

Acadia's Log – Marie Agnes

05/28/06, Douarnenez, France

Well, the first race is over...great to finally have brushed up against some other boats, and it all came out much better than I had imagined. I ended up in 7th place, after taking a 30 minute penalty for being over the starting line by about 1/2 of a boat length.

The week leading up to the race itself was a high anxiety and very intense time...between getting the boat of Zeebrugge, Belgium, towing here to Douarnenez, France, then trying to put the boat together and get her in the water during 3 days of gale force winds and driving rain. Two days before the race, it was a 15 hour day getting the boat inspected for safety rules of the class and the race and then also having the boat gauged, which is the whole measurement process the boat must go through to make sure it is a class legal Mini...there was also about 3 hours of paperwork involved between entering the race itself and formally being a boat and skipper registered with the Classe Mini. It seemed as though there were 100 hoops to jump through,



sometimes 10 at once, though it all came off with very few problems...for measurement violations my spinnaker pole was slightly long and my cockpit door had to have a cable attaching it to the boat, these things took a couple of hours to solve. The people in charge of the Classe Mini and other sailors in the class are all

extremely nice, so the process of sorting out all of the prerace stuff was less painful with their help. For the Mini Fastnet race which starts next Sunday, I have some things to repair on the boat, a few items I want to change and I will have to go through another security (safety check – like the checks they do for the Bermuda race), but it will all be much less intense and now that I have done one safety check, from here on they will be straight forward.

For the race itself there were about 66 boats on the line, with winds around 15 knots at the start. The course was 210 miles and we had to

round about 12 marks, many of them through or next to little rock islands and in two cases, pass through an area with 4 to 5 knots of current, like going through the Race.

At the start, I told myself I would be conservative, after all this was my 1st solo race and my boat handling skills are not great...though there I was trying to win the committee boat end of the line. Unfortunately, I was a bit early and had a fairly aggressive sailor below me who kept driving me up (as he should have) , so when the gun went off, I knew I was close and perhaps halfway over the line. As we were sailing upwind, I tried to hear the radio but did not have the volume up enough...I considered turning back, though as I looked around and saw a slew of boats near me, the thought of bearing away, jibing and picking my way through the close-hauled boats to get back to the line scared the hell out of me...fortunately I had read the race instructions and new that being over the line early was a 30 minute penalty, so I decided to keep going and figured all I wanted to do was finish the race anyway, who cares about 30 minutes.

By the time I got my head into what was going on, I had probably slipped to about 20th, so I started to work the boat and push her upwind...pointing high and moving fast, eventually working my way into the top 10 on the beat. I crossed tacks with Isabelle a couple of times, first I was ahead, and then she motored by, looking relaxed, waving and flying upwind. I eventually got the hang of tacking, which involves swinging the keel, changing the backstays and tacking the jib, a bit of a production (for me anyway)...all the other sailors seemed so graceful at it. About 2/3rds of the way up the beat (20 miles upwind) the fog rolled in, for 75% of the race there was only 100 yard visibility --- talk about high anxiety, racing this complicated boat for the 1st time, in an area I had never sailed, in heavy fog, around a rocky race course, pulling out charts that were soggy from the high humidity and for that matter using charts again --- no chart plotters allowed on Minis, and I have been using chartplotters and computers for years now. I had little time to prepare my course strategy (though I had entered about 20 waypoints into the GPS); I figured in the worse case, I would just follow other boats around, now I could not see any other boats. I managed to get through all of the major hazards (the 4-5 knot current areas were a bit spooky), tried my new code 0/gennaker sail with some success (though major problems getting it down - 15 minutes in the bow fighting the thing) was rather poor at jibing the boat with the spinnaker up (got he new sheet wrapped around the keel somehow on one jibe) --- it seemed that each time I was having boat handling problems, the fog had lifted enough for me to see a whole

group of boats parade by. I kept reminding myself to just finish the race, do not worry about the result. Even the chief measurer came up to me as I was leaving the dock and said "Clay, just finish the race."

