

THE BLACK DOG CHRONICLES



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THE STORY OF BLACK DOG'S TRIUMPHANT SUMMER RACES IN 2019

INTRODUCTION

During the spring, summer and fall of 2019, a 56-year old O'Day Dolphin 24, built in 1963, entered a series of sailboat races against a fleet of a dozen or so much younger, much more expensive modern design racing sailboats. The name of that boat was Black Dog.

Black Dog was purchased by sailor in Washington, D.C. named Homer Lang for \$1 in 2012. He found her on Lake Michigan at Willamette, Illinois, stripped and mostly abandoned. Lang saw something in that boat that others had not. She was designed by Olin Stevens of the venerable Sparkman and Stevens family of yacht designers and was five time fleet champion on Lake Michigan back in her heyday.

Homer trailered the boat to Maryland from Willamette and outfitted her with the latest racing gear, including a cunningham, preventers, a vang and a set of leads bringing all the controls back to the cockpit. He had the bottom painted with racing paint by the Matthew Brothers in Denton, Maryland and bought state-of-the-art Dacron North sails for her.

Homer recruited a crew to sail the boat, including an eager and somewhat inexperienced helmsman, Pope Barrow who had raced as crew in these races for several years on a variety of other boats. Later Pope was joined by his brother Henry, who took over the job of jib trimmer. He had learned to sail from the same person way back in the

1960s and 70s, their father. Other crew who raced occasionally on Black Dog in 2019 were Maura Hackett, Shelly Castle, Terry Thielen, Alex Wolcott, and Tony Saudek.

Black Dog was first raced in the Daingerfield Island Sailing Club Tuesday night series called the Keep it Simple Series (KISS for short), beginning in the fall of 2014. She raced occasionally in 2015 and 2016. She got some first places in 2016, but did not race in all the races. In 2017, Black Dog raced more often and was frequently in the top 3 finishers, with a lot of second places and an occasional first. Homer and his crew were beginning to learn how to avoid mistakes and make Black Dog go fast. In 2018 Black Dog began to win more races in Division B of the nonspin fleet. Then in 2019, beginning in the Spring, the old Dog broke her chains and really got loose. She quite simply ran away from her competition in the B fleet and was even beating all the A fleet boats (which she was not technically competing against.)

This is the story of Black Dog's achievements in the second summer race series, a series in which the boat was totally dominant. This was the last series in which her long time owner, Homer Lang, raced on Black Dog before moving to the coast of Turkey to live in his retirement home over there.

The earlier history of the boat, No. 59 of the Dolphin 24 series built by the the O'Day company, can be found on the web at www.Dolphin24.org under the name Black Dog. Her previous rather ugly name was Harbor Rat and more information can be found under that name.

Below is a picture of Black Dog's interior back when she was new.



Chapter 1

Race #1 of the KISS Summer II Series, July 2, 2019.

Dark and Stormy

It was a dark and stormy night....No wait! The evening started out well. A nice cool breeze at the dock. A fleet full of boats ready to race. But there were ominous signs.

The race authorities called a 30 minute delay to see if a T storm was

on its way. It passed by harmlessly, so the race was on.

The race committee set a short course (S 4 7 F) because of the delay. Black Dog's ever insightful helmsman announced wisely to the crew that "In a short race like this, you have to win the start. Otherwise you are toast."

The crew responded enthusiastically with such respectful comments as "Duh!" And "Tell me something I don't already know." And "Shut up you Genius. Just drive the damn boat."

Nevertheless, an effort, however pitiful, was made to win the start. That did not happen. It was all the wind's fault, of course. The wind slowed, then died. Went to Neverland. And the Dog was at the back of the fleet. Last over the start line. And not by a boat length. Or two boat lengths. By a football field at least.

Then a desperate struggle began. With no wind and strong adverse current, the Dog was continuously beaten by the start mark. Depressing. Discouraging. This went on and on until finally a small whisper of a breeze allowed Black Dog to cross the start line. She bolted for the shallows and started out on what looked like a hopeless effort to catch at least one boat and avoid the shame and miserable humiliation of a last place finish.

