

# MEXICO DEBRIEFING:

Every year about this time, we run an article or two dispensing advice to Mexico-bound cruisers: what gear to have, when to go, what to see — that kind of stuff. This year we're going to do it a little differently; we're going to let Kathryn and Ray Weiss, an

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There are tradeoffs in any cruising boat. A larger or more luxurious boat would have been nice, but buying a smaller production



office-manager and finish carpenter respectively, advise you. In their early 40s, they're experts in the sense they've just returned from a satisfying first-time cruise to Mexico aboard their Richmond-based 30-foot Pearson, *Pacific Crest*. Like most cruisers, Kathryn and Ray went on a modest boat and had to select gear to fit within a budget.

In the following article, we would raise a topic and Kathryn would answer on behalf of both of them.

## The Boat

Ray's been sailing the Bay since he was six aboard everything from Snipes to a King's Cruisers. I started sailing in 1984 when we bought our Snipe. After talking about cruising for 15 years, in June of 1987 we finally decided to start looking for the boat.

We thought about buying a Whitby 42 that needed a blister job, but I didn't want to work on a boat, I wanted to go cruising. Eventually, we purchased a 1985 Pearson 303 in Alameda, and signed the papers on New Year's Eve 1987. We were living in Oregon at the time and came down most weekends to sail the Bay. In July we moved to the Bay Area to be close to the boat. We really sailed in 1988, over 100 days. In 1989 we added the autopilot, Loran and the dodger and began sailing off the coast almost every weekend.

At the time we bought her, the boat had just the basics: three sails, a knotmeter, depthsounder, radio and an anchor that's since been relegated to our lunch hook.

*Kathryn and Ray enjoying life by dinking around in Mexico.*

boat meant we could have it all: our place in Oregon as well as a boat we could go cruising on right away.

The lack of space wasn't so much a problem as an inconvenience. I also compounded the problem by collecting too many souvenirs in Mexico, which made space tighter than it had to be.

## Itinerary

Ray and I pretty much followed the itinerary suggested by *Latitude*. We left Marina Bay on October 17 and took five days to sail to San Diego. We stayed in San Diego for nine days, attending the cruiser parties at both Pacific Marine Supply and Downwind Marine. It's hard to choose a loyalty between those outfits because they're both so marvelous to cruisers.

We arrived in Cabo San Lucas on November 17, number 26 in the *Some Like It Hot* Cruiser's Rally, after several stops along the Baja coast. Gil and Karen of Papi's Cruising Center were both helpful and caring. After coming home and talking with some fellow cruisers in Marina Bay, I believe the few who have written *Latitude* to criticize Gil and Karen don't represent the mainstream of opinion. Cabo caters primarily to sportfishermen and Southern California tourists, and Papi's Cruising Center is a haven in a 'stormy' port.

We left Cabo on December 3 for

Tenacatita Bay, which in recent years has become a manafanaland favorite among cruisers. By December 14 we were in Z-town, and liked it so much we stayed until January 25. We then began working our way up the mainland coast, crossing the Sea of Cortez to La Paz on March 8.

On May 21, having gone as far north as Isla San Francisco, we turned back for home. We left Cabo on May 25, had three rough days followed by seven days of good to excellent weather, and arrived at the Police Dock in San Diego on June 3. It was a good trip home, as we had unexpected following winds from Morro Bay to San Francisco.

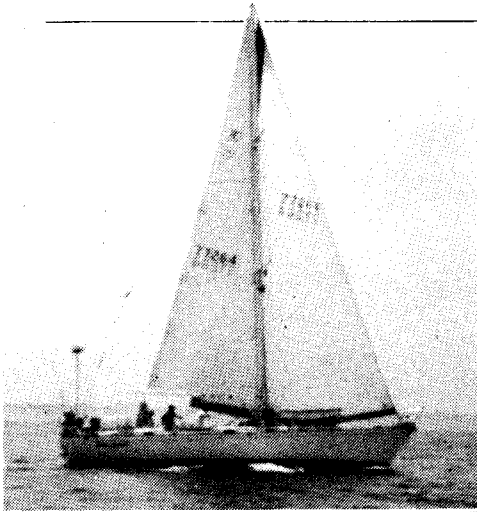
Our itinerary needed only fine tuning. First, we should have waited until April to come back across the Sea of Cortez; it's still too cool at that time of year. And two, we should have planned it so we could have continued further into the Sea of Cortez. The water was just starting to get warm and I was really beginning to enjoy myself when we had to leave. It was a big let down not going on to Puerto Escondido; as frustrating as almost, but not quite, having an orgasm.

## Radar

We had an Apelco 9910 and loved it. In fact, I wouldn't have gone without it. We had budgeted \$2,000 for just the liferaft, but then found we could rent a liferaft for the season for only \$600. That gave us the money for the radar, which cost \$1,200, and another



# PART ONE



*Radar, such as the one on this Marquesas-bound Peterson 44, help her 'see' and be seen.*

\$200 for the mount. Ray did the installation. The newer model has a 16-mile range, and that would have been nice. Regrettably, it wasn't available at the time.

The radar was a valuable navigation tool. On the way back up Baja, for example, it was extremely foggy as we neared Sacramento Reef. We'd been navigating by dead reckoning since it had been too foggy for Ray to take any sights. With visibility down to one mile, the radar allowed us to head safely toward shore, where we were able to use a combination of land fixes and depthsounder readings to fix our position.

The radar was also great for spotting and tracing ships. We could pick ships up on the

*Spread: Some of last year's 'Some Like It Hot' folks at Papi's. Inset: 'Pacific Crest' and two other boats anchored near the Cape.*

radar before we could spot them on the horizon. Then we'd use the range and bearing features to make sure we weren't on a collision course.

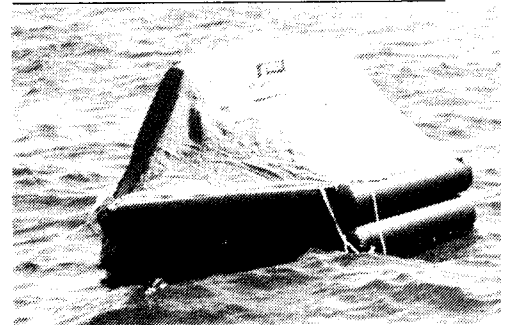
For me as a woman, on what started out as my husband's trip, I felt the radar was an important piece of equipment. Having it and knowing how to use it meant there were many times when I didn't have to bother Ray when he was off watch. That's an important thing for captain — crew relations, which is perhaps the most significant factor in the success of any cruise.

The Apelco radar is typical of the gear we bought for *Pacific Crest*. We had a limited budget that didn't include money for top-end gear, so we looked for inexpensive but serviceable equipment. It turned out great, as we didn't have any serious gear failures. And the gear was certainly adequate. For example, about a day out of San Diego a nuclear submarine popped out of the water just a couple of hundred yards away. I was curious to see if I could pick him up on our budget radar. I could, and found I was able to track him until he was four or five miles off.

