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Timing Races

by J. R. Sanchez (LA) and J. M. (Jack) Kinabrew, Jr. (LA)

New Orleans has always been a racing town.

From impromptu horse races on Esplanade Avenue in the early 1800's, to the race track that is now Metairie Cemetery, to the present day Fair Grounds, New Orleanians have been race fans.

In 1855 Stanislaus Fournier, the premier watch and clock maker in the city, made a stop watch capable of catching the finish times of the first four horses in a race. It had four hands that started simultaneously but were stopped individually. As far as we know, Fournier never patented it, and no examples have survived.

In addition to horse racing, New Orleans has always been a yachting town. From the 1840's there has been organized sailboat racing at West End, on Lake Pontchartrain.

As two past Race Committee Chairmen of the Southern Yacht Club, the authors can attest to the fact that one of the nightmares besetting the Race Committee is a close finish involving two or more boats.

All boats in a class start on the same gun. (Classes are started at five minute intervals.) Usually, in the course of a two-hour (or longer) race, the competitors become pretty well spread out. At the finish, two- to six-second intervals between boats are usual, but on occasion ten boats can finish in a ten-second space. Further complications arise when the stragglers from a previous race cross the line mixed in with those finishing a current race. As you can appreciate, catching the exact times of the finishes can be a real headache.

The one-design classes race up-and-up, so the important thing is to catch the order of finish. All boats in a one-design class—Stars, Lightnings, Solings, Lasers, etc.—are built to the same design, with only minor variations allowed. Hence they race against each other without handicap, i.e., "up-and-up."

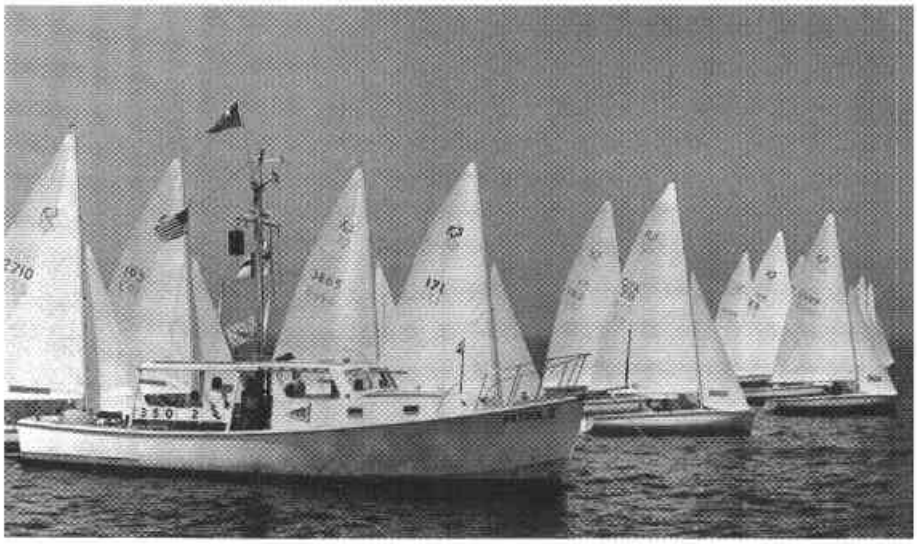

Figure 1. The start of the race at the Southern Yacht Club. The committee boat is in foreground.

Figure 2. A close finish in one-design class.

The handicap classes, however, have their elapsed time "corrected" according to a time allowance formula. Their finish times must be recorded to the second or the decimal equivalent. The elapsed times are fed into a computer to compute the "corrected" times. Boats in a handicap class differ in design—overall and waterline lengths, sail area, displacement, etc.—and have time allow-

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Figure 3. Close finish in handicap class.

