

The START of MY CRUISING

By Coos Bay Squadron Commander Michael Gibbons, JN, as a monthly column in



Everything has to start somewhere. This is the story of my first trip down the coast from Seattle to Coos Bay. It happened in 2002 and was the start of a long career of cruising up and down the coast of Oregon and Washington, and spending summers in the San Juan Islands and British Columbia. This is part one.

A friend, and commodore of the local yacht club, Rick Eichman, asked me if I would be willing to help him move a new to him sailing catamaran from Seattle to Coos Bay. Of course I said yes I would be glad to.

We drove up to Seattle on the 29 of August 2002 in his stepdaughters car with her boyfriend Eric to drive it back. We arrived about 2100 at the Duwamish Yacht Club docks, on the Duwamish canal. The boat "Lightyears" was tied up in the very inside spot and would have to be turned around by hand to leave the slip. The boat is a 36 foot sailing catamaran custom built and powered by a 9.9 hp electric start Yamaha outboard. The engine is semi built in with the controls at the steering station. The boat had two main sleeping areas forward with a quarter berth on the starboard side aft. A small galley on the port side and a dinette in the center section. There is a very nice navigation station on the starboard side.

Eric left the next day with the car after we went to breakfast at Mc'Donalds and a quick trip to a grocery store. Back at the boat we were getting things ready when the previous owner came down to trade keys and assist in turning the boat.

With the boat turned we departed about 0850 and headed north up the Duwamish canal. There were three bridges to get under on the way to Elliott Bay I contacted them on VHF as we approached and had no trouble getting through.

Once out in Elliott bay we were truly on our way. The bay is a large body of water almost surrounded by Seattle. The bay is crisscrossed by car ferry's and small boats of all kinds. As we crossed the first boat wake the engine coughed and slowed down, it didn't actually die but it came close. Back in smooth water it ran fine again. After a few times of this happening we found that the wire from the kill switch had a connector in it that was laying in the bottom of the motor well and would get wet when the boat rocked. As soon as we moved the wire we had no further problems.

We passed by the "Space Needle" on the way into Puget Sound. The weather was warm and mostly sunny with a light haze over the water As we passed Mutiny Bay on one side and Hood Canal on the other, a small cabin cruiser came along the port side with a lady on the bridge waving her arms. That motion is a internationally recognized distress signal but as we slowed to investigate she only wanted directions to San Juan Island.

As we were almost into Admiralty Inlet I indicated that she should just head north and cross the Straits of Juan De Fuca. They went on their way but returned a few minutes later

to ask the same question again. This time I got on the radio and gave them a compass course and distance. It was almost thirty miles so I don't know if they made it or not. In any case we didn't see them again.

Earlier in the day I had made a cup of coffee from a Safeway coffee bag. It tasted terrible but I had never used that kind of coffee so I thought it just wasn't very good. Rick hadn't been feeling very good but we thought it was just stress and nerves. As it turned out our water tank was foul. The boat had a water system with a dock fitting to give it pressure. The water in the tank was filled from the dock water but never actually used. It had probably been sitting for a long time. Luckily for us Rick had the good sense to bring two 2 5 gallon jugs of Sparkletts water.

To be Continued..

This is a continuation of the story of my first trip down the Washington Oregon coast. I am helping a friend deliver his 36 foot, sailing catamaran, from Seattle to Coos Bay. This is part two and we are just about to enter the Straits of Juan de Fuca. We have a 9 HP built-in outboard motor and about 20 gallons of fuel in 5 gallon jugs.

At 1700 we entered the Strait of Juan De Fuca through Admiralty Inlet leaving Puget Sound behind. The weather was starting to close in and the haze was thickening into actual fog. The winds which had been light and variable all day now increased and blew right down the straits from the west. The only way to progress at all was to motor straight into it.

We pushed on for a few hours and decided to head over to the Canadian side looking for better weather. As we approached Race Rocks on Vancouver Island at night, in the dense fog, with six contacts on the radar, the engine picks that moment to run out of fuel. We had a six gallon fuel tank that would run for about eight hours, it was refilled from five gallon jugs stored in the cockpit area. Lucky for us it was not very time consuming to refill the main tank and the engine started right away. Rick became very proficient at refilling our fuel tank.

