

Dissertation on a Cruising Conversion

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It was on. The call came through that Just Jane (JJ) was ready to depart Sydney for New Caledonia. On to the to find her bobbing gently in Black Wattle Bay, back-dropped by the Fish markets and the Sydney skyline.

This was to be my introduction to passage making, cruising style. Every other time I had gone to sea for a few days, it was in a yacht race. I felt I just had to experience the more measured pace of a well-found cruising boat on a long ocean passage.

Just Jane is owned by Jo and Arnold Capel, both long standing RSAYS members. They cruised the Australian coast in their first boat a Walker H28, then traded up to a Duncanson 35 for more coastal cruising, before settling on JJ as their home on water for their first Pacific cruise some years ago. They were now heading out again on this lovely lady with no particular plan in mind.

Just Jane is a Ted Brewer, Cape North design 44ft cutter ketch. She was built in Hong Kong by Cape Yachts in 1976 and the builder's plaque reads 'Built to Last'. At 12.5 tonnes basic and 15.5 tonnes gross she is a well mannered lady with a turn of speed if pressed. She holds 720 litres of water and 400 litres of fuel and for this trip, 200 rolls of toilet paper, 10kgs of coffee and 20kg of baked beans featured on the manifest.

The adventure had to wait a week for a weather window to depart Sydney. Pasha Bulker was still on the beach at Newcastle and each weather report was prefixed with 'Securite, Securite, Securite' meaning no go for today, warnings out. The idle time was spent walking the streets of Sydney, learning about JJ's systems and outboard mechanics.

As we all know, an outboard motor always stops when it is about to rain. We had 10 litres of spare fuel in the tender, and Arnie was cursing the motor as we rowed back to JJ in the rain. We hauled the motor up onto the deck and started dismantling. Carburettor off, top off carbide bowl and, "ummmm" bowl is dry, funny about that - so was the tank!!!. From this I learnt how to strip down an outboard motor even if

it was a long-winded way to find out we had just ran out of fuel.

On the 5th waiting day things really started getting weird. Jo introduced me to the Peg family who lived in a little basket in the cockpit locker, stating that cruising and waiting to leave port can get really boring. So I was introduced to Peggy Green, Peggy Red and the Wood Peg family who had smiley faces drawn on them. What have I got myself into I thought? The story goes that when JJ last cruised the Pacific Jo and Arnie had their son Tim with them and it was Tim who took to playing with the clothes pegs when things got a little slow.

After five days of waiting we decided to follow the latest low pressure system passing into the Pacific. We had a pleasant Customs clearance over coffee and cake at the Fish Market, a good night's sleep and departed at 0900 Saturday 30th June 2007.

An escort out of Sydney Harbour by two whales was surely a good omen.

Strong wind warnings were out with increasing winds offshore forecast. Yep, 50 miles out and 50 knot winds had us broad reaching on bearing 045M under triple reef main and half a

staysail. JJ bounded along at 9-10 knots in quartering seas of 5-8 metres. The auto helm was carrying on like a demented R2D2, whirring and clicking to keep the course true. Fantastic moonlight night and scudding cloud. I even had a warm bunk off watch and dry clothes, things that never happen in offshore racing.

First morning out, the wind was down to 20-30kts so the reefs came out and the staysail was fully unfurled. Mizzen and jib were left furled. This resulted in a nice sail balance for a steady 7-8 knots on the log. The first 24 hours put 182 nm behind us. Not bad for 15 tonnes propelled through the night by a couple of handkerchief sized sails.

