

Knocked Down, But Not Out



HOWLING winds ripped at 25 knots, whipping the open Atlantic into a washing machine of 10-foot swells. Bermuda was well more than 1,500 miles gone, and the Azores were still hundreds of miles beyond the horizon. Squalls swept the armada of 18 trawlers, everyone aboard anxious to rest at Horta in the Azores before setting out again for Gibraltar. Another gust blew in. Sue Spencer, the mate aboard *Uno Mas*, glanced at the anemometer: a 50-knot blast. In these punishing conditions the stabilizers on the 40-foot Nordhavn were about as effective as Band-Aids on an amputation.

A 40-Foot Boat in 12-Foot Seas Proves That the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally was More Than Just a Pleasure Cruise

**By Georgs Kolesnikovs
Photos by David J. Shuler**

Dubbed “The Fearless 40,” *Uno Mas* was the smallest vessel in this recreational fleet, the first such group to attempt a trans-Atlantic crossing. If Sue, her husband, John, and the tiny trawler were to complete this midsummer voyage, they were going to first have to make it through the next six hours.

Dubbed “The Fearless 40,” *Uno Mas*, the smallest boat in this summer’s Nordhavn Atlantic Rally, took a beating in the open ocean between Bermuda and the Azores, the Rally’s longest leg.

Smoke on the Water

The wind edged up, pushing the waves in the beam sea over 12 feet. *Uno Mas* perched on a crest, then dropped port side down toward the trough. As she reached bottom, crew member Chris Mather watched awestruck as the cold Atlantic climbed 18 inches up the salon windows.

"We were beginning to right, and the inclinometer was still pinned at 45 degrees," said Sue, who rode out the knockdown in the pilothouse with John. "We must have been over at least 55 degrees."

"It looked like *Uno Mas* was at a 90-degree angle," said Cecil Newsome, who was on *Egret*, the boat closest to *The Fearless 40*.

Surviving the massive drop was the easy part — Nordhavn hull #34 was strong, and she began correcting in the trough. Suddenly an acrid stench filtered up from belowdecks, the unmistakable odor of man-made materials being charred.

"As soon as we got out of the roll, all three of us smelled something electrical burning," said Sue.

Then the high-water alarm began trilling. Not good.

The crew needed to find the fire — and fast — but there wasn't a telltale smoke trail. John realized that the ship's Naiad stabilizers had lost power.

"We became a top that was just rolling from side to side in 12-foot seas," said Sue.

Only a few minutes had passed since the knockdown. The crew donned life-jackets and made sure the abandon-ship bag was at hand. John radioed the fleet to advise them of the situation, then aimed the Nordhavn into the seas to ease the rocking and rolling, allowing the crew to determine whether *Uno Mas* was on fire, sinking or both.

Mather made his way from the salon to the engine room, discovering lots of water but no fire, and the emergency pump seemed to be making progress.

The lazarette was next, but on the *40* the only access is through a hatch out in the cockpit, which was sloshing with water (actually the least of the problems). The storage space was jammed full of ice chests, containers and essential gear that would have to be removed in crashing 12-foot seas to allow inspection below.

"When he had something out of the

lazarette," said Sue, "he would knock on the salon door. I'd open it, he'd toss the thing inside, and I'd slam the door shut to keep the ocean out."

Mather worked his way to the sea strainer for the primary bilge pump. He removed it and handed it to Sue. As she began cleaning it, she noticed the blockage was odd. Most of the material looked strangely familiar. Then the realization struck: It was shavings and dust from the boat's manufacture. As Mather worked through the lazarette, the Spencers pieced together the events.

When *Uno Mas* went over, her port side was momentarily submerged. Seawater forced its way aboard via the engine-room vents, through the lazarette vents on the outside of the hull (which had been plugged with sponges for the passage), and past the lazarette's hatch gasket in the cockpit floor. The water pushed into tiny spaces never before accessed, collecting construction shavings from the far reaches of the bilge. The primary bilge pump simply couldn't handle the load. Salt water filled the bilge up to the engine's oil pan. The high-water alarm sounded, and the large-capacity emergency

pump started throwing water overboard.

With the primary pump working again, Mather moved farther into the storage space, where he found the inverter — fried completely black from its saltwater bath. There was no fire. Relief.

The cooked inverter explained the last part of the mystery. The part's failure meant no power was getting to the cooling pump for the Naiad stabilizers, which promptly shut down.

