

*Good Old Boat* wins BIG at the 2021 Boating Writers International awards

# GOOD OLD BOAT

*Inspiring hands-on sailors*





# GOOD OLD BOAT

CEO / CFO / PUBLISHER  
**Karla Sandness**

EDITOR  
**Andy Cross**  
andy@goodoldboat.com

SENIOR EDITOR  
**Wendy Mitman Clarke**

BOAT REVIEW EDITOR  
**Dan Spurr**

TECHNICAL EDITORS  
**Drew Frye | Rob Mazza**

ELECTRONICS EDITOR  
**David Lynn**

COPY EDITOR  
**Marcia Landskroener**

CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
**Kelley Gudahl**

ILLUSTRATORS  
**Tom Payne | Fritz Seegers**

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS  
**Cliff Moore | Fiona McGlynn**  
**Allen Penticoff | Bert Vermeer | Ed Zacko**

ADVERTISING SALES  
**Behan Gifford**  
advertising@goodoldboat.com

DIRECTOR OF CIRCULATION & BOAT CLASSIFIEDS  
**Brenda Ellingsen**  
brenda@goodoldboat.com | 701-840-6137

FOUNDERS  
**Karen Larson and Jerry Powlas**



The sailing magazine for the rest of us.



## On the Cover

With the February sun setting in Marina del Rey, California, David Blake Fischer sails his lovely *Delilah*, a 1972 Cape Dory 25. Ryan Steven Green shot the photo from the dock at Burton Chase Park. Find the photog on Instagram: @ryanstevengreen.

# GOOD OLD BOAT

2021 BWI Award-Winning Articles

On February 16 at the Miami International Boat Show, Boating Writers International (BWI) presented its annual awards for boating journalists, photographers, and videographers. Awards were presented in 15 contest categories to recognize writers for their "Excellence in creating compelling stories about boating through entertaining, educational, and inspiring journalism." The 2021 awards attracted 95 participants submitting 273 entries. *Good Old Boat* is thrilled that our writers took home 11 awards across six categories! To honor their work, this special *Good Old Boat* issue contains all of our writers' winning articles.

## 2 Hey There *Delilah*

Love ruins everything, until the right one comes along.  
*by David Blake Fischer*  
1st, Boating Lifestyles

## 5 A Deadly Calm

Wherein a foolhardy notion and a puff of wind nearly end in disaster.  
*by D.B. Davies*  
2nd, Seamanship, Rescue & Safety

## 8 Sailing Scared

Anxiety can scuttle everyone's time aboard. Here's how to understand it and help.  
*by Melissa White*  
3rd, Seamanship, Rescue & Safety

## 13 Too Close for Comfort

A near-dismasting on a Pacific passage calls for teamwork and trust.  
*by Melissa White*  
Merit, Seamanship, Rescue & Safety

## 17 (Un)Welcome Party

A mission to meet a circum-navigating friend takes an unexpected turn.  
*by Bert Vermeer*  
Merit, Seamanship, Rescue & Safety

## 20 C&C Redline 40 Mk 1

A Canadian Classic with a Racing Pedigree  
*by Andy Cross*  
1st, Boat Tests & Reviews

## 26 The Need for Speed

This refit of a proven, 1970s-era racer maximized performance for speed, safety, and fun.  
*by Ronnie Simpson*  
3rd, Boat Projects, Renovations & Retrofits

## 32 Sticking Point

The DIY deck paint job looked fantastic. Then the surveyor showed up.  
*by John Vigor*  
Merit, Boat Projects, Renovations & Retrofits

## 35 A Southeast Sojourn

Part One: Baranof Island's wild beauty and singular towns open a summer-long journey through Southeast Alaska.  
*by Andy Cross*  
1st, Boating Travel or Destinations

## 40 Into the Wild

Four friends and a refit rocket tackle the raucous Race to Alaska.  
*by Andy Cross*  
1st, Boating Adventures

## 45 Captain Spontaneous

Wherein loose lips end up sailing ships, that is, a venerable fishing schooner.  
*by D.B. Davies*  
Merit, Boating Adventures



# Hey There *Delilah*

*Love ruins everything, until the right one comes along.*

BY DAVID BLAKE FISCHER

I grew up with a sailboat because I have a big brother. Steve is five years older than me with a can-do attitude and an engineering mind to match. He built the forts and fixed the bikes; I played with them. So when family friends gave big bro an ailing mid-century catamaran in the early '90s, I was the lucky sailor.

Our summer place was on Bois Blanc Island, a sparsely populated, dusty piece of paradise on the eastern wing of Michigan's Straits of Mackinac. To call it a cabin is a stretch; it was an old mobile home our parents brought over on a barge in the mid-'70s. But Lake Huron was a stone's throw. The end of our gravel driveway

opened on an expanse so big it looked like an ocean.

That first summer with the boat, my brother patched the sails and rigged some lines. From that day on, I was hooked and spent every minute I could on the water, tacking along the island's cedar- and birch-lined coast with a sense of wonder only kids enjoy.

I was about 10 when a neighbor let me use his Snark, an 11-foot dinghy that would flip and turtle if you so much as looked at it. I loved that little boat. Then, a couple of years later for 50 bucks I got a Scorpion, a 14-foot Sunfish knockoff with a gash in the hull that we "repaired" each year with kitchen caulk until the

summer she sank. RIP. I loved that boat too.

But there's one sailboat that really had my heart. *Blue Moon* was a 21-foot sloop with salty lines that spent summers on a mooring and provided a picturesque backdrop to our secluded little bay. The boat belonged to Jerry, whose son, Ben, was my best bud. Jerry had a beard, smoked a corn cob pipe, and listened to Creedence. Over the years, I watched in awe as he waded waist-deep in the water, launched his dinghy, then shuttled out in the waves to *Blue Moon* before disappearing into the horizon. I loved all of this. Most of all, I loved the way Jerry loved his boat.

But of course, I was just a kid, then. And, anyway, it was all a long time ago.

When I move to California, these memories are behind me. I come to LA for grad school, but stay, get married, and begin to raise kids. And while Emily and I love the Pacific Coast, I all but let go of the possibility that I'll ever be *that* kind of sailor—neither the kid I once was nor the adult I thought I would become.

Then, one day, I suffer an Achilles tear that seems to confirm my emerging place in middle age. The week of my surgery, a global pandemic upends the world, so for the next few days I lie in bed and make a sport out of balancing an elevated leg on a teetering stack of books, pillows, and kids' toys. I'm perfectly unhappy until I see a YouTube video of Sam Holmes single-handedly a 23-foot sailboat from LA to Hawaii.

I watch and rewatch that video; I show it to Emily; I forward it to friends. A person in my state should really get a therapist, but instead I begin to seriously consider getting a sailboat. "Life is short," I tell Emily. "Whatever it is we thought our lives would be about, we need to start doing that stuff now."

I have a flair for the dramatic. Emily's learned not

---

Long past when he thought he'd own a boat again, David found *Delilah*.

All photos courtesy of Ryan Steven Green.





## I'm awash with worry about the boat I haven't found but may at some point buy.

to take my big ideas seriously until I take them seriously myself. But, this time I'm for real. "I think it makes a ton of sense," she tells me. "You've been talking about it for years. Let's get you a sailboat!"

If all I had was a dinghy, that would be enough. Then I start looking at used sailboats online. Here's a 40-footer on eBay for five grand. Here's a free, double-masted schooner. I forgive myself for going down these rabbit holes. I tell Emily that from now on, I'll focus on practical, local boats in Southern California...and the West Coast...and, OK, maybe British Columbia.

Over the spring, I enjoy long phone calls with friendly sellers across the state. I spend countless hours on blogs and YouTube. And, late at night, when the family's asleep, I form a habit of sneaking back into the living room to pore over a web browser where no fewer than 100 tabs are open to all sorts of sailboats. This one's great but needs sails; this one needs rigging; and what about the chainplates? Wing keel, fin keel, or full keel? And what if

we decide to live aboard, grow our hair down to our butts, homeschool the kids, and travel the world as a floating group of family singers?

"What?" Emily says.

"Nothing," I say.

The search for a sailboat expands my knowledge, but it also increases my awareness of all the potential pitfalls of owning a boat: the costs, the upkeep, the critical questions I should—but definitely won't—ask when I finally find the right boat. As my anxiety grows, it gnaws away at my enjoyment. And so, by early summer, I'm awash with worry about the boat I haven't found but may at some point buy. And while I really need some emotional support, I also recognize that this whole sailboat scene is way too bougie to earn me any real sympathy.

But, I do find some solace. I'm on my third phone call with a guy up north who's got a Catalina Capri 22, 30 years' experience, and a voice like a children's author that's calming my boat-buying jitters. "I've been there," he tells me. "In my experience, you can

*Delilah's previous owner had finished a major refit, including deck and topsides repainting.*

spend forever looking for the perfect boat. But, at a certain point, you get a sailboat and go sailing. The rest you work out along the way."

Well said.

The rest of the summer I skip back and forth across Southern California to see boats. Masked up, kids in tow, I check out a Catalina 22, a Pearson 28, a Cal/Hunt 24, and a gorgeous Nonsuch 26 that really grabs my eye. I learn a lot from these experiences, both about sailboats and about myself. "We're not going to get one, are we?" my 6-year-old blurts as we step off a 25-footer in San Diego.

"All you do is look and look, and you *never* buy!"

Kids.

Back at the car I kneel down and hug my son. I tell him I swear I have no idea what he's talking about.

It's pretty simple. Some sailboats speak to me, others don't. In my head, I know all the logical reasons for getting a newer boat; but love isn't logical; love ruins everything. And by October, I've come to grips with the fact that I have a type. I fall hard for the vintage designs of Rhodes and Alberg with their teak, narrow beams, and low freeboards. The attitude and aesthetic speak to me. And so, when Emily echoes the same, I know we're onto something.

At Oxnard's Channel Islands Harbor, there are two



**Your First Choice In Electric Propulsion**



**855-339-2248 x1  
or 626-298-2262**

[www.electrifyacht.com](http://www.electrifyacht.com)



Cape Dory 28s for sale. One is too expensive and the other is riddled with leaky hatches, bad seacocks, old wiring, and some corroding backing plates that genuinely scare me. After seeing the boats, Emily and I head to the beach to debrief. We stand ankle deep in the water and watch the kids play as the sun disappears behind the Channel Islands. We agree that there's a lot to love about the Cape Dorys, though taking on a fixer-upper is less than ideal. Still, for the first time in our six-month search for a sailboat, we both know exactly what we want.

My target's specific now, so I expand my online search beyond California to include Arizona and Texas. It's a bit of a reach, but what the hell, I include the Pacific Northwest as well. Then, one morning in late October, I stumble upon a freshly published Craigslist ad from Washington state: *1972 Cape Dory 25—with trailer—refit and upgraded.*

The listing is detailed and meticulous. The owner has just completed an extensive, 3.5-year refit that's given *Delilah* new sails, reworked deck coring, a strip and renewal of the gelcoat, new standing and running rigging, new wiring, fresh paint, and more. As an early Cape Dory 25, *Delilah* is a George Stadel design, not an Alberg, but she's every bit as pretty.

I watch as Emily reads the ad for the first time. Her smile says it all. "So beautiful," she says, swiping through the photos. "And it's hunter green! David, email him right now."

It's a fact: 85 percent of people pursuing out-of-state sailboats in the time of COVID are either crazy-in-love or stupid. By now I'm both, so I have to work to win over the seller, who initially tells me he hopes to sell to someone local who can easily see the boat. And so,



*Delilah* heads for home at sunset with David tall at the tiller.

after exercising some soft skills over email I find myself on the phone with Wade, the seller, swapping stories, reviewing images of the refit, and later sending along a deposit that'll effectively hold the boat.

One week later, my unlikely plan is in motion. Friday at 4 a.m., a buddy and I load up a rented pickup and leave California on a 19-hour drive to Wenatchee, Washington. We drive 1,200 miles and make it to Wenatchee by midnight. In a small motel, we do the COVID shuffle, disinfecting doorknobs, wiping surfaces, and playing paper-rock-scissor where the loser has to touch the TV remote. After a quick toast, we zonk out.

We're up early, before the vacuums hit the hallways. The motel is just minutes from the boat, so I've barely had my coffee when we pull into Wade's driveway where *Delilah* is resting on her trailer. Even covered in ice, the boat looks amazing. Wade gives me a walkaround and details

the many ways he's prepared her for the long drive back to California. I also get a peek at the garage-workspace of a talented guy who can do woodwork, weld, fiberglass, and restore a vintage boat. A guy who's spent hundreds of hours sanding, so I can go sailing.

I wish we could stay longer, but it's a pandemic. So, when the paperwork is done, we're on our way, towing *Delilah* down the driveway and waving goodbye. I feel a rush of emotion as we go. Maybe it's because of what *Delilah* has meant to Wade, or maybe it's because of what she's already beginning to mean to me.

Anyway, I'm two miles down the road, wiping tears from my eyes, when the phone rings: "Did you mean to overpay?" Wade asks, laughing. "There's too much money in this envelope." I am totally unqualified for financial matters; it's one of my best qualities.

When we circle back, Wade's standing in the

driveway with the extra cash in an envelope. "Take this too," he says. He hands me a small tote bag he recently sewed from Dacron left over from one of *Delilah's* old sails. "I'm glad the boat's going to someone who appreciates her," he says. "Have fun."

Twenty-plus hours of mountain passes, rain, snow, and way too many A.M. radio stations dedicated to political conspiracy theories later, we arrive back in L.A. The family comes running out when we pull into the driveway. The kids crawl around the boat, opening compartments and poking heads out of the hatch. That sense of joy from my childhood is coming full circle now, and I sleep well that night.

In the morning, I take *Delilah* down to Marina Del Rey where a friend and I rig a sailboat for the first time. Astonishingly, we successfully step the mast. Then, when all's good and ready, I back *Delilah* down the launch ramp and watch as she floats effortlessly off her trailer and onto the water.

The outboard is empty but will run on fumes to get us to the slip. I stand tall and hold the tiller, looking over *Delilah's* bow and listening to the sound of water as it laps at the hull. I know then that I love this little boat too. And, tomorrow, when I raise her main, unfurl her jib, and fall off the warm Pacific wind I'll swear I'm that kid again. 🌊

*David Blake Fischer lives in Pasadena, California. His work has been published in McSweeney's, theMOTH, and BuzzFeed, among others. Follow his sailing adventures on Instagram at @sailingdelilah*



# A Deadly Calm

*Wherein a foolhardy notion and a puff of wind nearly end in disaster.*

BY D.B. DAVIES

Get a bunch of sailors gathered around a table at the club and they'll tell stories. Sometimes the stories are yarns in which 6-foot swells become 10-foot waves, and 20-knot winds become a 30-knot gale, and most sailors understand that and enjoy the tale for what it is. If the story involves calamity and distress—and they often do—the nature of the crisis usually centers around equipment breakdowns or rigging failures, and always at the worst possible times. Seldom do you hear an account that hinges on the complete and absolute stupidity on the part of the storyteller.

Well, dear reader, you're about to.

It happened on Lake Huron, on a hot, windless August day. We were two experienced sailors aboard a 31-foot Contest named *Centaur*, taking about two weeks to sail up into Georgian Bay and then over to Manitoulin Island and into the North Channel, time permitting. But this day, our first having left Sarnia early that morning, was proving that while we might have plans, Mother Nature sometimes had other ideas.

After sailing 10 miles out under a gentle breeze, the entire lake now spread endlessly before us, flat as pudding on a plate. There was not a breath of wind. Sails hung lifeless from the top mast like heavy boudoir drapes. It had been that way for over an hour and we'd hardly moved a few

yards. After the first half-hour, we contemplated turning on the Volvo diesel and motoring to Kincardine, our first planned stop. It would take several stinky hours at 5 stinky knots under power. We opted to leave all the sails up and the autohelm on and just relax. Our plan B was Bayfield, a port much nearer that had a good selection of pubs and a nice marina. We were in no hurry, we had two weeks.

I had my computer with me and went to the bow to write. My sailing partner, Bill, sat reading in the cockpit. We were, to use an expression I've come to loathe, "dead in the water." If this kept up, we'd have to turn on the engine just to get to Bayfield. The hours passed, there were no other boats within sight, and we bobbed like the proverbial cork. The sun beat down like a pile driver.

The glare from the placid water bounced up and stung the eyes. The sweat poured off me, and after about 45 minutes I'd had enough. I shut down the computer and walked aft. Bill was sprawled across the cockpit, trashy novel still in hand. He was beginning to look like a lobster. I reached over the stern rail and lowered the swim ladder.

"I've had enough," I said, taking off my shirt, shorts, and

shoes. "I'm going in to cool off." With that I climbed over the lifelines and dove head first into the water.

I thought I would die.

Plunging down, I felt every inch of my being numbed to immobility by the teeth-chattering cold. I quickly turned upward and reached desperately for the surface. Once my lungs filled with air again, I wanted to scream from the shock. My goose bumps had goose bumps, yet with an ache in my groin from my testicles turning to ice cubes, I suppressed all displays of discomfort. I even turned the twisted look of agony on my face into a broad, forced smile.

"Oh man...that...is...incredible. I feel alive again. This is like a warm bath."

got worried, and then his head exploded above the water. He was shouting epithets even before he emerged from the depths, none of which can be repeated here, or probably anywhere in polite company, ever. By now, I had little feeling anywhere in my lower extremities, but I did manage to laugh at his glaring eyes and screaming mouth.

Then we felt it...across our shoulders and head. We saw tiny ripples fluttering what had been a polished piece of blue marble. Both of us turned as a puff of wind hit the sails and the boat skittered away, about 50 feet. We turned to look at each other, and I'll never forget the look of resignation on Bill's face. His eyes said it all: "We're screwed."

I'm no great swimmer, but it was obvious that Bill wasn't going to do anything. I felt another puff of wind and the boat slid further away. I started swimming as fast as I could toward it, head down in the water,

arms flailing, and feet kicking in a frenzy. I kept my face in the water, focused, pushing myself as hard as I could until I ran out of air. I looked up gasping and was no closer to the boat. Around me, the ripples had grown and multiplied on the water's surface.

I took another breath and plunged forward swimming once more, as fast as I could.

---

## I didn't feel the cold anymore, just my own desperation.

---

Bill peeked his head over the railing, putting his book down. He looked at me questioningly. I could barely move my tingling arms to tread water. My fingers were icicles.

"This is fantastic. Can't believe it," I crooned.

Bill shrugged, then stood up, climbed across the lifeline, and jumped in feet first. He stayed under a long time and I





ILLUSTRATION BY FRITZ SEEGER



When I lifted my head again, I was gaining, but I was also swimming off course, veering to one side and quickly running out of energy. Keeping my head above the water, I swam using just my hands, aiming for the swim ladder.

The ripples flattened, the surface turned smooth as a sheet of plastic again, and I was gaining on the boat. I found strength to keep going, but I was too slow with my head out of the water, and I knew that with one more gust of wind I'd be finished. I took a deep gulp of air and put my head down. This time, instead of frantic flailing, I pulled through each stroke, trying to keep the power in each left and right stroke even. I quickly felt I needed air but knew I couldn't stop, that this might be my last chance at staying alive. I didn't feel the cold anymore, just my own desperation.

And when I felt I couldn't go another stroke, when I'd have to lift my head to breathe, my right hand hit something hard and I clutched it with all the strength I had left. I lifted my head and felt a cool breeze. I was hanging onto the swim ladder and being pulled along at about 3 knots by a now freshening wind that flapped in the sails.

