

DOUG SKIDMORE • HOBIE CAT USA, FALLBROOK, CALIFORNIA, DIVISION 2, NAHCA SPORTSPERSON OF THE YEAR -2002

In the late 70's, Doug Skidmore purchased his first Hobie Cat while working on his degree at the University of Washington and that is the beginning of this Hobie story.

Over the years Doug became a very competitive sailor on the H-16, H-17, and H-20. He also became quite involved in the development of the Class in the Pacific Northwest. Most of the activity in those days was centered on Seattle where Doug lived, and so he sailed and served as a volunteer in NAHCA Division 4. Over the years, the Division became host to several National Championships. Doug was a key player in the planning of these events. At the H-17 Continentals, he served as the Principal Race Officer, where he did a great job in

conditions of 20 to 35 knots daily. This Championship was sailed on the Columbia Gorge, which is the 4th windiest site in the world.

Doug's wife, Maggie, is also from the Pacific Northwest. They met at a Hobie Regatta in Seattle and are now the proud parents of two future Hobie sailors. Maggie comes from a strong Hobie family and is herself a very competitive sailor.

Along the way, Doug became involved with the Hobie Cat Company as a sales representative on the West Coast. Things developed as they will for a talented person and soon he found himself as the Sales Director of the company. All the while he continued to compete in regattas and to support the Class as a volunteer. In his

ever-expanding role, he was able to influence the Company's awareness of the value of a strong Class Association. By this time the class had become the International Hobie Class Association with a North American Region, the NAHCA.

Most of you know the rest of the story: Doug went on to become the President of Hobie Cat USA, a position that he holds to this day. Having shared lean times, a strong bond has formed between the Company and the Class. Skiddy has been the voice throughout the years that has supported this relationship. Through all of this activity several things have never changed. He has remained a volunteer, a strong supporter of the Class, and a Hobie Cat sailor.

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It was as a competitor that Skiddy attended the H-16 World Championship in New Caledonia. An extraordinary event occurred at this Championship, which is best described by his crew. Laura Sullivan, of Division 4, the person most affected by the incident. Here is Laura's story: it is the story of a moment in the life of a man who emphasizes the ideals of the Carleton Tucker Memorial Sportsperson of the Year.

We've all had one of those days when things just aren't going right. It was one of those days in paradise – New Caledonia – the site of the Hobbie 16 Worlds Competition. It culminated in a tack that took a turn for the worse.

We were on a starboard tack, headed to A mark in the 2nd race of the

Masters Division on the first day of competition. There was a 15-20 knot, gusty breeze, with 3 foot swells on the inside course. My skipper, Doug Skidmore, called for a tack, so I started my move in from the wire. The next thing I knew, the boat wasn't coming about, and I was being thrown into the shroud.

We never made the tack. Our weight was now on the leeward side of the boat. With the breeze loading up the main and jib sails and our weight on the wrong side, the boat reared up and was flipping over on top of us. The boat lay over on its side and Doug was able to unhook himself when he hit the water. With the mainsail just above my head, I tried to free myself and found I couldn't move an inch or even a quarter of an inch. My

trapeze harness was hooked on the shroud. I desperately struggled in every direction and nothing worked. I knew I was in *serious* trouble.

I yelled to Doug, "I'm stuck! I'm stuck!" Doug dived underwater to try to see what was wrong. He had his face inches from my trapeze hook and couldn't see anything. Everything was black on black: my wet suit, my harness, and the shroud. With the wind driving on the bottom of the trampoline, the mast was driven downward. He came back up for air, took a couple of quick breaths, when the boat suddenly went turtle. My focus was on the harness hook, and so the boat going turtle caught me off guard. I never got a breath before the boat forced me under water.

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I was now under water with my head and neck bent at a 90-degree angle to the side. I twisted to try to get the pressure off. That twist was a nail in my coffin. With that move, I had wrapped the shroud in a full circle around my trapeze hook.

Doug was now swimming toward me. He tried to free me once again, in vain. It was a physical effort and Doug soon ran out of air and had to surface. I was now under water by myself. With no one in sight and in the total absence of sound, it was an incredibly lonely feeling. I remember thinking, "So this is how my life will end." I remember looking up at the dark blue trampoline and then looking at the light blue water below, feeling so alone. My head felt like it was

going to burst from the desperate need for air. I had an overwhelming desire to open my mouth and take a breath, and I started to. A little voice told me to "STOP!" I wasn't going to get the air I wanted, so I clenched my jaw, knowing I could hold out for only seconds.

While I was held captive in the water below, Doug had surfaced and swam to the closest place he could find, between the hulls in the front. He thought for a second or two and realized that the only chance that he had to get me to air was to pull me from the side boat. He recalled to me later that he stopped and looked at the boat. He told himself, "She can't come out here, she can't come out there, and she can only come out

here." So he positioned himself on the outside of the hull. He had to go under water in his life jacket, which made it challenging.