The old Dog was far far back in the fleet.

But then Black Dog's wind karma kicked in. The breeze picked up a little bit. The boat started to sail. It picked up more and more. She caught a laggard boat. Then another. And another.

After rounding the Windward mark and putting the pole out, things began to really look up. The breeze was building fast and the Dog's boat speed was getting better and better. She stayed with the fleet

up river to the Leeward mark (7), rounded it, and headed for the finish in much more breeze. With more and more breeze, Black Dog suddenly jumped into her zone, a rare place where she can outrun any boat in the fleet. She screamed down to the finish line like a bat out of Hell. 5.5 knots or more. Yikes! Exciting.

But meanwhile, a serious storm was approaching fast. The sky really was dark and stormy. Boats were dropping out left and right running for shelter. The radio was crackling with warnings. The moment Black Dog crossed the finish line, the lightening and rain started in earnest. It was intimidating. The crew of Henry and Maura expertly got the sails down pronto, and Homer (thank-you God), got the Honda outboard going.

Black Dog's crew and skipper struggled home against a 20 knot headwind in a downpour which almost entirely eliminated visibility. She was docked successfully (a miracle in itself) and the entire crew and skipper immediately abandoned ship, leaving the old Dog overnight while they raced on foot for any shelter they could find.

When the results came in. Black Dog had won everything. Won her class. Beat the whole nonspin fleet. Took the whole race by storm, so to speak.

How did she do it? A unbeatable combination of determination, guts, and maybe a bit of stupidity. And a boat that, under the right conditions, can go very very fast.

But it was also a bit of a survival story.

Chapter 2

Race 2 of Kiss Summer II Series, July 9, 2019

Who Let the Dog Out?

“We will never beat Lark.”

Black Dog’s helmsman had heard this depressing prediction so many times from Black Doggers that he wanted to throw up. Even her skipper, Homer had been known to voice sacrilegious doubts about beating Lark.

Lark is a brand new designed-for-racing Alerion. Beautiful boat. Very expensive. And fast. She has been consistently winning all the 2019 nonspin DISC races for Class A. Black Dog has been winning non spin B and often showing up just behind Lark in the overall non spin finishers list.

But on the night of July 9, 2019, it was a case of “Who let the dog out?”

Somebody opened the door and the Dog went on a tear. The rest of the fleet, including the feared Lark, was so far behind the Dog that it’s hard to believe they were in the same race.

In a one-on-one downwind run with Black Dog sneaking up behind Lark, the old Dog easily passed the slick modern big-bucks yacht. Left that pretty toy sniffing the Dog’s butt. (Later, Lark’s crew asked Homer how he did it. Homer told them to go home and clean their dirty bottom off.)

It was a SWEET moment.

The race started out looking like a real dud. Wind was predicted to be 3 knots gusting to 4 with a strong outgoing current.

Well....that was fake news. The wind soon got up into Black Dogs range and she put on her running shoes.

After a good fast, second place start, Black Dog dominated the whole race. She behaved like the US women's soccer team. Never gave the other boats a chance to do anything but cry all the way to the locker room.

The Dog knocked out Jurate and at least one other boat with deadly starboard crossings that spun them off into confused speed killing tacks. Fast, close mark roundings on the inside knocked off a few other boats.

The bottom line was sound tactics, perfect trimming, and great boat speed.

The trimmers, Henry Barrow and Terry Thielen, were 100% on their game right up until it was clear that the old Dog was a lock to win. At that point, they lapsed into idle chit chat. But the game was over. The old Dog roared through the finish with no one else around.

It was the Dog's day. One of her best races of the season. Maybe of the whole year.

If she could pull off 2 more wins, the Summer 2 season would belong to the Dog.

Chapter 3

Race #3 of the KISS Summer II Series, July 16, 2019.

Lady Luck Gives Black Dog the Finger

A lot of luck was involved in the race on Tuesday July 16. And that fickle lover, Lady Luck, cheated on Black Dog, allowing her only a third place in the overall nonspin fleet. The Dog did get a First in the B fleet however.