Jo and Arnie were starting to think about food on day 2. Dry biscuits and water that is. The offer to join me for bacon & eggs was politely refused. The Peg family were rounded up that morning from various parts of the cockpit and companion way. Not sure why or how they migrated from their locker but Peggy Wood was leading the way. The sun was out and the sailing delightful as the wind moderated. Moonlight at night, sunshine by day. What could be better as I started to unwind into cruising mode? We maintained a watch system of 3hrs on 6hrs off so there was plenty of bunk time to be had. Our Day 2 run was 160nm in moderating winds and the sea and bird life seemed to be starting



Owners Jo and Arnie Capel continue cruising Just Jane

to decrease as we got further offshore. On Day 3 and we passed 50nm north of Middleton Reef in the continuing moderate westerly. I got a little worried about the amount of food I would have eat to clear the pantry before quarantine inspection at Noumea. While Jo and Arnie were looking forward to some weight loss on the trip, I was stacking on the pounds. They still conveyed polite 'no thanks' to offers to share my manufactured culinary delights.



Vice Commodore Ian Power keeping a good watch en route to Noumea on Just Jane

There was very little bird life and no apparent sea life around us at this time. The ocean was almost like a desert. Swells had moderated and the motion was more kindly.

We furled and unfurled the poled out jib as the wind strength varied,

and sailed a very broad reach to keep the rhumb line. Day 3 run was 130nm. All spirits lifted as the routine onboard settled down and the weather moderated.

Day 4 saw Jo and Arnie past major mal de mer and in good sprits. Thus we declared it a fresh undies day and fired up the engine for hot showers followed by some washing. Wow, by then I was stoked on the cruising life and really enjoying the journey. On the other hand, Jo and Arnie treat these passages as more of a means to an end for them as travellers. Still, I have nothing but admiration for their skills and seamanship even when they were suffering seasickness.

For me however this was a superb, laid back cruising day spent reading David Salter's 'All Piss and Wind'. Surely this is close to yachties heaven? Day 4 run; 150nm.

Russell Radio in NZ was our minder for the trip. Des was terrific over the HF and while sometimes we danced a laborious phonetic alphabet exchange, the positions were logged and weather forecasts for our area received.

I reckon Des went to the same School of Radio that our beloved Les Harper attended.

At times I could not believe it was not our Les at the other end of the circuit.

While RSAYS was being battered by a storm on 4th July, we were enjoying a magnificent days sailing. Warm sunshine, tanning on deck, reading and snacking was the order of the day and evening. That night we sighted a ship that looked to be crossing our path.

A radar lesson soon followed and we were well and truly confused as the closure was so slow. In the end we managed a confused VHF channel 16 exchange in broken English with a 'Somethingeese' fishing boat working a sea mount near us. Back to the bunk for me while we continued our Day 5 run of 160nm.

Life at last on Day 6 - we were not alone Flying fish bounced off the deck and an albatross circled overhead. Moderate westerlies continued so it looked like a one tack trip. We were some 600nm off the Aussie coast and crossing the Tropic of Capricorn. By now I was totally relaxed and not wanting this passage to end. Day's run 150nm.

JJ rocked and rolled early on Day 7 as a SE swell crossed with 25-30 kts westerly wind. Everything was banging around so I received a lesson on the cruising uses of toilet rolls.

They are perfect to jam behind doors and in cupboards to secure loose stuff. Ingenious! Days run by 0900hrs was 156nm with only 80nm to run to Amedee Light and the entrance through the fringing reef surrounding New Caledonia.

The remainder of the day was spent stooging along at 5kts into a lovely warm night, thinking about the end of the journey and the excitement of land fall. Land ho' - the night loom of civilisation first, then the 2 flash Amedee light on the rise of each swell. We went through the reef a bit after sunrise in a well marked passage with the magic sight of surf pounding the reef on either side of us.

Just then it struck me that it was all over, and all I wanted to do was turn around and sail back out into the open ocean. One day maybe.....

It was 14 miles into Port Moselle and then the 'island time' clearance process that gave us plenty of opportunity to eat most of the remaining perishables before the quarantine inspector took away our rubbish.

Snug in Noumea and with smiles all round from Immigration and Customs officers meant a closure for me, but barely a beginning for *Just Jane* and our Squadron travellers Jo and Arnie. I wish them well and happy cruising and if you ever need an extra hand, pleaseeeeeee give me a call.

Native at play - Ile des Pins, New Caledonia