## Liferaft

We rented our liferaft, an Avon six-man offshore model, for the season from Offshore Marine of Essex, Connecticut. Hewett Marine of San Francisco also rents liferafts, and by the month they are even less expensive.

The rental from Offshore Marine cost \$600 plus \$100 for overnight air freight — that's not too bad when you consider the liferaft comes with a current certification. Liferaft rentals aren't uncommon, but you often have to reserve them well in advance.



*'Pacific Crest' was equipped with a rented liferaft similar to the one in this photo.*

We reserved ours in March for delivery on August 15th — and got the last one available.

A liferaft was something I insisted upon. You have to understand that I'm from Kansas, fourth generation. My people came over on ships and said, "Let's get as far away from the ocean as we can." So I felt more comfortable having a raft.

## Loran

We had a Vector Loran, which worked as far south as Cedros. I understand there is now a signal that works as far down as the Cape, but I can't say for sure.

Ray didn't let me use the Loran much on the way down because he wanted to develop confidence in his DR and celestial skills. By the time we came back up the California coast he was either confident of our skills or sick of celestial, so we used the Loran all the time.

## SatNav

We didn't have a SatNav, which didn't bother Ray at all, but I enjoyed it when we buddy-boated with people who did. Being next to a boat that had one really made things easier for me, especially at night. You see, Ray was a navigator in the Navy, so he was really compulsive about knowing exactly where we were. Next time we'll have a GPS so he doesn't have to spend so much time figuring out exactly where we are.

But I'm convinced that people should know how to navigate with a sextant, at least to where they can work out basic noon sights. I just heard that one of our good friends from Marina Bay and Mexico, Michael Hoffert of the Newport 41 *Resolute*, just made it to Hawaii relying on a sextant. I'm so proud of him. Michael tells me he's headed back to the West Coast, and after he



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adds refrigeration and some electronics, plans to head back to Mexico and beyond.

## GPS

These magic boxes had come down in price, but were still too expensive for us.



*Okay, they almost always wore harnesses when going forward.*

We're going to have one for the next trip for sure, just because it will allow Ray to relax while at sea.

## Hand-Bearing Compass

We had an Autohelm hand-bearing electronic compass, which I think is the neatest thing since popcorn. I feel it's worth the \$130 to have the accuracy and memory, as we used it over and over again.

## Man Overboard Gear

We had all the safety gear, used it, and did man overboard drills in both the Bay and ocean before we left. It wasn't so much because of Ray's Navy experience as my being raised in Kansas. One of our friends said that if the gods were after me, a small boat on a big ocean was the perfect spot. And the safety gear did make me feel much better, because I figure if I'm in the mountains with a broken leg, I can crawl to help. But if I'm out in the ocean and have to try to swim to shore, forget it!

For man overboard emergencies, we have a pole to throw in the water to mark the position and a Lifesling system to lift the person out. And we practiced using the system with a bunch of five gallon water bottles simulating a body. With practice, it got so that I knew I could maneuver the boat to someone in the water, under power or sail. And then I could, all by myself, lift them from the water using the Lifesling. Having

that knowledge was really important to my confidence and peace of mind.

## Rough Weather

In rough weather we'd wear harnesses, and at night we all wore harnesses and a personal strobe light. It was good because it gave us and our occasional crew confidence. Having practiced in the rough waters outside of San Francisco, pretty much everything in Mexico seemed easy. It really is true, that if you feel comfortable outside the Gate, you'll feel comfortable sailing anywhere on a cruise to Mexico.

The weather in Mexico was almost always mild, but there were a couple of times where it blew pretty good. Crossing the Sea of Cortez coming back, for example, we had 40 hours of pounding into steep eight foot waves every three seconds — I know because I timed them. We also had a really rough trip up from Chamela to Puerto Vallarta; it took 30 hours to cover 100 miles.

The best rough water sailing woman I met was the Aussie girl on *Deus Regit*. She'd never sailed before when her husband took her across the notorious Tasman Sea, which is the Sydney to Hobart course. It was really rough, but her husband kept telling her, "This is nothing, it will get much worse than this." Of course, she's never seen anything like it since, so nothing fazes her. She,

*By going on a smaller boat like 'Pacific Crest' (inset), Ray and Kathryn got to enjoy Baja sunsets (spread) now rather than later.*



*While most Mexico cruising is done in light air, it did blow on a couple of occasions.*

currently pregnant, and her husband have been cruising around with their two-year old daughter on a 25-foot boat. They left Z-town in February to head back to Australia to build a larger boat.

But having safety gear and using it is important, as both Ray and I discovered. We were nearing the anchorage at Isla San Francisco after a rough sail up from Isla Partida, when Ray went forward to douse the headsail. As he went forward, a wave pitched the boat — and threw him up in the air. I know he was at least two feet off the



deck because he was as high up as the bow pulpit. Anyway, he landed wrong and broke his ankle. I'm sure glad he was wearing his harness when that happened.

## Engine

Our boat came equipped with a 13-h.p. Yanmar; since it's supposed to be a cruising boat, we think Pearson should at least have put in the 18 h.p. model. In flat water we could cruise at 6.2 knots, but sailing or motorsailing into seas we'd be crawling along at 3.3 knots. There were times when it sure would have been nice to have more power. *Pacific Crest* has a two-bladed fixed prop.

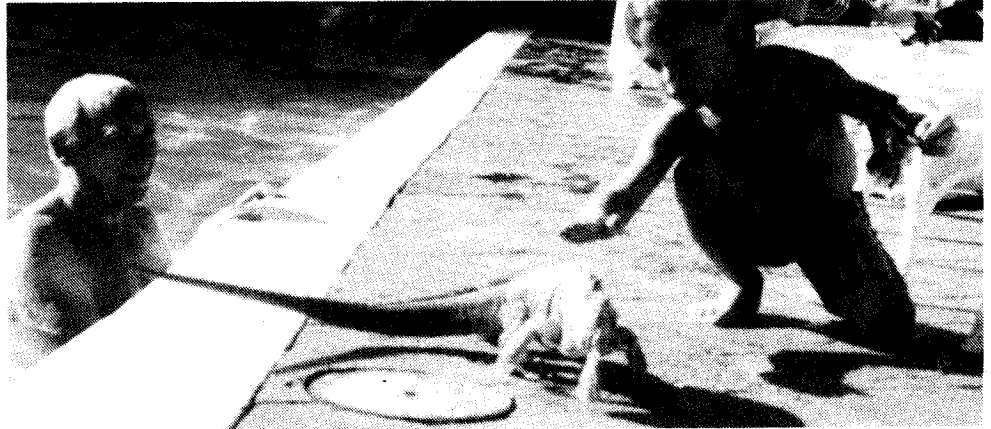
We ended up using the engine quite a bit more than we thought we would: 700 hours, including charging time. Light winds were the biggest reason. If you wanted to make a 40-mile daylight passage in one day and you're ghosting along at two knots, you tend to turn the engine on.

Ray did all the required engine maintenance, and it would have worked trouble-free had we not gotten some bad fuel from the Pemex station in Cabo San Lucas. It was the darndest problem that kept eluding us. We kept changing fuel filters, then we'd change the fuel lines, then we pulled the fuel tank. It wasn't until we pulled the tank and wiped it down with acetone — we were back in San Diego by this time — that we got the problem cured!