The story of the race, in brief, was crazy strong incoming current, with almost no wind. First, the Dog endured a terrible start (thank you to Bozo the Helmsman), next she had a good first leg most of the way but ending in dismal failure near the mark, and finally, a decent downwind finish to cross the line in third on a shorted course. (The course was shortened because the wind was so light and the current so strong that often the race marks were outrunning boats trying to go downriver.)

Mistakes were made. It will not be disclosed by whom, but his initials are BTH. The rest of the team, on the other hand (Henry, Maura, and Alex) and Homer, the skipper/main sheet trimmer, did outstanding work trying to clean up the mess made by BTH.

It was not enough.

The wind, when it came at all, came up the river in narrow streaks. You were either in the streak or not in the streak. If you were not in the streak, you were just debris, going backwards with

the current, watching the race marks speed past in the wrong direction.

The Dog quickly got out of the strongest current and caught some pathetic little wind streaks over on the Maryland side and was soon in the lead where she belongs. All the other boats, however, were spying on the lead Dog and soon played copy cat. In other words, they stole her strategy.

Then it was just a matter of on whom Lady Luck wanted to bestow some little bits of wind. She gave Black Dog the “no wind for you” signal (middle finger), and the Dog dropped back into third, where she stayed rounding the first mark and then all the way back downwind to the shortened finish.

Homer’s Rule* was violated and Black Dog paid dearly for it.

A very frustrating race, all in all.

Blackie was still in first place overall for the series and almost a lock for first place in the B fleet. It’s a 6 race series with 2 throw outs. She had 3 firsts in B and 2 firsts and a third in overall nonspin numbers. One more good finish would top the B fleet for the series. For overall nonspin, it was going to be more difficult.

Bozo The Helmsman apologized to the other doggies for the humiliating start.

*Homer’s rule is for a race where wind is shifty or patchy. In those situations, Homer says “stay with the leading boat. Don’t go off

chasing wind somewhere else. Failure to follow this rule probably cost us the race.

Chapter 4

Race #4 of the KISS Summer II Series, July 23, 2019.

It's the Little Things That Matter

A sailboat racer once said "The boat that makes the least mistakes will usually win the race."

In this race, the Black Dog's team made no mistakes. The result: she won the race by a large margin, across the finish line at least 5 minutes before the next boat (Gannet, a Capri 22).

This win nailed down First Place for the Summer II Series in the nonspin B class, and put Black Dog one win away from nailing down First Place for the entire nonspin fleet.

Conditions looked terrible before the race. Outgoing current. Wind predicted to be 2 knots, gusting to 3.

But as so often the case in the late afternoons on the Potomac, the wind came up before the start and held for a while. It built to 8 or 9 knots at the start. This is Black Dog territory.

The Race Committee was an embarrassing mess. So confused that they posted nonexistent courses, called out wrong times on the VHF and had to be coached by the rest of the fleet to make things right. But, what can you do? All volunteers.

The start was a good one for the Dog. Mistakes were made by everyone— except Black Dog's crew. Three boats were over early due to misjudging the downriver current. Their race was over before it started. They had to circle back around the committee boat and restart. This was to be a 3 mile race, so their goose was cooked.

Gannet was over the line first legally, but to achieve that, she had to slow down. Black Dog came up next to Gannet and 2 seconds behind her, closer to the pin and with full speed. Within seconds the Dog sped past Gannet and was leading the fleet upwind and downriver.

The first leg was a duel between Gannet, Black Dog, and Summation. Black Dog won all but one of the tacking duels. We had to duck Summation once because of a port/starboard disadvantage, but with a fast tactical duck we ended up in a better spot than Summation.

Frustrating for them no doubt.

The trimming team of Henry and Alex were impeccable. They attacked every little gust, every header, and every lift with perfect trimming, sheet lead adjustments, halyard changes and every other little adjustment that would gain us a 10th of a knot. No detail was overlooked. The teamwork and communication were fantastic.

Homer managed the main to perfection both upwind and downwind.

Even Bozo the Helmsman avoided making memorable major strategic or tactical blunders. For once.

