

Sailing

THE BEAUTY OF SAIL

REFITS

How to make older boats like new

The rewards of
buying into a

CHARTER FLEET



MAKING THE JUMP

Story and photography by Sally-Christine Rodgers

Sally-Christine Rodgers and her husband, former owner of West Marine Randy Repass, cross the Atlantic on the final leg of their circumnavigation with preparation, trepidation and plenty of laughter



The Pacific has always been my ocean, as familiar to me as my mother's arms, my father's voice and the dependable presence of my siblings. I feel fortunate to have sailed her vast waters, whether it be the beauty of cruising or thrill of Hawaiian racing. But when it came time to cross the Atlantic on the final leg of our circumnavigation, I felt great trepidation.

My husband Randy and I, along with our 9-year-old son Kent-Harris, left Santa Cruz, California, in 2004, sailing straight through to the Marquesas at breakneck speed aboard our Wylie 65 *Convergence*. We sailed onward through the South Pacific, across to Australia, down to Tasmania and beyond, cruising around the world on and off for the next 13 years. After cruising the Mediterranean, traversing the coast of Spain to Lanzarote in the Canaries, the time had come to sail the final leg home last spring.

Crossing the Atlantic, however, made me nervous. It brought to mind my father's stories about giant squid and the Bermuda Triangle. My friend Diane laughed at my apprehension. "Columbus sailed the Atlantic," she said. But for me, a transatlantic crossing was the great unknown of "Here be dragons," as medieval maps warned.

After facing a formidable list of repairs, adjustments, safety inspections and provisioning, we were ready to go. Randy, our now-grown-up son Kent-Harris, our Aussie friend Tim and I gathered in the cockpit for a final safety meeting. My heart thumped a little harder as we headed out to sea.

I took a last look at the charred lava flow of Lanzarote's Timanfaya National Park as it receded behind us. It is home to 800 species, but the only flora and fauna we would encounter from then on would be from the sea. Soon, shearwaters kept us company and flying fish skimmed the surface. I handed myself over to the unknown as intermittent waves knocked us sideways with bullylike shoves. Our true wind speed was 18 to 22 knots, and spray left Jackson Pollock splatters on my clean cushions. As tinges of first-day-out nausea crept up the back of my throat, an albatross swept over the foaming wave crests before disappearing into troughs. "Be the albatross," I told myself.

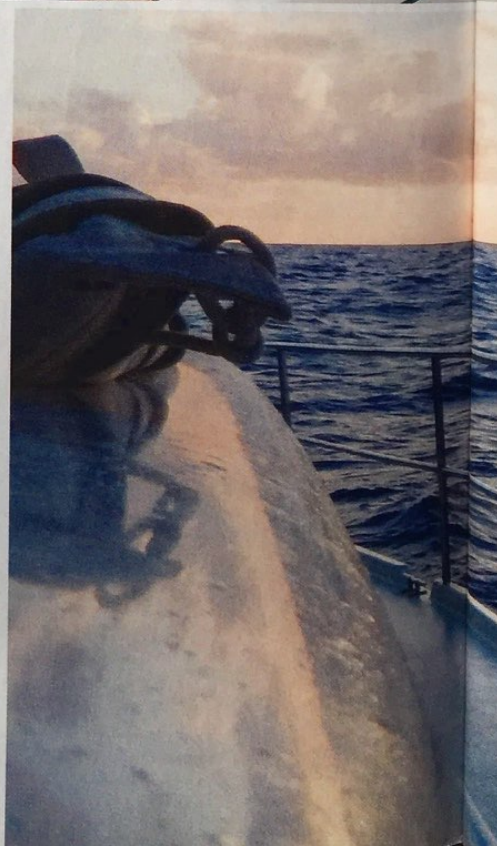
Between islands, we encountered what are locally known as "acceleration zones," a funneling phenomenon that increases wind predictions by 10 knots and can extend 20 miles beyond the islands themselves. Regaining our sea legs, we mastered numerous reefs and shakeouts in the fluctuating winds. At 0300 hours, however, our third reef line got tangled around our steaming light, 15 feet above the deck. Given the conditions, we decided to ride it out, our second reef keeping the boat under control with a speed over ground of 13 knots. Kent-Harris spotted a ship's light 12 miles out. It was *Sinfonia*, an 899-foot passenger ship moving at 10 knots heading to Las Palmas.