Getting clean fuel is very important



because there are times when you just don't want to change filters. We had to change filters during our rough sail up from Chamela



*Old, young and reptilian, you make all kinds of great friends while cruising.*

in the middle of the night, and that was no fun at all.

## Boat and Mechanical Problems

Engine problems are probably the number one difficulty cruisers have in Mexico. Number two is getting the problem diagnosed and getting the proper replacement parts. Sometimes the problems are caused by lack of cruising experience. There was a couple originally from the Bay Area but now out of San Diego, who were experienced racers but new to cruising. When they sailed non-stop from San Diego to Acapulco in 17 days — they were having so much fun sailing they didn't want to stop — they let the transmission freewheel. Somehow this resulted in them ending up with reverse gear only when they departed Isla Isabella a few months later.

Many cruisers are professionals who are taking a break from their careers, and thus have very little experience with mechanical problems. Probably the best-known last season were David and Nora, a couple of Southern California attorneys who had sailed their 39-foot *The Other Woman* down for the season to 'test their limits'. Around the beginning of the year they left Tenacatita Bay for Cabo San Lucas. But they never got there. About 100 miles south of Cabo they got hit by bad weather, tore their sails, lost the use of their engine, and were about to lose their batteries and therefore their SatNav.

Exhausted and cold, they put out a Mayday. It was picked up by a nearby Korean freighter, which arrived on the scene and asked them what they wanted to do. So

spaced out by the experience and exhaustion, they said, "Just get us off!" They later wrote to friends in Marina de La Paz to explain their actions, and said that in retrospect they wouldn't have done the same thing. Their boat and possessions were

valued at nearly \$100,000; since they had no insurance, it was like they walked away from all that money.

Since the boat was basically in good shape when they left, some cruisers reportedly tried to find it for salvage. The last I heard, she had drifted somewhere off Acapulco by March.

## Batteries / Charging

Ray installed and wired four 110-amp hour batteries and an Ample Charging system, featuring a 95-amp alternator, from Sparky Electronics of Sausalito. It was great. If we weren't motoring, we'd run the engine a little more than an hour a day. This would take care of our electrical needs, which were fairly modest: lights, stereo, 12-volt



*Unlike a lot of boats, 'Pacific Crest' didn't have a VCR or television. No great loss.*

refrigeration and an inverter. We didn't have a television or VCR. We found that we had plenty of juice, although we did pay attention. Cruising is all about paying attention.

Besides paying attention, it's also

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important that cruisers know what equipment is using how many amps, and set themselves an 'energy budget' based on their capacity. On *Pacific Crest*, for example, the refrigerator alone used 75 of the 100 amps we would use on a typical day.

## Invertor

We had a Prowatt 100 invertor that plugged into a cigarette lighter; it was great. We used it for our Sony weather radio, the battery charger for our handheld VHF and the battery for our drill motor — and they say you can also use it for computers, TV and stereos. The 100 was well worth the \$100, and it's since been replaced by the slightly more expensive and powerful Prowatt 250.

## Autopilot

We had a Navico 4000 autopilot, which cost just \$500. It was one size up from what's recommended, but we felt it was worth the slight extra expense. Like a lot of the gear we bought, it wasn't top of the line, but we loved it. It steered in following seas, pounding seas, calms, just about everything. It drove the boat about 90% of the time. The one time it wouldn't steer was a very rough day coming up the coast of California.

We're going to carry a spare autopilot the next time we go, as it is a competent and economical crewperson.

We did have one slight problem with the unit, but Ray opened it up, saw some corrosion, and was easily able to clean it out with WD-40 and a toothbrush. After that, it was good as new.

## Dinghy & Outboard

*Latitude* recommended that cruisers get a good-sized dinghy with a big enough motor



*Small and underpowered dinks are kid's stuff. Plan on planing, suggest Ray and Kathryn.*

to plane. Instead, we got small one with a 3.5 h.p. outboard. Both were perfectly fine in that we never dumped the dinghy and the



*A well-equipped galley keeps the first mates happy; an important thing on any cruise.*

engine always ran, *But*, it was a lot wetter than the set-ups other people had and more importantly, we didn't have the range to explore. Non-planing dinghies are fine for San Francisco Bay, the Delta and Catalina, but in my opinion they're not good enough for cruising.

Fortunately, there wasn't much dinghy theft in Mexico. The only one we heard about was a 14-footer with a 25 h.p. in La Paz, and that may have drifted away. About a third of the cruisers would lift their dinks out of the water each night, but we'd just lock our oars and leave it in the water. Theft, other than some oars in Melaque, was not a problem last season.

## Refrigeration

We had an Adler-Barbour, which looks like a 1950's freezer. It might have looked funky, but I had ice cubes, the frozen stuff always stayed frozen, and the food stayed cold. I thought it was just fine because we had cold beer without Ray having to haul ice all over the place.

When we were fitting out the boat, Ray told me I'd have to work two extra weeks to have refrigeration. I was happy to do it and it was worth the trouble. What Ray didn't tell me was that I'd have to work another three weeks for the charging system to power the refrigerator. (Lots of laughter). It took our Adler-Barbour about 12 hours to make ice.

Some of the other boats had mechanical and cold plate systems, but they had a lot more problems. Our refrigerator didn't breakdown at all. In fact, we didn't have any gear that broke down. If I had to choose

between having a refrigerator that broke down and not having one, I'd go without. Some of the cruisers in Baja use propane refrigerators, but that's too dangerous for us.

The refrigeration was also important for keeping my film cool. I shot 50 rolls while in Mexico, and didn't develop any until we returned to the States. Keeping film cool is critical to quality.

## Stove

We have an alcohol stove, while almost all the other boats have propane stoves. I'd love to have a propane stove, but I wouldn't let an alcohol stove stop me from cruising in Mexico.

## Watermaker

Our boat came with 35 gallons of water capacity and we added a 35 gallon bladder tank. Seventy gallons worked out well for us, because we did things like take our showers using a garden sprayer. But it would have been nice to have a watermaker because hauling water, like hauling ice, is really the pits. I also hear water can be hard to come by up in the Sea of Cortez in the summer.

Just about everybody seemed to have the PowerSurvivor watermakers and liked them. The 30 gallon per day models seemed more than adequate, because people kept trying to give fresh water away. You know how it is, you have to keep running water through the filter or it goes bad. The water from the machines tasted good, too.

Water capacity is sort of like refrigeration to me; you can do without, but why? I can live without a shower every day just as I can live in the woods. But if you can have a shower every day, why go without?

— **kathryn weiss & latitude 38**  
[Part II of the Mexico Debriefing will appear next month.]



# MEXICO DEBRIEFING:

**L**ast month we presented Mexico Debriefing, Part I, in which Kathryn and Ray Weiss gave their opinions on various boat gear. The Weisses, both in their 40s, had just returned from a season in Mexico aboard their 30-ft Pearson, Pacific Crest. In this month's Part II, they discuss additional gear, as well as many other topics of interest for those lucky enough to be headed south this fall.