The boat was pointing well upwind with crew weight shifted forward and to leeward and with both halyards loosened to move the draft aft on the sails about 60%. Tell tales were all telling the

right tales, all streaming: Windward and leeward uppers, middle, and lowers.

The old Dog rounded the upwind mark well ahead of the fleet.

Then the wind dropped and nearly died, fulfilling the NOAA prediction. The Race Committee announced a shorter course.

At that point, the Dog was in the lead and going upriver and downwind against the current. As everyone on the Black Dog Team knows, no boat in the fleet can contend with Black Dog on a downwind leg with Homer on the main and Henry on the pole. We continued to move further and further ahead of Gannet and Summation as well as the rest of the fleet, all of whom were in a hopeless situation. No wind. Adverse current, and watching Black Dog well ahead, working its downwind magic. They were all moaning and bitching, blaming each other, and casting aspersions around. So sad for them.

But the Dog's crew shed no tears for the laggards as she coasted happily over the line bringing home the #1 bacon for the fourth time this season.

Chapter 5

Race #5 of the KISS Summer II Series, July 30, 2019.

Can Black Dog Break Loose Again ?

That was the question everyone was asking.

To the doggies who missed the crew call for Race 5 of the Kiss Summer II Series, for those who had lame excuses (such as

birthdays of wives, weddings, anniversaries, hospitalized children, broken legs and other low priority excuses), all that can be said to them is: "You missed a good one!".

This was a race with high drama, heroes and villains, near misses, smart tactics, dumb mistakes, good wind and bad, and just about everything else. It was High Noon on the race course, and Black Dog was playing the part of Gary Cooper.

The fleet of 8 nonspin boats did everything they could, legally and illegally, to knock Black Dog off her game. They tried to bump into her. They ganged up on her. They tried to cut her off. They tried to drive her off the race course. They tried to steal her wind. They growled and barked at her. They gave her nasty looks. They tried everything in the book and a few things not in any book to keep the Black Dog penned in the doghouse.

None of their desperate moves worked.

The old Dog broke loose again and trounced the entire nonspin fleet for the fifth time this season, nailing down 5 first places in her division and four first places in the overall nonspin fleet. And that's with one more race to go. With two throw outs, the trophy now already belonged to Black Dog even if the boat sank at the dock before the last race.

Chest pounding aside, here is the detailed "factual" version of these momentous events.

The race was on the North Course, up by the Anacostia, a more complex and trickier course than usual. The Dog's battery was dead at the start of the race with no way to recharge. Without power she had no speed or depth instruments. Fortunately, the North Course

is mostly deep water so the loss of the depth gauge was not as fatal as it would have been on the Middle Course where you cannot possibly do well without precise depth information.

Black Dog wasn't fooling around at the start. Her timing was flawless. She was across first and going fast. But suddenly, just after the start, Jurate, a filthy Catalina 30 of ill repute, somehow passed the Dog, smirking at us maliciously. This was not a good omen.

The Dog was having none of it. She quickly pulled even with the filthy Catalina and went into attack dog mode. The Dog, the nasty Catalina, together with Summation and Kokomo raced together upwind in close quarters to the first mark, Green 11.

Coming to Green 11 in a clump of 4 boats, things quickly got ugly. The filthy smirking Catalina (Jurate) came at Black Dog on a vicious unanticipated starboard ambush, catching the Dog flat footed on port tack with no option but to duck her. Bozo the Helmsman ducked late. It was a tactical blunder and a bungled ducking job by Black Dog. The Dog recovered by tacking quickly after the ducking and came to the mark just a few feet behind Jurate.

But she was not alone. It was a messy traffic jam. The filthy Catalina got clear but three other boats were simultaneously at the mark with the Dog in the middle. Summation was on the Dog's port side nearest the mark, and Kokomo was outside on her starboard. There was only room for a thread of dental floss between Black Dog and the other two boats as all three tried to make the rounding. It was a squeeze play, and Black Dog was in the squeeze. She demanded her mark room rights because all three boats were overlapped close to the mark, but Kokomo was too incompetent, stupid, or belligerent to give the Dog even a millimeter of room. A 3-way collision was narrowly avoided, mostly by luck. Kokomo could have been

protested by both Black Dog and Summation. But the helmsman and crew opted to teach Summation a lesson in sailboat racing instead.

