

2009 was an interesting year. Not the best or worst, but certainly one I'll remember. At the last SSS meeting of the 2009 season I was asked, as the club's Commodore, to pose for a picture with George Lythcott who had finished second overall in the singlehanded division. He was very proud of the fact that he had worked hard and had achieved a high ranking among a group of sailors for whom he had great respect. He will also remember the 2009 season.

Last year, George could have sailed those same courses and recorded the same times by himself but, instead, he had sailed those courses as races against other highly skilled and experienced sailors who challenged his significant abilities. His pride wasn't a product of beating anyone: it was the knowledge that he was a better sailor at the end of the 2009 season than he had been at the beginning.

The original purpose and meaning of "compete" was to strive together; not winning for its own sake; not beating anyone else. It represented a purity of intent that is currently so exquisitely rare that this aspect of "competition" is all but forgotten. Competition improves the overall quality of a sport because it constantly improves the competence of individual competitors. Coincidentally, "Gung Ho" means about the same thing in Korean.

The SSS is possibly the largest active group in the world dedicated to sharing the skills and experience of shorthanded sailing. The TransPac is, as far as I know, the longest singlehanded race in the world conducted entirely by volunteers. Sailing shorthanded isn't for everyone; it requires a very different mindset. There aren't many of us. This is why SSS members help each other: we need each other to improve our skills. We are fierce competitors who use competition to become better sailors.

The SSS race program is designed for shorthanded racers at all levels, from the neophyte to the well-seasoned. The bay races are fun for everyone and a good place to start as a singlehander. The Farallones and Half Moon Bay races take the skipper out of the bay and into what can be fairly challenging open water. The 2,120-mile TransPac is the world-class race for the rest of us; an opportunity to sail the Bigs on the boat you have. The SSS race program is excellent training for those who want to become proficient singlehanders, and a great way to have fun doing it.

The wealth of knowledge within the SSS membership is truly amazing, and it's available for the asking. To those of you who are not members and may be thinking about joining, I encourage you to come to a few of our meetings or seminars and talk to us. Go to the website to read and participate in the online forum. You'll find some fascinating stuff. Read the archived logs from past Singlehanded TransPacs – this is the real deal, the way it really happens out there - singlehanded in the middle of the ocean.

I'm feeling very Gung Ho about 2010 and I'm counting on all of you to make me better by doing your best to get to the finish line before I do.

Bill Merrick

2010 SSS Commodore