## Anchors & Ground Tackle

When we bought her, *Pacific Crest* came with a 14-lb Danforth, 15 feet of quarter-inch chain and 150 feet of nylon line. This was quickly relegated to being the light lunch hook. We bought a 35-lb CQR to serve as our primary anchor, mounted it on a bow roller, and attached it to 80 feet of 5/16-inch hi-test chain and 200 feet of 5/8-inch three-strand nylon line. Our back-up hook is a 13-lb Danforth standard deepset anchor mounted on the stern pulpit.

To haul the anchors up, we installed a used Simpson-Lawrence manual windlass. It worked well for us in all situations, and was a big help when we had to anchor six or seven times in Chamela over a rock shelf. We were usually able to anchor in about 20 feet of water and would always have at least 5 to 1 scope out.

The electric windlasses looked real easy to use, but they are expensive, use electricity and are more difficult for a layman to repair. Our manual arrangement was more than



COURTESY OF ABISHAG

*Anchoring in the clear waters of Mexico is easy, as long as you have a big enough hook, plenty of scope, and at least a manual windlass.*

adequate for our size boat in Mexico.

## Sails

We had a main with three reef points, a cruising spinnaker, a 125% heavy genny, a working jib, an old working jib that we cut

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY PACIFIC CREST  
EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

down for heavy weather, and UK made us a storm jib. We really could have used a big light air genny — and some light sheets.

## Roller Furling

Everybody in Mexico who had roller furling told us we should have it. And I think they were right. If we'd had it, Ray wouldn't have had to go forward to drop the jib near Isla San Francisco, and thus wouldn't have broken his ankle. That cost \$3,000, caused him a lot of pain, and forced him to return to the States for a number of weeks. Ray still likes hank on sails, however.

Guys take note, women *love* roller furling because it enables them to handle the boat. If they're on watch and the wind comes up at night when you're sleeping, your mate can roll in a bit of the headsail and not have to wake you. Women feel better knowing they can handle things by themselves.

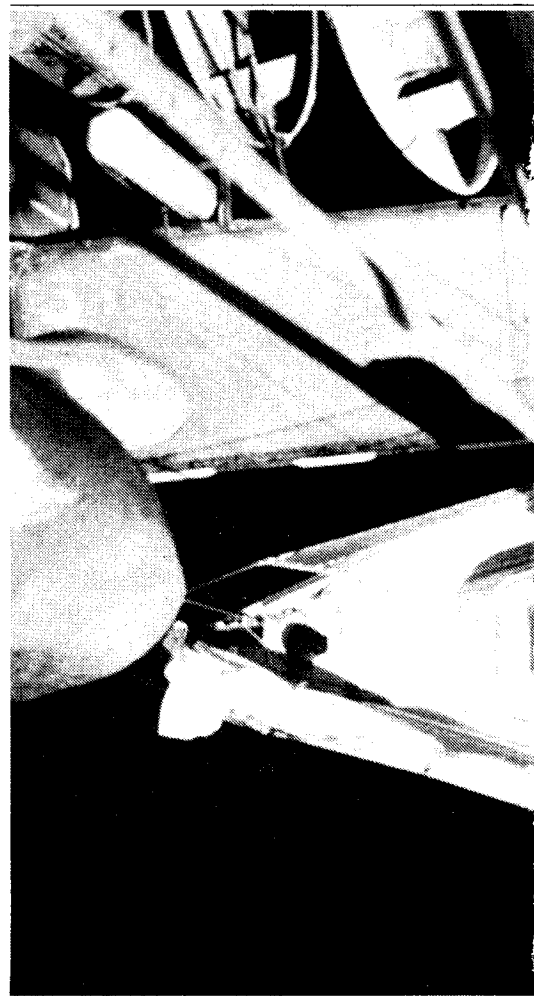
## Dodger

We bought a dodger from California Canvas of Point Richmond, and I wouldn't have left home without it. With the autopilot steering most of the time when it was rough, the dodger gave us a warm and dry place to hide out. If it was too hot, we still used the autopilot, and would use the dodger to shield us from the sun. I mean why freeze or fry when you don't have to? Several veteran cruisers told us they had made their first trip to Mexico without a dodger and had been just miserable.



*Dodgers are great for staying warm and dry, staying cool, and popping out from under in order to see famous bridges on homecomings.*

We had all the other stuff besides the dodger; awning, weather cloths, etc., but I made all of them. The awning was great and



only took five minutes to put up. Sailors in Northern California don't realize how much they need an awning until they get to Mexico. Even though I was voted as having the best tan at Baja Ha-ha, I try to stay out of the sun.

I also built an all-directional windscoop that really helped ventilate the boat.

## Ventilation

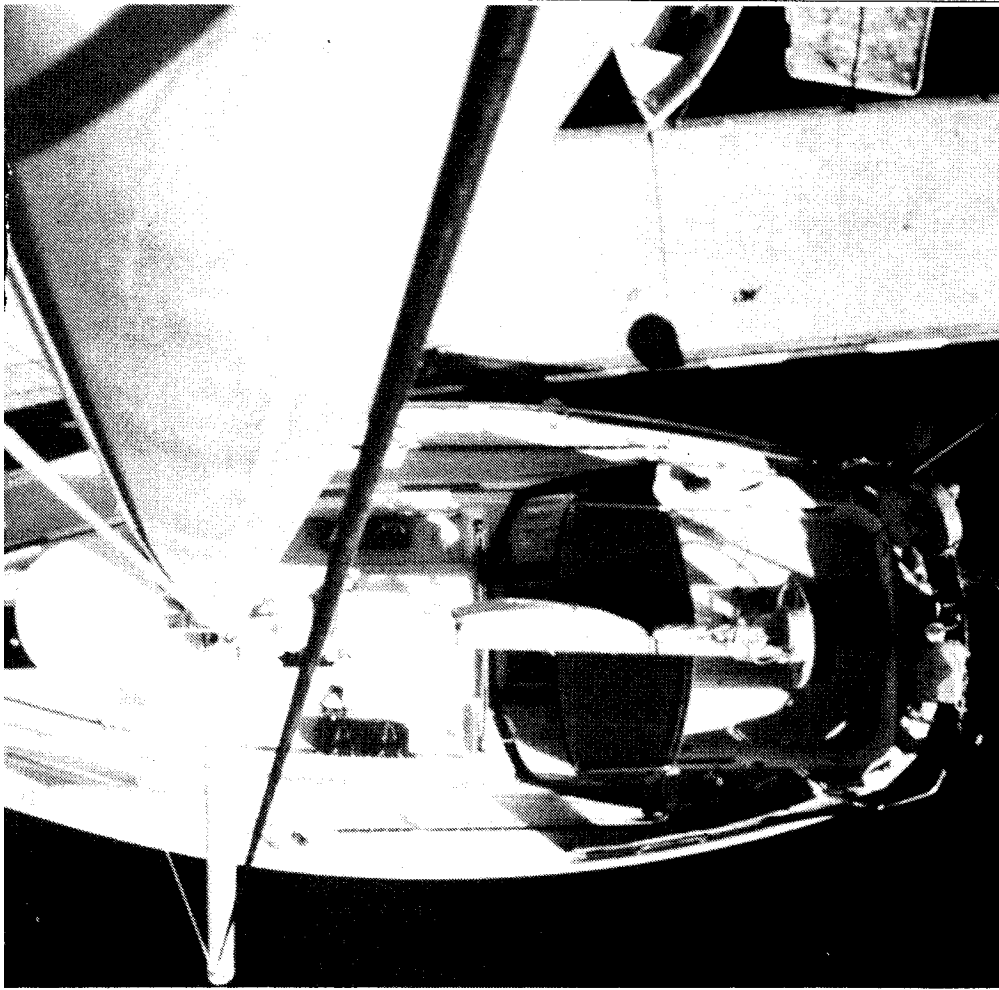
When we bought the boat there was only one deck vent; now there are eight. The extra ventilation affords much more comfort. We also installed a solar fan, which worked well, particularly on the slog to weather back up the coast of Baja. The boat still smelled like a locker room after three days of being closed up, but the additional ventilation got her smelling fresh again quickly.

