

What is Your System for Sailing Offshore?



Bayview Mackinac Race 2026

Due to a weather forecast predicting tumultuous conditions during the Bayview Mackinac Race, close to 10 boats dropped out before the race even began—and another 88 retired within a matter of hours due to 25 to 35-knot winds. During this two-course race, slower boats sail along the shore while the fast boats sail diagonally across the lake to a virtual turning mark in the Cove Island area.

For years, light to moderate winds have caused challenging sailing conditions on the Great Lakes, due to a dominant high-pressure system. This year, extreme heat followed by a cold front produced high wind and waves from the North.

The System for Sailing Offshore needs to include:

- Ingredients
- People
- Research
- Attitude
- Execution



Ingredients

The Boat

- Bottom: fair, smooth, hard paint, ceramic coating
- Keel & Rudder: fair, smooth, hard paint, ceramic coating
- Interior: empty bow and transom area, safety equipment low
- Deck Area: clean, well-marked, sheet bags, labeled clutches
- Dry-Sealed Hatch Windows: electric and manual pumps

A strong, sound boat is the key ingredient to your offshore success. Perfect the boat bottom with a final ceramic polish finish. Prior to the race, keep the boat out of the water until the last minute. For a distance race, plan on where to keep your extra equipment. Store safety equipment in dry bags, low in bunks close to the hull. To keep the weight low, place food in a large cooler on the floor. Use the cold storage area for dry food. Invest in a Jet Boil burner to filter the water from the lake or ocean.

Stash sails below deck strategically, based on wind speed and angle. Store crew bags in a well-marked 20-liter dry bag and place in an area that will improve the boat's performance. Place extra gear like flashlights and extra blocks in an easily accessible dry bag.

Other Ingredients:

- Mast and Boom and Prod, Sprit or Spinn Pole
- Instruments
- Sails
- Running Rigging



While the boat is the most obvious ingredient to successful offshore racing, other ingredients are equally important. The mast needs to be strong, yet light as possible. Check all fittings for strength and try to reduce windage. Teflon tape spreader ends. Clean and polish with ceramic when finished. The boom also needs to be strong, simple, and clean. Ensure outhaul and reef fittings are strong.

Instruments can be either a help or a big distraction. Working instruments make sailing long distances much easier—proper boat speed, heading, and wind direction must be accurate. GPS, wind speed, and wind angle in True and Apparent are also necessary. Sailing software allows routing and weather models. At a minimum, the Star Link antenna enables internet access from phones and computers. Since all boats now have a Yellow Brick tracker, the ability to see your competition is a must.

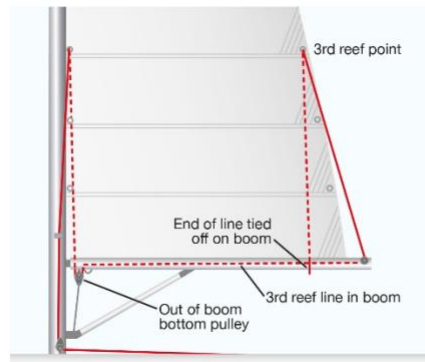
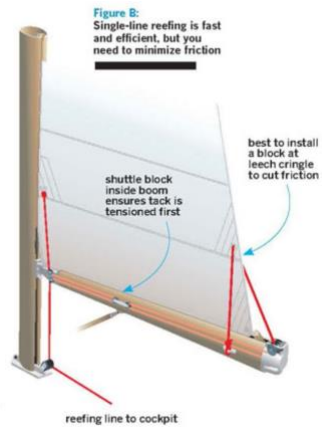
Instrument help:

- Boat Speed: Heading, GPS, VHF, ASI, Starlink
- True Wind Direction: speed, angle
- Apparent Wind Direction: speed
- Opposite Tack: gybe
- Heel & Trim (fore and aft)
- Rudder Angle: headstay tension
- Polar % Target Speed: angle
- Course Over Ground: to waypoint
- Set and Drift
- Starting Help



Sails

Sails are quiet engines—they must perform at each wind speed and be strong enough to last for many races. This year's Bayview Mackinac Race tested the heavy air sails of each boat. This was the first time many boats experienced reefing. A single line reef system with a very low stretch line is best. If set up well with slugs below the reef, this system can reef a main within seconds, minimizing the damage on the mainsail. This system works with the combination of a stretch line, low friction rings at the clew, and a crew member stationed at the mast.



A Heavy Weather Jib (or Heavy Weather Sail in a Boat with no Forestay) with:

- ** a) area, in unreefed condition, not greater than 13.5% height of the foretriangle squared,
- ** b) heavy weather jib area shall be calculated as: $(0.255 \times \text{luff length} \times \text{luff perpendicular} + 2 \times \text{half width})$
- ** c) readily available method, independent of a luff groove, to attach to the stay, and
- ** d) designed to provide propulsion and steerage in Beaufort scale 6 and on all points of sail. (Category 2 Regulations for Offshore Racing)

Many boats in the Bayview Mackinac Race did not have a heavy air jib. This sail is often called a number 4 and needs to be strong, small, and attachable to the headstay in case of a head foil problem. This sail, combined with a reefed main, make sailing in 28–33 knots of wind manageable.





