



LIVE THE DREAM

JIMMY CORNELL ON WHAT CAN REALLY MAKE OR BREAK A CRUISING VOYAGE

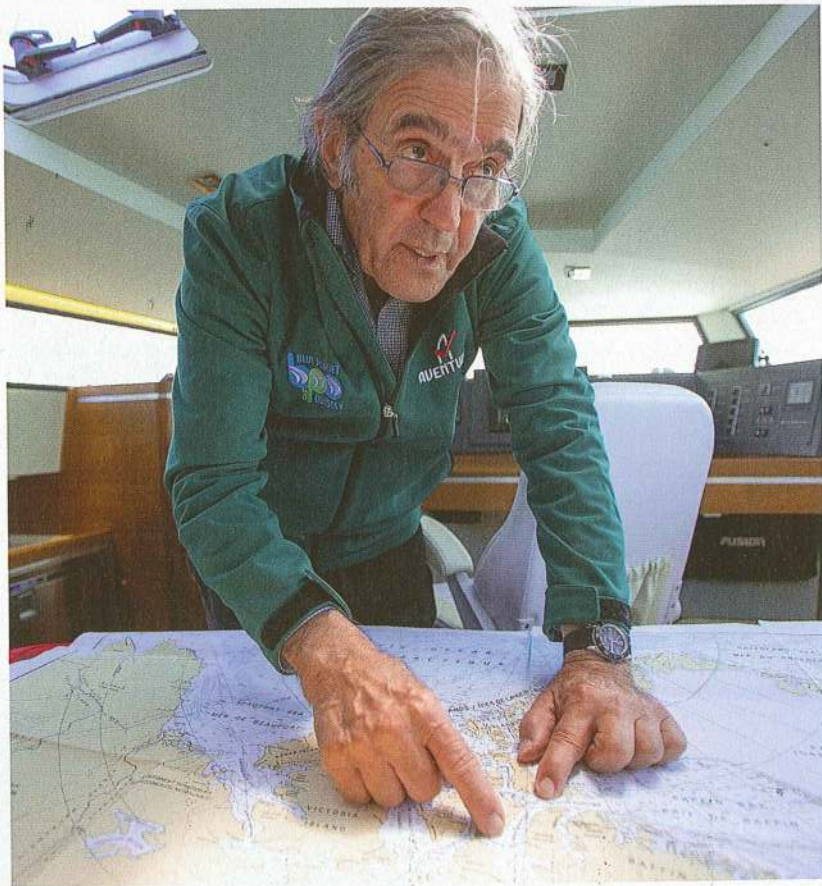
It is not always easy to define success or failure when it comes to voyaging – sailing in particular. Failure to arrive at a specific destination, for example, can happen for completely unforeseeable reasons, yet the resulting detour might end up, years down the line, being one of the most cherished memories of the entire trip.

However, from the cases of unhappy or abandoned voyages that have come to my knowledge over the years, the most common causes contributing to overall success or failure are as follows: the boat itself; the crew; access to funds; self-sufficiency; and, finally, attitude to cruising and life at sea.

As these are such important matters for anyone planning a long sailing trip, I conducted a wide-ranging survey among a large sample of long-distance sailors. The results were first published in my book *World Voyage Planner*, and my initial findings have been updated from observations made in the intervening years among participants in a series of transatlantic rallies. >

Bluewater cruising
has never been
easier, but it is still
a great test
of character





Jimmy Cornell:
'You must be able to deal with any emergency yourself.'

THE BOAT

I start from the premise that no object created by man is as satisfying to his body and soul as a proper sailing yacht.

Arthur Beiser, author of The Proper Yacht

Deciding what kind of boat to acquire for a long voyage is often more difficult than deciding to do the voyage itself, especially when there is such a bewildering range of boats available. There is no doubt that the choice of boat can seriously affect the quality and enjoyment of a long sailing trip, and a wrong choice may even lead to the adventure being abandoned.

There are many factors that can make a boat unsuitable for a long voyage: the most commonly reported is size – the boat being either too large to be handled easily by a short-handed crew, or too small to be comfortable. Lack of storage and speed on long passages is also a common complaint. However, important as size and comfort may be, the most essential consideration when choosing a boat for a long voyage is safety. There are many boats on the market that are perfectly suitable for weekend sailing or short cruises, but which may not be up to the demands of tough offshore conditions.

A common reason given for setting off with an unsuitable boat is: 'it was the boat we happened to own at the time'. Whether for financial reasons or lack of offshore experience, some people just decide 'this will do'.