After the ugly debacle at the first mark, Black Dog, Kokomo, and Summation were all headed downwind and upriver with Jurate in the lead. The remaining four boats in the race, were now already irrelevant.

As all you doggies know, a downwind duel with Black Dog is not something to be desired by any other boat in this fleet. True to form, Black Dog passed Jurate like she was standing still. Jurate's crew were not smiling when Black Dog sped past. They looked like they were at a funeral. Their own funeral.

All three boats spent the rest of the downwind leg sniffing the Dog's butt, trying to steal her wind and somehow catch up to her.

It was hopeless for them. Always is when Black Dog gets loose downwind.

After rounding the last mark in the lead, the final leg developed into a real nail biting squeaker. It was tactical fight to the finish. Black Dog sailed over by the airport chasing the breeze and less adverse current, but when the breeze came, it unfortunately came to where where Jurate and Summation were, not where the Dog was. (Black Dog was again in violation of The Homer Rule: "*Stay With the Leading Boats in a Shifty breeze.*")

It looked for a while as if Black Dog was headed for a third place finish. Panic set in aboard the Dog.

Then wind shifts came suddenly, as if sent by the God of the West winds. (Is that Zephyrus? Thank you wind God.)

It was first a 180 degree wind shift, followed by some other oscillating shifts, all out of the west. There was good pressure in the new wind. Black Dog's ever alert helmsman noticed the shift first and adjustments were instantaneously made. The Dog's determined team grabbed the opportunity. The other boats seemed asleep at the wheel. Their obliviousness was a sad blunder for them. Black Dog surged into the lead, and never gave it up.

Homer went nuts maxing out the power of the main while Henry and Peter worked themselves into a frenzy trying to squeeze every bit out of the Genny. The helmsman's nerves were a mess. He was grinding his teeth down to the gums, looking furtively around like a trapped rat for ANYTHING that could move the boat faster.

Realizing that a win was about to get away from them, Summation, using her rights as leeward boat, made an attempt to lee bow Black Dog and run her off course and into the shallows almost ashore into runway #3 at National Airport. With a little expert tweaking of the sail trim, however, the Dog got her speed up and passed Summation. The Dog's crew could hear the cussing, moaning, and groaning as Summation's crew recognized that their idiotic misguided tactic had failed miserably.

It was sweet!

From there on, it was an exuberant fist-bumping cruise to the finish.

Another first-over-the-line finish. A perfect ending to a great race for Black Dog.

Chapter 6

Race #6 of the KISS Summer II Series, August 6, 2019.

Icing on the Cake

The Daingerfield Island Sailing Club's 4 KISS seasons each consist of 6 Tuesday night races. Two throw outs are allowed each season, so the boat with the best 4 races in each season wins that season.

In the nonspin fleet of about 15 boats, there are two groups, A and B, depending on PHRF numbers with B being the slower boats (higher PHRF numbers). Black Dog has one of the highest PHRF numbers in the fleet, and based on those handicap numbers, she was in the B fleet and should be crossing the finish line behind all other boats.

That wasn't happening this season for sure.

This season, the old dog has really picked up some speed. She has been regularly crossing the line ahead of everyone in the entire nonspin fleet, not just nonspin B. All of the boats in the whole fleet have been looking at the Dog's tail at the finish line.

The last race of the Summer II Series was no exception. The only difference was that, this time, no other boat had even the slightest chance of finishing ahead of, or anywhere in sniffing distance of, the Dog. And they knew it. They were a sad looking bunch as they wistfully got out their binoculars to get sight of Black Dog's rear end when she crossed the finish yet again far in the lead.

As one of Black Dog's crew remarked, it was only "icing on the cake". The cake was already baked when Black Dog won Race 5 chalking up 4

first places in the series. That was a lock. It was not just the B fleet. It was the whole nonspin fleet that got shut completely out by the old Dog.