Your sail inventory for a **Great Lakes Mackinac** race should include:

- Main with one reef and, ultimately, slides below the reef
- Jib/Genoa wind range 3–14
- Jib/Genoa wind range 12–20
- Jib wind range 19–25
- Heavy air jib wind range 22–35
- Code 0 asymmetrical spinnaker, usually on a furler
- A3: close reaching asymmetrical spinnaker
- A2 or S2: downwind asymmetrical or spinnaker
- Genoa (IGS) Staysail & Spinnaker Staysail
- Storm Jib

Running rigging is the last ingredient for a successful race. Spectra, Dyneema, and Aramid yarns have created stronger, longer lasting rope. Most sails today last longer, thanks to high modulus yarns. The halyards and sheets now allow the sails to stay in proper trim at higher wind speeds, which ultimately allow the boat to sail faster.



In terms of importance, the running rigging should include:

- Jib or Genoa Halyard
- Asymmetrical Halyard for Code 0/A3
- Main Halyard
- Jib/Genoa/Asymmetrical Sheets

Not only should the rope be strong, but it should also be separated by color. This will make it easier to pick the proper line to operate.

To compete at a level to win, all the ingredients—from the boat itself to the running rigging—are essential. Next up: the crew.

In order for a crew to feel united, everyone must possess the attitude that all contributions are equally important. Some of my worst sailing experiences have been on boats with a tactician who acted and felt superior to the team.

Qualities of a good team:

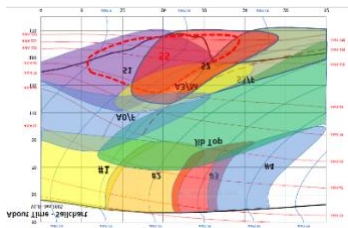
- Willing to work together to make achieve the fastest pace
- Show up prior to boat call and stay after most leave
- Provides information related to job responsibilities
- Encourages communication while racing
- Offers positive results (“Great Job”)
- Become a student of the sport (read/ask questions)
- Take notes/pictures
- Enjoys the team, on and off the boat



To ensure a successful distance race, begin research one year ahead of time. I enjoy learning about the area, weather, and competition prior to the race.

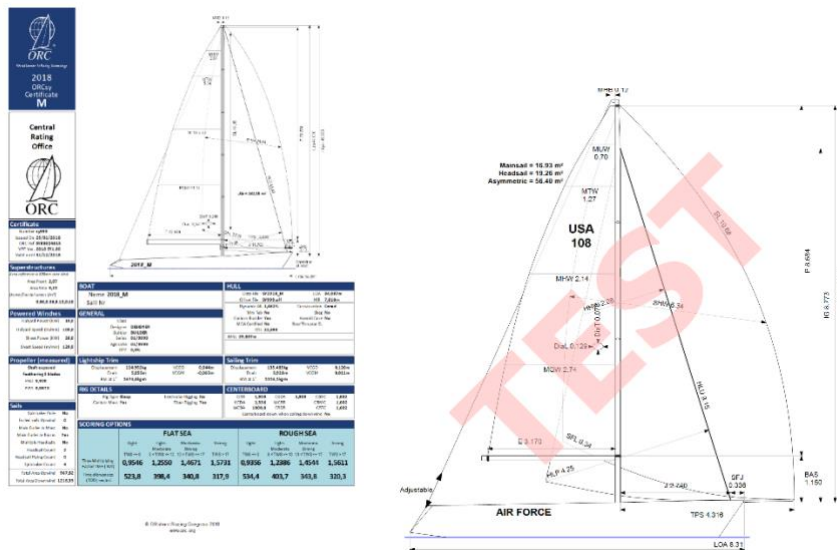
Timeline for a Bayview Mackinac Race

- August 2026 (decide to participate in the 2027 race)
- September–November (purchase items to make boat faster for next summer)
- December– February (work on boat physically to make it faster)
- February–March (crew meetings to review goals and check list)
- March–April (ORC work, measure sails, set up boat measure) (Enter race)
- April–May (Perfect boat: bottom, hull, deck, interior)
- May–June (Practice, work on cross over chart)
 - Research weather history for race
 - Practice running routes (Predict wind)
 - Understand the boat's polars
 - Practice trimming VMG and VMC (5% faster in VMC)
- June–July (Prepare boat for race)
 - Out of water, ceramic finish on bottom, launch two days prior to race
 - Set checklist for safety equipment and placement
 - Get Jet Boil and freeze dry food for race
 - Check water filter/electrolytes
 - Proper size Bio Bags
- Week prior to race
 - Weather and routes each day
 - Download all possible weather models, including AI
 - Prepare team for possible weather
 - Set times to meet, dock out
- Race Day
 - Team meeting three hours prior to race-safety
 - Dock out two hours to race to clean water line-band prop
 - One hour to start, test possible sail choice for start
 - Start in location relative to race plan



Rating Research

Most offshore races use a rule called ORC, allowing sailors to see their rating online, make adjustments, and calculate an experimental certificate to see if the changes improved the rating. Sail size and crew weight both affect rating. Make sure your crew weight is accurate and measure your sails each year. They do get smaller over time, and the difference will help your rating.