As the choice of the right boat is such an important factor, I asked survey participants to point out the design features that contribute most to the quality and enjoyment of their sailing. A few owners complained about their boats being too small, and stressed that for a long voyage, a boat under 40ft might not be suitable.

'LACK OF STOWAGE CAN BE MORE OF A PROBLEM THAN ACTUAL BOAT SIZE'

Other owners found that a lack of stowage was a more serious handicap than actual size. Many boats are designed for weekend sailing or charter, with storage capacity not a priority.

The most desirable features, according to the survey results, were a comfortable, sheltered watch-keeping position and an ergonomically designed cockpit, if possible with a hard dodger, which makes passages more comfortable in both hot and cold climates. Other features include: shallow draught to extend the cruising range; good access to the engine room for maintenance; a compact and user-friendly galley; comfortable sea berths and a proper double berth when in port. For sail handling, a well thought-out reefing system was considered essential with the lines being led to the cockpit, ideally to an electric winch. Also important was easy access to the chain locker, with a vertical drop to avoid the chain getting snagged, plus a powerful and reliable windlass.

For long periods sailing in tradewind conditions, easily handled downwind sails, such as a cruising chute or Parasailor spinnaker, are essential. Also, a strong autopilot, preferably backed up by a wind operated self-steering gear, a reliable watermaker, AIS and bow-thruster. For communication, satellite phones were regarded as an essential safety feature, but on long voyages SSB radios matter for voice comms with other boats, as well as email.

Some practical advice to would-be voyagers: many seem to be unaware of the high electricity demands of a boat equipped for long-term cruising. Ensure that those demands are met by a variety of energy supply options.

Many participants in the survey stressed the need to keep things simple: a strongly built boat; good quality winches; anchoring gear; and a reliable engine being paramount. The safety aspect should be the overriding factor when choosing a boat for a long voyage.

Late in my sailing life I had a unique opportunity to conceive a boat that would fulfil my long pursuit for an ideal cruising boat and my Arctic voyage on *Aventura IV* has comprehensively proven that point.

CREW

Trust no crew, no matter how fabulous his sailing career and credentials, until he is fully proven aboard.

Bill Butler, author of 66 Days Adrift

Many a voyage has failed because of crew problems and this may explain why the majority of boats that cruise long-distance are sailed by couples. While many voyages have been completed successfully by couples, the same cannot always be said of boats crewed by friends, acquaintances or occasional crew taken to supplement the permanent crew. Anyone choosing crew for an extended cruise or even just one ocean



Tim Bishop



Above: Give some thought to the downwind sails if you are planning to do much tradewind sailing

Left: Safety aspects, such as the aluminium hull on this Garcia Exploration 45, should be a very high priority when choosing a boat

Morris Adant



Tor Johnson

Eating, sleeping and sailing together in a confined space. Choose your crew carefully, or go without

passage, should take into account not only their experience, but also physical condition, reliability and compatibility with other crew members. Couples sailing by themselves should ensure that in an emergency both people can deal with any essential tasks.

Health and general fitness should be given a high priority as part of the preparation for a voyage. Whatever the age of the crew – and many long distance sailors are no longer in their prime – the physical condition of the crew should be a major consideration, especially on a long voyage when medical assistance is often not easily available. After a long period of an urban, sedentary existence, it is essential to get into good physical shape for sailing across oceans.

Over half the boats in the survey were crewed by couples, which only occasionally took on additional crew, and several stressed that they preferred this arrangement. Among the latter was Nancy Zapf of the yacht *Halekai*, who confirmed this view.

“The advantages of doing long passages as a couple are huge, provided both are fully competent. You only need one decent sea berth; watch-keeping routines are easy and you haven’t got the responsibility towards other crew. Less is more. The more people in a small place, the more potential for problems. Modern technology, such as autopilot, radar and AIS, has made it much easier to sail short-handed. Although for watch-standing we would prefer to have at least one extra crew member aboard, the logistics of doing so, and the limited space available, means that just the two of us is a better choice.”

At a recent seminar on voyage preparation I was taken to task by an older man in the audience. He felt that in my comments I appeared to regard wives differently from ordinary crew, arguing: “I cannot see any difference; on my boat I regard my wife as crew.”

“I disagree, and I have the feeling that your wife may disagree too,” I replied. “Husbands ought to have a different kind of relationship with their spouse than with their crew, be it friends or just acquaintances.”