This will be Homer's last full season on Black Dog as skipper, owner and mainsheet trimmer, and she and her crew really wanted to make it a humdinger for him to remember, and a humdinger it was.

Here are the blow-by-blow details of Race 6.

A great crew was assembled of Henry Barrow and Terry Thielen. Black Dog got out to the course early to size things up. The predicted wind of 6 knots was fake news as usual. Instead, racers were treated to about 13 knots or more, steady and directly out of the south. In this kind of wind, Black Dog can get going up to nearly 5 knots. The breeze did not vary until the last leg when it dropped a bit and shifted to the west.

The course was S-4-7-4-7-F.

Black Dog sized up the start line well and won the start upwind on starboard heading downriver to mark #4. That mark is not far from the start so a crowd was anticipated at the mark, and a crowd of at least 4 boats showed up more or less at the same time. One boat got around just ahead of Black Dog. One boat was just behind, and one boat skippered by the ever dangerous Irishman, Muldoon, got there at the same time as the Dog and just outside. The dog asked for mark room and Muldoon, always a gentleman, provided it graciously.

Immediately after the rounding, things got messy as everyone jibed and struggled to get their poles up. Black Dog struggled too. Lines were tangled and things got slowed down a good bit, but soon it was all under control and Black Dog got loose with the pole out headed downwind.

Black Dog raced beside Muldoon for a while head to head, but as has been said before in these chronicles, when Black Dog is going downwind with a pole out, the other boats in the fleet may as well go

home because they are just quite simply going to get badly beat. No exceptions.

In this race it was no different. Black Dog soon took a lead on the downwind leg and never looked back. There were two more legs to go, but once the Dog had her lead, she was not feeling like giving it up and she never did.

Another crushing defeat for the entire nonspin fleet.

Icing on the cake for Black Dog.

Chapter 7

Race #1 of the KISS Fall Series, August 13, 2019.

Bittersweet

The first race of the fall series was bittersweet for Black Dog. Bitter because it was her skipper's last race on Black Dog. Homer was about to leave for his new home on the Turkish coast. The crew threw him a farewell crab and corn feast last Sunday, which was attended by most of the 2019 crew.

It was also a sweet race because Black Dog continued to dominate the entire nonspin fleet, including boats that are 50 years younger and built to race in light air conditions.

There was some doubt that a race could be run on the evening of August 13. The after party was cancelled because of the possibility of severe thunderstorms and even maybe a tornado. Even more

troubling, the wind prediction was for winds of 2 knots gusting to 4 with an incoming current of nearly a knot.

But, of course, the determined doggies were not discouraged by any of this. Black Dog motored out to the start line early and began to check things out. The wind prediction, for once, proved accurate. There appeared to be either no wind at all or a spot here and there scattered around the river at random. No pattern to play with.

After raising the sails and trying to drift slowly around the start zone, the doggies found that while the surface of the water was glassy without a ripple, there was a tiny bit of wind aloft, enough to move the dog against even a fairly strong current. So optimism began to take hold.

The course was a short one. 2A. Start to mark 4, then back to 6 and next down to 4 again and finally finish at 6. This was only 1.4 nautical miles, making good start critical. (Wake up Bozo the helmsman!) When even the breeze aloft died on the first leg, leaving the entire fleet immobile, the course was shortened to only 0.7 n.m..

Black Dog was second over the start line about ½ boat length behind Truculent Turtle. Turtle is a very fast Lindenberg 26, which, up until now, had been racing in the spin fleet so the doggies were surprised to see her newly among our competitors. But the Dog loves beating the pants off fast, modern, expensive boats with big egos.

Turtle battled the Dog down to the first mark, number 4, a short distance away. After 5 or 6 tacks and lots of shallow water (down to 1 foot below the keel on one tack), the Dog got out of the current and caught some invisible shifts up top and began to move ahead. The tell tales were useless. Not even enough wind to make them wobble.

Black Dog rounded the mark to port on starboard tack just ahead of the Turtle. Turtle came at the mark on port tack. Both boats were being bashed back by adverse current, but that hurt the Turtle much more

because having to tack to starboard and then round the mark with almost no wind in adverse current was a tough move.