"They should see our LED masthead light," he said, as Randy drove *Convergence* dead downwind in the 30-plus-knot wind.

"She is way too close," Randy said, holding our course. We shined the spotlight on the mainsail as an extra precaution, but dressed in circus lights and oblivious of our existence, the *Sinfonia* crossed close to our bow, reminding me of a photo taken off the Oregon coast of a containership entangled with a sailboat's rigging.



The crew, from left to right, Kent-Harris Repass, Sally-Christine Rodgers, Randy Repass and Tim Sales, gather before the passage, above. The sun sets on perfect conditions for a transatlantic crossing, right. The Wylie 65 *Convergence* powers through the waves, previous page.



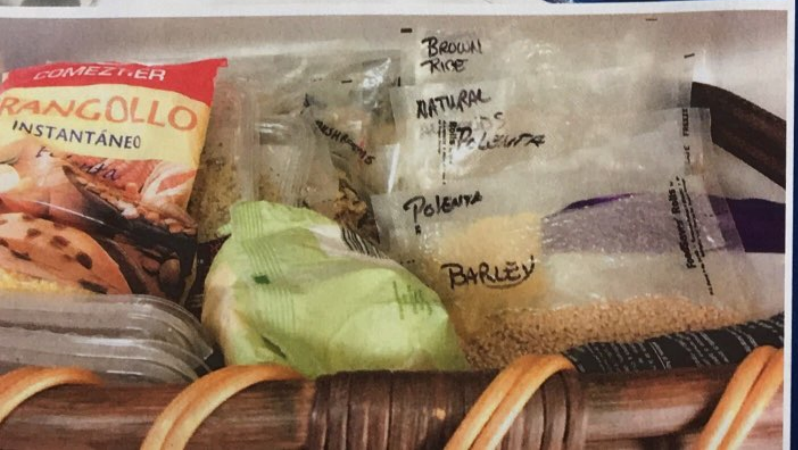


Each sunrise and sunset marked our journey with its unique imprint, with the night bringing a crush of stars, the rhythmic surge of the sea and the resounding wind. Passing our boat along like a bucket brigade, the Atlantic swells rose and fell. With no other vessels in sight, it was all blue, all the time.





Green onions keep sending up shoots during the crossing. Other provisioning tips include buying local products, and removing packaging and storing food in containers and vacuum bags, below. Egg dishes and making fresh banana bread keep meals interesting during the long passage, facing page.



GOOD EATS

THE ART OF PROVISIONING FOR LONG PASSAGES

When I was in college, I helped fill my own sailing coffers by creating menus, shopping for supplies and stowing provisions for offshore sailors. Keeping things simple was key. But after decades of provisioning in remote places around the world I have learned that adding the exotic and unusual can make a basic meal a feast. Here are a few of my favorite tips and packing tricks that I learned along the way.

VACUUM SEAL EVERYTHING

Vacuum sealing condenses your inventory, eliminates bugs and moisture, keeps food airtight for years and allows you to recycle packing material before leaving the dock. Remove all packaging from dry goods like rice, flour, quinoa and polenta and vacuum seal contents in uniform serving-size packets; label with a laundry marker and store like index cards in a crate or basket. Seal instructions for mixes inside the packets.

SPICE IT UP

Even bland meals can taste gourmet with a few condiments. Pack jars of capers, sun-dried tomatoes, pine nuts, roasted red peppers, seedy mustards, pickles, balsamic reductions, sweet chili sauce, pesto, jams, chutneys and the best olive oils, and wrap them in a nonskid drawer liner and stow low.

