

The Officers, Directors and Members of  
US SAILING  
are pleased to present the  
ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL  
to  
Tommy Wharton  
for the rescue as follows:

The 40-boat Star fleet was racing off Cedar Point Yacht Club in Westport, CT, in a 20-knot easterly wind and rough seas. After their Star was dismasted, skipper Lou Roberts and crew Kevin Elterman, both of Milford, CT, were cleaning up when they noticed a nearby Star disabled by a ripped mainsail. “We then heard a voice through the wind and were shocked to spot a person in the water, obviously in distress,” recalled Roberts.

Although half their rig was in the water, Roberts and Elterman were able to approach the distressed sailor, who had fallen off the other boat. His inflatable life jacket had failed to deploy, and the individual, who is in his 70s, was tiring quickly.

Elterman put on a life jacket and grabbed another. He jumped in and swam over to the man, whom he supported by keeping his head clear of the water. As the two Stars drifted away from the swimmers, Roberts called 9-1-1 on his cell phone. While reporting the accident and its location, he noticed an inflatable powerboat that was following the race. Waving his arms, he drew its skipper’s attention to the two men, who were barely visible in the water.

The powerboat had one occupant, Tommy Wharton, a Canadian National Team Coach who was following the Canadian boats in the regatta. “It was in my top five worst days I’ve ever seen. It was total chaos everywhere,” Wharton said later of the conditions. “I was amazed to see two men in the water, far from any other boat, with one of them holding the older gentleman up.” Wharton helped Elterman into the boat and the two of them assisted the distressed sailor. By this time boating writer Lynn Fitzpatrick had sent an alert from the press boat, and the marine police and other power boats had arrived. Elterman and the sailor were in the water for an estimated 40 minutes.

Both Roberts and Wharton praised Elterman as the rescue’s real hero. Roberts added, “It was nothing less than a miracle that our dismasting in the immediate vicinity, with no other boats near us, allowed us to hear him.”

Roberts drew several meaningful lessons from the near-fatal incident. “I will now be wearing a life vest in all future races with wind over 10 knots. I’ll remind anyone and everyone of the need to inspect inflatable life jackets on an annual basis, and will make sure my crew is familiar with how it works. I will also remind all that our sport can be equally dangerous, whether one mile or 100 miles from land.”

US SAILING's Safety-at-Sea Committee has awarded Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medals to Canadian National Coach Tommy Wharton for his rescue on September 10, 2009 during the 2009 International Star North American Championship.

Dr. Gino Bottino, MD  
Chairman, Safety at Sea Committee  
By Direction