Focusing on the muscles in my arms and hands to make sure that my grasp was secure, I hung on, breathing hard, until I could feel some strength returning. Slowly I pulled myself toward the now-outstretched ladder, and it seemed like the boat was trying to shake me off. I wouldn't let it. I pulled myself forward until I could reach up with my left hand for the second rung...then my right hand for the next rung...then my left foot on the bottom rung, slowly, deliberately, knowing any mistake would be fatal, until I finally climbed over the stern railing and collapsed on the cockpit floor still gasping for breath.

I knew I couldn't rest. If I got too far away from Bill, I'd never find him treading water in the vastness of the lake. I got up on my feet, released the jib sheet and then brought the boat about in what was becoming a steady breeze. The main filled on the opposite tack and I looked for my disappearing wake. It seemed like I'd swum a mile, but Bill was only a few hundred yards back, still treading water.

I came alongside him and swung the wheel to bring the boat head-to-wind. Slowly, Bill paddled over to the ladder and climbed aboard. We looked at

each other but said nothing, not a word. I grabbed the jib sheet and cleated it down. Bill reset the autohelm. The sails filled and the boat picked up speed.

Both of us sat in the cockpit lost in our thoughts of what could have happened. What would they have thought when they found the ghost ship *Centaur* sailing up the lake with no one aboard? No doubt they'd come up with some bizarre theories, from pirates to the plague. Even with a deployed swim ladder as a clue, who could guess that two sailors would decide to jump into the freezing water, together, without a tether, and leave the boat with the sails up and the autohelm on?

Later that night over dinner and a bottle of very expensive wine in one of Bayfield's most exclusive restaurants, we spoke of our next port of call and how long it would take to get there, what provisions we should buy before we left in the morning, how long it would take, and much more. But we did not talk about what happened that hot afternoon on Lake Huron. Ever.

That was many years ago. Bill has passed on now. When I think about it today, I still wonder why we never spoke about it. Perhaps it was just too

scary, or maybe we were too embarrassed. Yeah, maybe that was it. 🍷

*D.B. Davies is a sailor and writer who is a frequent contributor to Good Old Boat. He sails Affinity, his 1974 Grampian 30, around Lake Ontario. After extensively researching the men and sailing schooners of Canada's Maritime provinces, he wrote a dramatic screenplay about the famous Bluenose and her skipper, Angus Walters. You can find out more at [thebluenosemovie.com](http://thebluenosemovie.com).*

### The Takeaway—D.B.D.

We tend to think of life-threatening sailing moments in terms of a series of events that cascade together to create the danger. A slowly leaking through-hull that should have been fixed, a frayed line that should have been replaced, a weather warning that should have been heeded, charts that should have been updated, or flares that should have been replaced. The takeaway here is simple. One moment of inattention, one frivolous decision, can be just as deadly. Sail safe.

**PYI INC.** QUALITY MARINE EQUIPMENT SINCE 1981

**VELOX PLUS**

LEARN MORE AT [WWW.PYIINC.COM](http://WWW.PYIINC.COM)

PROPELLER WITH VELOX PLUS APPLIED AFTER 12 MONTHS AT SEA!

**PYI INC.** QUALITY MARINE EQUIPMENT SINCE 1981

**KiwiGrip**  
Non-Skid Deck Systems

**NON-SKID MADE EASY**

LEARN MORE AT [WWW.PYIINC.COM](http://WWW.PYIINC.COM)



# Sailing Scared

*Anxiety can scuttle everyone's time aboard.  
Here's how to understand it and help.*

BY MELISSA WHITE

**M**y husband and I were sailing our 1974 Olympic Adventure 47 slow and easy down a beautiful fjord near Tofino, British Columbia, on a lovely summer day. A woman who loves sailing, I was in my groove until Michael threw out an idea.

"Let's stop at the dock in Tofino and check out the town."

That was all he said, and all he had to say. I couldn't reply. I felt anxiety coming on strong and fast. I thought I would pass out, then I got nauseated, and my heart began that fluttery, flightless-butterfly feeling that comes with dread. I broke out in a cold sweat. I couldn't really feel my arms or legs—a common stress response. I knew what was happening; I was having a post-traumatic response to his suggestion that we dock our boat.

This fear, stemming from an event that took place when the boat was new to us, had blossomed into a more generalized anxiety about any number of things, including how shallow the water was (anything under 100 feet was cause for alarm). This was, of course, completely unreasonable, and I knew it. We have been sailing together for 15 years. This was our third boat.

Michael could tell I wasn't right, but he wasn't sure what was happening to me.

"I need to go down below and lie down for awhile," I said. "I am feeling extremely anxious about the idea of pulling up to



the dock in Tofino and it's causing me a bit of panic. There is nothing you can do about this, it's my problem. Just let me handle it." (OK, I'm a psychotherapist. I sometimes talk like this.) I went below, wrapped myself in a blanket, calmed myself down, breathed, rested, talked

myself off the ledge, did a few house-keeping things below. Slowly, I felt better. I still wasn't comfortable

imagining us docking our boat, but after about 30 minutes I emerged from the saloon to resume my role as an active participant of our two-person crew.

"You OK?" Michael asked.

**Docking—even if straightforward—is among the typical evolutions aboard that can trigger a debilitating anxiety.**

"I'll live. I just hate docking." I was tense but no longer panicking. I had decided I would get through it, just white-knuckle it.

My internal mantra: "It will be fine. It will be fine. It will be over soon." I was also strategizing how to handle every kind of docking situation that might present itself while trying to decide which job was less heinous: being at the wheel or taking the lines. I would opt for the lines because I was afraid that if I took the wheel I would freeze, and then bad things really would happen. It was exhausting.

In the end, I was saved by circumstance. We passed by the dock in Tofino because there wasn't enough room for our big boat. (Huzzah!!) We anchored around the corner and all was well. But the fact remained that my anxiety meant that I was more content to explore Tofino with my

---

## The situations our brains come up with may not be real. But the fear is.

---

boat on the hook and out of my sight than to pull up to a dock.

I tell you, living with anxiety is no way to live.

Did I want to feel that way? No. Did I have control over my response to the perfectly ordinary word “dock?” No. My panic was not willful. I simply was not in charge of my brain and what it was doing in that moment.

I share this because many people who do not suffer from anxiety have no idea what it feels like and no idea how to respond when people they love or people who are sailing with them experience it. In fact, it's very easy for people in the company of someone experiencing anxiety to needlessly (and unintentionally) make the situation worse. Examples of this include blaming the person who is feeling out of control, shaming them, or eye rolling. The fact is, nobody wants to feel anxiety and nobody who does experience it is in control of those feelings.

Unfortunately, sailing—especially with a two-person, couple crew—is a ripe environment for circumstances that trigger anxiety in individuals. Anecdotally, I know that it's not uncommon. Especially among women, anxiety aboard is so common a topic of conversation it is almost ubiquitous.

But even though statistics tell us women suffer from anxiety more often than men, anxiety does not discriminate by gender. We have personally known men who could not leave the dock on their own boat because of anxiety. They might simply need to get more experience to feel better, but they can't leave the dock to gain that experience because their brains are too busy making up doomsday scenarios that feel absolutely real at the time.

One man we know worked on his boat for years to prepare to go cruising. When he finally slipped his lines in Tacoma, he got as far as Neah Bay (about 250 miles) and turned back, his anxiety preventing him from going further. Nothing bad had happened. He just couldn't get a handle on his intrusive, anxious thoughts. The situations our brains come up with may not be real. But the fear is.

With the right tools and a supportive sailing partner, even anxious people can learn to relax and enjoy being on board. I might even be so bold as to say that if a person can accept the initial suffering and work through it, sailing is a good activity to use in overcoming an anxious brain—if you

are willing to face your fears and work up to feeling comfortable on board.

An anxious crewmember is not a safe and valuable crewmember. So, what can be done about it? The first step is recognizing the difference between anxiety and rational fear.

### Recognizing Anxiety

Anxiety is different from the normal fear of something new. In the episode I described, it's crystal clear that I was experiencing anxiety, not run-of-the-mill caution or strategic planning. A primary indicator is that my response was way

out of whack with rational reality. Pulling up to a dock is not generally viewed as a potentially life-threatening situation, one that should cause my level of concern. I may have been nervous about docking, but my response to nervousness would be to plan our docking strategy, even come up with contingency plans. I may have approached the situation with an alert sense of caution, but not a panic attack. Most people can tell the difference between genuine fear, such as when a shark is swimming toward you, and irrational anxiety, such as a panic attack prompted by the prospect of docking a boat.

## Medicating Anxiety-MW

It's important to acknowledge that anxiety is actually a brain chemistry reaction that is out of place in terms of what is happening in the physical world—an overreaction beyond control of the individual experiencing it. So, an attitude that the person should just “get over it” is not only unhelpful but counterproductive. After over 30 years of working with people who experience chronic and debilitating anxiety, I can assure you that if they could just get over it, they would have already done so without anyone else telling them to.

Once you accept that this may actually be a *medical* issue, getting treatment through medication begins to make more sense. In fact, the gold standard for treating any kind of anxiety, both acute and chronic forms, is a combination of medication and therapy. While I am not a prescribing provider, I refer many of my clients for medication to manage anxiety and then continue to work with them as they develop new coping skills and ways of thinking.

There are medications that intervene in the short term and in the long term. In the short term, where you have intense anxiety that needs to be calmed quickly, benzodiazepines such as Xanax work to slow the central nervous system down and induce a more relaxed state of mind. If your anxiety shows up only in certain situations or only on occasion, then these medications, when properly used, can go a long way in helping you relearn how to experience situations that make you anxious. If you are using them situationally and want to learn

and grow through those experiences, work with a professional who can coach you through the process so that you do not become reliant on the medications.

Unfortunately for some people, benzodiazepines can become habit-forming. If you have a history of addiction to substances, be clear about that with your physician and together you may decide these are not for you. My own personal caveat is that you need to know exactly how they operate in your own body before taking them onboard. Take the lowest effective dose, one that allows you to think clearly without feeling drugged or drowsy. And I would not recommend their use if you are singlehanded. Like all powerful tools, their effectiveness lies in appropriate and skillful use.

If your anxiety is more generalized—that is, if it affects more areas of your life than just being aboard—your medical practitioner may choose to put you on a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) such as Zoloft, Paxil, or Lexapro. These medications work by increasing the signaling of neurotransmitters involved in the serotonin systems in your brain. For many people, these medications literally are life-changing. When they work, they let our better selves emerge and experience life rather than trudging through our days in a fear-based frame of mind, always planning and strategizing how to get past the next perceived barrier, even as we create more hurdles for ourselves. It can be astounding, actually, the difference they can make.



Differentiating between anxiety and rational fear is important, because when anxiety hits, understanding that your internal state of excitement is out of sync with what is actually going on in your environment is an important first step to coping. I refer to the irrational feelings anxious people experience as “brain on fire.” Naming these feelings reminds me

that feeling anxious is not a character flaw or moral failing, it’s the way my brain is wired. Once I let go of self-judgment, I can work with it.

Coming to terms with this, taking responsibility for your own internal process, can be deeply personal and, for some, psychologically threatening work. If you suffer from anxiety, it means that your brain

is wired to respond to events outside its safety zone with a heightened sense of fear, and your safety zone may indeed be very small. Those who are not prone to anxiety are wired differently and are more flexible in their thinking and accepting of challenges.

But for those who do suffer from anxiety, it’s important to get to the point where you can say (and accept): “I really have no rational reason to be feeling this way, and yet I do feel this way. My brain is ‘on fire’ and I just need to calm it down.” It’s important to grasp the lack of judgment implied in this kind of statement and the concept of being able to hold both realities simultaneously: the lack of good reason for fear, as well as the acceptance of its existence.

A helpful tool to use for identifying your irrational feelings as irrational is to ask yourself questions like the following about situations that light up your anxious brain: Are other people on board worried? Is the boat literally at risk? Is my personal safety at risk? When asking these questions, you must use empirical data to answer them, not “feelings” data. Forcing your logical brain to consider a situation may not quell your anxiety, but it lets you acknowledge it for what it is, and that is critical.

## Late-Onset Anxiety—MW

While many people who suffer anxiety have done so for years, and in fact their symptoms can be traced even to childhood, some get hit with anxiety seemingly out of the blue. It’s particularly hard when someone who feels like they generally cope very well day-to-day suddenly develops feelings of panic aboard their boat. Suddenly something that has given them tremendous joy over the years becomes an activity to be avoided.

I see a seemingly sudden onset of anxiety symptoms in mid-life to be an opportunity to examine the kinds of stressors most people live with day-to-day and look for ways that they add up. We know that stress is additive and cumulative. In other words, we may be able to easily handle two or three stressful life situations such as working full-time and raising children, all while caring for a house (or boat, or both), but if you add having a difficult boss to the equation, it’s too much and we begin to feel “stressed out.” We may be able to handle one overtly stressful event in a day and keep on trucking, but if we are faced with multiple such events—the last straw breaking the camel’s back—then we can experience a trauma response, creating the perfect storm for an anxiety attack or for a post-traumatic response later on. It’s the number of issues adding up to a failure of our ability to cope. Anxiety is like that at any time of life.

Certain people are more at risk for experiencing late-onset anxiety. People with a history of depression or any kind of mood disorder, women with hormonal dysregulation, people with a history of trauma, people who have experienced a lot of very recent

life events such as moving locations, changing jobs, divorce or separation, death of a loved one; these big changes create external stress that leads to internal reactions that add up over time.

By the time mid-life comes around, our lives can get very complex, in addition to the changes in hormones and brain chemistry that happen as we age. We also begin a deeper understanding of our own mortality. Many people are dealing simultaneously with emotional and physical stress due to jobs, family obligations, financial matters, and other ways our modern life adds to the stress on our proverbial plates.

All these may feel like they are cleverly balanced against one another until we are out sailing, and suddenly we are hit with higher winds than predicted and have to hustle to get sails down and to get the boat to hold her course. In the past, these times may have felt exhilarating and fun and given us a real sense of accomplishment as we sail safely home. Now, as the waves crash over the bow, we suddenly realize we are afraid, if not terrified, and are having trouble coping and knowing what to do. That’s scary stuff when it happens.

If you experience a sudden onset of anxiety in the maturity of life, I encourage you to discuss that with your doctor to rule out any physical changes that may be causing those symptoms. Also, use the experience as information and examine your life. See if there are ways that you feel overly burdened and if you are trying hard to balance too many things on your plate without adequate resting time. Work with a therapist well-versed in anxiety and its treatment approaches if you continue to have difficulty.

## Easing Anxiety

Once you have worked to recognize your anxiety for what it is (and what it isn’t), consider employing the following tools I used in the docking situation.

1. Communicate what you’re experiencing clearly, succinctly, and without apology. Just state it. Out loud. Own it. It’s yours. Do your best to keep a calm voice.
2. Remove yourself from the situation if it is too overwhelming and is seriously affecting your ability to function. Take a 15-minute break if you can, with a plan to reengage with the situation when you are ready.
3. Wrap yourself up, just like a swaddled infant. It’s remarkably calming, and remember, we’re dealing with “brain on fire” here.
4. Breathe consciously, deeply, slowly, and regularly. Anxious people tend to chest-breathe and never actually fill their lungs to capacity. Breathe from the abdomen. This is a skill that you should learn if you have anxiety. Notice your breathing throughout the day, even when you are not experiencing anxiety, and begin breathing deeply whenever you find you are chest-breathing. This

action sends the message to your brain that all is well. Conversely, short, shallow breaths tell your brain that a situation is stressful.

5. After successfully calming yourself (and I am not averse to using medication to do this when the suffering is really bad; see “Medicating Anxiety” sidebar), it’s important to get back on the horse, as they say. Re-engage with the situation and see if your ability to tolerate it is improved. It’s fine to continue to feel anxious, just accept it and notice that it’s not actually killing you.
6. Identify the precise aspect of the situation that is the root of your anxiety and say it aloud. Then determine whether there is any action that could mitigate that stressor and tell your partner. For example, “I’m afraid that if we keep sailing heeled this far over with the rail in the water, a big gust will come and blow us over. I know it’s not likely, but my brain hasn’t caught up with that knowledge and

I feel afraid. Can we reduce sail or ease the mainsheet until I can catch my breath?”

7. When the situation is resolved, create an internal narrative that completes the story and ends in a reassuring place.

Visualize that story ending and allow the feeling of success to wash over you for a few seconds, at least.

For example, in the situation I described, my internal narrative might read, “Another successful docking! This just keeps getting easier.” See this successful ending, describe it, and feel it all at the

same time. The goal is to lock it into your brain as a real experience.

### Helping Your Crew

And what if you’re on the outside, looking in? Can you be a help to your anxious sailing partner? Yes, you can, and furthermore, if you’re a captain, it’s your responsibility to support your crew. I have lost count of

## Sailing is a ripe environment for circumstances that trigger anxiety.

the number of sailing couples I have met for whom the lack of understanding and respect from one partner toward the other, with regard to anxiety, is going to cost them the lifestyle they say they want.

Here is an example of how you can help. Let’s say you’ve dropped the hook, and your anxious partner feels like the boat is too close to the boat-eating rocky shoreline. You disagree and believe the boat is well positioned. Maybe you are right. But do you want to be right, or do you want everyone on board to be content and enjoy being on the boat? Being willing to see that this is a problem that needs to be worked—rather than a position that has to be defended or enforced—is the right attitude.

For some people, just knowing that their partner is listening, accepting, and willing to work a problem takes enough of an edge off that they can relax. In this situation, a straightforward solution may be to re-anchor farther from the rocks. Perhaps it’s enough to suggest that you both observe the boat’s motion for a while. Maybe taking a dinghy ride away from the boat, to gain another perspective on the distances involved, is enough. *The key is willingness to work together to solve the problem.*

An anxious sailing partner will affect everyone aboard. Fortunately, there are simple things crewmembers of the anxious sailor can do to help.

1. Accept and respect that if the anxious person could feel differently, they would. You don’t have to understand anxiety or be happy about it, just accept it. Anything less will make the situation worse.
2. Ask yourself and your anxious partner, “Is there anything I can do that will

Some knives *Fear* the water  
Spyderco’s Salt® Series lives for it.

### SALT® 2

Just one of over 20 models featuring H-1 or LC200N steel for extreme corrosion resistance



 **Spyderco**

spyderco.com 800 525 7770



Sometimes what used to be fun, like an exhilarating reach with the rail down, can suddenly become a source of anxiety-driven fear.

make this better or easier?" Express your willingness to do something to improve the situation for the afflicted person, even if you don't feel it's actually necessary. Your knowledge that the heeling boat will not capsize is useless to your anxious partner. Your partner's anxiety is *not about you*—unless you are doing something that exacerbates their unease, thus not respecting their welfare as equal to your own.

- This can be hard for some people. They feel that their partner's sailing anxiety is a slam on their seamanship. It isn't. In fact, an anxiety-prone crewmember who believes they will be listened to and assisted if they have a concern is less likely to suffer an episode.
3. Educate yourself about how the anxious brain operates. You don't have to become



a neuropsychology geek, just gain a basic understanding so that you will appreciate what your partner is up against when working through these things.

4. Slow down a bit. If you have a lot more experience on board than your sailing partner, don't expect them to respond as you would to things that feel natural to you. Don't expect them to accomplish jobs aboard at the same rate or in the same way that you do. The weight of unrealistic expectations can elevate or cause anxiety—don't foist them on your crew.

Anxiety is never an asset aboard, but it happens. Accept that while it's challenging, it doesn't have to ruin anyone's time on the water. To keep sailing safe and pleasurable for you, the anxiety-prone, you must understand that it has to be worth it to you to do the work to overcome the way your brain is naturally wired.