THINK CLEVER STORAGE

We designed a multi-tiered hanging shelf under the settee table for fruits and non-refrigerated veggies. Our icebox has long stainless drawers allowing for top and front loading. However, if you have a traditional top loader, the Container Store has numerous lidded bins that stack for easy access to cheese, veggies, meats and drinks. Stow tall bottles in beer can cozies in a deep drawer.

FREEZE YOUR FAVORITES

For long-distance passages, I freeze and vacuum seal our favorite meals so they are ready for any sea state. Soups, enchiladas, eggplant parmesan, cannelloni, breakfast burritos, lasagnas and pizzas are all easy heat-and-serve meals. Canned butter is a staple. Cheese freezes well, and although it tends to crumble rather than slice when thawed, it melts perfectly. Fresh lemons and limes can be frozen, thawed later and juiced. Freeze berries for parfaits, smoothies and waffles. Press fresh garlic into patties and freeze for an easy flavor hit to sauces and stir fry dishes.

KEEP IT FRESH

Some sailors pine for rum, but I need greens and grow a variety of hearty sprouts. Sunflower and pea are my favorites for adding vitamin K and crunch. To grow sprouts, shake a 1- to 2-inch layer of organic, sterilized soil into a flat tray, spread a thin layer of seed on top and keep moist in the dark—a garbage bag works great—until sprouted. I use a spray bottle to keep sprouts watered until ready for harvest. Fun for sailing gardeners.

Oranges last longer wrapped in foil. Keep green tomatoes cool and layered in newspaper to ripen slowly. Rinse and dry greens and store in micro-perforated vegetable bags to extend storage life.

Green onions kept in a clear jar with their roots in fresh water and a daily dose of sunlight will continue sprouting their tops, providing spring onions for a month. Separate onions and potatoes, and keep them in the dark to prevent sprouting. Unrefrigerated eggs last for weeks if turned over every day.

Peel and slice fresh ginger and cover with gin in a glass jar. It will last for months unrefrigerated. Plus, the ginger-infused liquid makes delightful ginger-and- tonic celebration drinks upon arrival at your destination. Cheers!

OPEN MARKETS ADD CULTURAL INTEREST

All over the world, we seek out unusual regional foods to stock our larder. In Indonesia, crazy long beans, spiky rambutan (a cousin to the lychee), purple mangosteen with their sweet gelatinous sections, and the scaly snake fruit, salak, add new flavor and textures to salads and desserts. In Turkey, we start our shopping day with a simit—a savory sesame-encrusted breakfast bread sold from street carts—before loading up on purple and white aubergines, firm cucumbers, ruby cherries, plump green figs, waist-widening cheeses, and salty olives. We carry insulated bags with blue ice blocks to keep things cold, and I ask fishmongers to fillet and pack fish into my own zip-top plastic bags.

COOKBOOKS AFLOAT

Amanda Swan-Neal's **The Essential Galley Companion: Recipes and Provisioning Advice for Your Boating Adventures** is filled with a cruiser's proven recipes and fun sailing anecdotes. I also carry my father's copy of **Joy of Cooking**; it is the bible on how to do everything from cleaning mussels to making a soufflé.





Tim Sales climbs out to the end of the wish-bone boom to tension the clue, above, and enjoys a midocean treat, facing page top. Dolphins ride the bow wave, right.

For 15 hours, except when we were in the brief wind shadow of the island of La Gomera, we faced 30 to 36 knots of wind. We were used to it, sliding down the foamy backsides of 13-foot seas. The tips of our wishbone booms left momentary signatures in the wave tops, as shearwaters banked off the swells, sweeping upward on invisible currents. We logged 210 nautical miles in our first 24 hours.