Problems Solved — Not

Uno Mas was not sinking, and she was not on fire. But without stabilizers in a brutal, beamy sea, *The Fearless 40* was more than just uncomfortable; she was downright dangerous. John had the ship aimed into the oncoming wind and waves to minimize the battering while they assessed the emergencies at hand, but that had put them off course. Any farther afield and *Uno Mas* wouldn't have enough fuel to make the remaining distance to the Azores. Getting on course without stabilizers put her at the mercy of a savage sea.

As order was slowly restored, John Spencer continued his radio contact with the convoy's escort ships. Jim

Leishman talked John through the process, to no avail. They went through it again and again. The turbulence wasn't helping, buffeting John, who wears bifocals, about in the tight space behind the electrical panel. "I would tilt my head up a bit, the boat would lurch and I couldn't see."

Failures and frustration grew. No matter how many times and ways Leishman walked John through the steps, the rerouting would not work. Nor would it ever. Jim was talking about a standard system as he knew it, but that was not what John was looking at; the bypass installation done during the winter had been done wrong.

"I'm sure Jim was thinking I didn't know what I was doing," said John, "but we were not talking about the same wiring system."

Leishman discussed the problem with Justin Zumwalt, one of Nordhavn's most experienced project managers, who was aboardship with him. Zumwalt knew he could fix the problem, but it was too rough to launch a dinghy over to *Uno Mas*. No problem — just swim.



The fleet arrived into Gibraltar (above) more than a month after leaving out of Florida. Jim Leishman (below), a VP for Pacific Asian Enterprises, hatched the rally idea more than a year ago and sailed every mile. *Uno Mas* (bottom left) toughs it out in rough water.

The boat's rolling added minutes to every piece of the project. Time ticked away and, with it, more and more fuel.



Leishman, a founder of Pacific Asian Enterprises (builders of the Nordhavn line), suggested that John jury-rig a power circuit that bypassed the inverter. He could run a lead directly from the generator to the stabilizers.

"We have one of those," John said, suddenly recalling the precautionary inverter bypass that had been installed during the preceding winter's maintenance. All he should have



Horta (above), the main town in the rugged and isolated Azores (right), was a welcome sight for rally crews — particularly the one aboard *Uno Mas*, whose scare during the 1800-mile voyage from Bermuda was the most perilous event during the entire passage.

“In a couple of minutes he was here,” said Sue. “No lifejacket, no flippers, no goggles — just his Fluke voltmeter inside his wetsuit.”

“My initial reaction was that there was no need to risk life. I told Jim we’d deal with this somehow. But he told us it was no big deal to swim over.”

Zumwalt, an expert surfer, was well-practiced at swimming in 10-foot seas and made the trek in short order. Fixing

the wiring, however, wasn’t quite as easy.

The rolling boat added minutes to every piece of the project. Time ticked away and, with it, more and more fuel.

Eventually Zumwalt was able to run emergency power from the generator to the stabilizer pump.

The small ship calmed down quickly, and the pace of the work sped up. But even on a level platform, sorting out the botched wiring and

bypassing the fried inverter took more than 90 minutes.

By 5 p.m., Zumwalt was back aboard *Atlantic Escort*. Six hours had elapsed. The fuel would hold out, and as everyone’s adrenaline settled down, so did the weather. *Uno Mas* pointed east, running easily to the Azores. ❁

For more on the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally, click on www.powercruisingmag.com.

RALLY ROUNDUP

The Nordhavn Atlantic Rally was the first-ever trawler yacht cruise in-company across an ocean. Eighteen vessels in lengths varying from 40 to 90 feet crossed 4,000 nautical miles of open ocean without a nysignificant problems. The ships left out of Florida on May 16 and 17. They made stops in Bermuda and the Azores before porting into Gibraltar on June 27.

“The rally was a huge success in every respect,” says Jim Leishman, a VP for Pacific Asian Enterprises, builder of Nordhavn and the event’s organizer. “Intime, we may look at a rally to southeast Alaska or some other trips.”

The Atlantic rally did more than move 18 boats across an ocean. It helped galvanize the loosely associated network of power cruisers into a solid community. It also proved that — thanks to advances in boat construction and electronics technology — trans-Atlantic voyages are now within reach of owners who operate midsize motor vessels.

Following is a snapshot of this one-of-a-kind event.