And if you find you are really suffering and cannot make headway on your own, get some professional help so that anxious thoughts never rule the day. Until you learn the necessary skills, it can be pretty overwhelming to try to manage anxiety on your own, and because each person's experience is deeply personal, generalizations are simply that.

If you're a partner of an anxious sailor, be willing to acknowledge that this is a biological, brain-functioning issue, not a character flaw. Make room for patience and be supportive of the learning.

Both people will have to work together if the goal is to be a good team on board, regardless of the roles you choose. But know that there is a path to overcoming. The time to get on that path is now, because life is short and there is a lot of sailing to do. 🍃

*Melissa White is a licensed therapist practicing in Washington since 1989, specializing in anxiety and its management. After sailing in Washington and British Columbia for 15 years, she and her husband, Michael, took the big leap in 2017 and sailed to Mexico where they spent three years on their Olympic Adventure 47, Galapagos. Since then, they have sailed to Hawaii and back and are refitting Galapagos for another long-distance trip. When she pulled into her new slip at Swantown Marina in Olympia, Washington, Melissa knew her anxiety about docking was truly a thing of the past. She is grateful to Michael for his patience and dedication to becoming a good team on board. Read more at [LittleCunningPlan.com](http://LittleCunningPlan.com).*

## Resources—MW

Education is the most important first step for anyone who is dealing with anxiety—whether that's you or someone you sail with. Working to understand how anxiety acts in the brain is critical to learning how to respond to it. Good tutorials online are easy to find, as are a number of books and other resources. Following are some that I recommend:

- The Pain of Worry: The Anxious Brain; [bit.ly/pain-worry](http://bit.ly/pain-worry)
- [youtu.be/zTuX\\_ShUrwo](https://youtu.be/zTuX_ShUrwo) (this is a good video that explains how a therapist works with anxiety.)
- [youtu.be/6hYfIDNyhJg](https://youtu.be/6hYfIDNyhJg) (this is an excellent tutorial on deep breathing.)
- *Anxious: Using the Brain to Understand and Treat Fear and Anxiety*, by Joseph Ledoux

## NEED A RUDDER?

Smooth Sailing



FOSS FOAM  
PRODUCTS  
OF FLORIDA, INC

**WE HAVE OVER 400 MOLDS**  
here are just a few  
of the manufacturers

<b>Beneteau</b>	<b>Endeavour</b>	<b>CSY</b>
<b>Hunter</b>	<b>Leopard</b>	<b>Watkins</b>
<b>Catalina</b>	<b>Morgan</b>	<b>Cal</b>
<b>Irwin</b>	<b>Caliber</b>	<b>O'Day</b>

*Celebrating*  
**40 Yrs**

As the world's  
largest producer  
of rudders,  
we have made over  
60,000 since 1978!

**[www.newrudders.com](http://www.newrudders.com)**

**352-529-1104**

**[info@newrudders.com](mailto:info@newrudders.com)**

Foss Foam Products of Florida, Inc.  
7060 Hwy. 41 North, Williston, FL 32696



# TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

*A near-dismasting on a Pacific passage calls for teamwork and trust.*

BY MELISSA WHITE

It's 0800 and I am snug in my bunk, still half asleep, contemplating greeting the day aboard *Galapagos*, our 1975 Olympic Adventure 47. The motion of the boat is familiar, charging under sail toward our Cape Flattery, Washington, destination. We're only 500 miles out, nearing the end of this long Pacific passage home from Hawaii. Then, my reverie is shattered by what sounds like the firing of a cannon upon our sturdy ship.

I jam my feet into sea boots, each on the wrong foot, while shouting to my husband, Michael, whom I hope is safe topsides. "I'm coming up! I'm coming! What happened?" I throw on my inflatable harness as I fly to the companionway. Michael is already in the cockpit and gearing up. His face is a shade of grey I haven't seen since we got water in our 20-hour-old

Beta Marine engine back in 2014.

"That was our backstay. We lost it. The insulator..."

He doesn't have to finish; I see miles of thick wire rope snaking around the aft deck. *Shitshitshit!* I look forward and up and see the parted piece hanging, only two feet long, swinging from the top of the mainmast. I'm grateful to see that the mizzen is unaffected; no triatic stay connects the two. Still. *We. Are. Screwed.*

"I have to get this sail down!" Michael calls as he leaps to the deck. The wind is on the beam and I realize we're lucky to still have our nighttime triple reef in the main. He's at the mast pulpit in two giant strides, uncleating the main halyard.

I am already rolling in the genoa. "I've got this one!" I shout as I see the main fall gracefully to the boom.

With both sails doused, I start the engine as Michael checks for lines or stays that may have gone overboard. When he gives the all-clear, I put us in gear, steer slowly downwind, and turn on the autopilot. I call this information out to him and he pauses, eyes the sea state, then nods. Whether we should be motoring downwind after losing the backstay is a question, but we consider the meter-high swells and decide that this heading takes the most pressure off the rig. Sometimes there are no great choices.

Michael calls, "Tighten the mainsheet and get the boom centered!" We're thinking in sync as I'm already doing just that. I begin to feel a wave of confidence—*the mast is still up, we're going to be OK, I can feel it, remember to breathe.*

Together in the cockpit, we discuss our next steps. Our

focus is twofold: take as much pressure off the rig as possible, and secure the top part of the mast. We're fortunate that *Galapagos* has a keel-stepped mast, but we realize we still need to act quickly and decisively.

"I'm going forward to get the main halyard and bring it back here." Michael has his captain's voice on; I'm listening and also observing his body language. "Tie a bowline in the end of this line so I can attach the halyard. I'll tie it to the hard point on the aft deck and then tighten it on the winch at the mast." He hands me the line and goes forward.

I tie a bowline and immediately wonder if I did it right. I'm not panicking, but I'm having trouble concentrating, and I worry that what I tied won't hold. When Michael returns with the halyard, I hand him my knot and ask



him to check it. He reties it, but he has to think it through, too. Normally, he can tie one without looking.

After attaching the halyard to the tether and securing it aft, Michael goes forward and winches the halyard taut, creating a temporary backstay. As planned, this puts an end to what Michael describes as

a sickening sight, the mast bending forward and then snapping back to a hard stop as the forestay catches it. I never see it because I don't look. I need to think and act, and to do that effectively, keeping fear at bay is critical.

I'm breathing a bit easier as Michael returns to the cockpit. I am making constant, slight adjustments to our course to keep the boat motion easy. *We are fine. The boat is fine. No one is hurt. We've got this. Our teamwork is spot on. Breathe.*

"I want to get the genoa off the furler," Michael says. "It's adding stress and weight to the rig. And if we do lose the rig at least we won't lose a good sail." This is going to be the hard part, the dangerous part. That sail is huge and heavy. Even on a dock, we have to use a lot of human power to manage it.

We decide that I will slowly unfurl the sail and simultaneously ease the halyard, while he guides the sail down to the deck. Winds are 12-15 knots, and I want to turn upwind so the sail doesn't fill as we unfurl it and stays on deck as it comes down. But swells are still over a meter, and I don't want Michael on the foredeck manhandling a big sail with the bow pitching. We have this crazy idea that we can do this

in a controlled way. Maybe we will get lucky.

Michael begins to go forward. "Michael. Clip on." I

---

## I look up and see the parted piece swinging from the top of the mainmast.

---

look him in the eye. He pauses. "I know it's a pain, but clip on. I cannot lose you overboard to this." He clips onto the jackline and goes forward. *Deep sigh. Keep the focus on the task at hand.*

I move forward to the mast holding the furling line—which is run from the cockpit winch—in one hand, so I can access the genoa halyard in the other. Michael is forward, holding onto one of the sheets so he can guide the sail onto the deck. But as I start to unfurl the sail, the wind begins to catch it, and I realize belatedly that our idea of a controlled drop at this angle to the wind just isn't possible. I have to unfurl the whole thing—*fast*—to get it down, because that's just how furlers work. I knew this. I let more sail out.

But Michael is still hanging onto the genoa sheet, and it's already pulling him around dangerously. I stop unfurling, fearing that any more force puts him at even greater risk. In the trauma of the moment, maybe he doesn't realize what's happening. He had mentioned that if we lost the rig, we could still maybe save the sail; it was pretty new. Funny the things you think of under stress. I care less about the sail than losing him over the side or dropping a line into the water to foul

the prop. But he's so intent on controlling the sail that he can't see how impossible that is. Looking back at me, his

face is focused, determined, maybe a little afraid?

"Let go of the line!" I yell. As soon as he drops it, I fully unfurl the sail and let go the halyard. With the wind still partly in it, the sail still fights us; Michael

has to pull it down, some of it landing in the water. Clipped onto the jackline, I scuttle forward, and together we heave it on deck. *Keep your feet firmly against the toerail. Make sure*

*of your footing. Don't move fast. Don't depend on the lifelines to hold you. Think things through. Keep your center of gravity low.*

Sail safely on deck, no lines dragging, he hands me the head of the sail and I haul it back toward the cockpit along the side deck. This is when I feel the weakest, when brute strength is required. Michael rolls the sail up from the front, heaving the massive thing over and over toward the deck in front of the hard dodger. We squirrel it into a bundle the best we can, cinching it with a line to hold it down.

"Let's take a moment," Michael says. It's just a few seconds, a moment to calm our brains down, acknowledge a small prayer of thanks that we and the boat are safe, gratitude



**PROTECT  
YOUR INVESTMENT**

**Super Cleaner & Finish  
For All Things Teak**

**Teak GUARD**  
teakguardproducts.com



**BOOM FURLING  
MADE EASY!**

**Introducing the C-Boom Furler  
Designed for boats 21' - 34'**



**cboomfurler.com**  
**703-790-6198**

for the most important things in our world.

Sails secured, temporary stay in place, we go aft to survey the damage...and realize there is none. We no longer have a backstay; otherwise everything is untouched.

We discuss our next move. The backstay that we set up is only temporary. Our mast is 62 feet tall and has—had—a split backstay. I suggest that we remove the broken stay and hardware and connect new stays—even if made of rope—to the existing chainplates, something closer to what we'd lost. Michael agrees.

Our topping lift was made from quarter-inch Dyneema spliced to a low-friction ring. We decide that he can run a line through that ring and secure it to the chainplates on each side. It's overkill for a topping lift, but just the thing for a temporary backstay.

This plan goes through a number of iterations as we get the thing set up, using a handy billy on one side with a line that can be run to the port side winch so we can winch the whole thing tight. At first, we run the line directly through the hole in the chainplate, but it's quickly apparent that isn't a good idea, as the edges are sharp and will almost certainly chafe through the line.

Fortunately, Michael finds some right-sized shackles in our bag of spares. Now the line is attached to a nice, smooth, stainless steel shackle, and that shackle is attached to the chainplate. We are feeling better now, but I look at the handy billy, and I'm still worried that while the blocks themselves seem suited to this use, the only

this backup would give us time to address the problem. I am all about backups. It may be mostly psychological, but it counts when you are trying to avoid a crisis; we make the adjustment.

Now that the mast is secured and we are out of immediate danger, we stand in the cockpit and look at

cockpit. At some point, I realize that the extra clothing in the bags is for sunny warm weather and warm water. Hats and gloves go into the bags. I put my computer in its case and put that in my bag. I double-check everything, again. Michael watches me do this. He knows me. *Best to be prepared.*

"I don't know if this helps," he says, "but even if we lost the rig, you know that the entire mast would not come down, right?"

Well, no, I didn't know that. In my head, I had pretty catastrophic visions of the entire 62-foot stick falling forward and completely destroying the deck, the boat taking on water, Coast Guard rescue kinds of things. He explains that the mast is two sections, and that the likely scenario would be that the top may part from the bottom. So we would lose the rig and it would suck real bad and cost a lot of money, but it would be very unlikely that it would cause us to lose the boat.

"Actually, that helps a lot." I say. "Thank you for telling me. I knew that our mast was built in two pieces and I'd forgotten. I remember now."

Regardless, we decide it would be prudent to let the Coast Guard know our situation and set up a comms schedule with them. We email them using the Iridium Go. They reply swiftly, the start of a twice-daily check-in that improves crew morale.

Night and darkness arrive, and every little noise spells doom in Michael's mind, concerned about whether our fixes will hold. Surprisingly better at denial than Michael, I get some shut-eye. In fact, I adopt a fairly fatalist view during situations like this and prefer to face death well rested. Besides, I am exhausted in mind, body, and spirit, and nothing can keep me from sleep.

---

## I need to think and act, and to do that effectively, keeping fear at bay is critical.


---

thing standing between us and another failure of this temporary rig is the small snap shackle assembly at the top of the block. It just looks too small. Maybe it's strong enough to bear this load, but I don't know that for sure, and it's going to keep me up at night.

I suggest we attach a safety line that bypasses the handy billy and attaches to the chainplate shackle. It would bear part of the load. And if the top of the handy billy failed,

each other. "I'm sorry," he says. I don't know why he is apologizing for anything, and that's when I begin to cry. Not big gulping sobs or out-of-control ugly crying, just kind of quietly weeping that this lovely passage has come to such an abrupt end. My dream of passing by Cape Flattery with sails flying fizzes, and I am heartbroken for us. That's what I'm crying about, and I'm not even sure why that is important to me. My mind knows that I am having an adrenaline stress response, but my heart knows I am just sad. I hold these two pieces of reality at the same time. Truth is truth. We will need to baby the rig until we get it repaired. We will motor for days. I am bereft.

We give ourselves some time alone to be with our own thoughts and feelings before going on to the next tasks. Then, Michael begins coiling up the broken backstay and I help him tape it securely to be stowed below. I get warm clothing and a handheld radio to add to the ditch bags in the



**HOOPERSYACHTS.COM**  
**NEW & USED SAILBOATS**  
**SAILBOAT HARDWARE**  
**RIGGING & SWAGING**  
**QUALITY SERVICE**  
**800.377.8795**  
**651.436.8795**  
**TIPS ON HOW TO SAVE FUEL COSTS**  
**BUY A SAILBOAT**  
**WWW.HOOPERSYACHTS.COM**



When I come up to the cockpit in the morning, Michael is playing “dodge that ship” and is bleary-eyed. He has sent our position to the Coasties and to our friends on land, and he has downloaded the news headlines for me to have over my coffee (some rituals are sacred). I suggest he try to sleep. We have four days to go to Neah Bay, Washington. (We don’t know at the time that Neah Bay is closed due to COVID-19.)

In the end, we made it safely home. In short, it was our teamwork and a lot of luck that saved the rig. Being able to keep focused on the tasks in front of us, having years of experience handling smaller boat crises together, knowing how to talk and listen to one another in an emergency, and having faith in each other’s abilities are all time-earned skills that were put to the serious test. Not insignificant is Michael’s ability, as captain, to listen to me and to take what I have to say seriously, valuing my opinion and ability to problem-solve, sometimes doing things he doesn’t think are necessary just because I think they are. That’s called respect.

Back in our home waters of Washington State, we are a sailing boat again, gliding across the water whenever the wind blows. It feels good to look aft and see those shiny new turnbuckles and the silvery strands of a safe, new backstay. 🦋

*Melissa White is a licensed therapist practicing in Washington since 1989, specializing in anxiety and its management. After sailing in Washington and British Columbia for 15 years, she and her husband, Michael, took the big leap in 2017 and sailed to Mexico, where they spent three years on their Olympic Adventure 47, Galapagos. Since then, they have sailed to Hawaii and are refitting the boat for another long-distance trip. Read more at [LittleCunningPlan.com](http://LittleCunningPlan.com)*

## The Takeaway—MW

First, because someone is bound to want to know, we did have our rig inspected before we began this passage. None of the three insulators on our backstay sparked concern. In fact, when we took our broken stay into Port Townsend to get a new one, the rigger said she had never seen one fail like ours did. She kept it to use as a teaching moment, because it’s the first failure like that she had come across.

Of course, anything can fail, but that was two experienced riggers who had the same opinion on the matter, which made us feel a bit better. But it’s also a reminder that shit happens, no guarantees. There was no practical way for us to have examined the insulator adequately.

From this experience, I learned that slowing down and thinking things through is critical even in an urgent moment. In fact, the right mental approach can make the difference between a situation that’s not inherently dangerous, and a situation that is hopelessly dangerous. As soon as I could, I focused on the fact that the boat was safe, not taking on water, nothing dragging in the water, no one hurt. Our situation was urgent, but there was never an emergency. That deliberate slowness allowed us to make adequate decisions. Thus, knowing the difference between an urgent situation and an emergency is critical.

It’s important to recognize that many times

there are no good choices to make, only less bad choices. For instance, I had to quickly decide whether to turn the boat upwind and into big seas or downwind to protect the mast from the stresses of the bow pitching. I decided that the priority was smoothing out the boat’s motion, even when it came time to lower the headsail.

The editor of this magazine questioned our decision to remove the headsail, rather than leaving it furled on the stay. As I’ve emphasized, people’s emotional responses to a situation are important, and listening to those as much as possible can make the difference between a traumatic memory and a good story. Michael wanted as much weight off the rig as possible; he *needed* the sail removed. His sense of relief when the sail was stowed was real and important. Yet, I can see now that we were both beginning to think a little less clearly in that moment. How could I possibly have thought that I could ease the sail out only a little at time and still get it to drop? That’s ridiculous. How could Michael have thought he could control the sail at all? He knows how difficult that is even on a calm day at the dock.

That said, I like to think that if the conditions had been worse—bigger seas, bigger winds—we’d have made the decision to leave it. At the same time, our decision to remove it when we felt the risk was low was a hedge against conditions possibly deteriorating in the days before we made landfall, winding up in a situation where we wish we didn’t have that additional weight and windage

loading our wounded rig. Not even hindsight is 20/20. I feel like we really got lucky not losing the sail.

I also have a tendency toward anxiety (“Sailing Scared,” March/April 2021) and have had some post-traumatic responses to situations aboard our boat, so I was very focused on making sure that I stayed present with the situation as much as possible. (I am pleased to report I am not traumatized by this event!) My success was due in large part to Michael’s ability to listen to my needs and concerns as crew and to respond accordingly. This is why I focus on teamwork.

We did right by saving our fuel. We are more apt to sail slowly than motor, and we have a light-wind sail inventory for just that reason. This approach left us with the fuel we needed to motor 500 miles when that was the safest option. A week earlier, for example, had we been impatient with sitting for a day waiting for the wind to fill in, we would have squandered fuel we eventually needed.

As a result of lessons learned from this experience, we now carry aboard enough Dyneema and fittings to replace underway any failed piece of rigging. We will also be carrying more new rope. We were scrounging during this episode, and it seems like we always are looking for rope to do one thing or another.

# (Un)welcome Party

*A mission to meet a circumnavigating friend takes an unexpected turn.*

BY BERT VERMEER

Bill Norrie had been singlehanded *Pixie*, his Bristol Channel Cutter 28, for nearly 90 days, sailing from Christchurch, New Zealand, to Victoria, British Columbia. This passage was the home stretch of a yearlong circumnavigation.

And what a last leg. After suffering a severe knockdown, Bill had been using a transom-mounted generator to charge his batteries since salt-water had seized the diesel's starter. Although *Pixie* was well equipped with electronics, including an AIS transceiver, Bill was approaching British Columbia with low batteries and limited communications. Friends and family ashore had only a satellite tracking device to follow *Pixie's* progress.

Bill would also have to transit the Juan de Fuca Strait, a 60-mile-long body of water separating Washington from Vancouver Island that runs eastward towards Victoria from the Pacific Ocean. At 15 miles wide, the strait is notorious for strong westerly winds and extended calms. Strong currents are common, with the eastern end experiencing up to 6 knots during large tides.

