



Two Chesapeake Bay boats at work. The Navy 44 *Swift* and Bob Anderson's *Ariel* in close quarters in pre-race maneuvers before the 2015 race. *Swift* won class B, and *Ariel* was second in Class A. Photo: Fran Grenon

Foreword

Writer-sailor Mark J. Gabrielson's new book is a fine, often surprising sea story of men and women who share a distinctively contrarian understanding of what sailing really should be—an adventure by amateur sailors in normal cruising boats making their damp, exciting way across rough seas to a beautiful, beckoning, remote destination.

Anybody looking for a true challenge should race a sailboat out of sight of land, many hundreds of miles across the rough Gulf Stream to beautiful, hospitable Bermuda. Once you've tied up to "the Onion Patch," you can pat yourself on the back and announce, "I'm a deep-water sailor." The 645-mile Marion Bermuda Race is one of very few internationally recognized Category 1 ocean races, defined as "races of long distance and well offshore where boats must be completely self-sufficient." A Category 1 boat must be seaworthy and well prepared, and her crew must be skilled and brave.

Putting all this together requires vision and leadership—and not just on the part of the sailors. The race organizers who created the Marion-Bermuda Race introduced a new approach to ocean racing. Historically, ocean racing boats were designed and built to race, and their crews often included professional sailors. The Marion-Bermuda Race took a different path when two sailors (an American and a Bermudian) founded it in 1977, with 104 boats on the starting line. They laid down two rules that broke from the usual ocean race. (1) The entries must be normal cruising boats and; (2) The crews must be amateurs (or as sailors say, Corinthians).

The new race immediately struck a chord. Although *Yachting* magazine publisher Bob Bavier had won an America's Cup and sailed at the very top level with and against professionals, he liked the founders' aim to "get ocean racing back in the reach of the common man."

As Gabrielson tells the story of the 20 Marion Bermuda Races to date, all the elements of a good sea story appear. "Whether forged through a rescue at sea, being thrashed by big seas and heavy wind offshore, or even collectively suffering through a mind-numbing and interminable calm, sailors who race from Marion to Bermuda, and who do so understanding that it's a race to be won as a Corinthian, will remain life-long friends."

That's one very valuable sign of success.

John Rousmaniere, ocean sailor and author of The Annapolis Book of Seamanship, Fastnet, Force 10, A Berth to Bermuda, and other sailing books.



The dock at the RHADC is a lively place as yachts arrive and everyone dresses ship. Photo: Fran Grenon



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Karina in calmer conditions than the 1979 race. Photo: Nancy Braitmayer

Introduction

The night of Sunday, June 24, 1979 was not the best for Jack Braitmayer and his crew of five close friends. They were racing Braitmayer's semi-custom Alden 42 ketch *Karina* in their first Marion-Bermuda Race, a 645-mile sprint offshore from New England to Bermuda.¹ Braitmayer is a Corinthian sailor; he sails his own yacht with an all-amateur crew whenever he competes. He spent his boyhood on the water, learning the basics of competitive sailing from his father in Sippican Harbor and Buzzards Bay off Marion, MA. He had cruised and raced his entire life in family-owned boats. But on that June night in 1979, when Jack was 52, he wasn't sure *Karina* would even get to Bermuda. His logbook shows that at 0100 the wind was building. The anemometer showed 15-20 knots sustained at that point. Navigator Mike Hayden was calling the course to steer. Except for a compass and a bulky radio direction finder (RDF), Hayden's celestial observations were the only navigational information his skipper was getting. And that wasn't very accurate. It was no fault of Mike's. Ever since 0230 the night before, *Karina* had been enveloped in thick fog and the sky was completely obscured. Jack did have a thermometer aboard, an essential piece of equipment for sailors traversing the Gulf Stream. A spike in water temperature is a clear indicator a vessel has entered the Stream. But *Karina* didn't have the convenient digitals wired to hull sensors used today. Instead, Braitmayer used a thermometer dipped in a bucket of seawater hoisted aboard for the purpose. The latest measurement showed that the ocean water temperature was beginning to rise. This was bad. Simultaneously rising wind speed and temperature are a combination Bermuda-bound sailors don't like to see. It means heavy wind could combine

with current, unpredictable squalls, and often tumultuous heavy seas in the Gulf Stream for rough conditions. If the wind blew strong counter to the current, seas could build to a frightening size.

By 0600 *Karina* was straining under sustained winds of 35 knots, with gusts up to 40. Jack and his friends had furled the mizzen and genoa, reefed the main, and hanked on a working jib. At 1100, the water temperature spiked to 77 degrees; *Karina* was in the Stream. Moments later, an enormous blast of wind and wave hit. *Karina* was knocked down on her beam ends by a powerful and sudden Gulf Stream squall. Spreaders scraped the tops of waves. The RDF came loose and crashed across the now vertical cabin sole. Amazingly, the beast still functioned when it was called on later in the race as *Karina* approached Bermuda.

Jack learned how to sail and race the way most Corinthian sailors do. They start young, fall in love with the camaraderie, competition, and aesthetics of the sport, and try to become better at it every time they leave the dock. Jack had served in the Air Force during the Korean War, and still had sailing on his mind. While stationed in Okinawa, Sergeant Braitmayer chose "Weather Observer" duty to better develop his meteorological skills in the hopes that it might improve his seamanship. When he returned to civilian life, he built a specialty chemicals business in northern New Jersey, but even then, lived on the Connecticut coast so he could get out onto the salt water. When he sold that business, he moved back to Marion and had his first *Karina* built by the Paul Luke yard in East Boothbay, Maine.

