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## Hong Kong maxi boat Beau Geste enters Port Huron-to-Mackinac race

BY PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

*Beau geste* is the French phrase for a fine or gracious gesture. One look at the newest addition to the Mackinac fleet next month, an 80-foot maxi boat out of Hong Kong christened Beau Geste, and it's easy to see why the boat brings that phrase to mind.

But this fine and graceful boat is also a fierce competitor. It's the race's second maxi, joining Doug DeVos' 86-foot Windquest and bringing a new rivalry to the race that's bound to be more interesting for spectators.

The transponders are back again this year, allowing fans to view the race's progress online. Instead of watching Windquest streak ahead of the fleet to an early finish, fans will be able to watch Beau Geste and Windquest duel for the first-to-the-island honors and see what course decisions the two boats make as they work their way up Lake Huron.

"It will give Windquest, which traditionally has been the first boat to finish, all they want and then some," said Al Declercq of Grosse Pointe Park, who has sailed 43 Port Huron-to-Mackinac races.

Beau Geste's owner, Karl Kwok, acknowledged that Windquest was a powerful boat.

"This is a sport. We like competition," Kwok said. "Win or lose, you don't want to be beating everybody with no competition."

Beau Geste is a new boat, launched in May 2009 in Auckland, New Zealand. It's a Bruce Farr design with hydraulic winches and an 18-foot keel that can retract to allow the boat to enter shallower harbors. The hydraulic winches mean the motor must be constantly running to power the winches, but the propeller is disengaged when racing.

Kwok, 61, is a third-generation owner of a Hong Kong department store, Wing On. His boat's hull is decorated with a red Chinese dragon, which Kwok said was almost the national symbol of China.

Beau Geste has clocked speeds of 30 knots in the right wind, Kwok said. The typical upwind speed is 12 or 13 knots, with typical downwind speed at 18 to 19 knots.

The boat has logged 15,000 miles, going from major regatta to major regatta, and doing better in each successive race. It took line honors as the first boat to finish in the Fastnet race, and then went to Sardinia for the Maxi Worlds, where it finished second in class. Next was the Middle Sea race around Malta and Sicily, where it scored another second.

Then it did a transatlantic race in November, where it again took line honors and broke the record by a full day, finishing in nine days, Kwok said. In February, Beau Geste did a 600-mile Caribbean race, where it took both line honors and first overall. It had just taken line honors, breaking the 90-hour record by a full 20 hours, in a race from Annapolis to Bermuda when Kwok talked to the Free Press

on Thursday.

Kwok said he planned to do the Newport to Bermuda race before sailing up the Great Lakes for Port Huron-to-Mackinac, which starts July 17.

Kwok has never done the Port Huron race, although he said he did the Chicago-to-Mackinac race in 2005. That was the first time he had raced in fresh water, and he decided he liked it enough to want to do it again.

"We're just checking the boxes," Kwok said. "I believe there are all kinds of blue water races in the world and I should do the ones I really like, and all these races are on the list."

Why is he adding Lake Huron to that list?

"I've never sailed in that part of the world," Kwok said. "I want to do it. Mt. Everest is there, I want to do it."

He's bringing a crew of 20 to Port Huron, and it's a very international crew -- Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, an Englishman and three of Kwok's friends from Hong Kong.

As for that freshwater sailing?

"You don't need to wipe the salt spray off your sunglasses, but you do need to bring your bug spray," Kwok said.

Contact PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI : 313-222-8851 or [mmwalsh@freepress.com](mailto:mmwalsh@freepress.com)

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