

# Men of Moxie

On a hot, sunny morning in June of 1980, 65-year-old solo sailor Phil Weld sailed into Newport, Rhode Island, to win the sixth edition of the famous Observer Singlehanded Transatlantic Race (OSTAR), which had started 18 days earlier in Plymouth, England. Weld, a craggy newspaper publisher, was a Harvard-educated World War II hero from Gloucester, Massachusetts, and his accomplishment was remarkable on several levels. He was not only the race's oldest winner, but the first (and last) American to beat the English and French skippers — who'd basically invented the sport of solo ocean racing, and won every previous OSTAR — at their own game.

I was on the docks that morning and vividly remember the scene; 1980 was an America's Cup summer in Newport, and the 12-Meter crews were leaving the harbor precisely when Weld was entering it. In homage to Weld's victory, as they were being towed out to the racecourse, the American, Australian, Italian and French Cup teams did a drive-by past his spindly, 56-foot Dick Newick-designed trimaran, lining the rails of their respective boats to give Weld a standing ovation. It sent chills up my spine.

Like Weld, another Ivy League graduate (of Brown University) who calls Massachusetts' North Shore home will this month sail past Castle Hill on an epic solo voyage. But 55-year-old Joe Harris, skippering a Class 40 rocket called *GryphonSolo2*, will be setting forth from Newport, not arriving here. If all goes as planned, in about four months, or roughly 120 days, he'll roll back into Narragansett Bay once again, this time as the holder of the world record for a single-handed circumnavigation on a 40-foot monohull. The current record-holder is Chinese sailor Guo Chuan, who set the mark in 2013 on a voyage of

just under 138 days.

I've had the chance to sail with Harris a few times over the last couple of years, which is always a very enjoyable experience. Yes, his stripped-out, high-strung, 40-foot racer is an absolute blast to put through the paces, but the best part is hanging with her laid-back skipper, one of those guys whose love of sailing is deep and infectious.

Fittingly, that passion was passed down from his late father, Woody, an accomplished racing sailor from Greenwich, Connecticut, who excelled in every sort of boat, from dinghies to ocean racers. For many years the father and son teamed up on countless races on Long Island Sound. For the younger Harris, though, the journey from junior hotshot to hopeful record-setter was anything but straightforward.

For many years, during and then after college, he spent his summers fishing in Alaska and hauling in the dough. A stint at the Landing School of boatbuilding brought a fresh set of skills, and established a new routine: summers up north on the fishing boats, and winters in New England plying his trade at boatyards including Little Harbor and Shannon.



*Joe Harris has his eye on a very specific prize: the fastest singlehanded circumnavigation ever recorded on a 40-foot monohull.*

After several seasons of this, it was Woody who finally posed the question, "What's your long-term plan here?" Admittedly, the peripatetic lifestyle did have its drawbacks, and Harris ultimately landed at what might have seemed an unlikely place: business school.

He excelled there, and launched a career in real-estate development and finance. It gave him the wherewithal to purchase a series of boats, each more serious and performance-oriented than the last: a C&C 40, an Aerodyne 38, an Open 50 winner of the Around Alone race, and ultimately, his current Class 40 thoroughbred, *GryphonSolo2*. All along, the idea was to enter one of the famous round-the-world races, but those kept falling by the wayside. Harris campaigned the boat in events like Newport-Bermuda, the Atlantic Cup and Marblehead-Halifax, but they paled in comparison to what he hoped to experience: a true, competitive circum-

navigation via the Southern Ocean and the distant Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn.

"So," he told me recently, "I decided I had to take matters into my own hands." Rather than race against a fleet of competitors, he'd undertake a shot at a record in the same waters he longed to sail. It would instead be a race against time.

With three kids back home, he understands the attempt will be a challenge not only to himself, but to his family. But his window of opportunity has opened, and he's pushing through.

Weld and Harris, by the way, share one other link. The former's boat was named after an odd-tasting soft drink also defined as "courage, nerve or guts." Yup, Weld sailed a craft called *Moxie*. Joe Harris personifies the term.

*Herb McCormick is CW's executive editor. To follow Joe Harris' voyage, visit his website ([gryphonsolo2.com](http://gryphonsolo2.com)).*