Research includes weather forecasts, both prior to and on race day. When researching weather, look at all sources and all possible models to see trends. Possible weather models are:

WEATHER FORECAST MODEL NAMES

- ▶ **GFS:** "American Model"; main global model run by NOAA
- ▶ **Euro:** "European Model"; main global model run by ECMWF
- ▶ **UKMET:** Model run by United Kingdom Meteorological Agency
- ▶ **GEM/GDPS:** "Canadian Model" run by Environment Canada
- ▶ **NAM:** "North American Mesoscale" model; alternate model run by NOAA
- ▶ **HRRR:** "High Resolution Rapid Refresh"; hourly model run by NOAA
- ▶ **RAP:** "Rapid Update Model"; run by NOAA
- ▶ **NAVGEN:** U.S. Navy Model
- ▶ **ICON:** Model run by Germany

Look for agreement amongst a few of the models and consider them as clues. Keep in mind: weather models or routers will not give you concrete answers. You are just looking for clues to help provide confidence while making a strategic decision. Listen to all comments from both experts and competitors. There are no right answers.



Attitude

The single most important piece of the sailing puzzle is attitude. Teams with the best attitude usually win. This is hard, as you will not truly know how a crew works together until a race turns out either great or awful. We all love each other when we win, but a long-term team will successfully communicate and maintain a positive attitude during and after a loss. In my experience, losses can go two different ways:

- The team blames each other and suggests different decisions.
- The team points out the positives and collectively suggests improvements.

It is easy to say, “you win as a team and lose as a team,” but you really do not know until it happens in real time. The goal is to find people who like each other both on the boat and on shore—and who continue to race with you each year.

Divide up job responsibilities to ensure everyone is making equal contributions to the end goal of winning.



The winning streak by the Chicago White Sox is a great example of how a changed attitude can make all the difference. This team lost over 100 games in each of the last three years, but, with a new attitude, is currently in first place. They did get a few new players, but what changed the attitude was to “**swing harder.**” The team decided if all the players could

increase their bat speed just a little, the team could get more hits. They did hit better this year, but what changed is a feeling of confidence based on an improved team attitude.

Execution

You now have all the ingredients to execute a successful offshore race. This year's extremely windy, rough weather during the Bayview Mackinac Race proved that preparation is key. The execution for this race had to be different than the typical mid-July race.

All competitors knew about the possible conditions, and some crews never left the shore. The steps of execution for this race should include:

- At dock, make the boat waterproof, tape all hatches to keep water out. Make sure all pumps work with one electric pump with long hose.
- Pack all light air sails in plastic bags and store aft in boat.
- Move sails and crew gear further aft in boat.
- Fill bottles with water and electrolytes.
- Before starting, boil hot water on Jet Boil and place in large thermos.
- To avoid getting wet and cold, put on weather gear early.
- Discuss safety system and make sure life vests are worn prior to big breeze.
- Discuss strategy with team members and start in a position relative to plan.
- Prior to start, talk about your sail change system. Consider dropping a jib prior to hoisting a new one.
- Make sure the helmsperson and trimmers change each hour during the entire race.
- Off helmsperson rest for an hour after steering.
- Yellow Brick update each hour, weather update every four hours
- Route updates every six hours
- Watch system in breeze, two thirds up and one third down
- Keep weight to windward, keep boat dry below

Once all the parts and pieces are assembled for a successful race, the execution becomes fun. When you know your boat and team is as good as, if not better than, any boat on the course, the sailing becomes enjoyable.

This year's Bayview Mackinac race was challenging due to the weather conditions. The giant waves resulted in a lot of seasickness, causing many boats to drop out. Many different pills, patches, and pressure point systems can help with motion sickness. Sea sickness is another piece of the puzzle that needs to be addressed, so it does not become the reason for dropping out of the most important race of the summer.



Sailors from across the US and Canada anticipate the Bayview Mackinac Race all year long. Every race is different. Being prepared for all conditions will guarantee an enjoyable and successful sailing experience. Sailing in Northern Michigan in mid-July can be the most beautiful place to sail in the world. Take the time this fall and winter to outline your system for sailing offshore and make next summer your best race ever.

Wally Cross