Once he got to the outside of the hull, he reached under the boat and grabbed for me. I never saw or felt a thing. I know only that I started to move for the first time. The blue water was getting lighter. I was disoriented but kept moving in the same direction, not knowing if it was right or wrong. My fear was that I would stop just inches below the surface.

When my face broke water, I took a huge gasp of air. No sooner had I gotten a breath than I was pulled back under. The next time I came up coughing up water. Doug watched me being pulled under and realized that

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we still had some immediate problems. He began working to free my harness.

With each wave, I was pulled back under. It didn't take long to figure out that I had a line around my neck, which was preventing me from being able to stay on the surface. It was now working on the front of my neck and started to crush my throat, so for the second time breathing became a priority. I started yelling, "There's a line around my neck!"

Doug removed the jib sheet from my neck and once again tried to free my harness. Once again I began yelling, "There a line around my neck!" Somewhat in disbelief, he reached for my neck again only to find the jib traveler line tightly encircling it.

The second line was tighter than the first. The only way out was for me to go straight down under the water as we both pulled out on the jib traveler line. Going back under water wasn't a place either of us wanted me to go. However, it was the best solution to the immediate problem, so under I went. With both of us pulling on the line, we were barely able to get the line off my neck. We ripped the ear-ring out of my ear with no time to spare. My head was now free above the water. I paused for a moment to take my first unhindered breath of air.

There was no time for celebration, as I was still stuck to the shroud, trapped by my harness. Nothing worked. Here we had two calm and capable people, Doug and myself,

under no pressure now, and we weren't able to free it.

It occurred to me that the only way to get free was to get out of my harness. I unbuckled the shoulder straps, the waist buckles, and leg straps and swam out of it. I took a couple of strokes more and stopped, floated on my back in the ocean staring at the sky, motionless and quiet, to regroup.

The case boat arrived and saw Doug in the water next to the boat and me floating on my back in the ocean. They took one look at us and jetted off with no idea what we had been through.

When we got back to shore, everyone was asking what was wrong. Doug hesitated before saying any-

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thing. Once he told them, he was pulled in a variety of directions to talk about the incident with the beach captain and the organizers. The shroud had been wrapped in a complete circle around my harness and had to be replaced. My 3/8-inch stainless steel hook was bent, as well as the metal support holding it. After seeing the condition of the boat, it dawned on us how desperate and grave the situation had been. We never really had a chance to talk about what had happened that day.

Needless to say, I didn't sleep that night. The wind was whistling through my hotel window and I was up all night thinking of the next day's races. I needed to know what I would do differently. There would be no rest until I had a solution.

The next morning, I called down to Doug and Maggie's room to arrange to meet Doug for about 10 minutes before breakfast. I felt a need to talk to someone and thought Doug might want to talk about it as well. It had been terribly traumatic for him, having to be the rescuer. When we reached shore, he was visibly unsettled. I thought that if I had died, I would have left a traumatic scar on the man's life. That is the last thing I would ever want to do to a person, to leave someone with a lasting nightmare.

We met at breakfast and talked briefly about what happened. Doug said every time he closed his eyes, the scenes kept playing over and over again. So he, too, had a sleepless night. I'm not sure we wanted to

relive the moments so soon. We both knew we had to "get back on the horse." We said we would go out and just take it easy.

Needless to say, the wind was stronger than the day before. WE ended up flipping the boat. Doug was going to go to shore and hang it up for the day. When I realized he was doing it for me, I looked over at him and said, "If you're going in because of me, I'm okay with all of this. I'm completely relaxed out here." He asked, "Are you sure?" "Yes!" I said. So we decided to go chase down some more Hobie Cats. We laughed non-stop for the next two days.

With each passing night, when I was alone in my room, my emotions were getting harder to handle. I still wasn't sleeping. I spent the time

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writing about the incident with the intent of providing some safety tips to other Hobie buddies. I was also hoping it would help me work through the situation. One early morning, when we were at the race site, I asked Doug if he would listen to my article. I wanted to make sure he was comfortable with what I was going to submit to the IHCA and the NAHCA.

I warned him that it would be emotional for me and there was a good chance that I'd cry. We walked

over to an area where no one was around and sat in some chairs under the competitors' tent. As I read the article, certain memories had strong emotional significance, and I had to stop many times to regain control. Looking at Doug when I finished reading, I realized he had taken my place under the boat and felt all that I had gone through. Since that time, he has helped me through various stages of emotions. He has been a great listener and an incredible friend.

From the depths of my heart and soul, I would like to thank my skipper, Doug Skidmore, President of Hobie Cat USA, for saving my life, for thinking through what needed to be done, and for helping me work through the emotions afterwards.

Doug embodies all of the qualities, characteristics, and demonstrates the Hobie Way of Life that the award intended. If Carlton Tucker were alive today, he would be proud to present this award to Doug Skidmore.