‘ALONE ON A SMALL BOAT A CAPTAIN’S DESTINY IS IN HIS OWN HANDS’

His spouse, who was sitting by his side, looked embarrassed during this exchange, and came to see me on her own during the next interval.

“I’d like to apologise for what happened, but he has always raced just with friends. We haven’t been married for long and he seems incapable of accepting that cruising with me is not the same thing. He will soon retire and is keen to leave on a big voyage, but I have absolutely no desire to go.”

A few days later, at a boat show, I met another couple that had been at the same seminar. Later that day the wife also came to see me on her own and asked me to visit the boat they had ordered, as it was exhibited at the show.

“Please come, as you may be able to persuade my husband to order a backup autopilot. As we shall be sailing on our own, I am very worried that if the autopilot breaks we’ll have to steer by hand. For some reason he won’t do it, but I know that he respects you, and I am sure you could persuade him.”

I did; and both examples only reinforced a view I have held for most of my life, that men are often their own worst enemies.

When I started running a new series of more family orientated rallies, one of the first features I introduced at the preparatory seminars was a women-only session. Such closed meetings gave women the opportunity to express freely their own views, doubts and concerns. It was an instant success, and such sessions are now held regularly.

From what I have been told, a wide range of concerns are often raised: being able to handle the transition from a comfortable life ashore to an uncertain one afloat; being alone on night watch, or in heavy weather, and concerns with safety generally; living with a partner for 24 hours a day and worried that they might not get along; concerns about ageing parents or being away from family, children and especially grandchildren. Another major concern for many cruising sailors is the risk of spending everything to go cruising, and not having a secure base to return to, or of being forced to return home sooner than planned.

FINANCES

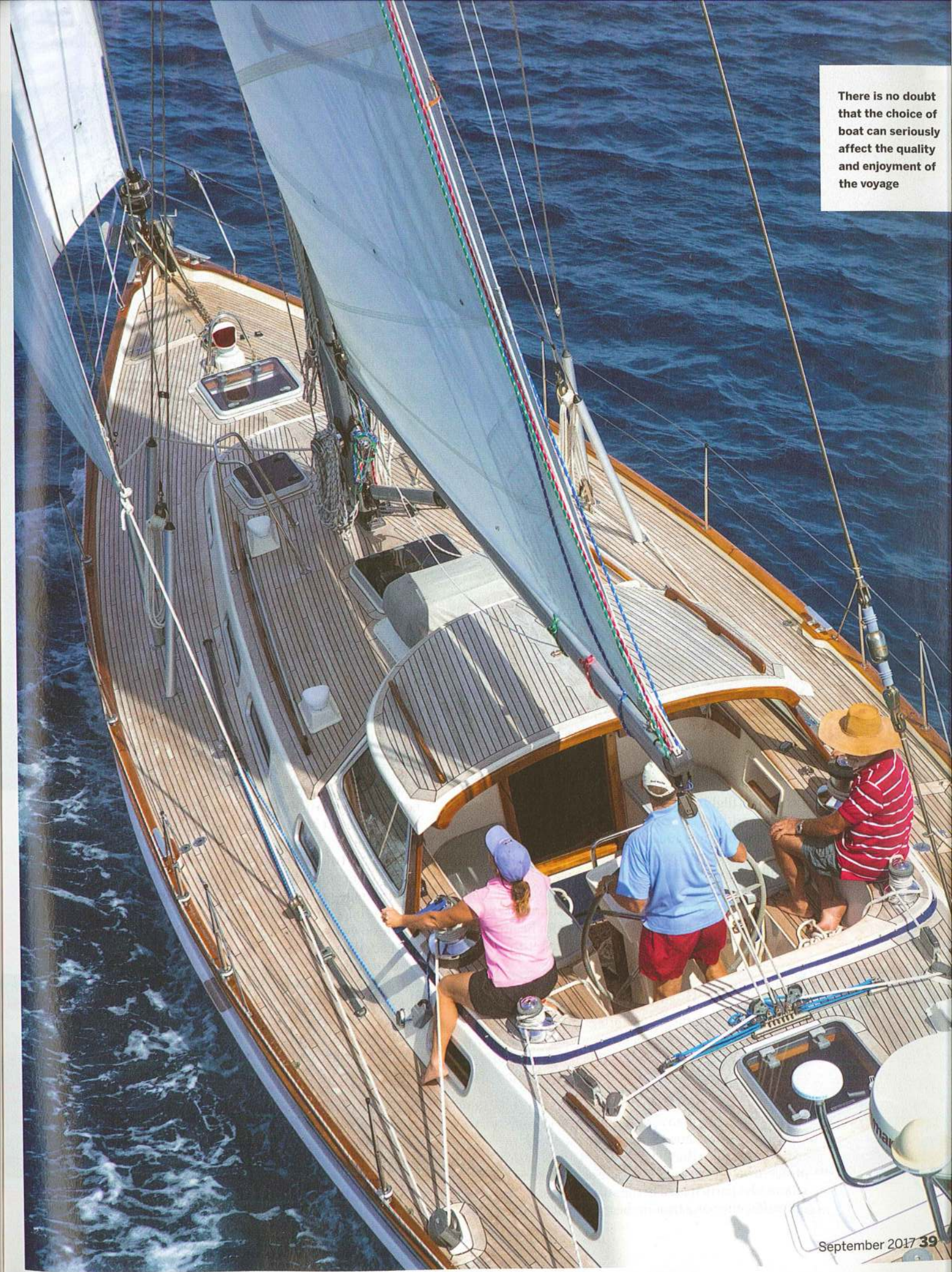
Make a detailed estimate of anticipated expenses, double it, and then decide if you can stretch your resources to afford it.

