

Gaining Experience or When the Forestay Gives Have a Rigger in Your Crew

Recently, my long-suffering crew member Mike Kerr and I sailed from Wirrina Cove to Kangaroo Island. The wind had been about 20 knots from the south-east and mostly, the waves were no more than a couple of metres. *Peregrin*, a 10 metre Duncanson had behaved well. With two reefs in the main and the No. 3 jib set, she wasn't overpowered or stressed. Neither were we.



The red straps under the bow took most of the strain. We took any remaining ...

Backstairs Passage was behind us and we were a long way into the bay near American River, which had appeared when it was supposed to, so some coastal navigation lessons must have sunk in. By then, the wind and sea had eased. We'd shaken the reefs out of the main and were doing one last tack before starting the motor and dropping the sails. Mike was helming and I was sheeting in. About half way through the tack there was an alarmingly loud noise, as of something large, probably important and expensive, breaking.

Up forward, the first 25 cm of the boat had detached.

We knew this to be so because we could see the stainless steel pointy bit dangling from the forestay which was no longer doing much to hold the mast up! Mike, a highly experienced sailor, directly suggested I start the motor and steer, as he dashed forward to sort things out, and I could find no fault with the recommended arrangement. He managed to get a couple of halyards from somewhere and temporarily obtained some support for the mast. Obliging, the anchor chain had lifted with the broken off bit of bow and the anchor lifted and snagged the pulpit, which stayed in place, thus giving a little time for Mike to do his thing. About an hour or so earlier, with stronger wind and higher waves, I suspect the pulpit might have broken loose.

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We then gingerly motored into American River and tied up at the wharf. The harbour master kindly agreed that we could overstay the usual four hour limit. For the next two days, assisted by local folk, we bought most of the island's hardware supplies and set about making the rig safe enough to motor home. Mike is not only a good sailor but a professional rigger and a fitter, so I might

say he set about making things safe, etc. I've included a couple of photos which give some idea of the end result.

We didn't know how badly fittings on the deck had been stressed by the breakage, so we opted to run-tie down straps under the bow and up to the detached forestay. We held the straps back with lines running under the hull, diagonally back to the jib winches.

This seemed likely enough to hold the mast but we then added in as many halyards and lines as we could, to add some support if the straps broke. We even lashed the pulpit to the toe rail, suspecting it might have been weakened by its recent tangle with the anchor. When finished, I felt the jury rig might have lifted the boat backwards out of the water before the mast would have moved. Mike expressed some concern that we perhaps had made the forward bit too strong for the backstay, but we feared the *Peregrin* would founder if we added any more bits. We also stowed the boom and mainsail, aiming to minimize loads on the mast.

We still had a hole in the nose of the boat. To keep the water out we first filled the first few inches from the inside with pressure pack fast-setting foam. Then we laid some fibreglass sheets and epoxy over the outside. It looked gaudy, not neat, but was strong enough and watertight.

Like many yacht owners I have a set of bolt cutters in my tool kit, always telling myself they'll be useful if I have to cut away standing rigging. These illusions were tested by the thought of how things might go if our work didn't stand up, and how tedious it would be if the cutters wouldn't really sever heavy line. At Kingscote I bought the hardware retailer's only set of cable cutters. I could hardly lift the things but I figured fear would give Mike enough strength to lop the right bits off if needed.

The weather was up a bit much for our crippled vessel, so we had to wait a third day, which gave us time to review our work. It's a rough old wharf at American River and *Peregrin* suffered some gel coat damage, despite our efforts with fenders and taking it in turns at night to alter lines

with the tidal movements. Finally, though, the forecast brought kindly predictions for most of the day. Having fueled up and checked all the bits we reasonably could, we wafted out, under motor.

The wind built. So did the sea. Had we been able to sail, it would have been safely manageable, even enjoyable, with winds around 25 knots and waves consistently about three metres. (Mike swears he saw a dolphin looking down at us at one point, and he is not given to hyperbole.) Still, we were doing a fair job of picking our way through holes and around bumps which wanted to move us about, leading us to look questioningly at the mast – which was staying where it was supposed to. We'd planned to overnight at Wirrina Cove, to check the rig before heading for Adelaide the next day. We were already imagining the looks of admiration when we brought the boat in with the best jury rig ever devised, we being all at ease, salt encrusted and leathery looking, having been tested and hardened by the worst the great sea could throw at us. We planned to be laconic about the whole thing.

