

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Racing started Monday with winds predicted to be variable at best. We loaded up and headed out only to be in a holding pattern for quite some time. These racers take their course layout and competition seriously. The club we raced with in the past uses channel markers for marks and you just get “close” to round them. The Race Master finally got a steady wind and set the course after hours of waiting. The racers lined up and the wind shifted adding a bit more delay. This would prove to be the story of the week with shifting winds and temporary delays. But while waiting we learned a new trick on the boat. The deck of the cockpit was getting way too hot for our feet so we started putting some ice on the cockpit sole. It worked great to keep our feet cool and our spirits up.

The winds settled and the racing began with a bang. Our family was watching the start of Gold Fleet when two boats collided at the start of the race. They were both repaired and able to race again with no injuries. For the first race we held back to see how things worked. We finished in last place but within 30 min of the 1st place boat so our race counted. The second race we tried to stay with the pack. I followed another boat tack for tack and was right on their stern as we crossed the finish line. It felt great and the kids were excited to be competitive.



Tuesday the winds were poor and after a long shore side delay the racing was cancelled for the day. The family and I made the best of it and closed up the boat before heading out to explore the city. We had seen some of the great Downtown area earlier so this time we decided to see the OKC bombing memorial. It was a beautiful museum paying tribute to a moment that will forever be etched into Oklahoma’s history. As we went thought the museum our children kept saying, “How come we have never heard about this in school?”. We did our best to answer but it is amazing how fast we forget our history as a nation. Following the museum we walked the outside grounds a bit and talked about what my wife and I remembered from when we saw it on the news. It ended up being a great day and a great break from the boat for a bit.

Wednesday turned into a marathon day with 4 races! In the first race we identified who the front runners were and tried to keep up. With a wing keel we knew we were considerably heavier and slower, but our goal was to finish one race not last. That first race on Wednesday was another close one with us finishing fifth! One of the Silver Fleet boats retired

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due to losing a crew member (they were okay). However, that first race on Wednesday had even more excitement as we looked over to see one of the Gold Fleet boats recovering their broken mast. Winds were high and our little wing keel did fantastic. Race 2 we did even better finishing just in front of another boat to earn a fourth place! Race 3 should have been better but the captain (your's truly) made a huge mistake. We sailed well and finished well in front of the fifth place boat, so we thought. I had mis-read the course and finished on the wrong side of the committee boat. Once we were turned around and finished in the correct side we again found ourselves in fifth place. Race 4 found us exhausted but not wanting to make the same mistake again so we followed the leaders and again finished in 4th place. Thursday winds were predicted to be high gusting to well over 20 so we went back to the hotel exhausted and spent some time in the pool.



Thursday morning came and we arrived at the marina still a little worn out from the day before. We readied the boat and the winds were a little lower than expected. Another racer realizing, we only had a 150 Genoa to use loaned us a 110 Jib, just in case we needed it. With winds seeming ok we decided to leave the big boy up and try to finish well. The final race started without a hitch and we were actually keeping up with the leaders for a time. However, we could not point as high and fell back just a bit deciding to try and take a different line through the course. It did not pay off and as we rounded the first mark we were again in 5th place. This is where things got interesting...



As we rounded the weather mark with the sails in tight out of nowhere a gust came across the lake and we were quickly knocked on our side so far that the keel and rudder came out of the water. My youngest was in the cabin and was tossed to the low side. My older boys and wife were clinging onto the life lines holding on, not quite knowing what was happening. Green lake water began to pour into the cockpit and flood the port side coaming. Thinking

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like a dingy sailor I stood on the coaming (where the sheets are usually stored) and was able to release the main. The boat stood up and righted itself nicely. I made a quick check of the crew; everyone was okay and accounted for even if they were a little scared. The water began to drain from the cockpit and my phone was swimming for a time though everything seemed to survive. After regaining control, we rounded the mark and kept sailing. We slowed down a bit blowing the main if the boat heeled too far and I talked to the family about all we learned in our knockdown. We prepared ourselves to come in last again and rounded the final mark heading for the finish line. We again chose our own line around the course and got a huge lift from a wind shift. It enabled us to point almost straight up the lake for a time and we regained the ground we lost. We made a final tack and again finished in 4th place! It was an epic day!

Back at the club we were all the talk. Apparently, everyone on the lake could hear us yelling and looked at the boat to see it lying on the side. The committee boat which was close by was looking for kids to be floating away from the boat. We talked about ways to avoid a knock down in the future and everyone was very helpful. Apparently, for those

more hard core racers, knockdowns happen some times and each has a unique way of handling it. Some release just the main, some the genoa, but all had a story to share. That evening was awards night. We were treated to some great southern BBQ and received multiple awards. Our family won the new racer award, and the boys all earned youth racing awards. They were given a really cool C22 medallion that my youngest can't wait to show his teacher at school. Our family also took home a fifth place trophy for Silver Fleet.

Yes, I realize there were only 6 boats in Silver and one retired but bringing home any award for a family of five racing nationals for the first time felt great. Having never seen a national's race for any boat and not finishing last multiple times really helps to encourage both our family and myself in our sailing skills. After everything was over I asked my family if they would do it all again and everyone said yes, though they did want a break for a little while. Next year's nationals are in Florida and while I am not sure we will make it there you can be sure we will return in the future for another great time of racing.

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Following the festivities our family left the boat on the trailer for an extra day and explored the science museum that had a ton of things for the kids to do and see. Oklahoma was a great family vacation and while yes, it was indeed about racing we did much more than just race the boat.



The kids learned some confidence and still got to have fun. We met some great people and had a fantastic time. Even the professional race organizer said when it was all over that the C22 family was one of his favorite races as everyone is so friendly. There were people who brought trailers full of spare parts just to loan out if needed, and boats that were rigged for everything from full out speed to family comfort. I can say that we were the only ones with cockpit cushions and creature comforts on board but we had a great time in style. The C22 is a perfect family boat in that it can be both raced and cruised. It has been a few weeks since

nationals and already we are planning our next adventure. Not another race just yet but rather a week of exploring the Apostle Islands on Lake Superior. How many other classes of boats can both race competitively one day and still cruise comfortably that weekend? Not many that I know of. In the end I want to say thank you to Catalina Yachts, Frank Butler for the design of one of the greatest family boats ever, the Lake Hefner Boat club and the TSA-LA-GI yacht club for the hospitality as well as the association for helping us to have a fantastic family vacation at the 50th annual Catalina 22 Nationals.

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Thank you Hal & Sally Smith

PRO—2019 Catalina 22 National Championship Regatta

A successful regatta often owes its success to the knowledge and experience of the PRO and the Race Committee. They are the unsung heroes of a great regatta. Hal Smith is a US Sailing National Race Officer. The Catalina 22 Class is very fortunate to have Hal & Sally Smith support our National Regattas. Hal Smith first became involved with the Catalina 22 National Sailing Association in 1975 and held the offices of Rear Commodore, Fleet Captain, Fleet Measurer, Regional Vice Commodore, and Regional Commodore. Hal sailed and raced Catalina 22 #3536 with his wife Sally as his regular crew. In 1981, they won the Catalina 22 National Championship Regatta in Ocala, Florida.