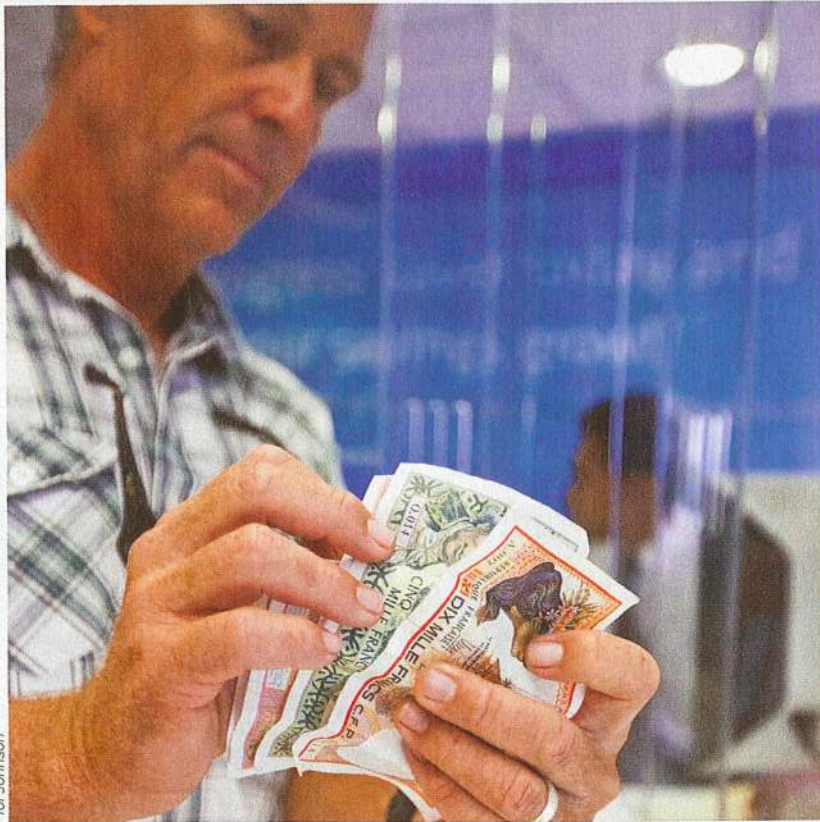
Roger Swanson, Bowman 57 Cloud Nine

No voyage should be embarked on without having adequate funds, not just for day-to-day expenses, but also a reserve for possible emergencies. The situation is now very different from the days when it was still possible to sail the world on a limited budget. ➤

Financial matters and the cost of cruising were an

There is no doubt that the choice of boat can seriously affect the quality and enjoyment of the voyage





Tor Johnson

Can you afford to cruise the way you want with the budget available?

important part of the voyage planning survey and its findings have been updated by recent figures. The average annual expenses quoted by couples sailing on boats between 40ft and 45ft varied between £16,000 and £20,000, to a maximum of £32,000. For couples on boats between 50ft and 55ft, the annual costs spanned the range from £26,000 to £32,000, and a maximum of £43,000 by a couple on a recently completed ten-year world voyage. These figures included all living expenses, marina, maintenance and repair costs, while the higher figures covered also the costs of going out, car rental and occasional flights home.

