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# Twenty Hundred Club Bridge Fiasco

By Nick Bowen

Every January, a group of sailboat racers in San Francisco Bay shake off their winter blues and participate in the “The Three Bridge Fiasco” race. “Three Bridge” refers to the only three marks of the course: Blackaller Buoy, near the Golden Gate Bridge, Red Rock, near the Richmond San Rafael Bridge, and Yerba Buena Island, between the western and eastern spans of the Oakland Bay Bridge. These marks may be rounded in any order and in either direction. Currents can reach six knots, especially in places like Race Strait on the north side of Angel Island.

The 2019 race had 314 entrants in 27 classes. The largest one-design class consisted of thirty Moore 24s (very popular since 1974 in the Bay). Most of the sailors competed in doubled-handed classes and about 10% raced single-handed. One factor behind the race’s success is the recent growth in shorthanded yacht racing, as seen by 95 two-handed entries in the 2019 Rolex Fastnet Race.

David Hodges is a longtime Three Bridge Fiasco competitor, and his reason for racing is a simple: “It’s just a really fun race with lots of strong competitors.” The most popular PHRF class was “doubled-handed, PHRF <108” where Hodges’ Farr 38 Timber Wolf won the race in a fleet of 43 entrants. The total PHRF fleet had 227 boats that finished, with 26 DNF/DSQ. San Francisco sailors can always count on their strong currents but occasionally they also have to deal with foggy, windless days. In 2014 they had 357 entrants and no wind. Only one boat, Dark and Stormy, crossed the finish line nine minutes ahead of the 19:00 deadline. The race has a pursuit format, which means the boats have staggered starts over a two-hour period. The “fiasco” comes about due to two factors: racers can cross the starting line in either direction and the principle of a pursuit race is that by taking the PHRF adjustment at the start of the race, in theory, all boats should finish at the same time (and again, crossing the finish line in both directions).

The race is organized by the Singlehanded Sailing Society of San Francisco, which shares several attributes of the Twenty Hundred Club in Narragansett Bay. Both organizers are without a clubhouse and depend on local clubs to host events. They also like to sponsor adventurous and unique races. This season, the Twenty Hundred Club is going to create a Rhode Island version of the California race that will be called the Twenty Hundred Club



© *The Twenty Hundred Club welcomes all sailors to compete in the new Bridge Fiasco on Sunday, June 7.*

Bridge Fiasco.

The race will begin just south of Prudence Island. The sailors then race to our three bay bridges in any order: the Mount Hope Bridge, the Jamestown Bridge and the Newport Bridge. The starting line can be crossed in either direction depending on which bridge you selected for the first mark. To claim credit for each bridge, the boat must fully pass under the bridge. The inaugural race will be held on Sunday, June 7, starting at 9:00 AM. High tide for that day is 9:46 AM, which means a southerly course could be best, making either the Jamestown Bridge or Newport Bridge the first mark. One sailor considering the race has observed that you could chose to round Beavertail to knock off the two Conanicut Island bridges at an extra cost of about 1.8 nautical miles. Many June mornings are often windless until the southerly kicks in, so maybe rounding Beavertail Point may be the winning strategy. But like all great race strategies, you never really know what to do until that starting gun sounds.

We encourage all sailors to join in this new race. It is a great venue to get some early season boat time. There will be podium awards for both Spinnaker and Non-Spinnaker classes. Unlike the West Coast version, we have no limits for crew sizes, so in the spirit of social isolation, we will be giving special awards for single-handed and doubled-handed boats. Sailors can register for the Bridge Fiasco at the club’s website, [twentyhundredclub.org](http://twentyhundredclub.org). ■

*Nick Bowen is the Commodore of the Twenty Hundred Club and races his Lyman-Morse e33 epiphany on Narragansett Bay. He can be reached at [commodore@twentyhundredclub.org](mailto:commodore@twentyhundredclub.org).*