

2018 PACIFIC CUP

It's interesting to find out what possesses some folks to travel long distances to participate in the Pacific Cup. In the 2014 edition, you may recall that it was Rob Date and crew who made the event a part of *Scarlet Runner's* around-the-world cruising/racing journey from Melbourne, Australia. The R/P 52 won that Pac Cup overall, winning the *Latitude 38* Performance Award and taking first place in ORR with a course time of 7 days, 14 hours, 25 minutes, 18 seconds.

Although *Scarlet Runner* may have traveled the farthest ever to participate in the Pacific Cup, two entries stand out for their determination to partake in the 2018 race — Andy Sponseller's Santa Cruz 27 *Low-down*, hailing from Flathead Lake, Montana, and Michael Schoendorf's *Blue*, a Riptide 41 from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

These adventures require significant time, energy, money, skilled crew and spousal support — elements that can take years to align. But, it also comes down to a simple phenomenon: the realization of a dream planted in one's mind at an early age — to sail.

In Andy Sponseller's case, that seed was planted by his mother, Jeanne. "I was 10 years old when my mother gave me a sailing encyclopedia poster," says Andy, who is 62 now. "It hung in my room for years and caused me to become a sailor." Although Andy has years of experience sailing on Flathead Lake (a challenging venue in its own right), this particular journey has been in the works since about November 2015, when Andy first heard about the Pacific Cup.

"I like the support from the Pacific Cup Yacht Club," says Andy. And even though this is his first long-distance ocean race, his priorities are not modest. "So far, it seems like sailing well is as important as winning. We'll keep the spinnaker up as much as possible and

"It will be intense, but I'm used to living without and making do with what I have."

sail in the best wind we can. Geezer Power!" Two more things Andy, sees going his way: "buying the best-prepared boat from 2014, and Jim Kautz is the best first engineer a skipper could have on the boat."

Andy will doublehand *Low-down* with Jim Kautz, a 66-year-old former smoke-jumper and Forest Service photographer. *Low-down's* tight quarters and slim ame-

Mike Schoendorf's Riptide 41 'Blue', sailing in the 2017 Chicago-Mac Race last July.



nities don't worry Jim. "I'm really looking forward to sailing the Pacific Cup," he says. "It will be intense, but I'm used to living without and making do with what I have, so I think it should be all right." And although his wife initially had some reservations, "She's been really encouraging and pleased with the PCYC's organization and overall race support, and she plans on meeting us in Kaneohe Bay for our post-race vacation."

Low-down is a 1979 Santa Cruz 27, hull #118. "I am the fourth owner," says Andy. "She's formerly *Wharf Rat*, San Francisco's 1994 class champion. Her second owner was a couple in British Columbia who cruised her, and then Stan Perkins owned her for 16 years and sailed her in the 2014 Pac Cup as *Mirage* (she won Best Prepared in 2014, finishing in 15 days, 10 hours, 46 minutes). I bought *Mirage* in 2016 and renamed her *Low-down*. I am honored to be sailing a Bill Lee boat, especially the 27, which in my mind is one of the breakthrough boats in sailing."

Relatively new to ocean racing, Andy and Jim have ambitious sailing plans. They'll tow *Low-down* from Missoula to Point Richmond, sail the Doublehanded Farallones race this March 24, and then

return home. They'll do another 1,200-mile drive back to the Bay prior to their Pac Cup start. *Low-down* will return to California via Pasha Shipping, and then be towed back to Missoula. Returning to the Bay in 2019, Andy would like to do the 2020 Singlehanded TransPac and from there head on to Sydney, Aus-

Andy Sponseller, skipper of 'Low-down'.



WENDY KAUTZ

DRAWS RACERS FROM AFAR



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to sail. I've been blessed to be able to participate with the design and ultimate construction of the Riptide 41, *Blue*. It's way over the top to be able to sail *Blue* with some real cool people in some amazing places. To balance that out we use our blessings to raise some funds to help people around the world get fresh water. So many millions of people hardly get a fresh cup of water a day to drink. We've helped in Haiti, Ghana and New Mexico, getting fresh, potable water. Most of the

"It's way over the top to be able to sail with some cool people in amazing places."

funds have been used to install sustainable systems for these people.

"BlueH2O is a good reminder for the crew of *Blue* and our supporters that we are all part of a larger community that has some real needs."

In terms of racing, the Pacific Cup ticks off a lot of boxes for Mike. "Many things come together for this event: length of race, starting location on San Francisco Bay, great downwind sailing, and finishing at Kaneohe Bay on Oahu in the middle of the Pacific. And, the Riptide 41 has good design characteristics for downhill sailing."

Getting *Blue* from Milwaukee to the West Coast is no small feat, and not typically something you do for just a summer or for one race. "The Pac Cup is part of a larger program to have *Blue* sail in the Northwest, on the West Coast and in blue water. Our five events include the Round the County Race in the San Juan Islands, the Southern Straits Race in the South Georgia Bay in West Vancouver, the

Swiftsure Race out of Victoria, BC, the Pacific Cup and finally the Rolex Big Boat Series in San Francisco.

"We trucked *Blue* from Milwaukee to Anacortes, WA, to Jim Betts' yard in October 2017. We re-rigged and launched *Blue* later that month, and practiced for a few days before the Round the County Race on November 10-11. *Blue* and crew performed well. We finished in elapsed order where we should have, and now *Blue* is back out of the water at Betts Boats for some work to prepare for Pac Cup, getting some electrical upgrades and such. We will sail *Blue* down to San Francisco in mid-June from Victoria, BC."