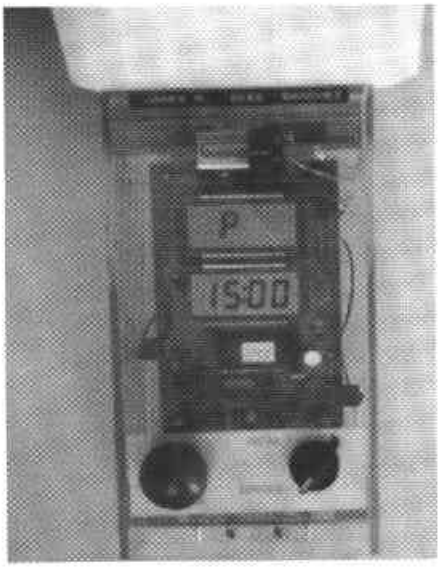


Figure 4. Top: single setting. Upper: "P"—preset. Lower: LED display in minutes/seconds.

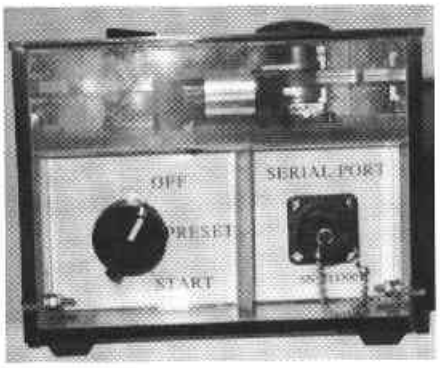
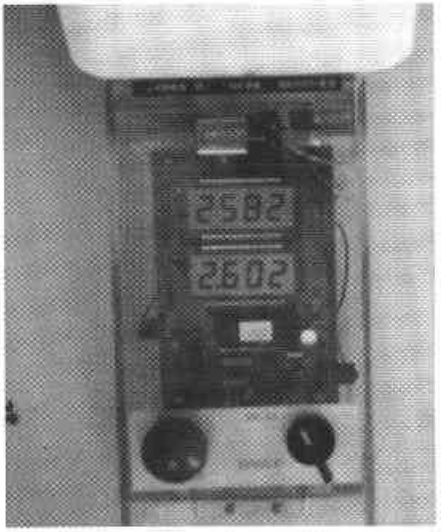


Figure 5. LH—switch off, preset, start. RH—port to computer.

Figure 6. Top: dual setting. Upper; cover—LED display in decimal hours.



ances determined by a formula that takes into effect the various design features.

In practice, two crews on the Committee Boat work the finish. One group records the sail numbers of the boats as they cross the line, in the order of finishing. The other is responsible for catching the finish times. The two lists are then combined to yield the official race results.

To relieve the headache of close finishes in the handicap classes, Clifton W. Sanchez, in cooperation with his father, (the author, J. R. Sanchez) developed, designed, and built an electronic timer, the HARC Handicap Racing Clock. This article is about the latest version of a finishing clock to meet all of the current need for accuracy of taking time for sporting events.

TO START UP: Turn top RH switch to "SINGLE." Turn rear switch to "PRESET." LED shows P 00:00.

TO START RACE (assuming start of first race is 2:00 PM): Flip UP/DOWN (front RH) to "UP" until 300 shows on lower LED. When committee boat chronometer reaches 1:30, turn rear switch to "START."

The clock is now in operation, counting on both upper and lower LED. It will continue counting until turned off by the rear switch, even though FREEZE button is hit or recorded times recalled.

Hit FREEZE button at each gun signal to record start of each class. For long races, the clock can be stopped after starting last class and reset and restarted for finish. For short races, let it run.

AT FINISH: Flip front LH switch (DEC.HRS-MIN/SEC) to desired mode. As each boat finishes, hit FREEZE button. At lull in action, flip front LH switch (UP/DOWN) to "UP" to recall finishes in reverse order. Hit FREEZE button to record more finishes.

Here is why this clock is so practical:

1) It can record time in minutes and seconds as well as the hourly decimal equivalent. In fact, it records

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both simultaneously, and by a mere flick of a switch displays one or the other.

