

CRUISER NAV RALLY – IT'S NOT YOUR FATHER'S LOG RACE!

By Tom Collins

Predicted Log Races – you know, those contests where the only thing you could use was a compass and tachometer, but you were supposed to navigate a designated course with precision and only a few seconds of error. That was fine when navigation was entirely based on sightings on aids to navigation and visual landmarks. Back then modern navigational tools such as GPS didn't exist and learning to be proficient with just compass and tachometer was essential to navigation. I recall doing just that in navigating to a small island 250nm out in the open ocean southwest of Cabo San Lucas before Loran or GPS existed. In fact we did find the island and it was a rewarding experience to have done so successfully using predicted logging fundamentals.

But today's skippers have a bridge full of fine electronic navigational tools that sit idle in a traditional log race. A good navigator will use all information available from all sources. And unfortunately, it is a fact that most skippers don't even know how to use these instruments beyond the very basics. We are involved in a sport that is supposed to test our navigational skills. We should be evaluating a skipper's ability to use all available instruments to come to the best possible navigational solution.

Hence the evolution of today's Cruiser Navigation Rally. We've transitioned from the horse and buggy era of compass and tachometer to this modern version of a predicted log contest. In a Nav Rally, the skipper is not only permitted, but encouraged to use all of his vessel's navigational equipment including GPS, provisionally with speed over the ground permitted.

The reader may ask: Then where is the contest as a test of the skipper's navigational skill if all these are permitted? The answer lies in the fact that the skipper still needs to do exactly the same set of predictions as before. Having correct predictions is half of the equation in figuring the error. Plus the execution still requires knowing the boat's performance characteristics such as the acceleration time, turn radius, and a speed curve for making non-empirical adjustments. Also the course needs to be followed precisely, making crab angle corrections for wind and current effects, and calling the marks accurately. Allowance needs to be made for delay and skid in large turns, and for dog legs around unexpected obstacles. All in all, there still remains much to be mastered in a Cruiser Nav Rally. In addition to scoring well in the rally, a further reward lies in becoming proficient in using all the boat's instruments.

Welcome to the 21st century and Cruiser Navigation Rallies - they're not your father's log race!