

# Van Isle 360 Yacht Race makes waves

The biennial marathon is the premier yacht racing event in the Pacific Northwest &#8212; one of the world&#8217;s top cruising grounds

BY CHRISTOF MARTI, SPECIAL TO THE SUN JUNE 24, 2013



Christof Marti writes sailing reports for the Vancouver Sun.

More than 40 boats are now racing around Vancouver Island in a marathon that's more a test of skill and nerves than a pleasure cruise.

In the Van Isle 360 International Yacht Race's ninth edition, close to 400 racers are currently sailing around the island, covering 729 kilometres, in 10 legs, spread over 14 days.

Starting in Nanaimo, the first half of the race takes sailors up the inside of the island through some of

the world's most beautiful cruising grounds, sailing through Desolation Sound and up through Johnstone Strait to Port Hardy. The second half takes the boats around infamous Cape Scott at the Northern tip of Vancouver Island into the Pacific Ocean. The distances between ports are much longer on the outside and each leg includes an overnight passage.

You may ask why would someone want to be on a small sailboat with up to eight other crew, with no showers and sitting on deck in the rain and wind for hours or baking in the sun without shade?

The answers are as varied as the sailors participating in this race: A love of sailing and the ocean, the adventure of visiting stunning places few of us will ever visit, the camaraderie among crew and competitors, are probably common sentiments among participants. The exhilaration when the wind is just right, the sails trimmed perfectly and the boat is accelerating down a wave can hardly be described in words.

So what makes Van Isle 360 so special? It's the involvement of the communities. At each stop, there is an event: The traditional pancake breakfast at the start in Nanaimo, the salmon feast at Hardwick Island, or the famous barbecue in Telegraph Cove.

The boats on this race range from small coastal cruising boats to high-end racing machines. The crews are just as varied. Some boats are crewed by highly trained, and seasoned racers. While other boats are crewed by less experienced sailors looking for a lifetime adventure.

Aboard Turicum, the majority of the crew are novice racers and we use the VanIsle 360 as a way of training new racers and giving them an opportunity to become part of the VanIsle 360 family and by introducing them to long distance and offshore sailing. For me, racing in the Van Isle 360 for the first time in 2011, was the beginning of an incredible adventure that took me sailing to Hawaii and back during the 2012 Vic-Maui International Yacht Race.

This year's event is characterized by light winds on the inside legs, making it very challenging for all boats. It's tough to sit on a boat, trying to tweak the sails to get the maximum out of the little wind there is. During the leg from Deepwater Bay to Hardwick Island, strong, adverse currents added insult to injury. With almost no wind to give the boats steerage, it felt like bumper-car racing. Around us, boats were anchored but spun around on eddy lines, bumping into one another or the crew was avoiding rocks. It was brutal carnage. Amazingly, everybody had a good laugh and there was no yelling or protests.

After a day of relaxing, washing cloths and drying sails and boats, the crews were looking forward to some exiting downwind sailing on Wednesday. Neptune seemed to finally have mercy on the Van Isle family with strong winds predicted from the northwest.

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