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H&S scene; High waves, high winds; Man against make

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While Tom Chambers was battling the winds and waves in the Gulf of Mexico last summer, Dan Harrison was battling a 120-pound maneating shark in the Atlantic.

Dan, a member of the Executive Office EDP Development group, was on his first shark-fishing expedition and was lucky — or unlucky — enough to catch two of those denizens of the deep his first time out. Shark fishing is not a sport for the faint-hearted or the lethargic — the hours are long and hard. Dan and his cousin Robert Adamson, the owner of the thirty-eight-foot cabin cruiser they used, left Long Island at 5 A.M. and faced a four-hour run before they could even wet a hook. It took them that long to reach a point thirty-five miles offshore where the waters would be warm and deep enough for sharks.

The equipment Dan and Robert used was standard deep-sea-fishing gear — a fiberglass rod and reel equipped with a static sixty-pound-test line. This means that the maximum weight the line can hold without breaking is sixty pounds. Having baited their hooks with squid, Dan and Robert secured their rods in harnesses around their waists and began chumming — throwing chopped-up oily fish into the water — in order to attract the sharks. Most sharks feed on fish, shellfish and even on smaller sharks. They have a keen sense of smell which, in some cases, enables them to track down prey as far away as a quarter mile.

"Patience is a necessity in any type of fishing, and shark fishing is no exception," according to Dan. He and Robert spent three hours chumming and watching for fins before a six-foot Mako went for the bait and began tugging wildly on Dan's line. In order to keep the shark from breaking the line, he put a drag on the reel which enabled the fish to run with the line until it tired. Then Dan would reel in furiously before the shark regained its strength and began stripping off line again. The Mako, a ferocious fighter
seventeen-foot waves and blustering winds. While battling the storm, the crew members' anxieties were increased by the realization that because of the lack of radio communication they couldn't ask for help from anyone on land.

Exhausted from their struggle against the towering waves and raging winds, Tom and his companions faced still another danger as they approached Vera Cruz on Wednesday evening—getting their boat safely past the craggy and forbidding reefs that line the shore, a task made more difficult by the oncoming darkness. Having slowly and carefully maneuvered their craft into port, the crew dropped anchor in early evening and, after heaving long sighs of relief, were ready to join in the festivities Vera Cruz had planned for participants in the Regata Amigos.

Two classes of boats participated in the regatta—racing boats and cruisers. Although La Vida was not among the first to arrive in Vera Cruz, it was the second boat in the cruising category to enter the port. The city made its visitors welcome with parties and street festivals. A miniregatta was held in the harbor, with government officials, including the mayor of Vera Cruz and the governor of the state, aboard the twenty-four vessels that had taken part in the race. Tom said that he particularly enjoyed seeing the sights of the historic Mexican port city, listening to the street musicians and sampling Mexican food.

Tom and his fellow crew members decided to take a rest from ocean voyages and flew back to Texas. One of the members of the new crew who volunteered to sail La Vida back to Galveston was Bob Brodrick, another member of the Houston MAS group, who had flown down to Vera Cruz to take part in the regatta festivities.

The owner of a two-passenger Sailfish, Tom started sailing when he was in college. He has made several trips to the Bahamas where he and a group of friends have chartered boats for week-long cruises in the Caribbean. His experience with ocean racing has made Tom enthusiastic about the sport, and he plans to participate next summer in a regatta from Mobile, another Gulf port, to Cozumel, an island off the Yucatan coast. Tom says that what he enjoys most about ocean racing is "being able to sail a boat for 650 miles, seeing nothing but the sun and the sea for days."

when cornered, is able to leap twenty feet out of the water, and Dan struggled for twenty minutes before he could land it.

The most dangerous part of the sport began after the shark was reeled in with its head out of the water. Dan had to slip a running noose over the head and carefully maneuver it below the dorsal fin in order to hoist the fish up by the tail. Only about 25 of the approximately 250 species of sharks are man-eaters, and the Mako is one of them. Dan realized this as he slipped the noose gingerly past the forbidding jaws of the unpredictable animal. An added worry was that the Mako is well known for its propensity for attacking boats, and Dan's captive lived up to its vicious reputation by taking a chunk out of his cousin's boat before it could be subdued.

Once the noose was secured, the shark was hoisted up by its tail and hung from the gin pole. Pulling the shark in by this method prevents it from damaging the boat or injuring the fishermen with its tail. A shark sometimes takes as long as ten hours to die, and even then the danger is not over—muscular reactions have been known to cause the jaws to snap at anything that approaches the mouth for as long as a half hour after the fish has died.

Attracted by vibrations and the blood that filled the water during the Mako's struggle against the fishermen, another shark appeared on the scene minutes later. After reeling it in, Dan and Robert discovered that it was a 150-pound Brown shark. Unlike the Mako, the Brown shark is not used for food, so they let it go.

It was midnight by the time Dan and his cousin were back on land. Once he was ashore Dan had time to think about just how much danger he had been in during his battle with the Mako. "When I was reeling him in I was too excited and too busy fighting to be frightened," he said. But for Dan, the excitement of the sport far outweighs the potential hazards, and he is anxious to try his luck at shark fishing again because "it's the most challenging sport I've ever found."