## Radios and Nets

Ray was astounded at how much we used our Combi VHF radio. Often times it's your only link with friends and the outside world. As such, an outside speaker and a mike accessible in the cockpit make watchstanding easier and life more quiet for those off watch.

It's important to have this vital link thoroughly checked out prior to heading south of the border. Something as simple as

## PART TWO



*The view from the top of a small, relatively inexpensive, but more than adequately-equipped Mexico cruiser.*

corroded connections can interfere or disrupt your sole means of communication. We, for instance, found we weren't able to transmit as well as we wanted on the way down. While at Mag Bay, Rich on *Sundance* recommended we check all of our connections. After Ray cleaned the ones at the top of the mast, our ability to transmit improved dramatically.

The various cruisers' nets are great sources of local information. Pacific Marine Supply has one in San Diego, and there are cruiser nets in Cabo, Z-town, Melaque, Nuevo Vallarta and La Paz. Several of the more popular anchorages have open channels.

Be careful what you say on the radio. If you switch from the calling channel to another frequency, you still don't have any privacy, because so many people enjoy "reading the mail". Do Mexican officials tune in to the nets and private conversations also? Sure they do. As such, you want to be cautious when speaking about Mexican culture and customs, port officials, and illegal activities you may be engaged in. "We'll be arriving at Z-town tonight with three tons of weed from Panama," for example, is none

too brilliant.

### Ham Radio

We didn't have a Ham radio and don't think it's critical in Mexico. One of the reasons is that so many folks love to operate them that you get offers to use them all the time. But if we were going to go beyond Mexico, we'd definitely get one.

You know what we used for High Seas weather and news? An old Zenith multiband that we bought at a West Marine Flea Market for \$10! It worked fine.

### Crew

Prior to the trip we always sailed with just the two of us, but our trip insurance required three for passages.

Our first crewmember was an old friend who had some sailing experience. He'd originally agreed to sail with us from San Francisco to Z-town, then meet us again in Cabo for the trip north. By the time we reached Cabo on the way down, he decided cruising wasn't what he thought it would be, so he left the boat.

As a result, we had another friend fly down and sail with us to Z-town — and he loved it. After that we generally had an

additional crewmember — but considered blowing off the insurance requirement by having just the two of us bring the boat up the coast of Baja and home. This was certainly feasible until Ray broke his ankle.

One of our options for the trip back up the coast was to hire a third crewmember in La Paz or Cabo. But deckhands — not captains — wanted between \$500 and \$1,200, plus airfare back from San Diego. It seemed a little expensive to us, so when Ray returned to the States in April for further medical care, he used the *Latitude Crew List* to search for crew.

Ray called 20 people on the *Crew List* who said they wanted Mexico experience; 12 of those called back. Of those, five were able and willing to make the passage. Out of those five, three were willing to pay their own airfare, while two wanted it paid for them. Ray figured that all five of them would have made good crew.

The first of the five Ray met was Mickey, a NOAA fish biologist from Petaluma. The interview with Mickey went so well that Ray felt he didn't need to talk to anyone else. Although I worried what kind of sicko might want to sail north, Mickey was wonderful! He was using the trip as experience to find out whether he should get a trailer boat or a keel boat. As a person to share a small space with, he was always really positive, had a great sense of humor, and paid attention. In short, I could sleep when he was on watch. He treated the boat with the care he would have shown for his own boat.

And make no mistake, having three crew, as opposed to two, for the trip up the coast is nice.



*VHFs are a necessity, hams are great, but mental telepathy is the least expensive way to communicate in Mexico.*

### Insurance

We played it straight when it came to insurance; we had it all. We had hull insurance (the rider for going to Mexico was just another \$150), Mexico liability

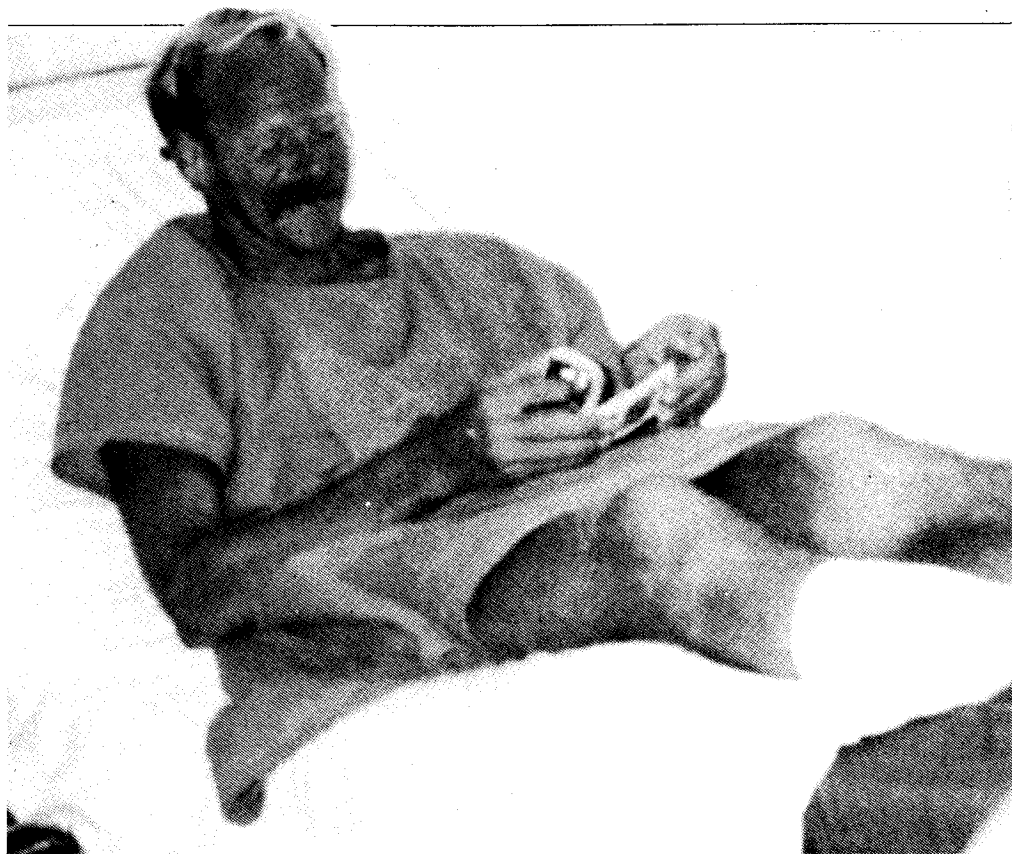
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insurance, and got extensions for both when we needed them. We also obtained health insurance from the American Small Business Association. All of the deductible for Ray's broken ankle, as well as nearly every associated expense, was covered by the medical rider that came with the hull insurance!