I'd known Bill for several years and had helped him prep *Pixie* for departure, and I

thought he would appreciate an escort into his home port of the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, Cadboro Bay, near Victoria.

---

**My immediate fear was of a collision—with *Sauterelle*, or *Pixie*, or a ship.**

---

Due to calm winds but roiled seas, it took *Pixie* three days to finally pass by Sooke Harbour. Having calculated

his timing, the Greens and I left the harbor together, and after only a few hours of patrolling in 15-knot westerlies on a sunny afternoon, we saw *Pixie* appear out of a distant fog bank flying poled-out headsails. Bill had no idea that anyone had come

this far into the strait to greet him, and as he neared, a broad smile came into view.

By late afternoon, our three boats were sailing east towards Race Rocks, the turning point towards the Victoria waterfront. A cool breeze blew over our sterns and the afternoon sun kept us warm. When the crimson sunset faded, darkness crept over the eastern horizon.

Race Rocks, a small island surrounded by dangerous reefs and marked by an historic lighthouse, is about a half-mile off the Vancouver Island shore. Victoria lies 10 miles beyond. The area is notorious; here, Juan de Fuca Strait broadens into a more open body of water. Race Passage, a narrow channel between the Race Rocks lighthouse and Vancouver Island shore, is known for strong, wildly

I also thought that with his engine kaput, a tow might be useful when he transited Juan de Fuca Strait's busy commercial traffic lanes.

So it was that on one pretty morning, I eagerly departed my home port of Sidney aboard *Natasha*, our Islander Bahama 30, and headed for Sooke Harbour to await *Pixie*, due to sail by sometime the following day. There, I met John and Marg Green of *Sauterelle*, a Farrier 31 trimaran. Longtime friends of Bill, they had the same idea of being *Pixie's* welcome party.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRITZ SEEGER.



turbulent tidal currents. And when Race Passage is rocking, the strait outside of Race Rocks is never much calmer.

As we approached in the dark, Race Passage turned, as expected, from a favorable

afternoon flood to a 4-knot ebb. We decided to escort Bill outside of Race Rocks, seeking more sea room and hopefully less opposing current. There was no talk of retiring to Sooke Harbour; the clear skies and easing winds were most benign. Thick fog was forecast to form after midnight, but we presumed that we would be at our destination well before then.

John and I discussed towing options should the wind evaporate completely. All three skippers had many years of sailing experience, both coastal and offshore, and the conditions seemed perfect for getting home.

I had a chart plotter and AIS transceiver aboard *Natasha*. Aboard *Sauterelle*, John and Marg were using a chart plotter with an AIS receiver on a cell phone. Aboard *Pixie*, Bill had insufficient battery power to keep any instruments powered up; he hoped he could keep his navigation lights operating—this he communicated to us in a weak, final VHF transmission. Neither *Natasha* nor *Sauterelle* was equipped with radar. *Pixie* had radar, but no power to use it.

At about 8 p.m., the orange glow of a full moon rose above the eastern horizon, a canopy of stars shining overhead.



lost sight of *Pixie*. He added that they were in trouble too, that when dousing the foresail, the halyard had let go and the sail was under the boat. With little forward motion, he was trying to get it back aboard.

Contrary to the forecast, westerly winds had picked up and were soon steady at 20 knots. Though welcome, the wind was blowing against a 3-knot tidal current, and the results weren't pretty.

I was running *Natasha* hard on a very broad reach, sailing at over 7 knots through the dark, whitecapped water. Yet even when peaking at 9 knots while surfing down some of the larger waves, *Natasha* was covering only 3 to 4 knots over the bottom. My neighbors also surged through the short, steep seas in the darkness, running lights clearly visible.

Ten miles to port, the bright glow of Victoria's city lights beckoned. We were all making a compass course that Bill had relayed just before his VHF died, one that would have us crossing inbound and outbound deep-sea traffic lanes, where vessels are controlled by the Canadian Coast Guard Marine Traffic Services. Despite a nagging concern about encountering freighter traffic, I believed that our small cluster of boats, clearly identifiable because of *Natasha's* AIS transmitter, wouldn't be at risk in this large body of water.

John and I were unable to communicate with Bill; we were simply following him. And he was aimed for home.

*Sauterelle* was just ahead of me to starboard, *Pixie* further ahead and to starboard of *Sauterelle*. Three little boats in echelon.

And then the fog rolled in.

When I saw the lights of Race Rocks disappear astern, I warned John by VHF. I could see Bill in the moonlight on deck removing his foresail poles, presumably to allow more flexibility in maneuvering under sail. Then fog rolled over *Natasha* and everything disappeared, except for the reflected glow of my own nav lights. The air temperature plummeted, and condensation covered my glasses and the chart plotter.

*Natasha's* sails began slamming in gusts that rose well over 20 knots, and quartering seas began throwing her about. That's when the outhaul on the mainsail snapped, and *Natasha's* loose-footed main lost all shape against the mast. The boat heeled ponderously under the pressure of the gusts.

I released the mainsheet and turned to port on a broad reach. I was hanging on to the wheel, trying to maintain a compass course as *Natasha* rocketed down ever-steepening seas. The VHF crackled and I heard John calling from *Sauterelle* to say that he had

My immediate fear was of a collision—with *Sauterelle*, or *Pixie*, or a ship. I realized I was experiencing one of the few times in my sailing life when I genuinely feared for my safety. I hauled the wheel further to port onto a beam reach, away from where I thought the other two boats should be, and the mainsail continued to slam against the mast.

From experience sailing these waters, I knew that fog banks typically streamed by in Juan de Fuca Strait and rarely turned the corner towards Victoria. I maintained my course to port, towards the shores near the Victoria waterfront, seeking some protection from the strong wind and high seas and hoping to improve visibility if I could evade the fog bank. I strained to read the bright chart plotter screen through glasses covered in salt spray blowing past the cockpit from the bow. I couldn't slow *Natasha* down; I needed boat speed to escape the current pushing me back towards the reefs of Race Rocks.

After a very tense hour racing through fog as fast as *Natasha* could go, handicapped by her mainsail, I suddenly sailed into clear night air. The entire Victoria waterfront, still over 5 miles away, twinkled. I called *Sauterelle* and told John I

was in the clear. John answered, letting me know that he had fought the sail back on board and was sailing in fog, turning in my direction. Neither of us had seen *Pixie*.

Bill was a seasoned ocean sailor and I believed he would take prudent action, likely steering *Pixie* on the last known compass heading towards the original destination, Cadboro Bay. However, I knew *Pixie* had no navigational aids and, potentially, no navigation lights. Bill would be crossing the traffic lanes blind, depending on deep-sea vessels to locate and avoid him using radar. The AIS on my chart plotter showed traffic in both directions.

As conditions in the clear air moderated, I repaired the outhaul and got the mainsail back under control. Then I hove to and contacted Victoria Marine Traffic Services on VHF to learn whether they could identify *Pixie* on radar. They could!

The operator gave me a position about 5 miles to starboard and said that *Pixie* appeared to be nearly stationary. The operator reported multiple deep-sea vessels nearby that would

be using the restricted sea lanes and expressed concern about *Pixie*'s safety. He asked me to contact the Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) by cell phone.

I briefed the operator at the RCC on the situation. When I said that I was headed to *Pixie*'s location to assist, perhaps to tow *Pixie* to safety, I was advised—*firmly*—to turn around and continue to the original destination of Cadboro Bay, not to risk becoming a secondary problem.

Feeling somewhat slighted, I recognized the situation from an outside perspective and started sailing towards Cadboro Bay. The RCC was sending the rescue vessel *Cape Calvert* to the scene and they let me know that *Pixie* was now in the center of the inbound traffic lane. I relayed the information to *Sauterelle* and we agreed to meet in Cadboro Bay.

It seemed like hardly any time had passed when *Cape Calvert* roared by *Natasha*, steaming into the fog bank. When I later heard from the RCC that *Pixie* would be towed to the Canada Customs dock in Victoria Harbour, John and I altered our courses to Victoria. It was just after midnight before *Natasha* and *Sauterelle* were tied up safely in Victoria's Inner Harbour.

In the clear dawn of the following morning, John, Marg, and I reunited with Bill at the Customs dock. While enjoying his first coffee in

a month, Bill regaled us with his tale of the night before, of reducing sail and retiring below decks, only to be startled by the deafening blast of a ship's horn and dazzled with white lights as the *Cape Calvert* loomed over his tiny vessel in the fog. At Bill's invitation, a *Cape Calvert* crew member climbed aboard and helped secure a towline for the 10-mile tow to Victoria Harbour, arriving safely before 2 a.m.

Canada Customs officials arrived at the dock and welcomed Bill back into the country—no need for a 14-day COVID-19 isolation period! With *Sauterelle* as escort, I was soon towing *Pixie* in flat water

around the Victoria waterfront on our way to the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. Arriving under tow may have been a bit of an anticlimax following a year-long solo circumnavigation, but Bill couldn't have been more pleased. 🚢

*Bert Vermeer and his wife, Carey, have been sailing the coast of British Columbia for more than 30 years. Natasha is their fourth boat (following a Balboa 20, an O'Day 25, and another Islander Bahama 30). Bert tends to rebuild his boats from the keel up. Now, as a retired police officer, he also maintains and repairs boats for several non-resident owners.*

## The Takeaway—BV

What could I have done differently to avoid putting ourselves and rescue services at risk? Having sailed these waters before, I should have been better prepared. This was not a planned event, and perhaps it should have been. I should have developed a worst-case or what-if plan and somehow relayed that to Bill aboard *Pixie*, by hand or throw-bag, before we lost daylight.

Better yet, I could have tossed a handheld VHF radio to him. With that, we could all have turned towards the Victoria waterfront with the arrival of the fog, sailing out of danger. The core of our problems was the inability to communicate with Bill, compounded by the unexpected and adverse conditions.

We knew that fog was predicted and should have given more consideration to stopping at Sooke Harbour to wait for better conditions. The homecoming was eagerly anticipated and certainly

colored our decision-making; it was easy to decide that we would be in port before the fog was due. It wasn't a bad decision necessarily, but giving consideration to alternative scenarios would have been prudent.

When the fog enveloped *Natasha*, I should have immediately contacted Victoria Marine Traffic Services or the Canadian Coast Guard to apprise them of the deteriorating situation with *Pixie*. With relayed radar guidance, I may have been able to stay in sight of *Pixie*. But soon afterward, I was struggling with my own safety and that avenue just didn't occur to me. (A big thank-you went out to Canadian Coast Guard services for their professional and timely response.)

I wasn't prepared for the conditions we encountered and should have expected. It was a valuable reminder of the dangers of the sea, even when sailing in local, familiar waters.



Bill Norrie and *Pixie* depart the Royal Victoria Yacht Club in late 2019 to start a yearlong solo circumnavigation.



# C&C Redline 41 Mk I

## *A Canadian Classic with a Racing Pedigree*

BY ANDY CROSS

As I walked down the dock at the Ludington Yacht Club, racers milled about, flags snapped in the breeze, and halyards clanged against masts in a chaotic tempo. Out on Lake Michigan, the late summer wind was churning the typically blue waters white, and I was eager to get out racing on the 1968 C&C-designed Redline 41 Mk I *Condor*. It was a moment I had been waiting for since I first stepped aboard the boat decades ago.

Co-owned by David and Kris Bluhm, and Stephen and Jennifer Bluhm, *Condor* is one of the first racer/cruisers designed by the now legendary Canadian team of George Cuthbertson and George Cassian. With its distinctive black hull and red boot stripe, it's a boat I've watched sail around Pentwater, Michigan, since I was a kid.

I have fond memories of being invited aboard *Condor* at a yacht club party for Chicago-Mackinac Race finishers. I was in awe. It was the largest boat my young sea legs had ever been on, and nearly every summer since I've admired it tugging

at its mooring and sailing on Pentwater Lake and Lake Michigan.

In the summer of 2020, I found myself dockside at a yacht club event, once again fawning over *Condor*'s shiny black hull while chatting with owners Dave and Kris Bluhm. They invited me aboard for a tour and a tip of Mount Gay, and before I knew it, we were making plans to sail later in the summer.

### History and Design

In 1965, Canadian yachtsman Perry Connolly commissioned Cuthbertson and Cassian to design a custom 40-foot racer that was to be “the meanest,

hungriest 40-footer afloat.”

The result was a boat named *Red Jacket*. Built by Ontario's Bruckmann Manufacturing, it's believed to be the first sailboat engineered with a balsa-cored fiberglass hull.

Launched in May 1966, *Red Jacket* won 11 of 13 races that she started that summer on Lake Ontario. Following her success, *Red Jacket* headed south and in 1967 almost won the famed SORC (Southern Ocean Racing Circuit). She returned in 1968 to win the SORC overall, competing against more than 85 of the hottest racing boats of the day and becoming the first Canadian and first

non-American boat to win the regatta.

The Redline 41 was born riding the wake of *Red Jacket*'s success—and along with it, C&C Yachts. Bruckmann Manufacturing built at least four Redline 41 Mk Is in 1967 and '68. The next iteration came quickly thereafter in the Redline 41 Mk II, also designed by C&C and built by Bruckmann. The Mk II prototype was *Bagatelle*, built as one of three Canadian contenders for the 1969 Canada's Cup. *Bagatelle*'s modifications included a slightly more swept and deeper keel, slightly enlarged rudder, and the addition of a “bustle” just forward

The Redline 41's raked bow, relatively flat sheer, and low freeboard typify the C&C designs that not only sail fast, they look fast, at right.

*Condor* powers just off the wind. Whether racing or cruising, the boat's turn of speed and power is evident, opposite page.









*Condor's* refit included a new steering pedestal and rebuilt, refinished cockpit seats, at right.

*Condor's* owners installed a 4-cylinder, 43-horsepower Vetus diesel engine in 1986 before leaving to cruise the East Coast and Bahamas. Access to the prop shaft and stern gland requires reaching over the engine, at bottom right.

of the rudder. Thirty-five hulls were built until 1972 when sales slowed, and the model was discontinued.

Despite reports that Lindsay Plastics then purchased the molds and started producing the Newport 41 in Harbor City, California, under the name of Capital Yachts, recently discovered correspondence between George Cuthbertson and a yacht club commodore reveals that the Newport 41 was a similar but “separate and distinct” design that was “a ton lighter” with a “considerably shallower hull.”

C&C's original Mk I design was envisioned as a racer/cruiser that could excel at both, and every subsequent version fits this brief. *Condor's* first owner, Hill Blackett, a well-known and successful racer from the Chicago Yacht Club, was said to be sailing with his two sons past Florida towards the West Indies when they made the snap decision to compete in the SORC. It turned out to be a wise move, as *Condor* went on to capture the SORC title in 1972. Her win even garnered attention from the likes of *Sports Illustrated* and *The New York Times*.

The boat returned to Lake Michigan where she won several Chicago-to-Mackinac races in the 1970s and early '80s. In 1983, Bill Bluhm bought *Condor* and moved her to Pentwater, Michigan. Along with his sons Dave and Steve, Bill successfully raced the boat throughout Lake

Michigan until 1988 when he and his wife headed out on an extended cruise. They traveled east through the Great Lakes to the Erie Canal, then down the Intracoastal Waterway, and on to the Bahamas. After a season of cruising, *Condor* was trucked back to Pentwater where she continued racing and daysailing and still resides today.

### A Born Racer

My first sail on that blustery late summer day began as we pushed away from the dock and *Condor* steadily nosed forward against the protests of the wind and waves. When Ludington's iconic North Breakwater Lighthouse came into view, so did frothing whitecaps.

Fortunately, all hands aboard weren't shy about sailing Lake Michigan in such a state, and Dave rightly called for one reef in the main. With the northwesterly topping 20 knots and frequently gusting higher, we also took a couple turns on the furling genoa. The racecourse was set as a large, one-lap triangle with a beat, a reach, and a run.

Tacking back and forth in the pre-start sequence, I could



feel the power in *Condor's* double-spreader rig transfer to the hull as she punched through the raucous sea. After a lively start and a bit of close action with a few other

competitors at the westerly end of the line, we were off like a shot, trimmed tight and sailing upwind.

The C&C Redline 41 quickly showed what this venerable







*Condor's functional cockpit, typical of the era, is designed for safety and quick, efficient sail trimming.*

design was built to do: sail fast. We brushed off a couple boats that fell to leeward and then passed underneath another comparably rated boat. Even with a partially furled headsail, *Condor* was close-winded and relatively dry—at least for those in the cockpit. As bowman farthest forward on the rail, I was getting a proper dousing. *Condor* took the seas in stride, not bucking or pounding in the waves.

We tucked in a couple smooth tacks, and with the upwind leg coming to an end, we cracked off and headed for the reaching mark. The crew rolled out the rest of the genoa, trimmed for speed, and *Condor* stayed hot on the heels of her closest, and only, remaining competitor. Most boats come into their own on a reach in fresh breeze, and the 41 is no exception. Throwing a wake and bounding across the waves, we made quick work of the second leg.

Jibing smoothly at the next mark, we seemed to

come out of the maneuver without losing any speed. From there we headed low to a deep broad reach and run. Tempting as it was to fly the chute, there was no need given the wind strength, our position in the fleet, and the distance to the finish. Accordingly, I kicked back, dried out in the sun, chatted with my foredeck mates, and reveled in the smooth ride across the line. I thought, “Wow, what a feeling it would have been to cross the finish line on this boat in one of those SORC or Chi-Mac wins.” To be sure, her timeless pedigree was alive and well.

As a point of reference, *Condor's* PHRF number is 105 seconds per mile, the same as the early-'70s, S&S-designed Tartan 41. But just to illustrate how much design has evolved, the J/35, introduced in 1983, rates just 72.

A subsequent sail in champagne conditions of 12-17 knots on a bluebird day gave me a chance to spend more time

at the helm and in a cruising perspective. With older cruising sails bent on, *Condor* still showed a good turn of speed and sailed at about 40 degrees off the apparent wind close-hauled. Her helm was light yet responsive, with just the right touch of weather helm. The performance-oriented sailor in me appreciated that I could quickly and easily adjust the traveler from the helm if she started to round up too much.

And as we engaged in a friendly duel with a newer, similar-sized performance cruiser inside Lake Pentwater, I got a feel for how simple it was to actually sail the 41-footer. I was also impressed with how we performed against the other boat; here we were, a 52-year-old racer/cruiser favorably trading tacks and jibes with a considerably more modern design.

### Rebuilding a Classic

While I didn't find a history of blisters in the Redline Mk I or II, normal problems with wet and rotten balsa core in the decks are likely for vessels of this vintage. Due diligence should also be given to the boats' spade rudders. Like the decks, these

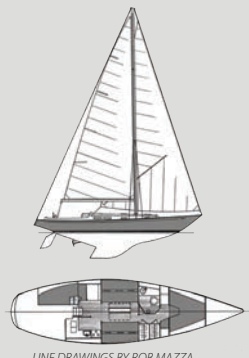
balsa-cored rudders probably need some attending to in the way of general maintenance, rebuilding, or even replacement.

Like many of the Mk I's counterparts, from the C&C Mk II to the various Newport models, *Condor* needed work in many of the aforementioned areas and more. Thankfully, she got it, and her rehabilitation process offers a blueprint for those looking to buy and restore one of these C&C classics.

In May 2012, brothers Dave and Steve took over *Condor's* ownership from their dad, Bill, and immediately put the boat inside dry storage at Snug Harbor Marina in Pentwater. The goal was to put her into racing, cruising, and daysailing shape for the future. The bones that C&C and Bruckmann had given *Condor* back in the late 1960s were still good, she just needed some modern love to keep going.

