



Chesapeake Racer Profile

by Carrie Gentile

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Charlie Husar



It's not a hot-shot fleet. The boats are not particularly handsome or fast. In fact, Sailing World dubbed them the "dancing elephants" based on their wide berth and billowy spinnakers resembling an elephant's behind. The PHRF rating is 222, and the last new Cal 25 was built before I was born. Despite all this, it's a Chesapeake Bay fleet that won't die and that's mostly because of Charlie Husar.

He's called the Godfather of the fleet. He's been racing on Cal 25s in Annapolis since the early 1990s, and owns two of them: *Chicken Little* and *Farfegnugen*. He also cruises his Cal 40 when he's not racing in the Sperry Top-Sider National Offshore One Design or NOOD Regatta, Chesapeake Bay YRA (CBYRA) Annapolis Race Week, Annapolis YC Frostbites, or Eastport YC's Friday night beer can series.

All that racing has earned him six or seven (he can't recall the exact number) top finishes in CBYRA's High Point series. "I'm not the best racer out there, but I am consistent.

I always show up," Husar says.

His method of growing, or more truthfully, maintaining fleet numbers and participation is to teach his crew members all he knows about racing, then persuade them to fly the coop and purchase their own Cal 25. "The survivability of a fleet relies on the third and fourth generation of owners. The key is to get people interested, keep them interested with good competition, and help them develop their skills."

His theory has worked. Husar has spawned six or so Cal owners from his own crew.

"It has hurt a number of times," he says, referring to teaching tactics and boat handling to his crew and then having them take these skills to their own boat. "But, that's how it's done. Get the crew excited and make them care."

According to Husar, the more competitive the fleet is, the stronger the fleet is. He says, "It's not fun to race if the fleet as a whole is not competitive."

That's why he shares his knowledge with anyone who asks. A few years ago, he organized pre-frostbite seminars as a chance for skippers to share tactics. He's also the fleet's social chair and organizes all the fleet dinners and unofficial races across the Bay to Hemingway's on Kent Island, MD.

For all his success in cultivating the fleet, Husar seems a bit glum about the future. In the last few years, he has noticed a shift in mentality of new crew members and says that dedication seems to be missing.

"When I started out racing on my friend's Bristol 22, we raced year-round for six years, and I only missed three races. Back then, it was a privilege to crew for someone. But there seems to be a whole different attitude now with young people. Back then, being on a team was important. People are much more self-centered now."

This hasn't stopped him. It's in his blood. I can hear him every Sunday between frostbite races at the Rockfish Restaurant, doling out advice on jib car placement, backstay tension, and how to drive through chop.

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Refitting a race boat is a challenge when most of the parts have not been made in 30 years. During a visit to Annapolis Performance Sailing, Husar found small-boat jib tracks that

work well as tracks for the Cal 25 slider hatches. "I never buy parts for their intended purpose," he says.

Husar orders parts, such as custom mast sheaves, in bulk to secure a better price for the fleet. He receives e-mails and phone calls about free Cal 25s about to be cut up, and he'll rescue hard-to-find parts such as booms, tillers, and spinnaker poles. Over the years, he's figured out which parts work on Cal 25s. Charlie says J/24 parts often work.

Husar alternates between racing *Chicken Little* and *Farfegnugen*; the latter, built in 1966, has benefited from Husar's care with a new rudder, beam, deck stern plate, sails, and deck hardware. "You can't price your labor because you'll never get your money back on it. You've got to enjoy working on boats."

After sitting with *Chicken Little*'s skipper for a few hours and a few Miller Genuine Drafts, I asked him why he keeps doing all of this? "It's plain addiction. The fleet is important to me. It's my baby. What I love about the Cals is that they are cheap, competitive, and fun. They're a brick sh@#house of a boat."