

I've been letting the experience settle a bit before I wrote any more about my experience at Nationals in Nebraska. Things have changed from the previous 3 events, and I think they deserve to be mentioned.

First, I want to thank the French family again. This was the first Nationals the Mutineers have done all on our own (without the Buccs) since 1981. That was largely because of the immense effort put forth by the French family. Ernie arranged the location, with his son Noah who manages the marina we used as home base. Noah created the regatta webpage. Ernie arranged the motel discount and meeting room for our annual meeting. He and his wife (and crew) Carol arranged all of the food for breakfast, lunch and dinner most days. He secured the Principle Race Officer, then secured a replacement PRO with short notice when the original had to back out, and drove him back and forth from the motel to the lake each day. Ernie and Noah inflated the race marks each day, secured the Race Committee boats, and held impromptu chalk-talks on the racing rules while we were waiting for wind. Ernie also personally donated a (LARGE!) perpetual traveling trophy that will have all of the names of the past champions and their crew engraved on it. When Noah wasn't on the water, he was running the marina. Ernie's other son, Nate, was our official photographer, taking a lot of video to be burned onto a DVD. When needed, he became the extra man on the race committee, doing whatever was needed, including bailing out Gordon's boat after a capsize. Ernie's dad Bill was also Johnny-on-the-spot, helping the RC, and following the family motto, "do what needs to be done".

For me this was a more serious Nationals competition than it was either of the past 3 years. I've been driven by the desire to see how the Mutineer could best be sailed, and have spent hundreds of hours working on my boat and technique. I raised the bar 3 years ago by buying new racing sails. Last year there were 2 other new sets. This year there were 6 sets of racing sails on the water, and they took 6 of the top 7 spots. The past 3 years I felt I had speed on almost

everyone, and could take control of each race pretty easily if I didn't make many stupid errors. This year was different. There were fast boats, smart skippers and crew, excellent starts (not mine!), and great tactics on the water. I often found myself in 3rd, 5th or 7th in the middle of a race, and had to find a way to pass boats. Nobody was as surprised as I was when Dale and I won the first race. I had battled back from 5th place shortly after the start, and was thrilled to face a certain 2nd as we closed in on the finish line. But, then one more lucky wind shift put us across a few seconds ahead of Peter. That happened time after time. In the 3rd race, I had a terrible start near the committee boat, basically in the 2nd row. I might have been in last place at that point. A big wind shift with pressure came in from the left side right after the start, and we watched boat after boat take off like rockets headed straight for the mark on port, while we were still trying to get clear air! We battled back, caught a few shifts and a few light puffs, and miraculously took 2nd. We worked so hard for that 2nd, I told Dale that was my proudest moment to date at a Mutineer Nationals. We ended the first day with 1-1-2, and I was thrilled and surprised. We had to work hard for every foot, every boat length, every pass, in that very light air.

On day 2, there was even less wind! I was pretty surprised when the RC began a start sequence. We had a good start and conservatively stayed in the middle, but Ian went left and found good pressure. The first boat had to round the first mark in 30 minutes or the race would be abandoned. I remember being hundreds of yards behind Ian and Todd, with no wind and seeing them ghosting toward the first mark. I prayed they wouldn't get there before 30 minutes, because I didn't want to finish this race. It was 95 degrees, no clouds, higher humidity than I'm used to, sweat is running into my eyes, and there is little promise of wind. Ian rounded at 28 minutes. We had to finish it. Dale and I sweated, and strained, and worked overtime in slow motion to get to the mark, and then the next, and then the next. By the end we had the lead, and took the line with another surprising first. Only 3 other boats got across the line within 30 minutes of us, so that's why there are 6 DNF's (Did Not Finish) on the scorecard, ironically including Ian who had gotten us into that drifting match!

The last day, the wind was back, blowing 10-20 mph, with very rough water from the Saturday motor boat traffic. It took me some time to get used to the boat again in very different conditions. Several boats were moving very well, especially Bob and Bill, and Peter. We studied them to see what they were doing better, and made adjustments. I found I was trying to point a little too high upwind, so we didn't have the power to cut through the turbulent water with speed. I made some adjustments to add some power to the sails, steered a little lower, and we were able to match Bob and Bill for speed by the 3rd race. We swapped leads a couple of times. We grabbed the lead at the beginning of the final beat to the windward finish. All we had to do was cover them to the finish. Bob threw in tack after tack, timing them so that I had to tack just after a motor boat or a jet ski had crossed my path, crashing into their wake (Did you think I wouldn't notice Bob?!) . They closed the gap, but we still had control. Then out of nowhere, Ian and Todd came flying in from the left side of the course on port, almost on the layline to finish. It was a tight crossing, and they had to bear off slightly to duck us. That was the difference between us and Bob finishing a few seconds before they did, as well as Ernie who almost slipped in from the right.

There were many lead changes through the week, a lot of spinnaker time, and some excellent boat handling. We looked like a racing class this year. It took bringing your A game to compete at the top level this year. That had been my dream 4 years ago when I campaigned my first Mutineer Nationals, that this would be the time to test your skills with best Mutineer skippers, crew and boats in the class. This is what it has become. An annual test of skill and boat prep, with plenty of social time on shore, and a time to learn about some very clever rigging ideas.

Thanks again to all who came, and all who supported us while we were having our friendly battle.

Gib Charles  
MCA Commodore