



Photos courtesy of Chicago Yacht Club

**A record 460 boats will compete in the 100<sup>th</sup> Chicago-Mackinac Race in July.**

It was a great day for Great Lakes sailors in 1970 when Lake Michigan muted “The Mouth from the South” in the Chicago-Mackinac sailing race.

That’s because this sweetwater sea caused superstar ocean racer and media mogul-to-be, Ted Turner, to swallow his sarcastic pre-race comments about 24 hours into the world’s longest annual freshwater sailing race, which marks its 100<sup>th</sup> running this July.

Asked at dockside before the start about the forecast for potential storm conditions in northern waters, Turner reportedly feigned fear, replying, “Yeah, I’m *really* scared.”

That was prior to the 60-knot, sail shredding reality check Turner and his 12-meter sloop *American Eagle* later endured in the Manitou Passage.

“I publicly retract anything and everything I have ever said about inland sailing,” he is reported to have told his crew during the storm, a quote widely — and perhaps rather gleefully — reported throughout the Great Lakes sailing community, and even recalled to this day.

This is no sail across some “mill pond,” as Turner had characterized the lake in the earlier exchange. The northerly gale that piped up that year beat on the fleet’s nose for 16 hours straight and out of 167 starters, 88 boats dropped out.

At 333 miles on the rhumbline, the Chicago-Mac is a test of sailing skill and seamanship. Lake Michigan, second largest of the Great Lakes, is a vast expanse of water with a reputation for winds that can range from fickle one year to ferocious the next, and

will often serve up both extremes in any given race. It attracts world-class competitors like software magnate Larry Ellison, Roy Disney and the late Steve Fossett.

Veterans of international offshore races like the Trans-Pac, the Fastnet, the Sydney-Hobart and the Volvo Ocean Race line up for invitations to enter. Sailors from Maine to California put this race on their calendars and each year the Mac hosts teams and boats from as far away as Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia to compete against hundreds of everyday sailors from throughout the Great Lakes region.

Sponsored by the Chicago Yacht Club, one of the nation’s oldest, founded in 1875, “the Chicago-Mac” will commence July 19, two miles off Navy Pier, with a record field of 460 entries from 17 states and 12 nations.

**Mac Memories**

“The people over all those years who have committed extensive pieces of their lives to making this race better and continuing its legacy are a testament to what a powerful draw the Mac really is,” says George Wolf, who chaired the race for three years, from 1996 to 1998, following two years as vice chair. Just finishing a Chicago-Mac engenders pride in every competitor, he notes.

“Yes, it’s a tradition, it’s an event but it’s a tough race, too, and very challenging,” Wolf adds. “For many people I’ve known through the years, their first real test of life was the Chicago-Mackinac Race.”

From its modest beginning on Aug. 6, 1898 when five



**The Mackinac Cup dates to 1906.**

yachts competed, the race has grown steadily, increasing in entries, boat classes and stature as a world-class sailing competition ever since. But it did not become an annual event until after World War II, hence the reason this year marks its 100<sup>th</sup> running.

Indeed, the Chicago Yacht Club didn't hold a second race until 1904. The third race, held the following year, marked a milestone in the gentlemanly pursuit of yacht racing when the first all-female crew sailed the yacht *Lady Eileen* to the finish, skippered by a "Miss Evelyn Wright."

That year, 1905, also set a record as a real drifter, the longest Chicago-Mac to date. The last yacht to finish, *Mistral*, logged 94 hours and 10 minutes for the course.

In 1906 the club rolled out the silverware when it created The Mackinac Cup as the perpetual trophy for the race. Three years later CYC achieved another milestone, this one technological, when it first employed wireless telegraph to report progress of competing boats back to Chicago.

In 1911 the yacht *Amorita* logged an elapsed time of 31 hours, 14 minutes and 30 seconds. That record stood for 76 years, until broken by Dick Jennings' *Santa Cruz 70*, *Pied Piper*, a boat designed to take on the Pacific Ocean in the Los Angeles-Honolulu Transpac race. *Pied Piper* sliced *Amorita's* time down to 25:50:44.

Then, 15 years later, Roy Disney and his 85-footer *Pyewacket* knocked two hours, 10 minutes and 10 seconds off *Pied Piper's* time. That 2002 record for monohulls still stands and Disney, now 78 and honorary chairman this year, has called that competition "Really half a lifetime of sailing folded into one 24-hour race."

In the 1996 race, the club voted to allow the real speedboats to enter by including a multihull division. Two years later, the centennial year race, Steve Fossett put his 60-foot catamaran, *Stars and Stripes* over the finish line just 10 minutes shy of 19 hours.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Macs

In the 99 years since first using wireless telegraph for position reporting, the Chicago Yacht Club has put technology to work for the racers, most recently from space. In 1993, the Motorola Corp loaned 12 Traxar GPS units to the Mac as an experiment in assisting the race committee to track progress.

In 2000, at least three boats in each of 20 sections carried satellite transponders and dedicated GPS receivers to send regular position reports. Two years later, the race committee used Microsoft's RaceNet software to track the fleet's progress with real-time scoring capability.

Three years ago the Mac became a real, though virtual, spectator sport as sophisticated GPS units allowed the public to track racers online. The race web site got a surprising 1.3 million hits in 2005 and a truly amazing seven million hits the following year.

The 100<sup>th</sup> running of this historic race gets underway about noon on Saturday, July 19. For online race tracking of the 460-boat fleet, plus streaming videos, photos and race updates, go to: [Chicagoyachtclub.org](http://Chicagoyachtclub.org). ■

— By Ryck Lydecker

## Mackinac Island

The Chicago Yacht Club sponsored its first race to this historic summer resort island in 1898. That same year, island residents banned motor vehicles and ever since, travel here has been by bicycle, boat shoes or horse drawn buggy.

That only adds to the Victorian era charm of this four-square-mile island, called *Michilimackinac* or "big Turtle," in the tongue of the original summer visitors, the Ojibwa Indians. French and later English fur traders corrupted the name to what we have today, pronounced "Mack-in-naw." (The nearby bridge spanning the strait about five miles from the race finish line and linking Michigan's Lower and Upper Peninsulas is spelled phonetically.)

A strategic spot on the Straits of Mackinac that connects Lake Michigan with Lake Huron, the British established a fort on the island in 1780. Fort Mackinac is now restored to its condition in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and remains one of the most popular attractions.

Far and away the island's signature attraction, on a bluff overlooking the harbor where Chicago-Mac racers tie up, is the Grand Hotel. It opened in 1887 and is said to have the longest porch in the world.

Mackinac Island is famous for its fudge, going at least as far back in history as the race, and the island must have more candy shops per shopping acre than any place else. Tourists here are known, fondly, as "fuggies."

This is also the summer "grazing ground" of a very unique fraternity, the Island Goats Sailing Society. To be a member, you must have sailed in at least 25 Chicago-Mac races and at last count, the society's 270 members had logged 7,442 years of Mac racing. In addition, Goats must have "endured over 60 days racing the Mac, raced at least 8,325 miles from Chicago to the island, survived sailing through 50 to 100 thunderstorms, suffered through 250 on- and off-watch changes and persisted through at least 25 summers."

In honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> Chicago-Mac, the Mackinac Island Yacht Club will inaugurate a new regatta this year, the "Round the Island Race." It starts at noon on July 23 and is open to all boats participating in the Mac race as well as local and area boats.

For more information on the race, go to: [MIYachtclub.com](http://MIYachtclub.com) and for the island, visit: [Mackinac.com](http://Mackinac.com).

Ocean racing yachts are frequent competitors in "The Mac."