My own advice on cruising budgets generally is to allow more than planned and have recourse to funds in a serious emergency. But I also urge everyone to think carefully before making a clean break with shore life during the current economic uncertainty and creeping inflation. If possible, you should keep a shore base so if you are forced to change plans, whether for health or financial reasons, you have somewhere to return.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Necessity is the mother of invention. When you're in the middle of nowhere and something breaks, you've got to be resourceful and imaginative enough to make things work.

Dave Lynn, Liberty 458 Nine of Cups

In today's world when help is usually just a phone call away, many people have lost the ability to be self-sufficient. I refer not just to the skills required, but also the attitude to try to deal with a problem before calling on outside assistance. Many of the sailors who participated in the survey stressed that self-sufficiency on a boat in the middle of the ocean is

essential. You must be able to deal with emergencies alone.

The skills required of the crew of an offshore boat are many, and include the ability to repair and improvise, navigate without electronic aids, be able to dive, give first aid in an emergency, and most certainly have the ability to sail the boat if the engine is out of order. To be able to deal with emergencies, the boat should carry a comprehensive set of tools, essential spares as well as backups for the most important pieces of equipment. There should also be a well-stocked medical kit and at least a rudimentary knowledge of how to deal with a medical emergency.

Self-sufficiency is of utmost importance in offshore sailing generally and certainly in remote areas. I have been in some emergency situations on my own voyages and have been able to deal with all of them successfully. I fitted out the first *Aventura* myself, which taught me to be self-sufficient, and ever since then I have attempted to do all that is necessary to be prepared for the worst. One golden rule that I learned is not to panic. It is crucial in an emergency situation to keep calm, take time to properly assess the situation, draw up a plan of action and then act.

Two situations, which occurred during my recent Arctic voyage, prove the point. The first happened in late summer 2014, soon after abandoning the attempt to transit the North West Passage because of unfavourable ice conditions. While motoring during a calm patch on passage to Greenland, there was a sudden loud noise from the engine. I stopped the engine as it was making a rattling metallic sound, suspecting that something had wrapped round the propeller.

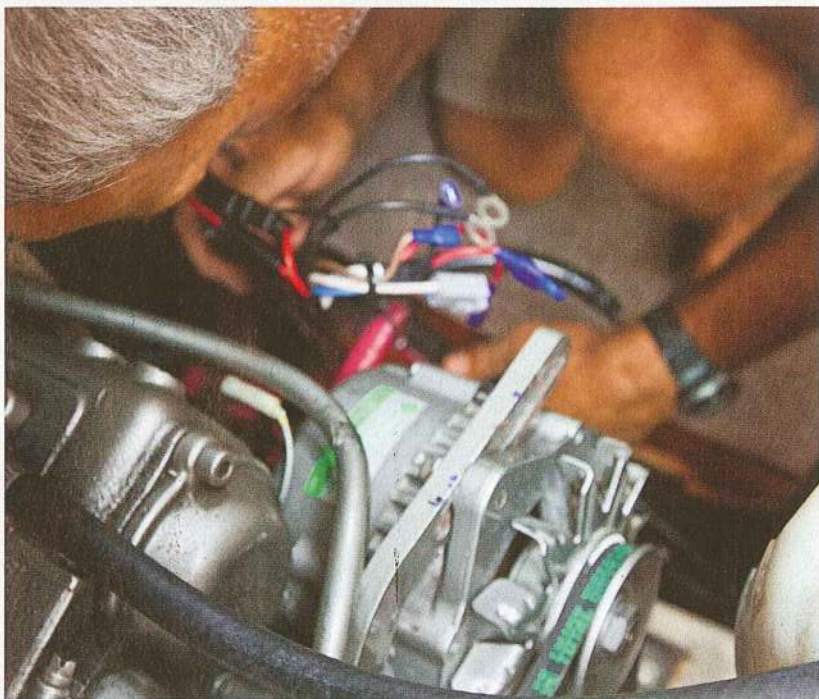
With the engine out of action and an imminent gale upon us, I mounted the GoPro camera with an underwater housing onto the end of an ice pole, lowered it over the side, and managed to get a good view of the propeller. A thick black rope was wound around the propeller shaft, with its end trailing behind. I realised that something more serious might have happened, so went to look at the engine and found that the bolts between the propeller shaft and transmission had sheared.

With much drifting ice as well as large icebergs still about, and the nights getting longer as we moved south, not being able to use the engine for the remaining 1,000 miles to nearest boatyard in Greenland would have been a serious handicap.