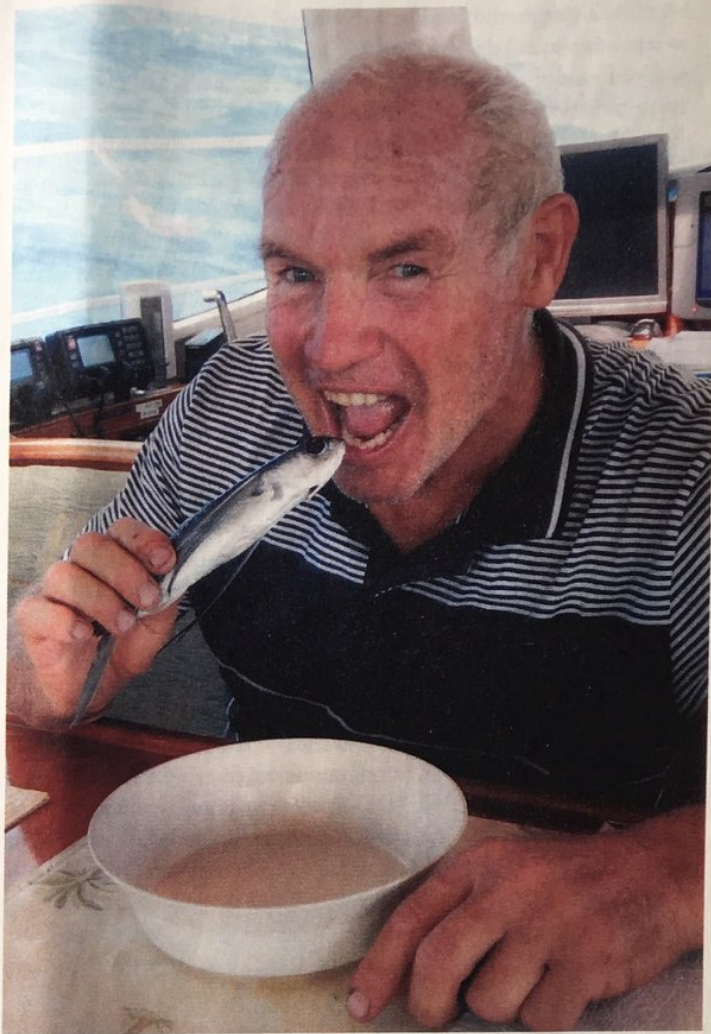
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When we were 5,000 miles off the coast of Mauritania, and the western shoulder of Africa no longer showed on our electronic chart, the autopilot died. An improperly installed pin that connects the tiller to the autopilot sheared. Tim, who was a shipwright in the UK's Royal Navy, and Randy, an electrical engineer, can troubleshoot and retool just about anything—good skills to have on a boat. Despite their skills, I contemplated that we are just a pinpoint in the crosshairs of latitude and longitude.

The weather was visceral for me, my chest responding to barometric variations, and clouds becoming atmospheric smoke signals sending warnings of what is to come. I was on watch when the wind ramped up. I roused Tim from a deep sleep to put in a reef.

"Whoa! Let me get my pants on!" he groaned. We started the engine, but heard only an ominous click. After a process of elimination, we determined that the starting battery was dead.

"At least this solves the mystery smell," Tim said. A strange sulfur smell had permeated the boat earlier, causing me to double check our stores, wonder about the presence of a dead rat and to finally joke about Kent-Harris's socks. An internal short had boiled out the electrolyte of the starting battery. Fortunately, Randy keeps backups for all critical systems on board, and a power cable from the house battery bank connects to the engine battery with a convenient



switch. Engine humming, we put in a reef and settled the boat just as a passing squall delivered pelting rain and a free boat wash.

I've found that appetites seem to increase at sea, and preparing tasty, nutritious meals in all conditions is essential for crew morale. Soon the heady scent of oregano filled the saloon. Just as I plated up a sizzling pizza, dolphins spotted us and we made a beeline to the bow to watch them frolic. Life was good.

