50 K Memories

From the Deck of the J/24 “Bandit” Skipper – Glenn Cliborne

The 50 K was like spending the day at an amusement park and taking in all the rides. The race started out like the lazy river ride on a tube and ended up on the giant roller coaster scarring us out of our wits and creating an adrenaline rush. Our first two hours on the lazy river ride was slow and without much excitement. We could still see the start line after the first hour. During the second hour, the helicopter flew over taking photographs and we all waved. When it flew back an hour later, it felt like we had only moved 10 feet so everyone needed to change positions so the picture would look different.

The wind eventually picked up and we started sailing up the Roanoke leg of the lake. Once we reached the S turn the ride was more like the haunted house. The S turn was a sailor's nightmare with "no wind" holes, swirling wind when it came, and powerboat wakes everywhere. It was like being in a washing machine. Most of the fleet caught us while we went through the haunted house. The wind picked back up as we went up the Roanoke and got to Bridgewater Plaza. Our adorning fans cheered us on as we turned the buoy. Then we sailed back down the Roanoke to the S turn and went through the haunted house again with more of the same. As we went down the Roanoke leg to the dam, we dodged two thunderstorms, saw a rain squall go across Smith Mountain, and a beautiful half of a rainbow hung on the left side of the dam as we sailed on and turned the islands in front of the dam.

Racing back up the lake under spinnaker to the Blackwater side, another thunderstorm was brewing and now we were in for Mr. Toad's wild ride. As we saw the storm approaching, I told the crew to take down the spinnaker before the storm hit. The boat behind us was not as fortunate and we saw their spinnaker flying off of the top of the mast like a large kite. I was thinking, I don't believe Ben Franklin flew his kite that way in a thunderstorm. The most ferocious part of the storm missed us and we continued up the Blackwater to the three islands across from Gill's Creek.

It was now dark and going around the islands we saw another storm off to the Northwest and thought it was going around us. We were wrong and in for a roller coaster ride to the finish! It felt like we were now going down the giant hill on the roller coaster. The wind continued to build and we were streaking to the finish the fastest we had been all day. Then the lightning and rain started. It rained so hard we could not see the shoreline 50 yards away. We guessed where the finish line was using the lights along Pelican Point. We were also trying to get off the water as soon as we could to avoid the fireworks in the sky. We crossed the line second, got the sails down and back to the dock as soon as we could. It was still pouring down raining and we looked like drowned rats, but we were thankful the amusement park ride was now over after 10 hours on a fiberglass seat.

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