2) The clock records and displays times when the finishes are so close as to make it impossible for one person to record sail numbers and times.

3) It retains in memory, at all times, the last 16 finishes. This data can be instantly recalled—in either minutes and seconds or the decimal equivalent—at any time. This feature allows the committeeman catching finish times to record and review times in periods of close finishes.

4) The clock has an access port in the rear of the box that permits a cable connection to a lap top computer. Thus the finish data can be entered directly into the computer.

5) The latest version of this clock is powered by a single 9-volt battery, easily accessible. Based on usage at the Southern Yacht Club, the expected battery life is over one year.

6) The clock's program is now contained in a preprinted circuit board instead of individual chips, the latter subject to vibration and disconnects in earlier models.

7) The size, 5 ½" wide by 8" long by 4 ½" high, and weight, 4 pounds, are about one half to one third that of the first version.

Although not the primary purpose of the device, in practice it is a great help in starting races. The LED display of the time is approximately one inch in size, affording excellent visibility to the starting crew of the Race Committee.

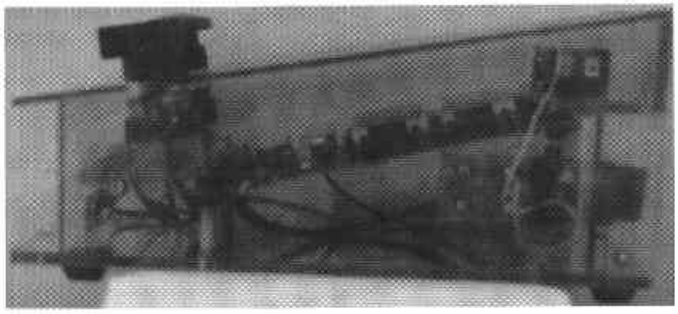

Figure 7. Side view.

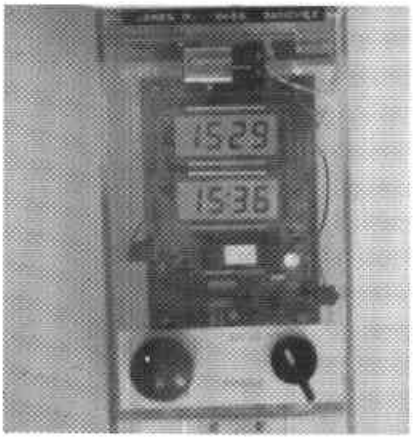

Figure 8. Top: dual setting. Upper; lower—LED display in minutes/seconds. Figure 9. Right—up/down switch. Left—decimal hours, minutes, seconds switch. On top: Right—dual/single switch. Left—freeze button.

About the Authors

J. M. (Jack) Kinabrew, Jr., became interested in horology as a result of marrying Eileen Kemp, adding another hobby to philately, woodworking, genealogy, and coins. Mr. Kinabrew has written other articles for the BULLETIN (see the October 1993 BULLETIN, Whole No. 286, p. 567, "The Paul Morphy Presentation Watch: Where Is It Now?"). He is a graduate of Tulane University and retired from the industrial supply business and from a stamp and coin shop.

J. R. (Skee) Sanchez died on February 11, 1994, at age 73. He was a life-long sailor and resident of New Orleans. A member of The Southern Yacht Club, Skee served as chairman of The Race Committee, and, according to his wishes, his ashes were scattered over the race course on Lake Pontchartrain.

MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

In conjunction with the Ramsdell Theatre's 90th Anniversary Celebration, John Perschbacher (MI) presented the "Manistee Memorabilia" show, which highlighted historical items from the Manistee area. Included in the display were several watches from the Manistee Watch Company. One of these watches is the only one of its style in existence. Other watches that were represented included key-wind and stem-wind Howards, Elgins and Walthams made of gold, gold filling or sterling silver. Perschbacher and his project were profiled in the July, 1993, edition of *Shorelines,* Manistee, Michigan.