After passing through a fairly significant hazard, Isles de Glenan, with only the main and jib (so I could focus on navigating), I got the nerve to put up the big spinnaker after another slew of boats went by me...all of a sudden, I was off and running, steaming along and passing 10 boats that I could see during the next 20 miles. When rounding a leeward mark near Lorient, I could see about 15 to 20 boats, but had no idea where they were in the pack of 66, though most seemed to be protos with an odd series boat here and there, so I figured I was in the top half of the fleet. It was now a 70 mile beat (more or less) in 10 to 15 knots of wind...I crossed tacks with a few boats I had rounded the leeward mark with and then the fog socked in thick again, I did not see another boat for the next 6 hours.

I chose the outside route on the beat (upwind options were fairly open with a few marks on the coast to observe), you could either go outside of the Isle de Glenan heading back North or go back around and through this island area (more of a coastal route)...an option one might take to play the current which was soon to shift against us. I had studied the currents on both routes and did not see any real advantage to going back inside the islands and figured most boats were headed offshore (I just could not see them). I was in my own private world, at times leaving the boat on autopilot, sitting on the rail, legs over the side, listening to my Ipod, glancing under the main for any approaching boats – they must be there, just beyond the curtain of fog. Hours later the fog lifted so that visibility increased to about 3 or 4 miles and I could make out one boat, about 2 miles back, on the same outside route. I studied the island area and inside route with my binoculars but could make out nothing. One boat finally approached from the shore area, but I was not familiar with this one (I was looking for boats I had rounded the leeward mark with), I was not close enough to make out his hull number with the binos. I never saw any more boats and then the fog socked in again – by then, I had resigned myself to the fact that the inside route must be the local knowledge deal, all the boats must have gone that way, and that somehow they had smoked me. I was never really clear of my positioning at the leeward mark, and figured with that group I rounded with were well ahead, I must be in the 20s or 30s --- what the hell, I just needed to finish the damn race. The sun went down (it is light until about 1030 here) it became very cold and I was rather tired, I had not slept for 36 hours straight. The fog slightly lifted again so I had 1/2 mile visibility –

I started sleeping for 10 minutes at a time in the cockpit, setting my ear shattering alarm to make sure it was no longer than that. I finally rounded a buoy at Chausse de Sein (high current area with major reef areas inside) and had about 40 miles of downwind work ... around a couple of buoys and then to the finish. I was tired, so I took it easy, not setting the spinnaker for a good part of this leg...I was nervous about a screwing up and having a major mistake now. Eventually, two tricolor lights appeared from behind, and over a matter of time, sailed on by...I thought okay, two was enough, time to start pushing again, and it was an opportunity to dry out the big spinnaker (which I had dropped in the water earlier on a take-down).

Eventually, through the early morning light and the partially lifted fog, I made out the finish line. As I sailed on across, I thought, if I am in the top twenty, I will be very happy – though in reality, I was happy to just have finished. A hard bottom inflatable boat approached (they have fleets of these boats to help maneuver Minis in and out of the marina)... one of the guys held up six fingers, I must have looked perplexed (I was actually astounded) so he did it again --- I thought, hell I am tired, he must have flashed a two before the 6 ... though he pulled up alongside and said, great job, 6th position. I still did not believe it until I rounded into the harbor and only 5 boats were on the dock (including Isabelle's boat, she got 2nd). I was completely amazed. Needless to say, the chicken and rice, and beer, at 7:30 in the morning was a welcome treat. I learned that four boats had plowed into the rocks in various places on the race course.

Acadia worked very well, I seem to be able to getting her going fast in certain conditions and points of sail, I just need lots of training so I have the confidence in my boat handling skills. Many of the sailors here, especially the top ones, are very skilled at maneuvering their boats, it is very impressive to watch. When I sail with Isabelle next week in the Mini Fastnet, I am sure I will learn a ton. The Fastnet is a 900 mile doublehanded race which starts on Saturday. They should have tracking info on the same website.

I am attaching a couple of pictures so you can have a feel for what it is like. The tide here is over 20 feet which makes for some interesting times.

Thanks so much for all your support. There is no way I would ever be here without it.

Clay