18: Boats taking part in the rally

3: Non-Nordhavn vessels taking part

\$5,000 to \$9,500: Rally entry fee, depending upon length of boat

109: Total number of participants

13,77: Ages, respectively, of the youngest and oldest participants

3,861.7: Distance in nautical miles from Fort Lauderdale to Gibraltar via Bermuda and the Azores

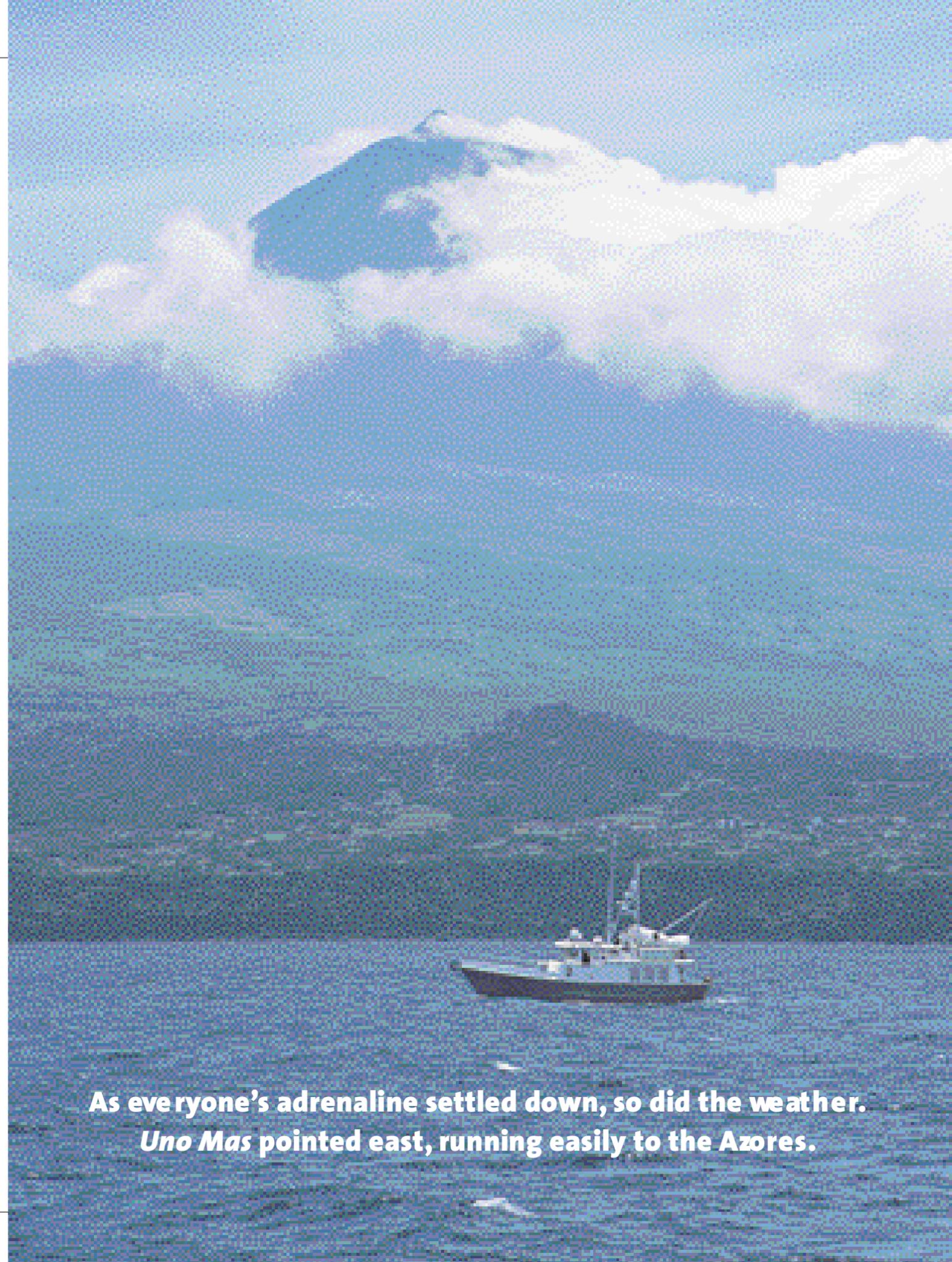
1,800: Approximate distance in nautical miles between Bermuda and the Azores, the rally’s longest leg

1,600: Diesel fuel, in gallons, burned by a typical Nordhavn 46 during the trip

2.7: Size of Gibraltar, in square miles

2: Owners considering going on to circumnavigation

2: Boats being shipped back across the Atlantic this year.



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