



Dan Nemy/CCA

Heavy weather seminar relates tough conditions

▲ Above, the seminar participants on stage. Below, from left, Randall Reeves, Rich Wilson, Jean Luc Van Den Heede, Steve Brown and moderator Frank Bohlen.

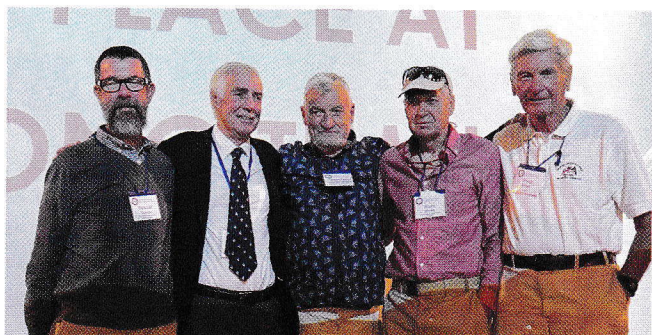
ON SEPTEMBER 14, 2022, AS PART OF THE CRUISING Club of America's Centennial Week celebration, the CCA hosted a seminar on "Heavy Weather Sailing from a Bluewater Perspective" at the Jane Pickens The-

ater in Newport, R.I. The discussion was led by CCA member Frank Bohlen, an emeritus professor of marine sciences University of Connecticut. The panel consisted of four sailors with extensive offshore experience: Jean Luc Van Den Heede (Mini-Transat, BOC Challenge, Vendee Globe, the Route du Phum, winner of the 2018 Golden Globe Race and the 2019 CCA Blue Water Medal), Rich Wilson (set speed

sailing records and raced in two Vendee Globe Races, winner of the 2004 CCA Blue Water Medal), Randall Reeves (Pacific voyages and the Figure 8 Voyage Around the Americas and Antarctica, winner of the 2020 CCA Blue Water Medal) and Steve Brown (winner of the CCA 2020 Far Horizons Award).

Frank Bohlen opened the discussion with a look at how to define heavy weather, noting that smaller vessels are troubled by smaller waves than larger boats. He also stressed that the primary issue is the waves that heavy weather produces. He outlined the interaction between wind waves and swell, wind against current, the effects of topography and the existence of rogue waves.

Randall Reeves talked about his solo Figure 8 voyage and how he used the software package PredictWind for gathering his weather forecasts. He also described getting knocked down on



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his boat *Moli*, a 45-foot aluminum sloop and how a pilothouse window broke and flooded the boat. He had not fitted any storm covers to the windows. He did have dorade vent caps that he used on numerous occasions when he found himself in big seas to prevent downflooding via the vents.

French sailor Jean Luc Van Den Heede described some of his heavy weather efforts in his long career of offshore races. Van Den Heede pointed out that usually the worst part of a storm is not the beginning, but after the storm's movement has created wave trains from different directions and is producing confused seas. Given this, Van Den Heede underlined the importance of getting ready, sleeping and eating early in a gale as the greatest trials will usually come later.

Steve Brown made the point that the best heavy weather tactic of all is to avoid storms if possible. Should a storm encounter be immi-

nent, he said the best strategy is to reef down and prepare the boat early. Brown related his experience running under bare poles near South Georgia Island in the South Atlantic, being pummeled by a storm with 65-knot winds. Bare poles and the windage of the hull allowed them to stay in control. Brown also touted the value of Victor Shane's Drag Device database (dragdevice.com), a compendium of drag devices: Galerider, Jordan Series Drogue (JSD), etc. Brown talked about his experience deploying his favorite heavy weather device, the JSD.

Finally, Rich Wilson talked about his experiences with drag device deployment when caught in a gale 400 miles west of Cape Horn aboard the catamaran *Great American* when Wilson and crewmate Steve Pettengill were attempting to break the speed record from San Francisco to Boston via the Horn. Wilson talked about how tricky it was

to set the drogue at two wavelengths behind the boat while working in 80-knot winds and estimated 65-foot seas.

Wilson also spoke highly of an old-fashioned heavy weather technique called dragging warps — long loops of rope behind the boat. Wilson found that tying overhand knots into the line at regular intervals made the warps more effective. At one point he and Pettengill had 12 knotted lines deployed for a total of more than 1,000 feet in length. He said they worked well in slowing down the cat and in stopping the seas from breaking onto the boat. Warps weren't a complete panacea, however. Eventually, a larger breaking sea hammered the stern of *Great American* and carried away all the antennas and wind generators. The next big wave capsized the boat and left it floating inverted. Luckily, a ship was nearby and was able to pick up Wilson and Pettengill and deliver them to safety.

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