

# Main Brace

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## Editor

## Gene Ferguson



Well September, finally. That's when the hot days and cool nights are supposed to roll in, I'm still waiting.

I hope your summer was filled with good times and plenty of activities. I know not many clubs have had racing programs in August but the Cruisers are still at it. I notice that they are taking place in the cooler states. Bet you haven't seen any reports of cruises in Texas.

I hope you have been following the website lately. There is some new activity to be explored. Just in case you have not looked lately, we now have the MainBrace on line. you can see it at <http://www.catalina22.org/MainBraceMag.htm>. That page has been pretty busy since it was put up on August 2. As of September 1 at noon, we have had 10,626 hits on that page so I know some folks are looking.

It is our plan to have the MainBrace on line each month. This is a very neat program that uses a page turning event that allows you to turn each page with a corner click. the mouse roller or the links at the bottom of the page. It gives you a full screen look and can be enlarged. It also has several other features that you will have to check out and become familiar with them.

Enjoy reading the MainBrace in full color even before you get your printed copy in the mail.

Remember to keep me posted when you have a Fleet Captain change or a Region Commodore change. Don't send me a note saying that John Henry is taking over as our new Fleet Captain. There is additional information that I need and I don't have the time nor the inclination to search through all my files looking for an address or phone number. The only way to get the information to me is our [Change Notice](#). This is the bottom link at the bottom left corner of the home page of the website. That form gives me all the correct information and I don't have to trust my nimble fingers and mind to type the correct information.

Keep those photos and emails coming.

Technical Editor  
Chip FordA seaworthy little boat  
when in crisis

Onset Bay Marina, Cape Cod, Mass.  
July 28, 2010; 6:00 pm

Wow, I really am still alive, thanks to my seaworthy little C22!

I'm soaking wet, everything is; the cabin is a mess, I'm still straightening it out, putting things back on shelves and seats, evidence of the near disaster.

I arrived around 4:00 pm; somehow made it here tied up to a slip, am decompressing. Earlier I didn't expect to need a slip again in this mortal coil:

The Cape Cod Canal was a challenge shortly after noon with a SW head wind, stronger than I'd anticipated (building to a steady 20 knots, I later learned). Sailing is forbidden in the canal. Most of the way motoring from northeast to southwest in the canal's 5-6 knot ebb current, light spray was coming over the bow. This made photography a bit difficult, cleaning my glasses a regular event. Once out of the canal into Buzzard's Bay I expected clear sailing to West Falmouth. I've experienced the mouths of the Merrimack and Piscataqua Rivers on strong outgoing currents into head winds. It's rough, clashing natural forces until you get through them. I think I'm dealing with the same phenomenon – once out beyond the clash the seas will settle. I seem to be wrong and getting wronger, The clash becomes greater,



Coming out of Cape Cod Canal into Buzzard's Bay.

four foot seas coming at me as I navigate between channel buoys, five foot and still building. I rush to close up the boat completely. Six foot, seven and **Chip Ahoy** and I are taking a pounding. As they keep building I head out of the channel, hope for calmer water; there's

a small fishing boat anchored way over there. I watch the depth gauge. 40 feet, dropping, 30, 20, still dropping and boat and I are still being battered, the bottom is coming up too quickly for comfort. I crawl forward to the bulkhead, squint to read the depth gauge, make sure. Yes, not feet, *fractions* of feet: 8.2 feet, 6.0, uh oh, head back out. Yeow, no good options, none.

Back into the 6-7 footers, I'm getting concerned. I open the cabin, jump below, grab the PLB [personal EPIRB] and stick it in my pocket, close up the boat, crawl back to the tiller, clip the PLB to my belt, stare at the sea and wonder what I'm doing out here in this little boat. No time to grab my foul-weather jacket (I am already soaked anyway) nor the SAR life jacket, never mind get them on. This situation came on with little warning. I have to stick with the inflatable vest I'm wearing, hope I won't need more and it won't self-inflate prematurely. I think about grabbing the safety harness tether, decide I'm not sure I



After coming about, retreating back toward the canal with a following sea.

want to be attached if the boat goes down. I send out a prayer of gratitude to Frank Butler, Catalina Yachts designer. **Chip Ahoy** is so far holding together, though a C22 isn't designed for these conditions. Which will go first, I wonder: mast or keel; maybe the rudder? Please God, not the outboard. The hull's taking a ferocious pounding; maybe something will split, crack? What am I doing out here in this? I've never been more grateful for all the work I've put into this little boat – should have upgraded those pintles and gudgeons.

