

The Suffolk Times.

Sports

Despite sinking in race, Optimistic to sail again

by [Paul Squire](#) |

10/12/2014 8:00 AM



The sailboat Optimistic sails in Cutchogue Harbor before last weekend's Whitebread race. The boat would late sink off Shelter Island in rough seas. But the boat could soon sail again. (Credit: Richard Labella)

Optimistic, the sailboat that sank off Shelter Island during the Whitebread race last weekend, will sail again.

In fact, the 28-foot sailboat owned by Huntington resident Bill Archer is in such good condition that it could set sail now, said Brewers Yacht Yard manager Michael Acebo.

“We could put the mast and sails on and [Mr. Archer] could go sailing this weekend,” Mr. Acebo said last week.

Optimistic was one of [92 boats competing Oct. 4 in the 21st annual Whitebread](#), a regatta from Cutchogue around Shelter Island and back. About 11:15 a.m., just as it was rounding the MOA buoy near Ram's Head, the boat was hit by strong gusts of wind, Mr. Archer told The Suffolk Times.

“The winds were blowing harder than had been predicted and there were strong gusts of wind,” he said. “We were careful to be on the look-out for wind gusts which you can see coming by observing the water surface.” As the gusts got close to Optimistic, Mr. Archer would let the main sail out to keep the boat from tipping, a technique used in racing called “heeling over.”

Mr. Archer and his crew turned Optimistic as they headed toward Sag Harbor and back to home, but they took their eyes off the water for a split second, he said. In that moment, a gust of wind struck the boat and grabbed the sail, pulling it over and causing water to flood into the cockpit from the starboard side.

Mr. Archer said he released the main sail to right the boat just in time for a wave to hit on the other side. By then, the stern was underwater.

“The rest of the cockpit filled up with successive waves and we quickly began to submerge, stern first,” he said. “The sinking took all of two minutes.”

Thankfully, two racing boats also competing in the Whitebread — Sea Breeze and Tidelines — happened to be sailing nearby and saw Optimistic in distress. Both vessels pulled out of the race to help rescue the crew, all of whom were brought back to land unharmed.

Optimistic sunk to the bottom, about 50 to 60 feet down.

The next day, Douglass Marine went out to try to locate the boat by sonar, but was unsuccessful. The next morning, Mr. Archer and Douglass Marine employees dragged a weighted line across the bottom and eventually found Optimistic sitting on the bay bottom upright. Her mast was only a few feet below the surface of the water, Mr. Archer said.

Douglass Marine raised the boat and brought it to Brewer Yacht Yard, where they began work to repair the sailboat, Mr. Acebo — the manager — said.

Optimistic had to be demasted, and the sails have to be cleaned. The fuel tank was also drained and the engine was flushed, Mr. Acebo said. Despite being submerged, the engine is now working again.

The boat itself is also in good shape, only needing to have the little electrical work inside replaced. Mr. Acebo said Optimistic was recovered quickly and wasn't underwater enough to have the salt water affect it too much.

Fixing Optimistic, Mr. Acebo said, is far from an "insurmountable task." It will be ready to sail again by next season.

Mr. Archer said he's grateful to Mahlon Russell, skipper of Sea Breeze, Bob and Carol McIlvain of Tidelines and both crews for "putting themselves in peril by motoring around in rough waters, plucking us from the waters and motoring us back to port."

Mr. Archer also thanked Patty, an employee at Douglass Marine who picked up his distress calls and helped coordinate the rescue. He told the Suffolk Times he is thankful for the support of his family and the members of the Peconic Bay Sailing Association as well as his crew who followed orders calmly and have "offered unending support and encouragement."

"Although an ordeal, I have a lot to be grateful for," he said.

psquire@timesreview.com

[Bill Archer](#), [Brewer Yacht Yard](#), [Douglass Marine](#), [Optimistic](#), [Sailing](#), [Whitebread](#), [Whitebread Race](#)