The ASBA health insurance cost \$380/month for the two of us and protected us against catastrophic medical bills. They're not my favorite company, but they were all right. As it turned out, the rider on our hull coverage paid as much of the broken ankle expenses as did the ASBA policy. Naturally we were delighted by the medical coverage from our hull insurance, which we got from Leisurecraft/TransPak after going through the ads in *Latitude*. Leisurecraft/TransPak even wanted to know if we had enough cash to carry us through until the claims were processed!

Insurance, both health and boat, was a major topic of conversation in Mexico: Do you have it? How much did it cost? Is the company still in business? The majority of the newer, better maintained boats had hull insurance, while many of the others did not. I don't have any figures, but I'd guess less than 35% of the cruisers had health insurance. The nice thing about Mexico is that health care is relatively cheap. Long term cruisers, such as Keith Radcliffe on *Shangri La IV*, gets Mexican health insurance for about \$250 U.S. a year.

(Incidentally, we found the staff and doctors at the military hospital in La Paz to be well-trained and professional. Specialists in the States later told us that Ray's surgery had been handled well. Everyone was helpful during this stressful time: other



throughout our trip. One of our rules was that we'd buy water wherever we saw the locals buy water. It served us well. We treated our water with bleach or iodine and washed all our fruits and veggies in a bleach solution. The formula we used for purifying water was a quarter teaspoon of bleach to five gallons of water or 20 drops of iodine to 10 gallons of water. Remember, you can't use both methods with the same water. There are, however, nearly as many water purifying formulas as there are cruisers.

***Half of the medical expenses for Ray's broken ankle were picked up by the rider on his hull insurance policy!***

got fairly heated as *everyone* thought they had the right formula.

Many of us haven't lived in a hot climate before, and the one thing to keep in mind is how important it is to keep drinking plenty of fluids. One lady we know well drank too many margaritas, got too much sun, became dehydrated and developed a bladder infection. So watch it!

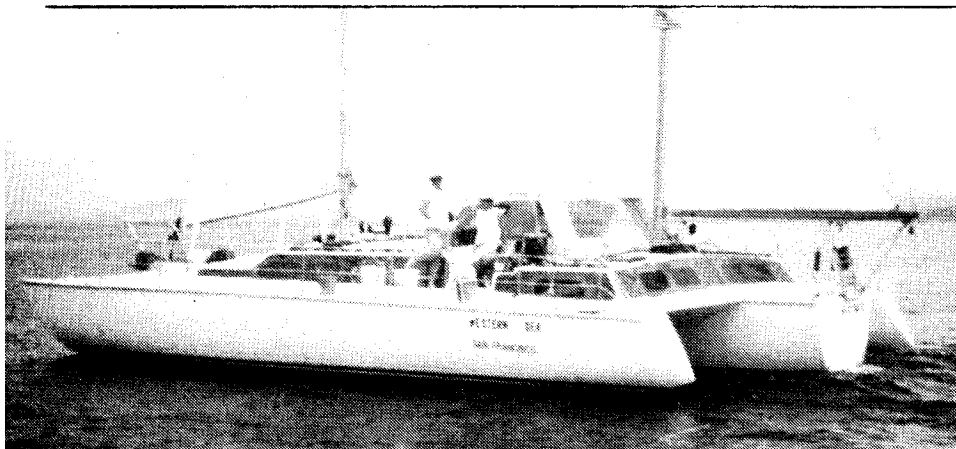
## Money

We took cash and traveller's checks, and later used our Visa card to get cash from banks. The one advantage of having the Visa for cash is that it takes several weeks before the charge hits your account, during which time your money earns interest at home.

But there are disadvantages to relying on plastic to get cash. Not all towns, Turtle Bay, for example, have a bank that will give you pesos on your Visa. Remember also that banks in Mexico have short hours, long lines and observe every conceivable holiday.

We did not use ATM machines in Mexico to get cash. As *Latitude* readers know, some cruisers lost money trying to use those machines.

Buying things in Mexico is not always as easy as it is in the States. When the hospital asked for 8,000,000 pesos before releasing Ray, all I could say was, "Do you take Visa?" After several conferences, the mustachioed and gun-toting administration officials



***Some of the happiest cruisers are neither young nor in magnificent shape; like the folks on 'Western Sea', they've just got the right attitude.***

When it was my turn to run the La Paz net, the subject of water treatment arose and the conversation lasted for about 15 minutes and

boaters, the La Paz marinas, taxi drivers, hospital staff, and others. Again, it's the good people that make for a good cruising experience.)

Other than Ray's ankle and some *tourista* I got in Guadalajara, we stayed quite healthy





*Mary Shroyer, of Marina de La Paz, has been a great help to cruisers over the years.*

agreed they could — if we would pay the 3% service charge they have to give the bank. It was fine with me; I just wanted my captain back. Making the customer pay the service charge for using a credit card is not uncommon.

Lots of smaller businesses in Mexico, and even larger ones in small towns, don't take bank cards. Small vendors are even wary of accepting travellers' checks. Even cash doesn't always work. We tried to keep our coins and bills under \$10,000 pesos for small towns and shops, because they rarely have change for \$50,000 peso notes! (In November, the exchange rate was 2,922 pesos to the dollar; in May it was 2,994. Many vendors and cruisers just used 3,000 pesos to the dollar for simplicity's sake.)

## Other Papers

Mom handled most of our business back home, and did a wonderful job. It kept us in touch and allowed her to 'participate' in our cruise. We'll never do that to her again! Next time we'll find a way to simplify things and pay a pro to handle our affairs. It was a hassle for her when unexpected things happened — like the IRS audit.

Although you don't need a passport to travel in Mexico, you want one because it's the best form of identification. In some places at some times, in Manzanillo during the Gulf War for example, the Port Captain requested that cruisers leave their passports with him overnight. Those in the know refused to leave them, giving him copies of

their passports instead.

All the how-to books suggest a notarized letter from your lender giving you permission to take a mortgaged boat out of the United States. Nobody ever asked us for that letter, but Murphy's Law says we never had to show it because we had it. Murphy also governs checking in and out of Mexico: six copies of everything is one too many, five copies is one too few.