Although I did not have the right bolts on board, I found some longer bolts and cut them down to size with the electric angle-grinder. I retrieved the sheared-off bolts from the bilge, and recuperated their nuts. Hanging upside down over the back of the engine, I managed to pull back the propeller shaft sufficiently to reconnect it to the transmission.

It was now time to deal with the remains of the rope. Although I was able to turn the propeller shaft by hand, I dared not start the engine and put it in gear. I donned my dry diving suit, and kitted myself out with all the gear needed for a dive in ice cold water, but decided not to use a tank for a job that may only take a few minutes. Attached to the boat with a safety line, I came close to the trailing rope and managed to cut some of it off, but the violent rolling of the boat with my head banging against the hull, forced me to give up. But at least I had been able to ascertain that the propeller was indeed free.

In the rough swell, however, it took a superhuman effort to get back on the boat as I was weighed down by 12kg of lead weights, and the boat was bouncing



Tom Johnson

Mechanical know-how is a must-have for serious world cruisers

violently. Although I was wearing a drysuit, the hood was not dry and I could feel the cold getting to my head. I knew that I was in a critical situation and, as an experienced diver, was aware that I had to get out of the water quickly as I had only about one minute before hypothermia would set in and I may no longer be able to act rationally.

It was the sight of my daughter Doina standing helplessly above me that gave me the strength to lie on my back and lift my feet one by one out of the water so that she could reach down and pull off my large fins. I then managed to put my foot on the lowest rung of the boarding ladder and was helped up the rest of the way. I dropped exhausted into the cockpit; Doina later told me that I could hardly speak and sounded incoherent.

Eight days later we were in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, but having the remains of the rope removed and the transmission checked had to wait until *Aventura* could be hauled out at a US boatyard, 3,500 miles from where the incident had happened.

One year later, having successfully completed a transit of the North West Passage, this time from west to east, the engine kept overheating on passage from Greenland to the UK. Having checked all possible sources, I concluded there was an airlock in the cooling system, but could not locate it. Concerned about setting off on such a long passage without a working engine, I had a chat with my friend Dunbar whether we should detour to the nearest port in Greenland, about 150 miles away. He said he had no objection, if I preferred to carry on.

So carry on we did, and from that point we just sailed. Without the engine we had to rely on charging the batteries with our solar panel, wind and water generator, which they did perfectly and covered all our energy needs. Sailing the remaining 2,000 miles proved to be no real handicap as we had more than enough wind to sail, even if not always on our desired

Sailing around the world: a convenient method of travel or a way of life?



Tim Bishop

course. We also had two fully-fledged storms thrown in for good measure. We made landfall safely in Falmouth, where a local mechanic found the source of the airlock and fixed it. Looking back now, I found the experience of crossing the North Atlantic without an engine both satisfying and actually quite enjoyable.

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The choice of boat is absolutely crucial for the successful outcome of a voyage, but there is an even more important factor: your attitude to sea and sailing, and to cruising life in general. Setting off on an extended trip or a life on the ocean is a major decision that entails a complete change of both lifestyle and mentality. Leaving in a sailing yacht just because it is a convenient way to see the world is not a good enough reason. I have met sailors who were unwilling or, more often, unable to make the transition from a shore-based person to becoming a full-time sailor. This may not be a great problem on a relatively short passage, such as a sail from the Canaries to the Caribbean, or California to Hawaii, but it can have serious consequences for those who leave on a longer voyage of several years.

In my many years of sailing I have met numerous outstanding people, and invariably what made them stand out was their attitude. What I most admired in them was their profound respect for the sea, and how being on the ocean came to them naturally, undoubtedly because they loved what they were doing. What they all had in common was that special mind-set to embark on a long voyage, which required such qualities as courage, perseverance, determination and self-confidence. The fact that we live in an age when it is so much easier and safer to sail to the remotest parts of the world has not changed those requirements in any way.

This is the kind of mental attitude that must be understood and accepted by anyone planning an offshore voyage. The safety situation in certain parts of the world may be cause for concern, as are the effects of climate change. But there are still plenty of peaceful places to explore and exotic destinations to enjoy. All that is needed is a positive attitude. Ultimately, how satisfying and enjoyable your life on the ocean will be is not determined by how big or small, comfortable or well equipped your boat may be, how much or little money you have, but primarily by your own attitude.

Alone on a small boat in the middle of an ocean, far from land and outside help, a captain has his destiny, and that of his crew, in his own hands. Nothing can describe this condition better than the words of the Victorian poet W E Henley:

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

Jimmy Cornell's latest book, 200,000 Miles, published by Cornell Sailing, is available from www.cornellsailing.com