I'm tacking under motor only to quarter the huge waves, roll a bit with them instead of them busting over my bow then crashing into the troughs. I'm playing the edges, still hope to reach West Falmouth – what a story this will be if I can

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make it! I can, just don't panic. Play the angles, the edges, tack when I must.

Six feet of water below **Chip Ahoy** again, motor-tack out quick without broaching. Seven and eight foot seas hungrily greet me to play with **Chip Ahoy**. This is nuts, insanity. But I have no options. The powerful canal current is still running out; I can't return. These seas are going to swallow me soon if I don't.

That calming sensation envelopes me for the first time since the near-death experience aboard *Even Song* in '76. Geez, that was in Buzzard's Bay too, like it's been waiting patiently all this time for another bite.

Ford, you're going to die, so relax and handle it as well as you can. Choose your exit strategy.

That would be pointing back – they will understand when the boat goes down that



Wish I got some shots of the big ones before re-treating.

I recognized going on was crazy. I time the turn between big waves, cut the tiller hard at the right moment, and come about. **Chip Ahoy** is retreating back to the canal's sphincter without broaching. Now what?

I have no idea.

I gave up ducking the heavy spray coming out of the canal. It was impossible to duck, so I just sucked it up. But quickly my glasses were wet, are salt-coated. Wiping them only smears the salt film on the lenses. I can't see out of them, push them up onto my forehead. The GPS is in the same condition. The "waterproof" chart is saturated, can't read it without glasses anyway.

The seas are now following, a bit more comfortable, less frenetic. I take out the cell phone and call Barbara, fill her in (sort of to say goodbye), ask her to quickly find me a contact number for the Onset harbormaster. I recall there's still a route and waypoints on the GPS into Onset Bay on the other side from my 2006 trip. I should at least be able to find it – it is somewhere between my location and the canal's anus.

Maybe I can reach it, get out of this mess, survive? Barbara in turn calls Wally (my second cruise backup), fills him in. He calls me, then calls ahead to the Onset Bay Marina and reserves a slip, calls me back and helps talk me in.



Two larger boats coming out deal with conditions.



They keep pounding their way out as I run back in.

I find the bay's entrance buoy about four miles back, just short of the canal, pull into the lee of the land and the roiling seas are left behind. Wow, relief – incredibly wondrous. But the wind is still blowing hard. I contact the marina on VHF and am soon heading for my

slip alongside the fuel dock.

Idling with just enough power for steerage I am coming in too fast with the following wind and choppy bay. I time it, hit neutral early as I'm right

on target, two dockhands are awaiting, have to hit reverse hard as I come alongside the slip, still hit the dock with my bow. We have **Chip Ahoy** tied up quickly.



Between what I could make out on the chart without **Chip Ahoy** safely at its Onset Bay Marina slip. glasses, occasionally locating my position on the salt-coated GPS screen with a thumb-wipe, I have found my way here, have survived Buzzard's Bay again.

I took some photos randomly – blind snapshots so I'd have something to show if I survived – but I didn't capture what could have been the best: While life and boat were most imperiled, my attention consumed with survival; when so much ocean spray was coming over the bow it would have been futile and a risk of camera. Darn, sure wish I had captured a few of the big ones out there – but what I managed to literally point-and-shoot without aiming ought to provide some atmosphere.

I'm glad that I decided not to tow along the dinghy on this trip. I doubt it would have survived, at best it would have been a major distraction, if not contributed to a disaster.

As I vowed if I survived, I wrote and thanked Frank Butler for such a strong little boat. He replied:

"I am so happy to hear that everything turned out right and that you were so concerned, especially taking the pictures in that situation. I was glad to see that the boat was able to bring you home."

For more of **Chip Ahoy's** seafaring cruise journal, photos, chart, and Buzzard's Bay GPS track, go to: <http://chipford.com/cruises.htm#2010>