An open-ended spa treatment commenced by stripping *Condor* down to her bones—just the hull, deck, and engine remained. After removing all deck hardware, Dave and crew jumped into fiberglass work by reconstructing large portions of the rotted core in the cabin top and deck. They dropped the rudder and peeled off the fiberglass skin, hogged out all the bad balsa core,

C&C Redline 41 Mk I	
LOA	41'5"
LWL	30'0"
Beam	11'2"
Draft	6'4"
Displacement	19,475 lb
Ballast	9,500 lb
Displ./LWL	322
Ballast/Displ.	49%
Sail area (100%)	776 sq ft
SA/Displ.	17.12



LINE DRAWINGS BY ROB MAZZA



rebuilt it with closed-cell foam, and put the top skin back on.

The brothers treated *Condor* to all new AC and DC electrical systems, along with a suite of new Raymarine instruments and a NavPod at the helm. They upgraded interior and exterior lighting systems to LED, rebuilt all seacocks, and installed new plumbing systems, along with a new water heater and a fully reconstructed head. They upgraded tankage to include 18 gallons of diesel under the cockpit, 25 gallons of water in a tank under the port settee, and an 18-gallon polyethylene holding tank on the port side under the V-berth. The small tank capacities indicate the owners' racing priorities.

They reconstructed the main bulkhead and cabin sole and built and installed new cabinetry, along the way rehabbing or replacing every hatch and portlight. New

***Condor's* tidy and efficient nav station includes the electrical panel and space for electronics, at right.**

**The snug, seaworthy galley is tucked next to the companionway with a two-burner stove, single-basin sink, and icebox, at bottom right.**

cushions and upholstery iced the cake, and *Condor* shows in a condition that would have been similar to, or even better than, when she left the factory in 1968.

The steering systems on these boats are wire and chain with an aluminum quadrant, so solidly built, Dave says, that "you could steer an aircraft carrier with it." That said, the brothers installed a new steering pedestal. As work on the cockpit continued, they rebuilt all the cockpit seating and, as one would expect, freshened the exterior brightwork. They rebuilt all winches, converting the



## Comments From an Owner

Last year we purchased *Minnie*, a 1969 Redline 41 Mk II. I've enjoyed her responsiveness at the helm and overall speed. Her traditional rig is straightforward and simple to sail. We are currently updating *Minnie*, and even though most systems are original they are functional. We are replacing batteries, halyards, sheets, seacocks, drains, wiring, hoses, etc. The hull is ½-inch solid fiberglass, with some additional coring added above the waterline towards the bow. Large frames support the 9,000-pound keel; bolts and washers are stainless steel and look perfect. The only issue we've found is

rotted wood from a leaky seacock under the head sink and leaky mast boot. Her large wooden hatches have surprisingly not leaked. The hull-to-deck joint is solid from what I can tell. There is a wood rubrail. *Minnie* has been repowered with a 4JH5E Yanmar. What we like most about *Minnie* is her solid construction, low freeboard, and classic lines. She has a large cockpit with comfortable seating, huge ice box converted to refrigerator, and a Lake Michigan PHRF rating of 108. Our plans are to daysail, occasionally race, and family cruise.

—Frank and Lisa Cobb,  
Muskegon, Michigan





The main cabin includes traditional pilot berths port and starboard and a centerline table that opens up for dining, at left.

*Condor's* glossy interior brightwork was reconditioned with several coats of varnish, and the white paint throughout was refreshed. Note the absence of a headliner, which exposes the deck hardware fasteners for easy servicing, at bottom left.

cruiser that knows its way around a racecourse and can be outfitted for coastal or offshore voyaging.

Want to set it up as a daysailer that is quick to get out of its slip or off its mooring, hoist the sails, and enjoy an afternoon on the water with friends or family? Yep. Have aspirations for distance or round-the-buoy racing with a full crew or shorthanded? Go for it. Looking for a platform to turn into a bluewater cruiser that can happily tick off the miles at sea or swing comfortably at anchor in an idyllic bay? Let your dreams be your guide.

After all, dream boats don't have to be shiny and new to be fast, fun, and safe. And while they'll undoubtedly take work, oftentimes it's boats like the C&C Redline 41 that are worth the most. Not monetarily, perhaps, but in appreciation by a family who has owned it for decades; by those of us who admire it sailing in the same place every summer; or by a kid who steps aboard and then years down the line achieves sailing dreams of his own. 🚤



primaries to self-tailing. They repainted the double-spreader, keel-stepped mast and replaced all the lifelines.

No restoration of this proportion could go without attention to the hull and topsides. *Condor* got new topside gelcoat gleaming with black Awlgrip and an epoxy

barrier coat and bottom paint below the waterline. More than four years after coming out of the water, a much improved *Condor* splashed in July 2016.

### A Boat for All

While the lineage of the C&C Redline 41 decidedly skews

towards the performance end of the spectrum, its original racer/cruiser brief means it can be a boat for all purposes. If you're able to find any of these models on the market today, yes, you'll likely be getting a project that breeds many other projects (just ask Dave). But you'll also be getting a fast

*Andy Cross is exploring the western Pacific coastline, from Alaska to Panama, with his family aboard Yahtzee, their 1984 Grand Soleil 39. He is the editor of Good Old Boat magazine, the former editor of 48° North magazine, and former managing editor at Blue Water Sailing magazine.*



# The Need for Speed

*This refit of a proven, 1970s-era racer maximized performance for speed, safety, and fun.*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RONNIE SIMPSON

Three months after selling my Cal 2-29, *Loophole*, I found myself pining for another boat. I thought I'd be satisfied racing or sailing other people's boats, but without a boat of my own, life just seemed a bit less...interesting. Owning my own boat offers essential therapeutic benefits; at the end of a long day, nothing beats the feeling of clutching the tiller and steering my boat wherever I want to go, powered purely by the wind.

Once I accepted that owning a boat was necessary, I realized I had an opportunity to replace *Loophole* with something even better aligned with my sailing self. Before starting my search for the next boat, I considered carefully what I wanted.

I firmly believe that fast is fun. My next boat would go upwind with ease and respond to zephyrs on the quiet days. She would be a performance boat I could cruise, not a cruising boat that struggled to

perform. Clearly, her underbody would feature a fin keel and a spade rudder. She would be on the lighter side of the displacement curve. Her sail plan would be generous.

Looking at my future, I knew my next boat needed to be capable of sailing around the world. She would even be willing and able to play a starring role in a poor man's Sydney-to-Hobart campaign. And she still had to be fun to sail. I knew she had to be pleasing to look at.

It wasn't long before I found a Peterson 34 lying alongside a dock in Honolulu. She was a bit rough around the edges, the proverbial dime-a-dozen plastic classic in need of a little love. But I knew she had an impressive racing and performance pedigree. I knew she was strong, and her build quality was good. Her lines were pleasing. Below, I found an interior that would satisfy my liveaboard needs. I knew that with some refit



*Quiver rolls downwind under her new asymmetrical spinnaker.*







effort and minor modifications, *Quiver* was a boat that could eventually tick every box on my requirements list. I offered the owner just enough money to not offend and was quickly on my way.

### The Big Three

Now I could begin the project to refit *Quiver* to optimize her already considerable sailing chops for cruising speed and shorthanded efficiency. I started by focusing on what I see as the three key points of durability:

the rig, the keel, and the rudder. It's critical that the first stay upright and the other two stay attached. In the course of sailing more than 100,000 miles—split between racing boats and cruising boats—I've lost all three; this is personal.

I was confident enough in the mast itself to wait until later—as I prepped to go far offshore—to pull it and conduct a full inspection. The standing rigging, though, had to go immediately, since I had no way to know its age. I

replaced it piece by piece with the mast in place.

Next, I turned my attention to the rudder. A 40-year-old fiberglass hull is one thing, but a 40-year-old fiberglass foil that endures the strains and stresses of steering a lively boat—that's another thing entirely. With offshore plans for *Quiver*, I opted to replace the rudder, as I have done on my last several boats.

Some will argue that a full replacement wasn't necessary, and that draining the water from what could be a soggy rudder, then sealing it back up, would suffice. But under this scenario, it's extremely difficult to qualify the integrity of the rudder stock and aperture, both critical elements of the system. I believe any boat

of this vintage intended for offshore sailing needs a new rudder, regardless of how the rudder appears. The value of peace of mind increases with every mile I sail away from land. And, my racing experience supports my opinion; of all the offshore races I've sailed or written about, rudder failure while reaching is the most common cause of retirement or major problem.

I couldn't buy a new rudder off the shelf at my local chandler. For my third boat in a row, I enlisted the services of Foss Foam of Newport Beach, California. Foss has molds to build many different rudders but none for a Peterson 34—and that suited me just fine. When buying a new rudder for a 40-year-old boat, it costs nothing to go with a newer foil shape; it's a good performance upgrade.

I asked the folks at Foss for the coolest, most efficient rudder shape that matched as closely as possible the surface area of the boat's original rudder, built around a rudder stock with dimensions identical to those of the boat's original. Foss suggested using a mold for a Carl Schumacher-designed Express 37. They also recommended adding a bit of foil surface area forward of the post to preserve the stock rudder's semi-balanced nature.

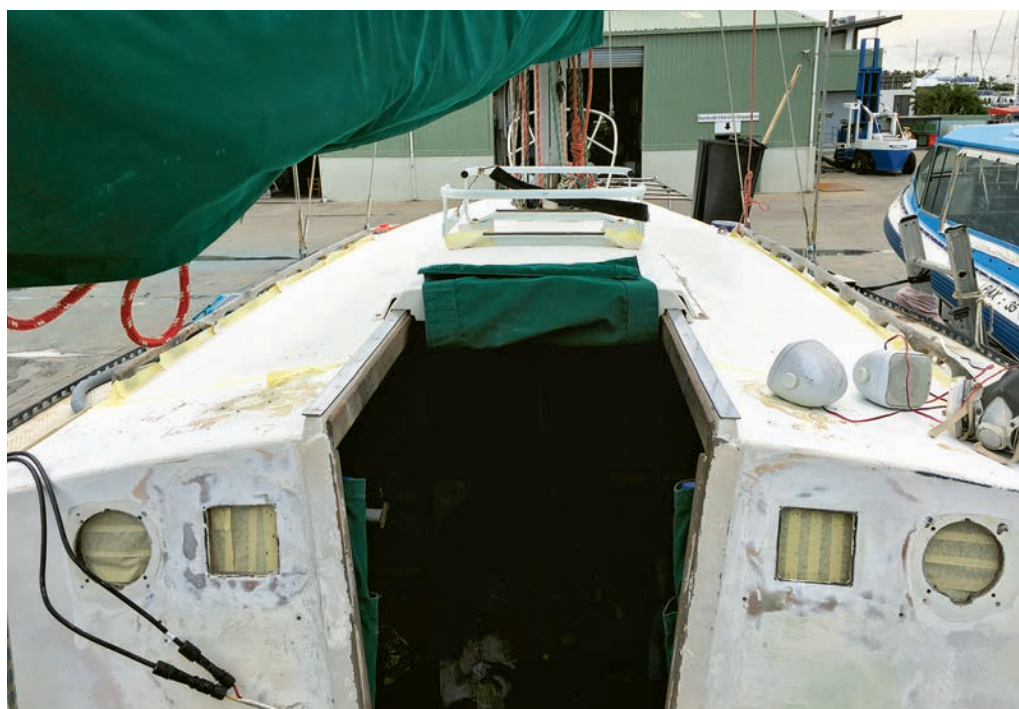
A few weeks later, I unpacked a sexy new blade that looked decidedly less 1978 and more 2018, and it fit *Quiver* like a glove. It was a fun, interesting, and ultimately rewarding journey from initial conception to on-the-water gains.

For the keel, I relied on a thorough visual inspection, in and out of the water, and a lot of shakedown sailing. The keel bolts are easily visible and accessible, relatively massive, and spaced closely. I have not tried backing the nuts off, but whether in the water or on the



On the hard for bottom paint, *Quiver* shows off her new Express 37 rudder, at left.

In mid-refit, the deck is stripped and prepped for new line organizers and rearranged deck hardware to improve shorthanded sailhandling, below.



hard, there are no cracks in the bottom paint to indicate movement of any kind. I will remove the keel at some point, but for now, and maybe due to my observation of the boat's overall robust construction, I have no shortage of confidence in the keel.

### The Powerhouse

Having addressed the three critical points of durability, I was eager to refine *Quiver's* performance as a sailboat. I started with sails. First, I ditched the roller furler for a full inventory of hank-on sails. I know it's contrary to what most people would do, but I am a firm advocate of hank-on sails, especially for short-handed ocean sailing. Why? Because I prefer reliability to convenience.

On my first sail across the Pacific, from California to New Zealand in 2014, I recorded statistics on the fate of that year's cruising fleet. By far, the most common major failure

experienced by other boats was related to roller-furling headsail equipment. Rigs and sails are easily damaged (sometimes catastrophically) when a furler fails to furl in a blow, and less common but more insidious is the damage or corrosion furling gear can hide that can threaten the mast itself. It's a wake-up call to watch a vessel arrive in a distant port with ribbons of shredded, semi-furled Dacron flying from the headstay.

As if to confirm my instincts, on a sail during the first week I owned *Quiver*, the lower toggle on the headstay failed. The Schaefer furling drum had been trapping salt-water (not draining, a common issue in some older Schaefer furlers), promoting corrosion of the toggle. To add insult to injury, installation of the furling equipment made it difficult to inspect this toggle. It was a major scare and reinforced my decision to re-rig and my preference for hank-on sails.

*Quiver* shows off the Peterson 34's well-known upwind chops.



Once I went with a simple wire headstay, I purchased a couple of new hank-on sails and modified the older-but-serviceable 110 percent and 135 percent genoas. With a full hank-on inventory that now effectively included a #1 genoa, #3, #4 blades, and storm jib, I had a headsail to suit any condition.

It's hard to overstate the efficiency gains (read: speed gains) offered by flying the sail best matched to the conditions, versus sailing around with the wrong headsail most of the time while carrying the additional windage and weight aloft of a partially furled sail and its heavy aluminum foil.

The bowsprit, fabricated from a small-boat boom, lets Ronnie set *Quiver's* new asymmetrical spinnaker with ease.

And, changing a hank-on jib or reducing sail is easy; nothing slides up and down like a metal hank on a wire forestay. A lowered sail (or one that's ready to raise) is easy to manage as it stays on deck and is firmly attached to the boat at its luff.

Next, I addressed the Peterson 34's long genoa tracks. To sail more efficiently, I cut out a middle section of the stock track and moved it inboard and far forward to







give my #4 jib and storm jib a tighter sheeting angle, letting me lead the sheets inside the forward-lower shrouds. When I relocated the cut portion, I also removed and rebbed the existing sections of track.

With the headsail situation sorted out, it was time to move on to the mainsail. *Quiver* came with a groove in the mast and nylon slides on the mainsail. This created enough friction that the mainsail was a bear to hoist—worse, it was reluctant to come down when I wanted it to. This was more than just a bother; the ability to quickly lower and raise a mainsail is really a matter of safety and sailing efficiency. There are times when you need the main

---

**By enabling the mainsail to slide quickly up or down, the Tides Marine Strong Track system makes reefing easier and safer, at left.**

**Note the hank-on headsail and lack of roller furling. Ronnie made the switch to enable better sailhandling and sail choice, below.**

to come down immediately, and the ability to easily and quickly put in or shake out a reef in the mainsail maximizes how much I can sail *Quiver* to her potential.

While many sailors choose to sail under full main and then reef the furling headsail as the wind picks up, I choose a headsail that's just barely on the side of being really powered up, and then I reef the mainsail as the breeze blows harder. Since it's harder to change a hank-on headsail than to manage the main, this makes sense, and by moving the center of effort forward, this configuration actually reduces weather helm and self-steering-system loads. It's a very French way to sail; I often see shorthanders flying a double-reefed main and the biggest headsail possible.

My solution to *Quiver's* sticky mainsail slot was to install a Tides Marine Strong Track system, a slippery, plastic track that slides up the existing mast groove. Highly polished, stainless steel slides on the mainsail glide up and down with a minimum of fuss.

Mainsail sorted, it was on to the fun stuff: the spinnaker. Most older boats carried large symmetrical spinnakers that powered them dead downwind quite efficiently, at least with a full crew—still, when it came to some IOR designs of the Peterson's era, there was a well-known saying: "Upwind, go like hell. Downwind, pray like hell."

But managing a spinnaker pole, topping lift, foreguy, and sheets and guys is not so practical for daysailers or cruising boats with small crews, especially when the asymmetrical exists. And truthfully, the asymmetric is far more than a compromise; it makes downwind sailing safer and easier. The boat must run downwind at slightly hotter angles than when using a symmetrical kite, and this off-the-wind heading eliminates much of the dreaded







*Quiver at anchor. Note the split genoa tracks, with a section far forward, which lets Ronnie closely sheet his smallest headsails, at left.*

Ronnie cut the Peterson's original, single, long genoa track and moved the separated pieces for cleaner, closer sheeting, at bottom left.



Since I wouldn't be flying a symmetrical kite, I had no need for the pair of secondary winches mounted to the cockpit coaming. Adding seven rope clutches in the cockpit allowed me to remove two winches by the mast and one of the three winches in the pit.

All in all, I went from nine winches to four. As well as easing sailhandling and opening up the cockpit for more comfortable seating, eliminating five winches removed a lot of weight, and reducing weight where possible can return big dividends in terms of efficiency, aka speed.

It's been four years now since I began living aboard and sailing *Quiver*, and it's still a joy. I open her up in the light stuff,

and she scoots along nicely, no need to run the motor. I can throttle her back in a breeze, for comfort, and she still puts up good numbers. She sails like an old racing boat, performing reliably well and getting me where I need to go. I started with the fastest and most efficient platform that was available in my size and price range, and by equipping her to my need for speed, I have ended up with a boat that is a joy to sail and so keeps me doing just that—sailing. 🌊

*Ronnie Simpson is a 35-year-old racing and cruising sailor, as well as sailing journalist, writer, and sailing media professional. He has sailed more than 100,000 miles on his own cruising boats and on racing boats, and has made ocean crossings on everything from a Moore 24 solo to a 100-foot, fully crewed supermaxi. He currently lives in western Fiji on his Peterson 34 Quiver, where he has started a surfing-related company in the Mamanuca Islands.*

“death rolling” that prompted that saying about IOR boats with pinched-in transoms.

I needed an asymmetrical spinnaker for *Quiver*, and I relied on an old sailmaker's trick to score a good kite for cheap.

First, using a section of a 3-inch-diameter boom I salvaged from a small boat, I rigged a small bowsprit. I attached it aft using a small bracket and through-bolting it to the deck. Forward, I secured it to the toerail with lashings. In front, I attached a low-friction ring through which a tack line could pass. With the sprit in place, it was time to measure, first from the tack to the max hoist position of a spinnaker halyard. This was the maximum luff dimension of my new sail.

Armed with that number, I headed to the internet to search luff dimensions for popular one-design race boats. Bingo! The J/105 shares the same dimension that my rig was prepared to handle. Now it was a simple matter of shopping for a gently used asymmetrical from a J/105—easy! When the new-to-me kite arrived, it fit like it was cut for my boat.

### The Controls

With the sail plan refit complete, I turned my attention to how I could manage the sails most efficiently. When they built the Peterson 34 in 1978, there must have been a sale on winches, because they installed a staggering nine of them; two at the mast, three in the pit, and four in the cockpit.

## Authentic Turkish Cotton Textiles

Highly absorbent, quick to dry, and compact to store aboard.

