

Hudson River Jibe

From "The Hudson" by Carl Carmer

Narrated by Chris Bowser

Novices used to be afraid to watch an experienced skipper jibe- change his mainsail from one side to the other while running before the wind. It seemed suicidal, even after trimming down the sheet to put the helm hard up and let her swing to an angle of 45 degrees. The wind would hit the loose sail and send it across the deck, the heavy ninety-foot boom swinging as if it were a fishpole. The sail would go thundering over the taffrail, obviously about to yank the mast out by the roots when it fetched up. Calmly the skipper would hold the helm hard up, while letting the sheet run freely. Just as catastrophe seemed inevitable the sloop would have swung far enough around for the wind to catch the sail on the other side and blow it all aluff. Then the skipper would throw the helm hard over, and as gently as a disciplined pony the sloop would take to her course again. That trick had to be played "mighty careful" though. A latter day sailor, Ben Hunt, tried it once when he was at the wheel of the sloop *James Coats*. When the mainsail came over the deck a loop in the sheet caught him around the neck and popped his head into the river without taking the rest of him along.