



PLEASE NOTE: WE AT THE COASTAL CURRENT ACCEPT NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FOLLOWING NOR CAN WE IMAGINE WHY WE AGREED TO PRINT IT.

I once, briefly, dated a girl named Erika. She was good lookin' with lots of promise but she turned out to be a tease and wouldn't put out so I split for more promising fillies. Which reminds me of two things. Heard tell that Jim Cantori of the Weather Channel was royally pissed that Erika spurned his attentions round last call last Saturday. Get over it, Jim women are fickle. The other thing is that the storm magnates slid back up to Port O'Connor last Sunday morning real early so we may be in luck for the rest of the season.



Doubt anybody was in it, no spill so no haz-mat cleanup.

The storm magnates would be Papa Ben and the Mechanical Men. Actually I'm referring to Ben Heilker and his 54' Bertram Mechanical Man and his 1st Mate Lupe Sanchez, a native of these parts. Ya see, these gents have had an interesting couple of months. Erika was the second storm they've rode out on the boat for and yeah she teased them too while they were tied up along the rail at South Point waitin' for her to put out.

The other storm was an entirely different story. Ya see, Papa Ben is a magnate in many different ways. He lives in Victoria where he is the proprietor of Victoria Air Conditioning which is one hell of an outfit. Ya'll are probably familiar with them since everybody and their brother in the valley is suing them for mold in schools that they had little or nothing to do with. But I'll say this for Papa Ben, he has a motto that he drills into all his managers, "Do it right the first time and be prepared to defend yourselves and the company in the lawsuit that'll inevitably be brought after we're finished". I guess that's the cost of doin' business round these parts where maintenance is considered a four letter word. But I digress.

We were loungin' in the cockpit of Mechanical Man, sippin' cocktails, when he and Lupe recalled their experience with spinner Claudette. They were getting' prepared for Poco when Claudette started her waltz in the gulf. Ben had kept a seasoned eye on the l'il witch cuz he suspected, and rightly so, that the storm gurus in Miami were gonna fail miserably in their psychoanalysis of the storm.

Papa Ben had filed a plan with the insurance company that required him to seek safe harbor in the Victoria barge canal turning basin, about a thirty-mile run from where they sat. His main concern from spinner Claudette was the predicted tidal surge that would've put his mistress over the pilings where she now sat. The time and distance element didn't concern him much cuz he'd put new screws on her and she was now makin' 36 knots, but he had budgeted three hours for the run.

So he flips on the radar and sure enough the folks in Miami had completely blown the call. The witch had gotten her act

together, a nice compact eye that guaranteed she'd spin up well beyond the fool's predictions. Time to flee. Lupe has four poly ball bumpers in the cockpit and plenty of stout line ready to go. As they blast across the San Antonio Bay channel towards the barge canal, spinner Claudette begins to roar and they realize this ain't gonna be the meek blow that the gurus had predicted. She was gonna be sloppy with big sharp teeth.

Lupe excuses himself from the bridge and goes down to the salon to dig out some more protection. When he returned he's donned a dive mask and he has a bandana coverin' his mouth and nose. He hands a second bandana to Ben who puts it on no questions asked. They look like a couple of old time train robbers 'cept Ben has his Costas on as they enter the barge canal.

A few miles past the BP plant conditions go from ridiculous to absurd. The environment has liquefied, the wind is blastin' their faces out of the north, they're drivin' into a six-foot chop and the rain feels like gravel shot out of a cannon. Without the bandanas they'd probably drown. As it is they're barely chokin' down air.

Papa Ben finally says to hell with this cuz 'cept for the radar they're blind so he's gonna



Ben Heilker and Lupe Sanchez on the bridge of Mechanical Man, this was a better day for a boat ride.

turn around and run with it and try to make safe harbor at the BP dock, (if they can find it and get permission to tie up). As he makes the turn a wave swamps the cockpit and an expensive poly ball flies out. Lupe wants to retrieve it but Ben says screw the damn thing.

They make contact with the BP manager and all he says is bring her on and good luck. When they enter the BP harbor they find some protection alongside a chemical barge. Lupe gets the stern secured and the remaining poly balls deployed as fenders but he's havin' a hell of a time securing the bow. All of a sudden a couple of the barge crew appear and get the lines around a cleat and the bow is secured. Apparently they'd been watchin' the radar too cuz moments later the eye of Claudette passes over the BP plant. After thankin' the barge crew profusely they ride out the rest of Claudette in relative comfort.

A few hours later as they head back to Port O'Connor, Ben gets on the horn and offers a reward of a large bottle of Crown for the safe return of the lost poly ball. That's when he gets the news that five of his buddies had sunk in the turning basin. They were tied along side what turned out to be a gravel barge and the wind had filled their cockpits with sand, gravel and water runnin' off the barge.

A few days later they get a call inquiring about the reward for the lost poly ball. Lupe rendezvous with the guy and hands him a gallon of Crown. All is whole again; end of story.

We welcome your fishin' photos. Drop them by 2600 Padre Boulevard on the Island, or mail them to I.B. Hooked, c/o Coastal Current Weekly, P.O.Box 2429, South Padre Island, Texas 78597. Be sure to include the name of the angler, weight and type of fish, where caught, and name of boat if applicable. Photos with SASE will be returned.