10% off with the code “GoodOldBoat”  
marmaraimports.com/boat

**marmara**  
IMPORTS



# Sticking Point

*The DIY deck paint job looked fantastic. Then the surveyor showed up.*

BY JOHN VIGOR

**T**oward the end of a 13-month refit, my 1968 Santana 22 was looking pretty spiffy. Just the decks remained to be painted. By this time, I was well aware that there is no such thing as a quick fix aboard a boat, so I was quite resigned to doing everything necessary to thoroughly prepare the decks for painting.

I washed them with fresh water with a little detergent in it. I let them dry and wiped them down with a rag soaked in acetone. I sanded them lightly by hand and carefully brushed them clean. I washed them again with fresh water and let them dry.

At the boating store, I paid a small fortune for some Interlux Perfection topcoat, a two-part linear polyurethane. I tried to buy some Interlux epoxy prime coat to go with it, but the store was out. So, working on the premise that epoxy is epoxy, no matter the label, I bought a different brand of epoxy sanding surface primer, and one that happened to claim to be especially good for crazed gelcoat like mine. It was a brand I recognized, so I knew it would be fine.

Back at the boat, I spent a tedious afternoon fitting little bits of blue masking tape around the windows and a host of deck fittings. The next day, I brushed on my two-part epoxy primer coat, allowed it to cure, and gave it a gentle sanding. I brushed it clean before applying the two-part Perfection topcoat. As I painted, I sprinkled 30-grit sand (kiln-dried and sifted) liberally on top. I let the paint cure, then carefully brushed off the sand that wasn't stuck to the paint.

I brushed another topcoat over the sand. I let it cure. I brushed another topcoat over the topcoat.

I removed all the bits of masking tape before the fast-curing paint could stick it fast to the deck.

It was a magnificent job, striking to behold, a gorgeous nonskid surface in light grey.

Then came the great day when the surveyor arrived to check the boat for the insurance company.

Tap, tap, tap. Long silence.

"John?"

"Yeah?"

"Your deck is delaminating."

"What? No, it can't be! I just painted it!"

"Listen to this," he said, tapping his diabolical little hammer on the foredeck "It's not solid."

I'd heard the dull thuds, but I couldn't believe it. I knelt and pressed the deck with my thumb. It moved. I could feel air space underneath. My heart skipped a beat. A feeling of dread gripped me. I should have checked the decks more carefully before I did all the painting work. Was all my nonskid work wasted?

I pressed down again and paused...was the void between the paint and the deck? I gulped hard and slit a small rectangle on the fore-deck with a box cutter. I gripped a corner pulled.

To my astonishment,

three solid layers of Perfection and one layer of sand, all formed into one plastic sheet, came away in my hand. Underneath, shining on top of the prime coat I'd hoped never to see again, was a layer of sweet-smelling moisture.

I tugged some more and the solid layer of paint covering the entire foredeck came



Coatings and adhesives are central to many boat maintenance projects, often the seemingly easiest boat projects. But that doesn't mean there are not countless ways to screw them up. As a lifelong DIYer, and despite my chemistry background, I've made my share of mistakes. This means I have some lessons to pass on.

### Test Cup

Always mix a test batch of any new two-part product, even if just in a small cup, to make sure the applied product cures in the expected time frame. Temperature, age, humidity, and the exact mixing procedure can all make a difference. Even the factory can make mistakes. Thirty years ago, I was tasked with applying an epoxy coating to 15,000 square feet of concrete refinery floor. We spent days cleaning and prepping the concrete, most of a day applying over 50 gallons of epoxy—and it never cured. The manufacturer's story was that a disgruntled employee had switched part A and part B labels. What I remember is days spent scraping, wiping down with xylene, and reapplying. Thereafter, I always mixed a test cup for any large job. Then, not long after, I applied an E10-gasoline-rated lining to a 12-gallon fiberglass tank I had built for my boat, and it didn't cure. It turns out the manufacturer included the wrong mix instructions. Since that debacle, for any product that's new to me, I've always mixed a test cup, even for the smallest jobs.

### Epoxy Blush

As a byproduct of the curing process, epoxies generate a waxy surface film, referred to as amine blush. The extent of the blush depends on humidity, curing time, and epoxy chemistry. Some products claim to be blush free; reduced blush is more accurate. In extreme cases, the cured surface feels waxy and appears hazy, but even when undetectable, it is there, ready to prevent paint—and even additional layers of epoxy—from sticking

(this is probably what ruined John's deck nonskid project). In extreme cases, applied paint will not cure. Fortunately, the amine blush is water soluble and easily removed by a good scrubbing with TSP (trisodium phosphate) and a Scotch-Brite pad, followed by a wipe down with acetone or xylene. Don't skip this step.

### Temperature and Humidity

Cabin fever reaches its peak in early spring, and you are burning to get to work on your projects. At this time, 40°F and no wind can feel positively balmy. But if product instructions indicate that the temperature needs to stay above 50°F for the duration of the curing period, take that instruction seriously. If you don't, the product will cure slowly (if at all), strength will suffer, and the finish will be disappointing. I know how frustrating it can be to not take a shortcut when the conditions are nearly right, but waiting beats a crappy finish job. Of course, you can always heat the boat, with all of the related fire and ventilation hazards that involves.

### Lexan Cracking by Polyurethane Caulk

It's not the polyurethane that causes this, but rather the solvents mixed in and the long contact time those solvents have with the Lexan while the sealant cures. I used 3M 5200 to rebed dozens of loose screws securing the perimeter of the large saloon windows on my cruising catamaran. Despite there being virtually no stress imparted on the Lexan by the screws, and despite there being no cracking present before I did the job, about a third of the holes crazed within a month. The correct product for most glazing products is Dow 795 silicone.

### Polyurethane and UV

I reglazed a window using Sika 295. It came out beautifully. A year later, the window fell out while I cleaned it from the inside. Later

testing revealed that even UV-resistant polyurethanes are vulnerable to UV that strikes the bond surface, which is exactly what happens when the sun comes through the window. Sika has a procedure that includes priming the window with a UV-blocking primer, but the better approach is to use Dow 795.

### Silicon Remover

While we're talking about silicone, someone is going to point out that removing the silicone residue is difficult, and paint, other sealants, or even more silicone will not stick to it. This is true, unless you use Re-Mov/DSR-5 to remove the silicone residue. This product is very effective at removing both the silicon and the residue, to the point where 100 percent bond strength is attainable.

### Incompatible Paints

Who hasn't sprayed paint over enamel and then watched the underlying paint orange peel, requiring complete stripping and starting over? Always review manufacture advice regarding what can be overcoated with what, and when in doubt, test first.

### Recoating Time

It's important to allow solvents to evaporate from each layer of coating before applying topcoats. Rush it, and adhesion will suffer and underlying coats may bubble. This is true of both one- and two-part paints and varnishes. That the first coat feels dry to the touch is not enough (a coat that is hard enough to sand is probably an adequate measure). The exception to this rule is epoxy primers and fillers, which do not contain solvents and should often be overcoated before fully cured; this will be stated in the instructions.

When in doubt, follow manufacture instructions to the letter. They've made the mistakes for you. It may feel like they are steering you towards buying more of their proprietary solvents and prep product just to make a buck. Sometimes they are. Sometimes they're not. This chemist advises you not to take a chance.





away in my hands in one piece. I wanted to laugh and cry at the same time.

The surveyor moved in and tapped some more with his hammer.

"The good news is that the deck isn't delaminating after all, and your prime coat is adhering nicely." I couldn't speak and must have looked dismayed. "I'll come back when you've fixed it, no extra charge."

The same thing happened with the sidedecks. The layers of paint and sand just peeled right off. It was like lifting linoleum from a kitchen floor. I knew there was nothing to do but start all over again.

I needed a few moments to assimilate this reality. Then I went home. I poured whisky into a large glass. For my shattered nerves, you understand.

I'd found out the hard way that not all products are compatible. There must have been some unfortunate chemical reaction

between the epoxy of the prime coat and the polyurethane of the topcoat. They weren't speaking to each other.

I learned that I should stick with the products of one brand, one manufacturer, from beginning to end. That's the best way to ensure that the solvent wash, thinners, filler putty, primer, and topcoat are all from the same family and will play nicely together.

Eventually, I returned to the boat, gritted my teeth, and began sanding. I went through the whole production schedule all over again, with the prime coat and the topcoats all of the same brand. The result was once again magnificent.

Actually, better than magnificent. This time, it all stuck. 🚤

*John Vigor is a former managing editor of Sea magazine and author of 10 books on boating subjects, including a children's adventure novel, several reference books, and a travel-adventure memoir; Small Boat to Freedom. He has contributed numerous stories to Cruising World, Sail, Practical Boat Owner, Yachting World, Good Old Boat, South African Yachting, 48° North, Latitude 38, and others. As a newspaper journalist, he worked on three continents and wrote a daily humor column for large metro dailies for nearly 20 years. He lives in Bellingham, Washington.*



## Fiberglass

"Itching for fun"



Fast Friendly Supply

Service Plus Great Pricing  
Shipping Worldwide Daily:

Core Materials- Divinycell & Balsa Core  
System Three Epoxies  
WEST System Epoxy  
Fiberglass, Carbon, and Kevlar Fabrics  
Premium Vinyl Ester and Polyester Resins  
3M Boat Care Products and Abrasives  
Surf and Sailboard Materials & Components  
Tools and Supplies  
Boat Building Supplies

No Minimum Order

Check out our catalog at:  
[www.fiberglasssupply.com](http://www.fiberglasssupply.com)

Or call: 509-493-3464

Located in Bingen, WA



## Custom Sailboat Fabrications

Stainless steel chainplates, stem plates, anchor rollers, stanchion bases, and more to replace worn out or damaged deck hardware

Davit systems and stainless swim platforms with precision waterjet cut starboard decking available for most sailboats

We take pride in using only North American raw materials.



**STAINLESS**  
outfitters

We ship anywhere in the US and Canada.  
800-268-0395

[www.stainlessoutfitters.com](http://www.stainlessoutfitters.com)





# A SOUTHEAST SOJOURN

*Part One: Baranof Island's wild beauty and singular towns open a summer-long journey through Southeast Alaska.*

BY ANDY CROSS

**T**wo hundred miles from the nearest point of land, it's 11 p.m. on the summer solstice, and I'm peering out across the expansive Gulf of Alaska. To be smack in the middle of this storied and notorious body of water on the longest day of the year is stunning. All around our 1984 Grand Soleil 39, *Yahtzee*, the calm North Pacific Ocean is lit up like I've never seen before—light is slowly fading through soft shades of

*Yahtzee* anchored in Gut Bay, one of the many pristine and wild spots that makes Southeast Alaska an extraordinary place by boat, above.

It's never too early to learn how to handle your boat. Porter, at 6 years old, takes the helm of *Yahtzee*, at right.

oranges, reds, and finally cool blues as midnight approaches. Throughout the night it never truly gets dark at this latitude. Instead, a dusky combination of lingering sun and moonlight lies gracefully on the horizon. The experience is almost like a dream.

We'd slipped *Yahtzee's* docklines two and half days earlier on Kodiak Island and pointed east on the 560-mile rhumb line toward Baranof Island with a planned landfall at Goddard Hot Springs near Sitka. Even in summer, weather windows to cross the gulf can be few and far between. But, having sailed the opposite direction from Sitka to Kodiak Island several years earlier, in 2017, we knew what we were getting into. When the

opportunity to cross presents itself, you go.

Light winds were expected for several portions of the passage and, thus far, that's how it has panned out. We've been chugging along under

power through most of the first couple days with rare patches of wind coming and going. It's frustrating, but we'll take it. Finally, a southerly breeze trickles in after the magical solstice show, and by







**Downtown Sitka is among the largest communities in Southeast Alaska, and around every corner is either a towering mountain or sweeping water view.**

midmorning we're shooting eastward at a pleasant 6 to 9 knots under our big blue spinnaker. All the while, Jill helps our boys Porter and Magnus with schoolwork in the cockpit, and we listen to music, read books, and tell jokes.

After 12 hours of gorgeous spinnaker sailing, the wind goes light again. Down comes the sail, on goes the engine, and we continue plodding eastward through another beautiful night at sea. Only light zephyrs appear until a bank of clouds arrives on the southern horizon. Sure enough, this is the wind we've needed, and *Yahtzee* gets hit with a 15- to 20-knot southeasterly that puts her into a close-hauled gallop.

Soon, heavy rain squalls pass over, and the seas quickly go from smooth to a sloppy chop that is, by all accounts, annoyingly uncomfortable. Fortunately, as night approaches, so does landfall. It's a mere 12 hours away, and we can almost feel our reward—soaking in hot springs and exploring one of our favorite places on earth, Baranof Island.

In the middle of the night, as if on cue, the wind makes an abrupt change from the southeast to southwest, and we ease the sheets for a long broad reach toward Sitka Sound. When the morning light filters through the dark clouds, a faint bit of volcanic Mount

Edgecumbe becomes visible on the horizon and our excitement builds. On our approach to Goddard, our first landfall, the skies alternate between sun, clouds, and rain. And then, nearly four days to the minute after leaving Kodiak Island, we pick a spot off the beach in Hot Springs Bay and set the hook.

My last log entry of the passage gives the overall stats but most importantly conveys the mood: "564 miles, 95 hrs 55 min, 5.9 knots average (with a big smiley face written beside it). Back in Southeast Alaska and we're happy to be here. Time for a soak."

An embarrassment of riches, Baranof Island has dozens of incredible places to drop the hook, and Goddard is a perfect place to start. When the anchor is snubbed, I scramble to get the dinghy off the foredeck and switch *Yahtzee* from offshore to cruising mode. Our crew can't get ashore fast enough and the reward is sweet. Alternating between the beach at Goddard and two hot tubs that are plumbed with

hot water from the springs, we bask in our new surroundings and hug friends from *Arctic Monkey*, a buddy boat.

With no pressing reason to be in Sitka anytime soon, we pass another day at the springs before moving over to nearby Kidney Cove to prolong the fun. Rain continues as we sail through a cluster of islands, and when we arrive, clouds cling to the green mountainsides hanging above the cove.

Southeast Alaska—or simply "Southeast" as it's called by Alaskan residents—is recognized for these breathtaking mountain views, abundant wildlife, countless islands, and scenic anchorages. It's also known by sailors and locals for

its typically rainy weather, even in the summer. This particular season, though, we're about to get lucky.

While roasting hot dogs and marshmallows for s'mores over a beach fire later that evening, we watch as the once sedentary clouds start to move and then fracture to reveal a pale blue sky. This is the beginning of what turns out to be a gorgeous stretch of sunshine and warmth that lasts off and on throughout most of the summer.

The following morning, we awake to brilliant sunshine and

**Magnus hones his dinghy handling skills.**





decide to move closer to Sitka and anchor in Leesoffskaia Bay. A long, shallow bay that snakes its way from west to east just a few miles south of Sitka, we find surprisingly warm water and a mid-70-degree day—hot by Southeast standards. Swimming, fishing, hiking, berry-picking, and beachcombing take up most of the next three days before we reluctantly peel ourselves away and make for the city to reprovision and get fuel.

### Savoring Sitka

Pulling in through the harbor's northwestern breakwater, we can instantly feel the vibe of this quaint Alaskan city where mountains meet the sea.

With sun gleaming off craggy, snow-capped peaks that seem to shoot straight up from the city's subdued skyline, and tall, green conifers growing thick underneath it all, there is something about this scene that instantly captures the senses. Truly, it is a special place.

One of our favorite aspects of cruising in Southeast Alaska is that for all the solitude and wilderness that we revel in, visiting the unique communities nestled among it all can be equally as rewarding. With a population of roughly 9,000 Alaskans, Sitka is on the larger end of these locales, which means an expanded selection of eateries, boating and fishing supplies, boutiques, and shoreside activities.

With *Yahtzee* snug into Eliason Harbor among the rustic and hearty North Pacific fishing fleet, we set about with a mix of chores and fun. The boys scurry onto the dock and are soon met by members of the Sitka Coast Guard Auxiliary who pass them coupons for free ice cream cones at McDonald's (yes, there's even a McDonald's here) for wearing their lifejackets. Given the warm day, that seems like an appropriate place to start.



With drippy ice cream cones in hand, we head downtown, which is a modest 10-minute walk. Along the way we find ourselves passing through a working waterfront where seafood processing facilities and marinas perfectly showcase the town's deep roots in the sea. Sitka's downtown is a quaint mix of storefronts, restaurants, parks, historic sites, and a beautiful library. All look out over the water or up at sweeping mountain views. The only thing that changes the complexion of its streets is when a throng of tourists descends from a cruise ship onto the city's sidewalks. But it's only a minor annoyance. After all, they're enjoying Southeast Alaska, too.

While the conveniences of the city are pleasant, we particularly enjoy exploring



(top to bottom) Porter tries his luck in Warm Springs Lake.

Porter holds one of the nine Dungeness crabs he snagged in Appleton Cove to feed the family.

After a 560-mile passage across the Gulf of Alaska, the boys and Jill are all smiles in one of the hot tubs of Goddard Bay.





the beautiful Sitka National Historical Park and Castle Hill, the former site of old fortifications and the home of the first Russian governor. Sitka and Baranof Island are the ancestral home of the Tlingit people, who lived full and imaginative lives here for thousands of years until the Russians came in 1799 in search of more fur and forced them from their land, only to sell Alaska to the United States in 1867.

The town was later a hub for those seeking fortune

in the Alaska Gold Rush. Storyboards throughout the park illustrate the fascinating history of the area, and we also use the space to enjoy the stunning views and burn off some of the kids' energy. Another popular attraction in Sitka is the Raptor Center, a rehabilitation facility for eagles, hawks, and owls.

Though we're enjoying the town, our crew is also excited for the next part of our voyage. The plan is to round the top of Baranof Island to explore

some favorite spots and discover others. Indeed, being larger than the state of Maine, Southeast is so big that you can't see it all in one summer. Not anticipating another stop in port for several weeks, we change the engine oil, fully stock the fridge and cupboards, buy extra fishing gear, and top up on fuel and water.

### Baranof Found

On our list of haunts from 2017 that we want to revisit are Appleton Cove on the north side of the island and then Baranof Warm Springs, Red Bluff Bay, and Gut Bay on the east side.

While rounding the top of Baranof Island, we happen upon a brown bear swimming across a narrow expanse of Peril Strait. I don't know who is more surprised by the encounter, us or the bear. Brown bears are native to Baranof and the neighboring islands of Chichagof and Admiralty. We prefer to view them from the safety of our boat and do so often. But when we venture ashore, we take

precautions such as being loud and carrying bear spray and/or a flare. Should we accidentally encounter a bear closeup, our plan—which most experts prescribe—is to fight the urge to run and to talk to the bear calmly. Easier said than done, I suppose.

Soon after the (thankfully distant) bear encounter, we watch humpback whales feed close to shore and drop the hook in nearby Appleton Cove. A known hotspot for Dungeness crab, we bait our crab trap with the remains of a decent-sized ling cod, and Porter catches nine monster crabs that keep us fed for days.

Pulling ourselves away from Appleton, we sail into Chatham Strait toward one of our favorite places in all of Alaska, the glorious hot springs at Warm Springs Bay. Chatham is a relatively narrow, 150-mile-long body of water that extends from the junction of Icy Strait and Lynn Canal, in the north, all the way to the Pacific Ocean in the south. It can be notoriously boisterous, but on this day it's quiet, with puffs of breeze working down from the north. Shortly after turning into the strait, we come across more whales—a female orca with what appear to be two calves, and a pod of humpbacks.

As we move south, a public bathhouse and natural pools at Baranof Warm Springs sing their siren song. These are our main preoccupations once *Yahtzee* is tied up at the free dock where we plan on spending the night. But there's fishing ashore as well, next to a nearby waterfall or by



Jill and Porter show off a rockfish caught near Sitka. The shorts and T-shirts aren't typical here, but the Cross family lucked into a long spell of warm and clear weather, at top left.