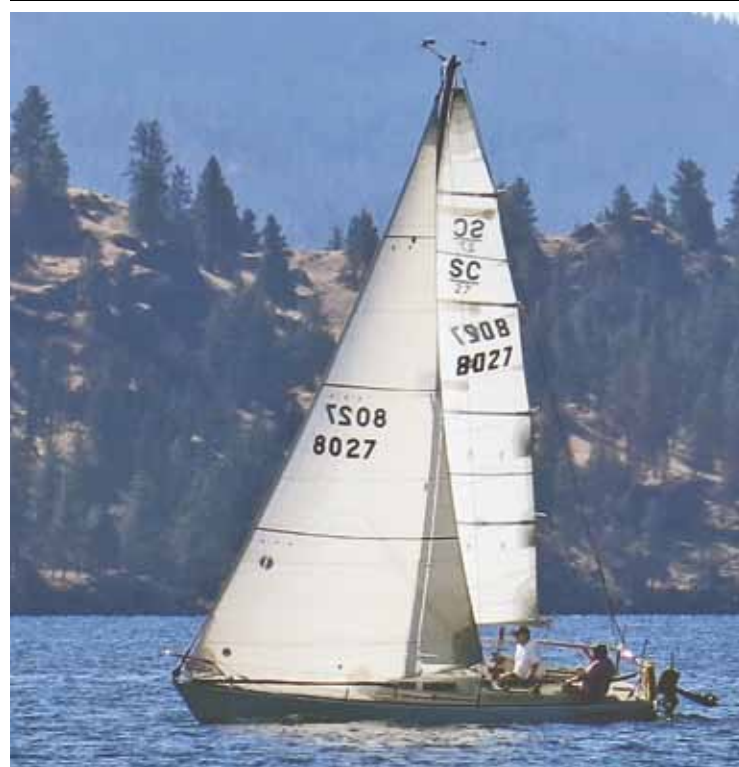
Building a boat, traveling all the way to the Pacific Northwest and managing the logistics and all the other elements raises the question — who's crewing with Mike? "We've been building a Pac Cup team and Northwest adventure team for a number of years," he said. "*Blue* was completed in 2013 and has been sailed and raced for five years. Brian Huse from Victoria, BC, is our captain's assistant and navigator. Fritz Lanzinger from

tralia. Among other races, the Bridge to Bridge race, the Oregon Offshore, a circumnavigation of Washington, the Delta Ditch Run, the Swiftsure and the Double Damned are a few events on his list. And to think — it all started with a sailing poster.

Like Andy Sponseller, Mike Schendorf, 57, dreamed of sailing at an early age. He'd been following Pacific Ocean races since the 1970s. "I was racing on offshore boats on the Great Lakes and had heard of *Ragtime*, *Merlin*, *Windward Passage* and *Kialoa*. Such wonderful stories and yachts," says Mike. "Thinking of far-off places, multiple days on a racing yacht, and sledding downhill made daydreaming in school fun!"

Over the years, two worlds in Mike's life began to come together: his dream of sailing in the Pacific Ocean and raising awareness for the world's neediest populations requiring clean drinking water — the purpose of his nonprofit, BlueH2O (www.blue4water.org). It's not often one can combine such disparate worlds, but Mike has.

"I think it really came down to having some balance. I feel extremely fortunate



WENDY KAUTZ

Andy Sponseller and Jim Kautz sailing 'Low-down' in ideal conditions on Flathead Lake, MT.

Seattle is a wonderful all-around sailor with good feel and balance with some solid offshore and one-design experience. Kris Bundy from Bellingham, WA, is an accomplished I-14 sailor with real

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solid offshore experience. Two of the crew are from the Great Lakes. Mark Keast is our courageous bowman who is tenacious in completing tasks and maneuvers. Eric Cooper has been with me since the design and building stage of *Blue*. He will be managing the pit and acts as our general engineer and handles project management. I'm hoping that Jonathan McKee can join us too. He has been an instrumental mentor for me in the design, build and operation of *Blue*. His schedule may prevent him from joining the fun."

When asked about how they plan to sail the race, Mike brings some thoughtful concepts to mind — beyond just sailing fast. "This is always a good question. For me the answer is about the same for each event and adventure we take: Safe, Tidy, Fast and Fun," he says. "It's my primary responsibility to have a safe, well-prepared vessel for every event and delivery we do. We



Mike Schoendorf, skipper of 'Blue'.

need to get home in healthy condition. I try and have a well-prepared, provisioned and equipped racing vessel for each race. In turn I ask the crew to take care of the asset. I don't mind racing *Blue* very hard. I just ask that the boat, gear and equipment be treated with respect. It

is a racing program, so I also ask that *Blue* be pushed well around the race course all the time." It doesn't matter to Mike if they get first or last place, the attitude's the same. "Stay focused on our task at hand. Beers taste much better that way regardless of where you finish in the standings."

Racing for Mike is a means to pursue an adventure in a competitive environment. He and his crew aim to enjoy the deliveries as much as the racing, to enjoy the sailing experience. "That's why *Blue* was built."

The 20th Pacific Cup will start the week of July 9 off the race deck of the St. Francis Yacht Club. For more information and the latest updates, go to www.pacificcup.org.

— ross tibbits



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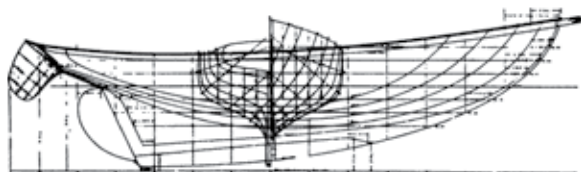
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