

I just recently discovered a printout of this story that I had kept stashed away over the years. It was written on my first Macintosh in 1984 or 1985. At that time I drove a Ford EXP and towed my sailboat to a series of weekend races that covered much of the Florida peninsula. Pumpkin Shooter was the call sign I used on my CB radio. My memory is a bit hazy, but I think that Slingshot was the CB handle of my good friend, Don Ackerman. Don was a great friend and lived far too short a life. He passed away in the early to mid 1990s, a victim of ALS. The story itself is just slightly embellished, all these events really happened on this one road trip. In order to keep the original flavor of the document, I choose to use images of the original Macintosh printout to create this pdf.

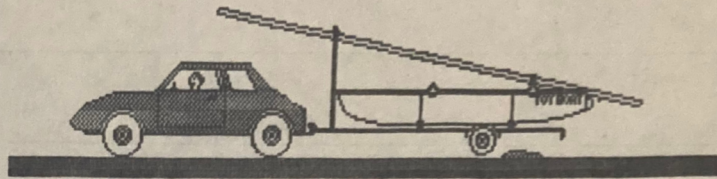
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PUMPKIN SHOOTER AND

SLINGSHOT

by Mike Willegal



On a warm and rainy Friday evening, a couple of Prindle 15 sailers set forth in their land transportation machines to cross the great state of Florida to attend the annual Tampa Gold Cup Regatta. They met as soon as they could get together after work and stopped on the outskirts of Fort Lauderdale at the King Diner for fortification. Refreshed, they traveled through the gathering darkness across the uninhabited Alligator Alley (probably named in honor of a local Prindle racing team). After passing unscathed through the infamous alley, Slingshot and Pumpkin Shooter veered northward across the desolation of I-75 toward Tampa.

No sooner did they reach the approximate latitude of Fort Meyers (famous for the Florida Prindle State Championships) than Pumpkin Shooter noticed a disturbance in the smooth growl of his husky 1.6 liter engine. Accompanying this roughness was a marked reduction in speed. Immediately, Pumpkin Shooter reported these findings to Slingshot over an advanced wireless telecommunications device. The team then pulled over and examined the power plant of the hapless land transportation machine.

Upon finding a possible loose electrical connection and after brief consultation, they decided to proceed.

After moving forward another 32 boat lengths, Pumpkin Shooter discovered that the problem had not been solved and pulled once again to the side of the expressway. Additional seapeople, also enroute to Tampa, this time from the great metropolis of Miami, happened by and stopped to help. After another inspection it was decided that a spark plug had failed. A frantic search ensued and it was discovered that a removal tool for said spark plug was not readily available. Pumpkin Shooter noted that it had been stolen several months ago from this very same land transportation machine. So with reduced power and much reduced speed, Pumpkin Shooter and Slingshot proceeded onward, hoping to find a full-service gas station at the next exit. A few minutes later the next exit was located and taken. However, after a short search, no gas station was found. They then attempted to return to the expressway, but no northbound on-ramp could be found. After taking the necessary short jaunt southbound, the team then proceeded to the exit and searched the streets of Fort Meyers for a spark plug extraction device. The duo tried several service stations, a drug store, and an all-night department store (it was now about 11:00 PM), but none was to be found. Finally in desperation, Pumpkin Shooter suggested they call Jay, a popular local Prindle sailor.

After checking the phone book unsuccessfully, his phone number was discovered in an old Florida Prindle Gold Cup series book that Slingshot had the foresight to hang onto. At first Jay thought the phone call was a prank. Finally after several minutes discussion, Jay realized that some old sailing buddies really did need his help. He even had the unusual-sized spark plug extraction device. After a 20 minute wait, Jay showed up. The group then extracted the spark plug, but while trying to clean it, Pumpkin Shooter broke off the tip. However it could still be made functional and

was returned to its proper place in the engine. The 1.6 liter power plant ran much smoother, but not perfectly. Slingshot noticed that the spark generating devices were made by a certain well known company and said that he had been told by informed sources never to use that brand.

After several well wishes and thank you's Jay proceeded toward home and Pumpkin Shooter and Slingshot headed back toward I-75. However, shortly after pulling out, Jay had a flat tire. Slingshot noticed this and the duo proceeded back to help their old buddy Jay. After about 20 minutes of fighting Jay's hydraulic jack, it was determined that it was inadequate for the task. Pumpkin Shooter brought out his jack. It was able to perform the job, but just barely. Once again Pumpkin Shooter and Slingshot said goodbye to Jay and headed for I-75 and the Regatta in Tampa.

After proceeding a ways, the kludgy repair job to the Spark plug failed, but the fearless duo proceeded onward, Pumpkin Shooter running on 3 cylinders. Top speed was 55 miles per hour and top gear was third (out of four) for Pumpkin Shooter's husky 1.6 liter power plant. After about 50 miles, Pumpkin Shooter noticed that his gas consumption was extremely high and he would need gas soon. Unfortunately, gas is very scarce between Fort Meyers and Tampa on I-75. They would have to exit the thoroughfare and continue on secondary roads until gas could be found. After a 10 mile excursion the gas was located and placed into Pumpkin Shooter's fuel tank. Undaunted, the duo retraced the route back to I-75 and the trip to the Tampa Gold Cup Regatta resumed.

About 3:30 AM and still 50 miles from their ultimate destination another cylinder failed and Pumpkin Shooter could only continue onward at a creeping 20 MPH. Finally the power plant was almost helpless and a rest area was sighted. Enough was enough. It was time to rest, they both decided at once and so they did.

After three hours sleep in their land transportation machines, the duo

awoke to continue the journey to the Tampa Gold Cup Regatta. One mile ahead, an exit was sighted. Pumpkin Shooter took it, and on Slingshots advice, pulled over. The team would abandon the wounded vehicle and search for a completely new set of spark generating devices using Slingshot's working vehicle. After another half mile, a parts store was located and it appeared to be open. On closer inspection it was found that the sign on the door said "closed", but they entered anyway. Pumpkin Shooter was able to purchase the required replacement spark plugs and even found the removal device that could not be located the night before. As they walked out, Slingshot noticed that the label on the new parts indicated that they were the same brand as the existing parts. They wondered if this was an ominous portent of things to come? After installation, Pumpkin Shooter's vehicle ran much smoother, but not perfectly.

Although his vehicle ran roughly at times, Pumpkin Shooter made it to the Regatta on time. Between Pumpkin Shooter and Slingshot the racing was very close and very exciting, being filled with many feats of skill and derring-do. Going into the last race of the Regatta they were tied for first place. After they traded the lead at least five times, Slingshot grabbed the lead and held on for the win. Tired, proud, and happy, Pumpkin Shooter and Slingshot secured their trusty Prindles behind their land transportation machines. They had no sooner started out down the wrong road to Fort Lauderdale, when... but that's another story.