He had *Karina* built with the Marion-Bermuda Race in mind. He was attracted to the fact that it was a Corinthian



The 2015 Marion-Bermuda Race gets underway in Buzzards Bay. The race remains one of the premier Corinthian ocean races. Photo: Fran Grenon

ocean race; a race in which a skipper and his own boat are tested against others and their own boats. It was a contest that brought out not only the best ocean racing, but best preparation, management, provisioning, and selection of unpaid crew; all voluntary, and all the complete responsibility of the owner/skipper of the competing yachts.

Jack wanted to win the Marion-Bermuda Race so badly that he had four *Karinas* built over the seven times he raced to Bermuda. He said in an interview: “I kept building new boats hoping this would be the one to win!”

After the Sunday knockdown in the Gulf Stream, the engine wouldn't start. *Karina* also didn't have a generator. They had no means of recharging system batteries. Bilge pumps and running lights became top priorities. No unessential electric power was to be used. Heavy winds raged. Crewman Peter Demerest cracked a rib on a bulkhead corner when he has thrown across the cabin while pulling on his foulies. He would remain in pain, and very limited in what he could do, all the way to Bermuda.

At noon the next day, the log showed winds still sustained at 30-40 knots. *Karina* and her crew were exhausted, but they finally cleared the Stream. Seas moderated to a more reasonable 6 feet.

Tuesday, June 26 dawned clear and *Karina* romped towards Bermuda at 7 knots under the mizzen, double-reefed main, and working jib in a strong nor'easter from astern. The worst was over. The crew could relax and recover. In the darkness at 0332 on Wednesday June 26, *Karina* crossed the finish line off St. David's head on the eastern end of Bermuda, her running lights dim from a lack of amperage in the battery bank. Jack sailed a few easy reaches until nautical sunrise brightened the eastern sky. Fortunately for the engine-less *Karina*, there was a gentle easterly blowing that morning so Braitmayer and his crew of Hayden, Demerest, Dick and David Webb, and Rick Wilson sailed the boat through the narrow reef entrance off St. George's, then down the length of Bermuda's northern shore



Jack Braitmayer (third from right) and his *Karina* crew celebrate a class win in 1993. Photo: Jack Braitmayer.

and through the pin-hole entrance to Hamilton Harbor, one of the world's most protected bodies of salt water. In the bright morning light, these tired sailors from Marion sailed Jack's 42-foot Alden right up to the wharf in front of the elegant Princess Hotel. Their only regret was that at that time of day, there wasn't anybody around to see them make their turn into the wind for a perfect wharf landing under sail. Braitmayer called it an “eggshell” landing; so gentle nothing was broken. Their 1979 race was over.

The Principles of the Marion-Bermuda Race

The Marion-Bermuda Race is one of the premier long distance ocean races in the North Atlantic. This biennial race, held on odd-numbered years, starts near the head of Buzzards Bay off the historic town of Marion, MA and finishes 645 nautical miles away off St. David's Head on the eastern end of Bermuda. The race is overseen by a board of Trustees, organized and operated by an organizing committee of Bermudian and American volunteers, and is

sponsored by the Beverly Yacht Club in Marion, the Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club in Bermuda, and the Blue Water Sailing Club with members in New England and all along the eastern seaboard.

The Marion-Bermuda Race is unique. It was originally designed for and continues to embody purely Corinthian yacht racing. Active paid professionals are excluded, and organizers carefully vet any sailors with professional sailing backgrounds to ensure that they will compete in the race with a Corinthian spirit.

The word “Corinthian” was invented by the ancient Greeks. Put simply, to be Corinthian was to be of Corinth, a flourishing port city to the west of, and in competition with, Athens. Corinth was home to one of the four major athletic festivals of the ancient Greeks.² These “Isthmian” games, as they were called, rivaled the Olympic games in size and splendor in ancient Greece. Like the original Olympic games, all the athletes were amateur (nearly all aristocrats as well), and the idea of sportsmanship, and competing for the sake of honor instead of prizes or compensation, was considered the highest ideal.

Yachting historian John Rousmaniere has written about the origins of Corinthian yacht racing, and how the idea was somewhat radical when it reemerged in the more modern world:

The image of a “Corinthian” as a buttoned-up, blue-blazered, stiff-necked amateur yachtsman is relatively new. The word originated with the citizens of the ancient port of Corinth who were famous both as fine sailors and as exuberant risk-takers in numerous activities, legal and otherwise. “It was a place of proverbial wickedness, energy, riches, noise,” A.N. Wilson says of first-century Corinth. Evidence of the rebellious nature of the Corinthians can be found in the New Testament

in St. Paul's chiding letters to the city's early Christians. Centuries later, Shakespeare had wild young prince Hal describe himself as “a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy.” So, when young American and British amateur racing sailors 150 years or so ago called themselves and their yacht clubs “Corinthian,” they were identifying their efforts as a revolution. The skill and courage required for a volunteer sailor to prepare, command, and crew a big, fragile racing sailboat in a very professional (and very rough) game were noteworthy. So too was the love of risk that lay behind it—a daring not always found among professionals and their wealthy patrons.³

In the modern world, the Corinthian sporting ethic was cultivated by the British (and Bermudians), followed by the Americans, and reached its apogee in the late nineteenth century. A number of Corinthian yacht clubs were formed at that time, largely in reaction to the professionalization of competitive sailing. The historian of one of those clubs wrote: “The founders ... adopted a threefold statement of purpose: Becoming proficient in navigation; [maintaining] the personal management, control and handling of their yachts; [and excelling in] all matters pertaining in seamanship.”⁴ Competence in navigation, personal control of their own yachts, and excellence in seamanship; this book will show that these three tenets were, and remain, the essence of the Marion-Bermuda Race.

James Barnes and his Little Harbor 60 *Lynley III* at the Class A start of the 2013 race. Photo: Fran Grenon