The rounding was a bad blunder for the Turtle.* It allowed the Dog to get a good lead down current and downwind. No one, even a fancy fast new boat with a low PHRF should ever give the Dog the downwind lead. When that happens, the Dog breaks off her leash and runs like a greyhound chasing a bus.

Truculent Turtle is built and outfitted for speed with carbon fiber sails and the whole nine yards of racing gear. She has a PHRF of 168. Black Dog has a PHRF of 258. This means that Turtle has to beat Black Dog by 90 seconds for each mile of the course we race on. This is one Hell of handicap for Turtle on a shortened short course which ended up being only 0.7 n.m. It meant that Turtle had to beat the Dog by over a minute (63 second) to win, and here she was on the final leg only a couple of hundred yards from the finish unable to catch the runaway Dog!

Luckily for the Turtle, however, the shifty wind was making things crazy. First it moved ahead, then east, then west. It was all over the place and so light that it took enormous concentration to figure out where it was coming from. The doggies were on top of it, however, and they instantly adjusted to each microscopic shift to keep moving, sometimes at 0.2 knots even with the help of some current, which, by now, had dropped to almost nothing as it was about to turn the other way.

The race looked like another amazing win first across the line by Black Dog with the Turtle next and the rest of the fleet still struggling to get around the mark way back downriver.

But don't count any chickens yet. The fickle little wind suddenly filled the Turtle's sails but never reached the Dog.** Turtle gained on the Dog right before the finish and crossed about a boat length ahead, denying Black Dog line honors. Black Dog was about 15 seconds behind her,

maybe less. Of course, after the PHRF is counted in, Black Dog clobbered the Turtle. She needed to be across ahead of the old Dog by 63 seconds. 15 seconds did not quite cut the mustard.

The rest of the fleet was nowhere to be seen.

Before the race, another competitor stopped by while the crew were putting Black Dog together and asked what the secret was. How had Black Dog managed to win all three prior series this year and cross the finish line ahead of everyone in the fleet on so many occasions? Bozo the Helmsman pointed to Homer and Henry (Maura, the remaining crew had not yet arrived). It is all about teamwork, attention to detail, knowing your boat's strong and weak points, constant sail trimming, and intense concentration. No secret tricks.

It was a bittersweet victory as everyone said good bye to their beloved skipper.

Homer has transferred ownership of Black Dog and all her accoutrements to the Black Dog Racing Team, LLC, a corporation owned by the crew so Black Dog can still continue to race, but without Homer's dedication, inspiration, and skilled mainsheet trimming, her prospects going forward are very much in doubt.

There is a big vacancy on the main, waiting to be filled by someone who can operate on a fast learning curve and, MOST OF ALL, pay attention to detail, and understand all the little nuances sail shape using the traveler, the main sheet, the Cunningham, main halyard tension, the outhaul, the preventers, and the angle of heel, among many other little things which all add up to one big thing: MORE SPEED.

Racers in the fleet can still hear Homer calling out at the top of his voice after each tack "SPEED FIRST!"

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*Turtle sailed past the mark a good ways to allow for current, then tacked over to the mark on starboard and tacked again to port to leave the mark to port. While this tactic is often recommended in the sailboat racing books, Black Dog has proved that it is a totally stupid move in adverse current by trying to do it herself one or more times in past races and getting absolutely KILLED. Bozo the helmsman knew better this time and so he enjoyed watching Turtle make a mess of her rounding.

**Black Dog was also guilty of two screw ups on the final leg. With the wind sometimes aft and sometimes coming on a broad reach angle, the jib sheet lead needed to be moved way forward. That would have eliminated the twist in the jib up top and prevented any air from being lost. The trimmers did not do this, and Bozo the helmsman just sat on his butt wondering what to do. It was a costly oversight. It while the Dog still won the race, that and a tactical oversight cost her the coveted line honors.

The tactical blunder was the failure of Bozo the Helmsman to try to cover Turtle as she came up from behind on the same tack. If the Dog had covered the Turtle and given her a dose of bad air, the story would have had a better ending.