Convergence is 66 feet with a 63-foot waterline and can easily average 200 miles a day under her cat ketch rig. She can carry 400 gallons of fuel, enabling 1,500 nautical miles of motoring if necessary—a good thing when the wind is light. Despite dark squalls, we found ourselves frequently motorsailing. Using stretchy bands and hand weights, I savored the moments of calm, with the cockpit serving as my personal gym. With time, one's body adjusts to the constant motion. Bracing and balancing give offshore sailors a natural core workout—one that is all too often undermined by the consumption of beer.

Time has a way of slowing on long passages. Being up at all hours and sleeping in the midday throws off one's internal clock. I never knew what time it was, nor did I care. Hourly engine checks and log entries kept us connected to a routine. Our tricolor masthead light was the only thing that announced our existence in the black curtain night. While the swells continued their march south toward remote beaches and rocky coastlines, we moved west. Staring out to sea, my thoughts wandered, fears were forgotten and possibilities emerged. With 1,000 miles to go to Bermuda, much could happen, but my initial wariness had dissipated. I didn't want





The locale fishing boats moor in the tidal lagoon in Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands. A tern takes a rest 1,000 nautical miles from Bermuda, left. The author harvests sprouts grown during the crossing, far left.

the passage to end. Being thoroughly removed from the world's chaos and the daily demands of our working life (not to mention the news) made sailing the mental health break we all needed. Our little band of voyagers was content, although I confess that after eating our last avocado, I did have a little cry.

It takes a lot to keep a boat running. Navigating, sail trim, monitoring chafe, making water, changing fuel and water filters, hourly engine checks, cleaning heads, doing laundry and preparing meals. We solved a strange coolant leak. A faulty seacock left behind a trail of polystyrene beads with its incoming stream of seawater. We designed "wake the dead" alarms on all bilge pumps, and when a corroded hose clamp fails flooding amidships bilge, we are on it. There's always something. One crystal-clear morning, as I sliced date nut bread and melon, I notice that a flying fish had left a bloody trail of scales from the binnacle where it first made impact across the cockpit floor. I picked up its battered body and prepared a little breakfast surprise.

Strange sea creatures called veleva passed by, their glassine sails transporting them effortlessly eastward. Flat mats of yellow sargasso weed were more frequent, some entangled with fishing line and bits of plastic. We saw a variety of debris but little sealife. At 12 days out, a tern landed on the port bow rail. Fluttering its wings, it rocked back and forth, gripping the stainless tubing with slender talons. Orange-beaked and black-headed, it was, like us, a long way from anywhere. Perhaps it had smelled the sweet tropical scent of ripe bananas emanating from the galley. I whipped up banana milkshakes, baked banana nut bread, fried bananas, even scared up a batch of banana pudding, but eventually I ran out of ideas.

The humidity was high, as moisture-filled clouds surrounded us, making everything wet. The wind was light and on the nose, but odd wave trains lifted us as solidly as a pile driver, then drop us hard, shattering our nerves. Our Kevlar hull, designed to withstand hitting a reef at 15 knots, was being tested. We were all being tested. We moved in slow motion, arm length by arm length, always reaching for the next handhold, bracing against anything solid. I was as bruised as a roller derby contestant. Our comfortable passage—one that I wanted to last forever—had become an ordeal that I couldn't wait to be done with. Eventually, we adjusted the sails with a double reef in the main and a single reef in the mizzen, which settled but slowed the boat.

After avoiding a high and circling a low, Bermuda was finally on the chart. The wind was on the beam and long swells settled in. Sweet. We sailed placidly toward our destination, the customs dock at St. George's. After 15 days at sea, we were healthy, had no major problems and had shared many good laughs. Kent-Harris had been great crew and still likes hanging out with his parents, we were still crazy in love and our friendship with Tim had deepened. Our next leg? Newport then up to Maine. Being at sea reshuffles priorities. Having small spaces and few possessions becomes a luxury, offering the mind great expanses and endless possibilities. Life is not about the stuff, I realized, yet again; it's about relationships, experiences and adventures.

When I had asked Randy, "What shall we do for our 30th wedding anniversary, babe?" He looked intently into my eyes and teased "Sail across the Atlantic?" Box checked. 📍