Get your cruising permit and fishing licenses in San Diego. Pacific Marine Supply and Downwind Marine have all the details, and you can compare notes and share rides with other cruisers going through the same process. It takes a little time but is very easy.

Checking in and out of various Mexican ports — and you're required to do this every place there's a Port Captain — isn't much of a problem as long as you're not in a hurry. Figure on half a day, as the Port Captain and Immigration are usually conveniently located at opposite sides of town. Besides, nobody in officialdom likes to set a bad example by working too fast.

There are marinas and other outfits that will do the paperwork for you. When we checked in to Cabo, for example, the marina said they'd handle our paperwork "as a service" for \$23. We thought they meant it cost \$23 and they'd do it as part of our paying to stay in one of their slips. Then we found out that other cruisers with similar size boats only paid \$1.50 U.S. So we'd actually paid about \$21.50 to have someone do it for us — which turned out to be quite reasonable compared to what some outfits charge. Nonetheless, if you're one of the legions of cruisers with more time than money, you'll want to do your own checking in and out.

Cruisers often wonder if it's worth the hassle to check in and out of each port. Some yachties don't bother with the procedure if they are only staying one night, but they're very discreet about it.

One cruiser didn't check out of La Paz; when he arrived in Puerto Vallarta the authorities confiscated his boat. The fines and storage fees were very expensive and it took this casual captain several months to retrieve his vessel. So ignore Mexican law at your own peril.

## Language

There will be times when no one speaks English but you. Cruisers who took a Spanish class said they were glad they did, but it's certainly not necessary. What is necessary is that you make an effort to speak

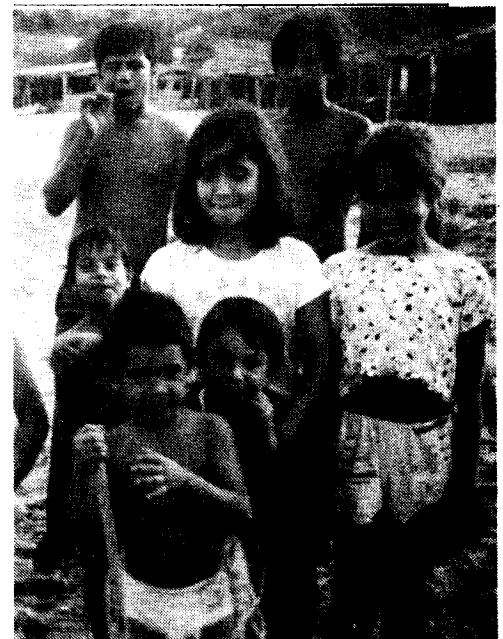
Spanish. The locals were gracious in trying to understand and help our mangled tenses and grammar. I practiced with everyone: in line at the bank, with shopkeepers, taxi drivers, streetsweepers, fisherman and farmers. It was fun to finally be able to make a joke and be laughed with rather than at.

Smiles and sign language are cross-cultural, but only work to a certain point. Asking directions us an example. If the directions are more complicated than 'just across the street', you may find yourself asking over and over again.

There was also the case of the first attempted rescue of the sloop *Touitchka* from a Baja beach. The folks on shore were unable to communicate with the Mexican fishing vessel that had come to try to pull them off. The language barrier ruined a good chance to effect an early rescue.

## Mexican Mail

Mexican mail more than lives up to its reputation for being less than dependable. And it's not cheap. After promising to send postcards to half the known world, I was shocked that it cost between 50 and 75 cents U.S. to send just a postcard! A popular alternative is to give your mail to one of the many people headed north. While folks headed north will drop your mail in a slot, it's considered bad manners to give them



*It's times like this, when confronted by a happy and curious group of young Mexicans, that you wished you'd taken Spanish lessons.*

money and ask them to buy stamps — so bring your own.

The 'Cruiser's Express', which is basically cruisers forwarding mail from one port to another, varies in speed depending on the

# MEXICO DEBRIEFING:

time of year and ports involved, but it is pretty reliable. Christmas cards, for example, followed me from Cabo to Z-town, up the mainland coast, finally arriving in La Paz in May.

## Bartering & Trading

It's great! Useful items to bring include any major music group or California sports team T-shirts or hats. Used items are fine as long as they are clean and in good condition. Calculators, wristwatches, fishing gear, small tools, school supplies, American toys, brand-name tennies and bright-colored fabrics are much appreciated.

Joy Bauer of *Nanva* spent no money on souvenirs or gifts. She'd tell the vendors she had no dollars or pesos, just the items in her basket. She was able to trade for just about everything she wanted, from rugs to hammocks to jewelry.

## Exploring and Inland Travel

You can travel inland and explore to match your budget. Fritz and Janice of *Edson* were the most industrious explorers we met. They went somewhere nearly every day, by walking, biking or by riding a local



'Pacific Crest' found Mickey, their crew for the slog back up the coast, through 'Latitude's' Crew List. He paid his own way.

bus to the end of the line. Usually it's a whole different world just a couple of miles from an anchorage.

For the long distance bus trips, it's worth it to pay the few cents extra to ride first class

— unless you're searching for the 'complete' cultural experience.

## Don't Leave Home Without . . .

**A good cart.** No matter what you think, you'll schlep tons.

**A galley strap to keep you in place while cooking underway.** Install another set of pad-eyes and a strap at the nav station, too.

**Business cards** with your name and address and call signs, your boat name, type, size and identification numbers printed on them. Most cruisers like to have a line drawing or artwork of their boat as well. These cards are a good way to exchange addresses with fellow cruisers and are appreciated by officials, too. A similar boat stamp is a good idea, too.

**Camera.** What type and how sophisticated depends on individuals tastes. Minolta Weathermatic 35mms were popular this season, but I wish we'd made space for our good single-lens reflex and a big zoom lens. A Polaroid camera is great for ice-breaking and friend-making, but remember, they are not waterproof. I forgot.

**Video cameras** make for lots of laughs and long time memories, and many boats had them. The most prized, however, were the waterproof video cameras.

**A photo album of home.** Photos of the rest of your family, your home, your workplace, your hometown — these are a great way to share your world with others. Mexicans were fascinated by our pictures of snow country and mountains, although San Francisco was always the favorite.

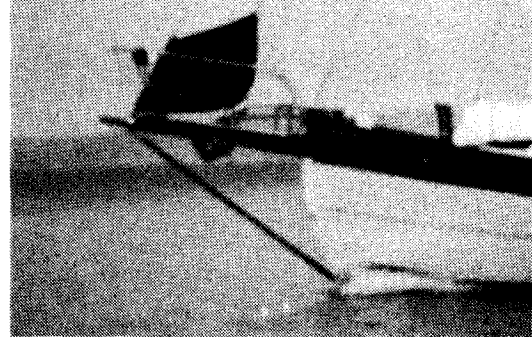
**Gifts** are a great way to meet people. We took party favors, balloons, pencils, and American *pequenitos* (candy) for the kids. Given a choice, most kids would take a toy or pencil. I'd go to a completely deserted beach with a Ziploc bag of these things and within minutes children would materialize from nowhere. I'd get a chance to learn more Spanish, the kids would have new material for dumb *gringo* jokes, and eventually the kid's parents would come around.