We couldn't find any better conditions in Canada so we returned to the Washington side and pushed on through the night. It was the most miserable night of the trip. We both had to be up to deal with the traffic in the Strait. Radar is a real lifesaver in that kind of situation, without it we would have been unable to move. Everything on the boat was drenched by the thick fog we were traveling through including us. .

As the sun come up or I should say as the sky lightened we were approaching Cape Flattery at the west end of the Straits of Juan De Fuca. We managed to locate the buoy that marks the last of the rocks and made our turn to the south without ever seeing land.

We headed south all that day, Saturday, again without ever seeing land and hardly ever seeing another boat on the radar. By Saturday night we had decided that we would probably have to use the engine all the way home and needed to stop somewhere for fuel. The nearest place to stop was Grey's Harbor on the Washington Coast. As the Sun came up on Sunday we were poking our way through the fog looking for the entrance buoy. Between the GPS and radar we found our way in without incident.

As luck would have it the fuel dock was just inside the entrance As luck would also have it they were closed on Sundays. While Rick attended to the boat I walked up the ramp looking for information. As I walked along the sea wall I spotted a lady standing on the sidewalk wearing the brown sea boots that are favored by the locals out here so I asked her how to

get gas on Sundays. She directed me to a gas station at the other end of the harbor about a block from the marina.

Next month, down the coast the fog clears, an overnight passenger, and my observations.

The continuation of my trip down the coast with my friend Rick. He and his wife Sherry had just bought a new to them 36 foot catamaran in Seattle and has asked me to crew for him to bring the vessel down the coast to Coos Bay. This is the third and final episode of this little adventure. The trip so far has been easy and mostly uneventful although there have been no opportunities to sail. We begin in Grey's Harbor Washington getting additional fuel.

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We got underway again and headed down to another dock right by the last gate out of the marina. We had four, five gallon jugs to put gas in so we headed down the block with them. We found a Texaco station where the local girl had said it would be and filled our jugs. As each filled jug weighed forty pounds we were not looking forward to the trek back carrying eighty pounds of gas each. We had only gone about thirty feet when a nice guy in a pick-up gave us a ride back. There are still nice people in the world.

Underway again in the fog and heading south. The remainder of the day was pretty uneventful.

The boat had an Autohelm autopilot. To say that it had a personality would be an understatement. If it felt like it it would work great at other times it would steer 30 or 40 degrees off course or not steer at all.

I finally used the time honored troubleshooting technique of giving it a good smack and all of a sudden it worked. After taking it apart and reseating the connections it worked great all the way home.

Sunday night we had a passenger. A small tired looking bird landed on the forward deck and stayed there until sometime Monday morning. Rick said it took off and flew about three times around the boat and headed for land. Monday was a great day, the sun finally came out and the fog burned off. Still not enough wind to sail at any speed but by then we were resigned to motoring all the way. It was a beautiful day anyway, it was the kind of day that makes it all worthwhile.

Most of the way down from Grey's harbor we had very few contacts on the radar. By Monday we decided that it wasn't working anymore. As we closed with the land just north of Coos Bay we couldn't pick it up on radar just a few miles offshore. At least it worked when we really needed it getting out of Seattle.

Toward evening the ever present fog returned for the final few miles into Coos Bay. As we approached the jetties the dredge "Sugar Island" was working in the channel, with a small utility boat zipping around all over the place. I finally called the small boat on the VHF to find out what he was doing. He was surveying the channel, for the dredge I assume.

We docked in Rick's slip about 1800 Monday Sept. 2 2002.

My impressions. .

Never go to sea without taking all the foul weather gear you own, you still won't have enough.

Catamarans have an interesting motion. They don't roll like a monohull and things don't fall like they do on other types of boats. The motion is shorter and sharper than other boats. They have more room than a monohull sailboat of the same length but less than a powerboat.

Puget sound looks like it would be a great place to have a powerboat and spend some time cruising.

Yamaha makes a damn fine engine.

The month of Fogust is not a good time to be coastal cruising. We were in the coastal fog bank most of the trip.

I would do it again in a minute.

Cdr Michael Gilh, JN

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