Which was when the motor quit. In truth, it did give a few seconds' warning, as it starved for fuel. And we did get a restart for a minute or so, before it gave up altogether, but I don't call that helpful or of any account, and would say, in essence, the damned thing quit! The wind immediately rose to 40 knots and no wave wasn't breaking – or less than four metres high. The top of the mast was rolling and pitching and yawing through 30 metre arcs. Mike and I stopped practicing being laconic – we couldn't even manage stoical or phlegmatic.

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With little debate, we decided a pan call was in order. (Is 'pan' derived from 'panic'?) The water police



No weather is good weather without a sound forestay!

answered promptly, took our details (to posthumously notify kin, no doubt) and handed us over to Sea Rescue, Worrina. We'd really had enough by then and wanted someone with us when the mast fell off, as we felt sure it would, so we requested that they come and hold our hands. They obliged, and in about an hour a motor launch was alongside.

Meanwhile, having decided not to immediately drink the rum ration and simply sulk, we'd put up a storm jib on the strongest bit of the forestay. Well, to be honest, Mike put it up. I was too short to reach that high. And the front of the boat wouldn't hold still while I was up there. And he is an experienced sailor and professional rigger, as well as being tall. We regained fair control with the wind on our starboard quarter, and were making about five knots, more or less in the right direction. Quite mysteriously, as soon as we got the storm jib up, the gale abated and the sea calmed considerably. As did we. The rig held, too.

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Near Worrina, the Sea Rescue people took us in tow and got us into the marina. (For this, by the way, we opted for a bridle across the stern winches with a line from there over the bow. We didn't trust using the mast to tie on, fearing it could have been weakened by recent events. We didn't trust anything on the foredeck, either. Actually, we didn't have confidence in anything much on the damned boat by then, but we thought we'd give the stern winches a try, they at least not having recently broken off under load). About that

time the Channel 7 helicopter arrived and spent about ten minutes noisily filming us. We were in the news that night, albeit for about four seconds.

My erstwhile long-suffering and loyal crew had secretly arranged for his sister to meet him at Worrina, so immediately jumped ship and went back to Adelaide with her. This cowardly betrayal when I was about to test his fitter's skills on my engine was a blow. I was laconic about it and broke out the rum ration to ease the pain.

The next day the marina manager helped me with the motor and we ultimately diagnosed the lift pump as being faulty. A tiny valve had ceased to work. It has, I believe, worked faithfully for several years, but it decided to give up there, in the middle of Backstairs Passage, with building weather and on a day when we couldn't properly sail. There is a Murphy and his laws do apply.

It only took a week for the suppliers in Brisbane to send a new pump to Adelaide, via Melbourne, though they still are not sure of that, and via some places they couldn't find out about at all, not even to save face. Fitting the new unit wasn't too hard, but bleeding the fuel system was. The marina manager took that job on with gusto and I calculate he swallowed a litre of diesel fuel. He is a young man, though, and should recover.

I tested the motor under load for a few hours and it behaved impeccably. It stood a good chance of becoming part of a mooring anchor if it hadn't - and I had threatened it with that possibility.

The next day, fair weather being predicted and having run out of rum, I took Peregrin out, promptly encountering 30 knot gully winds. I opted to run with the breezes, considering Edithburgh a likely outcome, but they abated after

an hour or so and I headed north to Adelaide. The rest was uneventful, except for odd moments when the resonances in the boat briefly altered the engine noise, equally briefly altering my equanimity.

After about nine hours, tired and less than laconic, I came home to the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron. Friendly folk were there to meet me and help tie up, which was nice. It is always nice when people help me tie up, actually. And that was that.

A couple of thoughts:

Losing Peregrin's bow was an experience, if one I'd rather read and not write about. I learned some things which might be useful if I ever go to sea again. Mike and I met generous and helpful people all along the way; at American River, Kingscote and Worrina. Alan and Carol, who operate the marine radio station at American River, were simply grand, even providing dinner on our last night there. Coming home in Backstairs Passage, the commercial boat Fishstalker was close to hand and ready to help if needed. 'Seamanship and Fellowship' are more than words out where they really matter. We're grateful and indebted.

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One last thought ... a couple of years ago I was crewing (the skipper may disagree about that) on a well-found yacht coming back from the Adelaide - Pt Lincoln race. The rudder, being the most aft-ish bit, fell off, causing consternation and drama.

Now I have sailed on a yacht which lost the most forward-ish bit.

The remaining possibility is disturbing to contemplate.



A fibre glass patch on Peregrin's bow worked well