**Used clothing and bedding.** You need to bring these for the various Christmas Drives. Remember, too, that such things are needed at any time of year in almost all the small villages, and that the people greatly appreciate it. We heard many 'king for a week' stories from cruisers who had been kind to small villages.

**Paper products.** Mexican paper products are no treat. The toilet paper is rough and scratchy, and the paper towels are flimsy. American paper products are best. Bring



Boat 'business cards' make life easy.



them from the States, because they cost much more in Mexico.

**Food treats.** Produce is a real bargain on the mainland, and combined with tortillas and fish, you can eat for practically nothing. But if you're attached to brand names and gourmet cookies, you'd better bring them along.

**Lady treats.** If it makes you feel good, you should probably bring it. A butane curling iron was a big deal for me when my perm began to run out and I was hearing "no habla" horror stories of sign-language perms.

**Mañana attitude.** As soon as you accept the true meaning of *mañana*, everything mellows out. *Mañana* does not mean 'tomorrow'; it means 'not today'.

## Folks In Mexico Who Help Cruisers

I can't say enough good things about Mary Shroyer at Marina de La Paz, who has done so many nice things for cruisers. For first-time cruisers making their initial stop in a foreign country, Gil and Karen at Papi's Cruising Center are a tremendous help. And on the mainland, Philomina at Los Pelicanos in Melaque is right there for cruisers.

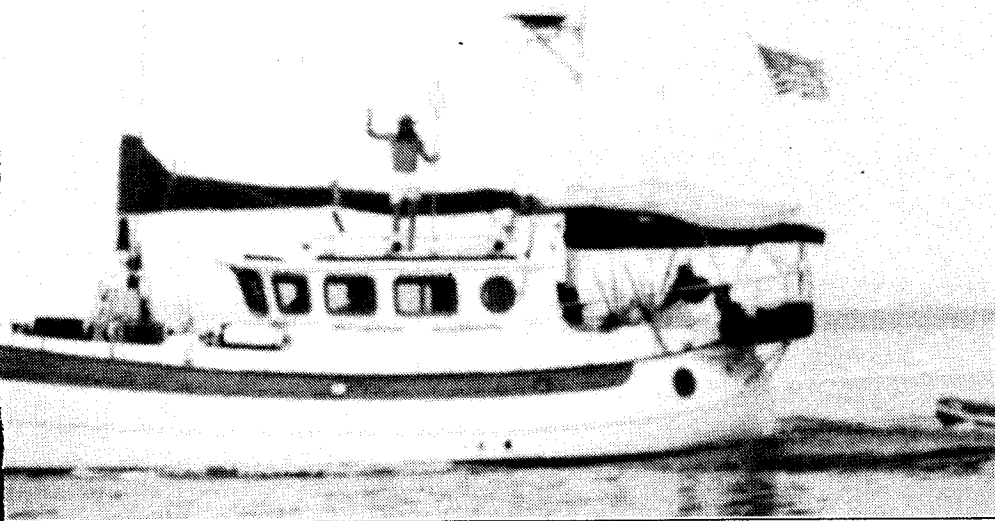
## Other Cruisers

The people are the greatest thing about cruising. But naturally, not all of them enjoy

## PART TWO



People are what make cruising great. This bunch waits out the weather at Mag Bay.



Neptune whoops it up in the Sea of Cortez aboard a Hans Christian 'wedding cake' 44.

themselves. As always, there's a group of women who've "just come along for the ride" and won't ever let 'husband Harry' forget it. Of course, there are a few sub-human captains in every port, too.

Some first-timers discover that cruising is more work than they thought it would be. There was one wife on a San Rafael boat, for example, who got fed up before they even reached Turtle Bay. She left, but the husband kept going. The last I heard he'd gotten new crew and is enjoying the Sea of Cortez.

One or two couples thought Mexico was too dirty or that it cost more than they thought, but we never heard of a cruise being the cause for a divorce. But then we like to surround ourselves with people who are having fun — and there are some great ones!

Two of my favorite friends were Janice and Howell aboard the little Shock 27, *Glacier Blues*. He's about 45, sort of a '60s rebel from the Bay Area, and she's in her early 30s. Jim and Rose Mary of *Puffin*; Rich and Linda of *Sundance*; Shelly on *Star of Denali*; Alan of *Carioca III* — these are just some of the many great people we met in

Mexico.

Other couples were inspirational. I'm thinking particularly of Van and Bernadine VanDeventer on *Western Sea*, a 42-foot Cross trimaran. Both in their 60s, they'd had all kinds of careers all over the world and learned to speak many languages. They worked in Nicaragua and spoke Spanish, in Iran and spoke Farsi, in Siberia and spoke Russian. They'd done all that while mostly owning monohulls. But when Bernadine's arthritis got bad, they switched to a multihull because it was easier on her.

Here's an example of how well he treated her: We met them at Cedros where they had a birthday party for Bernadine. Van produced some kind of Baskin-Robbins ice cream cake he'd snuck down in dry ice from San Diego! This Sacramento couple, familiar faces at Stockdale Marine, were absolutely living life to the fullest. As far as we were concerned, they were the spirit of cruising!

### Now Instead of Later

We didn't have our dream boat or all the gear we wanted, but we have no regrets going as we did. Getting everything would have meant another year of waiting or having to give up part or all of our Oregon home — neither of which we wanted to do.

Other boats we saw down there we liked?

Of boats our size, we were impressed with Babas and Shannons. Our 'lottery boat' is a Mason. *Tamasha*, the big Herreshoff, was great, but she cost a fortune and isn't that nimble. I don't know . . . we love our boat.

### What We'd Do With \$10,000

If we'd had \$10,000 more to spend on *Pacific Crest*, a planing dink would be number 1, because I just hated not having the greater range. A GPS would be number two, because then Ray could be as laid back at sea as he is at anchor. Then would come our own liferaft, a watermaker, a drifter, a propane stove, solar panels, an extra autopilot and an extra alternator.

That would pretty much eat up \$10,000, but other stuff that would be neat includes, an outboard track for the genny, replacing the opening ports with metal, installing a better traveller, an outside VHF speaker, securing the internal mast cables that slap around, getting a masthead tri-color, redoing some of the galley cabinetry, and installing better lighting.

Our 'dream on' list consists of: scuba gear and a Nikonos underwater camera, a water-proof camcorder, roller furling, a navigation computer, and I'd kill for a laptop computer.

### What's Next

We're planning on leaving again in two years with the same boat, after adding a watermaker, liferaft and some of the stuff mentioned above. We would like to spend two winters on the mainland and two summers in the Sea of Cortez — perhaps returning to Oregon during the hottest summer months. We figure we'll be able to



The spirit of cruising. Van snuck a Baskin-Robbins ice cream birthday cake to Cedros for his sweetheart — and wife — Bernadine.

afford it if we work hard for the next two years.

Our biggest regret about this last cruise? We wished we'd planned a little differently so we could still be out cruising.

— kathryn weiss