Andy and Porter head out on another fishing expedition, at left.



climbing up to a picturesque alpine lake. It's hard to fathom that the hustle and bustle of Sitka is only 15 miles from here as the crow flies. Yet, because of Baranof's mountainous interior, there is no road connecting us.

Later that evening, I push the window curtain aside in the bathhouse, look out to my right, and take a few seconds to watch the massive waterfall tumble into the bay. To my left, *Yahtzee* sits at the dock with a mishmash of other cruising boats and rugged Alaskan fishing craft. Behind me, hot spring water is filling a tub, and as I reach down to test its temperature, I can't help but crack a wry smile. Baranof Warm Springs is one of our most cherished stops, and it's so good to be here again.

After one final morning soak with sunshine filling the bay, we finally pull ourselves away from the hot springs and meander south toward Red Bluff Bay and Gut Bay, our final stops on Baranof Island before crossing Chatham Strait. Only 10 miles apart, Red Bluff and Gut weave directly into the mountainous heart of the island with 2,000- to 4,000-foot peaks and glaciers hanging above. Steep rock walls grace the sides of the inlets until the few anchoring spots reveal themselves. We get a strong sense of the true pristine wilderness we're in and try hard to hang on to every experience we're having together.

In Gut Bay, we are anchored to the west of a tall mountain peak rising vertically from sea level; the sun is up but not quite extending all the way to *Yahtzee*. Rowing toward a sun-splashed beach, we soon feel the warm rays and scurry ashore to bask in the morning light.

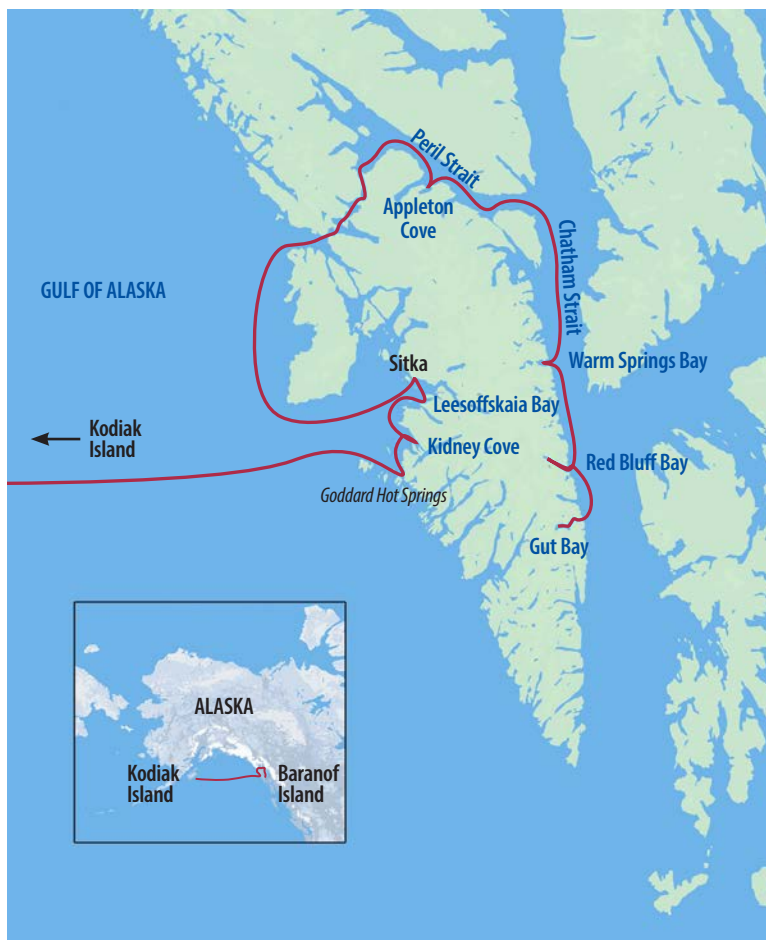
With the tide nearly 15 feet out, the beach is basically a massive science laboratory for us to explore. Crabs, clams,

**The hot springs in Warm Springs Bay are among the Cross family's favorite stops, and Magnus makes tracks for them.**

mussels, urchin, limpets, sea stars, and more fill the tidal zone, while four species of salmon jump just feet from shore. Above the high-tide line, a grassy meadow of verdant greens stretches toward the base of a mountain and a trickle of cold spring water snakes its way down through tall conifers and past huge boulders. I climb atop a particularly flat one and scan the meadow for brown bears before sitting down, stretching my arms overhead, and letting the warm sun hit my face. Perfection.

This is our last stop on Baranof, and our landfall from Kodiak Island seems like it was a year ago, not a month. Now, with a limited amount of time left in Southeast Alaska before summer ends, I start to envision the next few weeks ahead. While I don't like to think too far forward while cruising, it's inevitable—and bittersweet. We have more places to see in this breathtaking place but, until then, I decide I'll just enjoy this moment. 🌊

*Andy Cross is exploring the western Pacific coastline, from Alaska to Panama, with his family aboard Yahtzee, their 1984 Grand Soleil 39. He is the editor of Good Old Boat magazine, the former editor of 48° North magazine, and former managing editor at Blue Water Sailing magazine.*





# Into the Wild

*Four friends and a refit rocket tackle the raucous Race to Alaska.*

BY ANDY CROSS

Gripping the tiller in my left hand and the coaming in my right, I spin my head from side to side, desperate for my eyes to connect with something in the inky black night. My watchmate, Mark, and I are both confused. Aboard a Santa Cruz 27 in the Johnstone Strait—a narrow, 68-mile channel that is part of the Inside Passage that connects southeast Alaska and northwest Washington—the water around us is being whipped into a frenzy and we don't know why. There's not a breath of wind. Then it hits me. "Wind is coming. Lots of it."

Sure enough, seconds later *Wild Card* is pressed hard over to starboard. The anemometer briefly reads 40 knots, and our crew is suddenly all action. We're overcanvased, having spent the past several hours trying to squeeze every fraction of a knot we could from zephyrs. Now, the wind keeps coming and Mark and I only manage to ease sheets before the off-watch crew, Mike and Robbie, appear on deck half-dressed to help calm the melee.

With the #1 soon wrestled and lashed to the foredeck and two reefs tied in the main, we shoot onward through the



strait, forereaching through the night. Mike relieves me from the helm, and I drop down below into the small cabin, strip off my wet foulies, and climb into my cozy pipe berth on the port side.

I listen to the howl of the wind and I feel the hull undulate. I stare at the fiberglass overhead just inches from my nose. "The Race to Alaska is no freaking joke,"

I say to myself, chuckling. We were then in second place among a fleet that had

the old Santa Cruz warhorse to the start line at all.

---

## The winner walks away in soggy boots with a cool 10 grand in cash nailed to a log.

---

### The Race

Race to Alaska (R2AK) is an annual, 750-mile, human- and wind-powered suffer-fest that starts in Port Townsend, Washington. The first leg is 40 miles to Victoria,

British Columbia, where racers make a quick stop to clear into Canada. Then, from

Happy sailors crossing the Juan de Fuca Strait during leg one to Victoria; (L to R) Andy Cross, Mark Aberle, Mike Descheemaeker, and Robbie Robinson.

Victoria it's a long, nonstop passage to the finish line in Ketchikan, Alaska—a lot harder and more complex than it sounds.

The rules are intentionally simple: No engines, no outside support, no classes, no handicaps. Racers pass through two Canadian checkpoints, one at Campbell River and one at Bella Bella (the latter was the only checkpoint in the 2020 race), but otherwise, the route is your own. The Northwest Maritime Center of Port Townsend, Washington, runs R2AK and describes the challenge this way: “It’s like the Iditarod, on a boat, with a chance of drowning, being run down by a freighter, or eaten by a grizzly bear. There are squalls, killer whales, tidal currents that run upwards of 20 miles an hour, and some of the most beautiful scenery on earth.”

It’s also been called “the America’s Cup for dirtbags,” in the fondest, most irreverent sense of that illustrious term.

Oh, and the winner of R2AK walks away in soggy sea boots with a cool 10 grand in cash nailed to a log. The

The range of the race’s fleet is evident as R2AK racers gather at the docks in Victoria’s Inner Harbour before the start, at top right.

Andy takes his turn at the pedals to keep *Wild Card* moving while under sail in zephyrs, at right.



second-place crew settles for a set of steak knives (they’re actually beautiful pieces of cutlery). Everyone else gets the chance to say they finished...or didn’t. Many don’t. Of the 39 teams that registered for R2AK in 2018, the year we raced, only 21 crossed the finish line.

I was captivated by the race when it first ran in 2015. After watching the

first three races from the sidelines, I couldn’t take it anymore. I wanted in, I *needed* in. But I didn’t want to race with just anybody on any old boat. I wanted to accomplish this magnificent crazy feat with friends.

Soon after I texted my good pals Mark Aberle and Mike Descheemaeker, I heard back: “We’re in!” Led by Mark, we added a fourth compadre, Robbie Robinson. Team *Wild Card* was thus born of four buddies who had met years prior, living aboard on the same dock in Seattle. It was perfect. Now, we needed a boat.

### The Rocket

Our list of requirements was short. The boat needed a cabin big enough to get four grown men out of the elements, it needed to be seaworthy enough to handle the rigorous winds and currents of the notoriously rugged Inside Passage, it needed to be fast, and it needed to be affordable. Our criteria eliminated the rowboats, multihulls, kayaks,



*Wild Card* slides to weather with her new high-tech sails, new instruments, and new running rigging. Note the trapeze tied off to leeward; when in use, a crewmember would be hiking to weather off of it, at right.

and stand-up paddleboards that some racers chose and narrowed our focus to an older, sporty monohull sailboat.

We scoured Craigslist. Luckily, we found the proverbial diamond in the rough in a 1978 Santa Cruz 27, hull number 55. SC27s were considered rockets ahead of their time in the late 1970s, but time had not been kind to hull 55. We found her with soft spots all over her balsa-cored decks, bent spreaders, a bent spinnaker pole, and really old sails. We only found the wasps' nests down below later. Essentially, we bought a nice double-axle trailer with several months' worth of boat projects perched atop it.

So it happened that on a sunny July day, while most of the 2017 R2AK fleet was still navigating the Inside Passage, Mark trailered our



every other part of the boat as well, replacing wiring, winches, and electronics. They even fitted a trapeze to the mast and ordered a fresh set of Ballard Sails including a main, #1, #3, and a big, black asymmetrical spinnaker. An asym on a SC27 you might ask? Yes! They installed a carbon Forespar bowsprit to fly it from, and the sail turned out to be a speed-inducing adrenaline pumper throughout the race. Our boat

would really start on race day: tactician. From Seward, I studied the course and thought through all the right decisions I'd need to make to keep the boat moving as fast as possible, every minute of every day we were on the course.

The major piece of the puzzle we had to figure out was how we'd propel our SC27 through the water when there was no wind. And there would definitely be periods of no wind. In this race, sitting and waiting for wind, maybe even losing ground to a contrary current while waiting, is a recipe for losing. But we lucked out.

Mark had beers with a previous R2AK competitor who agreed to sell our team the pedal drive his team had used. Conveniently, it wasn't too difficult to mount our new drive to our boat's outboard motor bracket. When we finally tested our human-powered propulsion solution, we were pleased to see that it could drive *Wild Card* forward at a respectable 2 knots—2.5 knots if the pedaler's legs were feeling fresh.

From the beginning, there seemed to be plenty of time to get things done...and then, all

of a sudden there wasn't. With the race start looming on June 14, we found ourselves in a race to finish before the race.

The headlong rush into R2AK madness ended with a downhill tow to Seattle for paint and bottom fairing and a team rendezvous in Port Townsend; and the race was on.

### The Ride

When I re-emerged sleepily on deck after the melee in the night, Johnstone Strait had utterly changed. Gone were the washing-machine seas and gale-force gusts. In their stead was a flat-gray waterscape that blended into the fog hanging in the air and clinging to the surrounding mountains.

We were ghosting along under full sail, and I was happy to learn that we'd slipped into first place overnight. The Olson 30 *Lagopus* was now in second, and the Melges 32 *Sail Like a Girl* was in third.

If you'd told me before the race that we would be in the lead days into it, I would have thought you were crazy. I knew our team of quality sailors was up to the challenge, but it would have been hard to imagine a Santa Cruz 27

## If you'd told me that we would be in the lead, I would have thought you were crazy.

boat from cow pastureland in central Oregon to Skykomish, Washington (population 198), where it went into Mike's barn-turned-SC27-spa.

Over the ensuing months, Mike, Mark, and Robbie replaced about 90 percent of the decks and cabintop. Our stalwart crew attacked nearly

got new spreaders, standing rigging, and running rigging.

During this time, I felt a bit like a slacker, but commuting from Seward, Alaska, wasn't an option. (To this day, I cannot give Mark, Mike, and Robbie enough credit for the work they put in.) Instead, I focused on my role, one that



pulling ahead of so many other boats in the field that are theoretically faster. My hope at the start was that we'd finish the race, maybe somewhere in the top 10 or 15.

Now my racer brain was in hyperdrive to squeeze everything we possibly could out of this boat to stay in front. For a while, I was successful. After

exiting Johnstone Strait, we sailed fast up Queen Charlotte Sound, endured a weird night at sea off the notoriously brutal Cape Caution, and we still held onto our lead.

Arriving at the checkpoint at Bella Bella, we converged with the Olson and the Melges, and they both squeaked ahead of us, much to my

disappointment. From there our only hope was to throw a Hail Mary by going where the other boats didn't, maybe gaining a lucky break in wind or current that would give us an advantage.

It was our only option, but a gutsy call nonetheless. Onward we went out into Hecate Strait while the two frontrunners went up the inside. Out in the open, we promptly sailed into a massive windless hole. And when I say windless, I mean nothing. Zero. A forecasted 10- to 20-knot

northwesterly breeze was a bust. We took turns on the pedals in an effort to keep the boat moving, but we weren't encouraged because we knew that *Lagopus* and *Sail Like a Girl* could both go faster than we could under human power alone. We desperately needed a wind advantage.

Finally—*finally*—the tardy northerly did show up and we used every bit of it to make massive strides on the leaders as we crossed the Canada-Alaska border. It was a huge high...and it was followed by a big low. We could see both boats ahead of us when the wind shut off again. Then we watched as they slowly got smaller. My log entry from that moment read:

"Alas, as we sit in the doldrums again, it seems to be too little, too late. We're 80 miles from Ketchikan and are pedaling. It's all we can do. Fortunately, spirits amongst the boys are high. Did we ever imagine being in this position? Hell no. But we'll take it. We're having the time of our lives!"

After pedaling hard through the windless night, we entered the last straightaway to the finish. At this point, the wind rewarded us with one final run. Up it came from behind us, first 5 knots, then 10. We hoisted our big, black asymmetrical for one last joyous run and positively shot towards downtown Ketchikan. The wind rose to 15 knots, then 20 and *Wild Card* was up on plane like a surfboard, hitting 12 and 13 knots of boat speed. At the helm, I was all smiles. All of us hooted and hollered with adrenaline-pumping fun.

We threw in one last wipeout of a jibe for good measure, then picked our way into Ketchikan past cruise ships moored in the pouring rain. When we jumped onto the dock to a waiting crowd, beers were pushed into our palms



A fisheye view from the trapeze, at left.

Team *Wild Card* hosting happy hour on the docks in Victoria's Inner Harbour. Note the pedal-driven powertrain at the stern, at bottom.

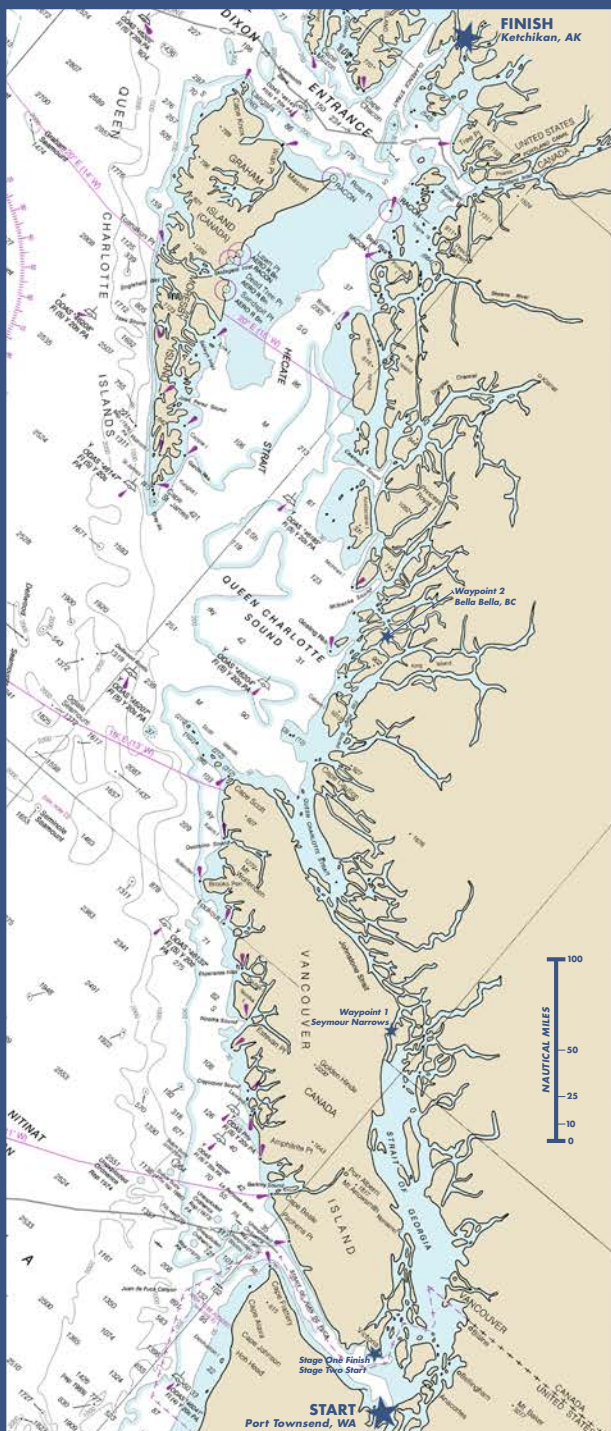






# RACE TO ALASKA

Port Townsend, Washington to  
Ketchikan, Alaska  
Full Course Chart



**750 MILES,  
NO MOTORS, NO SUPPORT,  
ALL THE WAY TO ALASKA.**

printed by FrugalNavigator.com

and a bell rang out to signal that we had done it. We had finished the Race to Alaska.

## The Results

In the end, *Sail Like a Girl* held off a very persistent *Lagopus* to claim the \$10,000 prize and 2018 R2AK bragging rights. *Lagopus* got the steak knives. A six-day, 22-hour run earned *Wild Card* third place. It was one hell of a ride.

Since then, I've replayed almost every mile of the race over and over in my mind. The holes of no wind. The breeze when it did come. The heat. The cold. The fog, and the purest cobalt sky. The many tacks and jibes. The downright wicked currents. The pedaling. The sailing. The friends. Snagging first place in Johnstone Strait and holding it for nearly two days. Finishing in Ketchikan after absolutely sending it in 20-plus knots of breeze. Now that was some exhilarating sailing.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think our team would take a dilapidated 1978 Santa Cruz 27 purchased from Craigslist and pulled from a field in Oregon,

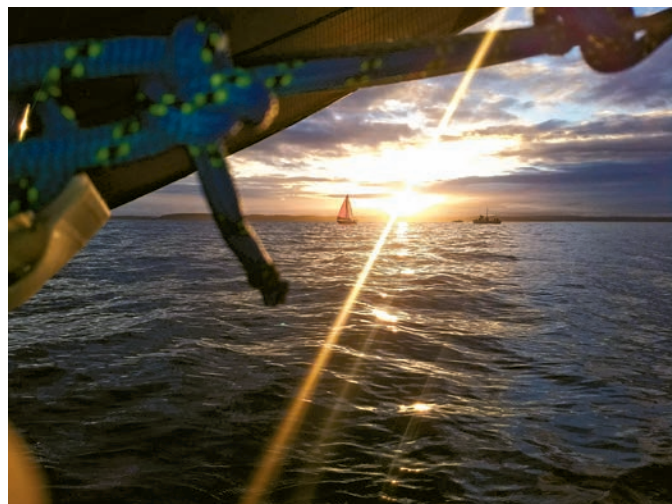
and then go out and compete at the top of the R2AK fleet. We had sailed our boat as a team just once before the race and still went toe-to-toe with a Melges 32 and an Olson 30. We held off the many trimarans in the field! We gave it our best, leaving nothing out there.

And truth is, that's the only way we could have done it. At its core, it's a crazy idea, that so many racers in all manner of small craft—everything from open dinghies and hot trimarans to kayaks and paddleboards—can try to navigate, as fast as possible and without an engine, this intimidating distance and these challenging waters. And that, more than anything, is what makes it a boat race like no other. It taps into the raw and raucous spirit of everyone who enters, and everyone who gets it and vicariously follows along. Literally and figuratively, it's a boat race into the wild, and an adventure I'll never forget. 🚤

*Andy Cross is exploring the western Pacific coastline, from Alaska to Panama, with his family aboard Yahtzee, their 1984 Grand Soleil 39. He is the editor of Good Old Boat magazine, the former editor of 48° North magazine, and former managing editor at Blue Water Sailing magazine.*

Sunrise over Admiralty Inlet shortly after the start in Port Townsend, below.

Map courtesy Frugal Navigator / r2ak.com



# Captain Spontaneous

*Wherein loose lips end up sailing ships,  
that is, a venerable fishing schooner.*

BY D.B. DAVIES

Decades into my successful marriage, I know that compromise is requisite to happiness. Which explains why, that summer, my beloved Grampian 30, *Affinity*, sat quietly alone at her mooring for two solid weeks while Jacqueline and I vacationed in Newfoundland, the rock on Canada's eastern extremity she had her heart set on visiting.

After arriving in St. John's, I quickly came to appreciate the easy informality of everything and every place we went. If I wanted fries instead of mashed, that was no problem. If I'd lost my ticket to the museum, that was OK—it was enough to explain that I'd paid and lost my ticket. If I didn't make it in time for the scheduled whale watching trip, then I could take the next one. There seemed to be a cultural divide between this province and the rest of Canada; Newfoundland seemed free of silly rules and constraints. People were friendly and simply glad we'd come "from away" to visit.

After lunch one day, Jacqueline said she had a coupon to take a trip on the schooner *Scademia* (Jacqueline is a planner and had coupons for nearly every activity on this trip). I was eager to see the harbor and the schooner, but when we arrived, I couldn't hide my disappointment. *Scademia* was about 100 feet long and perhaps 18 feet abeam with two tall masts. She sat tethered to the dock between

two much larger vessels. A man was working on the foredeck of *Scademia*, within earshot of where we stood.

"I think I'll pass on the schooner trip," I said.

"Why? I have a coupon."

"It's not really a schooner anymore, it's just a tourist barge. The aft boom has been removed to create a tent to keep the tourists out of the rain. They built a cabin around the forward mast for a gift shop or something. There are benches for people to sit on. There's an observation deck on top of the gift shop. The sails look like they haven't been raised in years." My eyes traveled up to the crow's nest. "Certainly the royals, top gallants, and yankee haven't felt any wind in a long time. None of this would be on a fishing schooner. This is a tour boat. I imagine all they do is motor around the harbor or something."

I suggested a place on George Street for lunch and we left, noting the sign that said the next sailing was at 2:00 p.m.

At lunch, Jacqueline reminded me that she had a coupon for the schooner and that she'd

like to use it. I repeated my objection but conceded that I didn't have a better plan for our afternoon, except for the brewery tour. We agreed to return to the dock, see what was happening, and then decide on either the schooner or the brewery.

Back at the dock, I was surprised to see a crowd waiting to ascend the gangplank. I was working on my best pitch for sampling a beverage at the brewery when I noticed the man who'd been working on the schooner's deck earlier striding along the dock. He doffed his hat and smiled as he passed the tourists, then dropped the smile and replaced it with a scowl; he was making a beeline for us. I nodded as he approached, and he took me firmly by the shoulder and led me away from the crowd.

"Earlier, you were making noises like you know something about sailing a vessel."

"I have a sailboat on Lake Ontario," I offered in my defense.

"You know your red greens and fore from aft?"

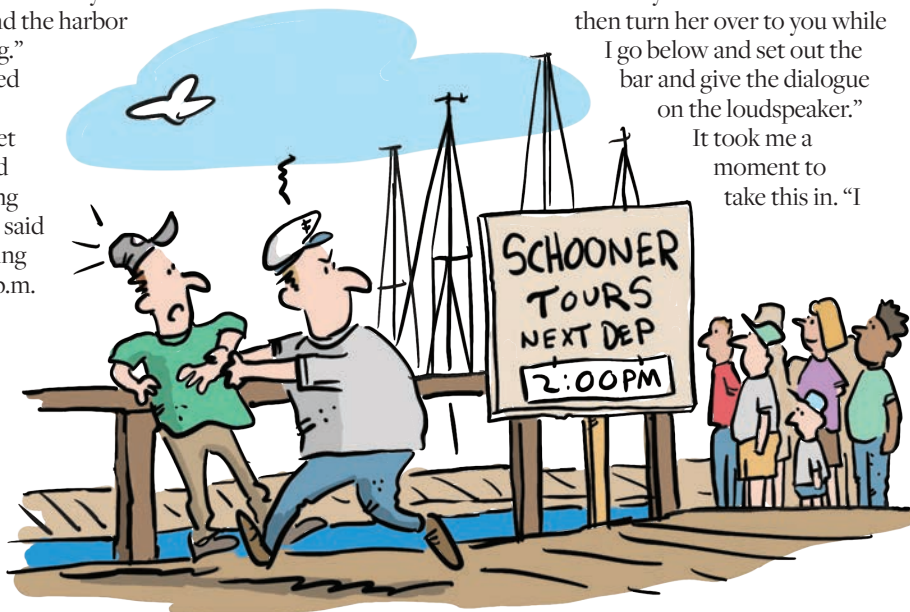
"Yes."

The man leaned in closer and spoke in a whisper. "Then I'd be needing a favor to ask. There's a music festival up north and all my crew is gone to it, except for Peter there on deck. I make a piddlin' on ticket sales, especially with people like you keeping coupons. It's the bar and souvenirs that keeps me afloat...so I'll be asking this favor."

"I don't understand," I stammered.

The man's voice went even lower, "Would you be takin' the helm for the cruise? I'll clear her away from the dock and then turn her over to you while I go below and set out the bar and give the dialogue on the loudspeaker."

It took me a moment to take this in. "I





don't...I've never sailed a ship this size."

"You was talking pretty big to that lovely young lady with you afore the lunch."

I glanced back at Jacqueline and straightened my posture. "I suppose a ship's a ship...but I've no interest in motoring about. Once we clear the harbor, I'd want some sails up."

The captain paused. "I'll talk to Peter, the young lad. He can put up the lowers, but that's all. There's a brisk breeze out there today and I don't want a load of tourists too sick for drink and souvenirs."

We stared at each other before I finally said, "If it'll help you out, I'll do it; but keep an eye out. If I get in trouble, you'll have to take over."

"There's a lad. It'll be a great day."

With that he put a big smile on his face and strode over to the gangplank to welcome his guests on board. I returned to Jacqueline.

"What was that all about?" she asked.

"Nothing really," and I took her hand to join the embarking throng.

When we were all aboard, I heard the twin diesels fire up. Peter scurried around the deck making preparations to cast off. A few people from the small ticket office down the dock came out and lifted the heavy lines off massive iron mooring cleats embedded in cement, and Peter coiled them aboard. The captain put her in gear and expertly nudged her back and forth between the two huge vessels lurking fore and aft until *Scademia* was clear. He motioned for me to come take

the wooden wheel. Jacqueline looked puzzled and somewhat apprehensive.

"The harbor gap is only 60 feet wide, so take her up the middle if there's no other traffic," said the captain. "Follow the red greens and you'll be fine. Here's your throttle. If it's not too breezy out there and Peter hoists sails, just draw the levers back here to an idle, but leave her in gear. Off your starboard side you'll see Cape Spear. Point your bow for the tip of the point."

With that, he took his captain's hat from his head, placed it on mine, then disappeared down a companionway. Suddenly I was at the helm of a fishing schooner in the middle of St. John's Harbor. I was both thrilled and terrified.

I pushed the twin levers forward and the ship lurched. I corrected and she responded obligingly. Heading for the gap, I saw the first green marker and steered to leave it to starboard. People milled all over the decks before me, some pointing up to Signal Hill

shielding us from wind and wave. Moving slowly through the calm waters, one couldn't help but think that if man had set out to build a perfect harbor, he couldn't have done better than nature did with this one.

The speakers on deck exploded: "Welcome aboard the schooner *Scademia* and enjoy your trip back to the time when fishermen took vessels such as this out to the Grand Banks summer and winter through all weather to fill the holds with

cod for a hungry nation. As we motor toward the harbor mouth and the great Atlantic Ocean, look up the steep cliff on your left side and you'll see Signal Hill, the site where



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM PAYNE

## Under sail, once I got her in her groove, I could feel her doing her happy dance.

the first wireless message was received from Europe..."

I heard the words, but I couldn't pay attention; I was too focused on praying that there would be no vessels coming into the harbor through the narrow gap we were quickly approaching. To my great relief, it happened that only myself, *Scademias*, and a few hundred tourists slipped through and out into the Atlantic that day.

Out of protected waters, I felt a southwest wind tug at my clothes and try to lift my hat from my head. The seas before us started to build to 2-foot waves. As I helmed with one hand on the huge wooden spoke and secured my captain's hat with the other, I noticed several people in the crowd looking toward me. I offered a broad smile in reply, which they seemed to take as reassurance.

I pushed the throttles forward and *Scademias* responded, holding a steady course out into open water. To my right I could clearly see Cape Spear in a hanging gray mist. Several people came from below with cups in their hands and Schooner *Scademias* T-shirts on their backs. The ship was handling well. I was gaining confidence. It was time to kick it up a notch. I spotted Peter in the crowd and beckoned him over.

"I'll swing her around to the wind. Can you put some canvas up?"

"Looks like a great day for it! I'll raise the two lowers." I was surprised and encouraged by his enthusiasm, and also confused.

"How can you raise the stern lower without a boom?"

"I'll secure a block to the stern rail and run a sheet. Give me a nod when you want them up and hold her steady to the wind."

With that he was off and soon appeared at the mast

with a few of the sturdier-looking passengers who all held fast to a halyard. I brought her head to wind and nodded. The huge rings around the mast flew skyward taking the canvas with them. The sail flapped about in the wind and I gave the throttles a nudge forward to hold her to course. With the sail up and the thick halyard cleated, Peter and his hearty crew moved to the forward mast and quickly hoisted that canvas. Once secure, Peter nodded, and I eased her to port and in just a few seconds the canvas snapped, the sails filled, the deck heeled, and we were off romping close-hauled through the waves heading straight for the point of Cape Spear.

In one sense, there really was no difference between *Scademias* and my 30-foot Grampian. Under sail, once I got her in her groove, I could feel her doing her happy dance. When she drifted to windward, just a slight nudge of the wheel brought her back. The tourists milled about the heeled deck and leaned on the rails, the sails were taut as Peter eased the sheets, the waves swooshed beneath the lee rail, and I stood feet astride. I caught Jacqueline's eye in the crowd, smiling the broadest smile and looking like a television fashion model with the wind whipping her long, black hair. I felt a tug at my sleeve and looked down to see a young lad. His mother smiled.

"He wanted to come up and meet the

captain," she yelled into the wind.

"Welcome aboard, son. Are you enjoying the sail?"

"Yes sir...she's really moving fast, isn't she?"

"She'll do," I replied.

"Would you like to take the helm for a short spell?"

"Could I?"

I moved to the side but kept one hand firmly on the wooden spoke. "Just step in here and take her with both hands."

I held on tight to keep the boat on course while the young fellow moved in beside me, grasping the wheel and smiling into his mother's camera. And with a click, I was immortalized as an ocean-going captain, not of a tourist barge, but of a true fishing schooner, *Scademias*.

We galloped along toward Cape Spear...more cups in hands, more T-shirts...a happy ship she was, and then Peter approached.

"Would you like the staysail up? It'll help balance her. She's going good."

"Sure," I said. "Do you need me to bring her head to wind?"

"No, just ease her up a bit to take the power out. I've got some hearty crew who'll have it up in no time."

With the staysail up she did smooth out and weather helm eased. Now she was skimming along more on a beam reach rather than close-hauled, and Peter had adjusted the sheets with the skill of an experienced sail trimmer. Throughout, the loudspeakers barked sporadically about the wooden ships and iron men of the Atlantic provinces, about John Cabot first discovering St. John's Harbor in 1497, about sailors finding the Grand Banks and the cod so thick you could jump overboard and walk across them without sinking. Then I heard, "And to your right is Cape Spear, the most eastern point of land in Canada...and now we'll be coming about and heading back to St. John's Harbor."

Coming about? "Peter!"





Peter emerged out of the mass of bodies. I didn't need to ask—he could see the question in my eyes and laughed.

"The staysail is self-tacking and I've good men on sheets for the other sails and they know what to do. Hold her steady for another five minutes while I get everything ready, then yell, 'Helm's alee' and swing her around. It'll be fine."

A few moments later, the speakers boomed again. "Ladies and gentlemen, we'll be coming about in just a minute, so find something to hold on to and secure your drinks. Ready when you are, Captain."

I took a deep breath, felt the eyes of the crowd upon me, looked up to the sky, and savored the wind in my face

and the firmness of the wheel in my hands. "Helm's alee!"

With that I spun the wheel, spoke after spoke slapping my hand. *Scademia* lurched and for the briefest moment, with my heart in my throat, she paused with the waves splitting to either side of her hull, then slowly eased through irons onto the port tack. The headsail slid across over everyone's head, the big boom came across the deck with the sails flapping only momentarily. Peter scurried to move the block and sheet on the stern rail over to the starboard side before the wind filled the sail.

I looked to the bow, and I'd gone too far around.

With the wind now astern and the open sails, we were bobbing out into the Atlantic and perhaps Europe. But just a gentle pull on the wheel and she righted herself again. Peter moved from one line to another and sheeted the sails in until I had her dancing along again, steering a bit high of the harbor mouth off in the distance. The sails were filled with powerful gusts, the sun shone, and we were on our way. I was captain of all I surveyed.

Approaching the gap, I turned to windward, and Peter dropped and secured the sails. I motored half-throttle into the gap. Alcohol and the near certainty of surviving the voyage infused the crowd, and their singing was more boisterous than it had been heading out. Even so, my mind was on one singular thought; "Red, right, returning. Red, right, returning."

Once inside the harbor, I swung south and motored past *Scademia's* mooring spot. I couldn't believe how small the space was, those huge tankers towering over on either end. I swung the bow around and headed back. There was no one at the dock to catch the bow line that Peter was preparing to toss. I motored just past the empty space and slipped the levers into neutral. All I could do is try to parallel park like a car on a busy street. My hand went to the levers ready to pull back into reverse when I felt a hand on my shoulder and the captain's hat lifted from my head.

"I'll take her now, Skipper," came the captain's voice, and I breathed a heavy sigh.

"All yours," I said as I left the wheel and walked into the singing mass of humanity to find Jacqueline.

Within minutes *Scademia* was nestled into her mooring spot. People had appeared

from nowhere to catch and secure lines, the gangplank was dropped, and the chattering mob wobbled off the boat to steady themselves on dry land once again. Jacqueline slipped her arm through mine saying, "Hey sailor...that was fun, wasn't it?"

I looked around and couldn't see Peter or the captain, and so Jacqueline and I walked down the gangplank together and stood for a moment looking back at *Scademia*. Peter appeared on deck. I waved him ashore and he came to greet us.

I shook his hand and said, "Is the captain available? I'd like to buy you both a beer."

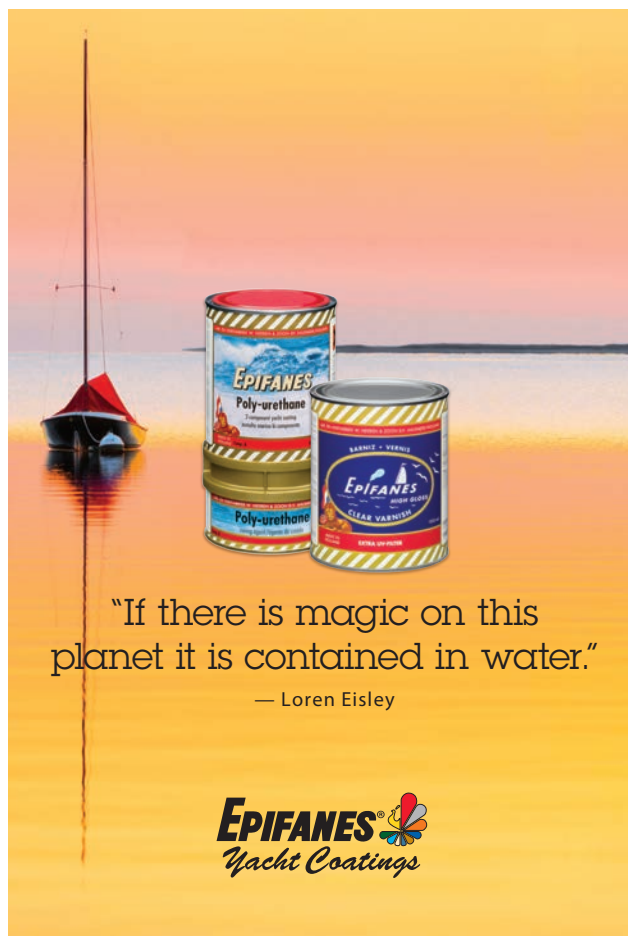
Peter looked back to the boat. "Would love to, but we've got to clean up for the dinner cruise. Apparently, it rained at the music festival and everyone is on their way back, so we'll have a full crew tonight."

"I understand," I said. "Tell the captain she's a fine ship and it was a pleasure to be aboard. I appreciate the opportunity."

Jacqueline took my arm and we started away down the dock. "Well, Skipper, you've had a rough voyage. I think you'll need a beer at the brewery tour and then a short nap before supper."

I looked down into those beautiful, deep brown eyes, that smiling face, and thought to myself, Davies, sometimes... in spite of yourself...you do make the right decision. 🦋

*D.B. Davies is a sailor, writer, and frequent contributor to Good Old Boat. He sails Affinity, his 1974 Grampian 30, around Lake Ontario. After extensively researching the men and sailing schooners of Canada's Maritime provinces, he wrote a dramatic screenplay about the famous Bluenose and her skipper, Angus Walters. You can find out more at [thebluenosemovie.com](http://thebluenosemovie.com).*



"If there is magic on this planet it is contained in water."

— Loren Easley

**EPIFANES**  
Yacht Coatings