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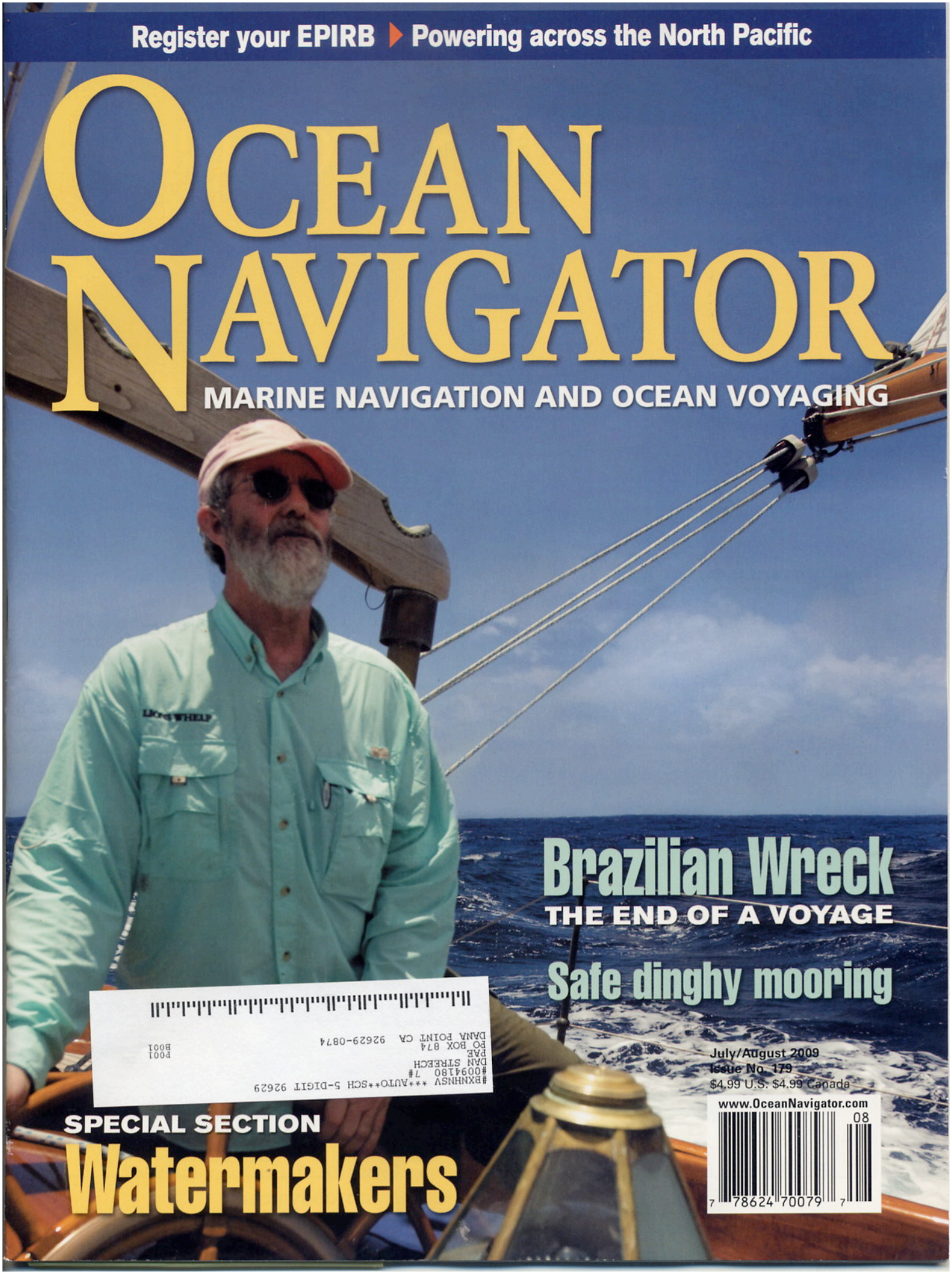

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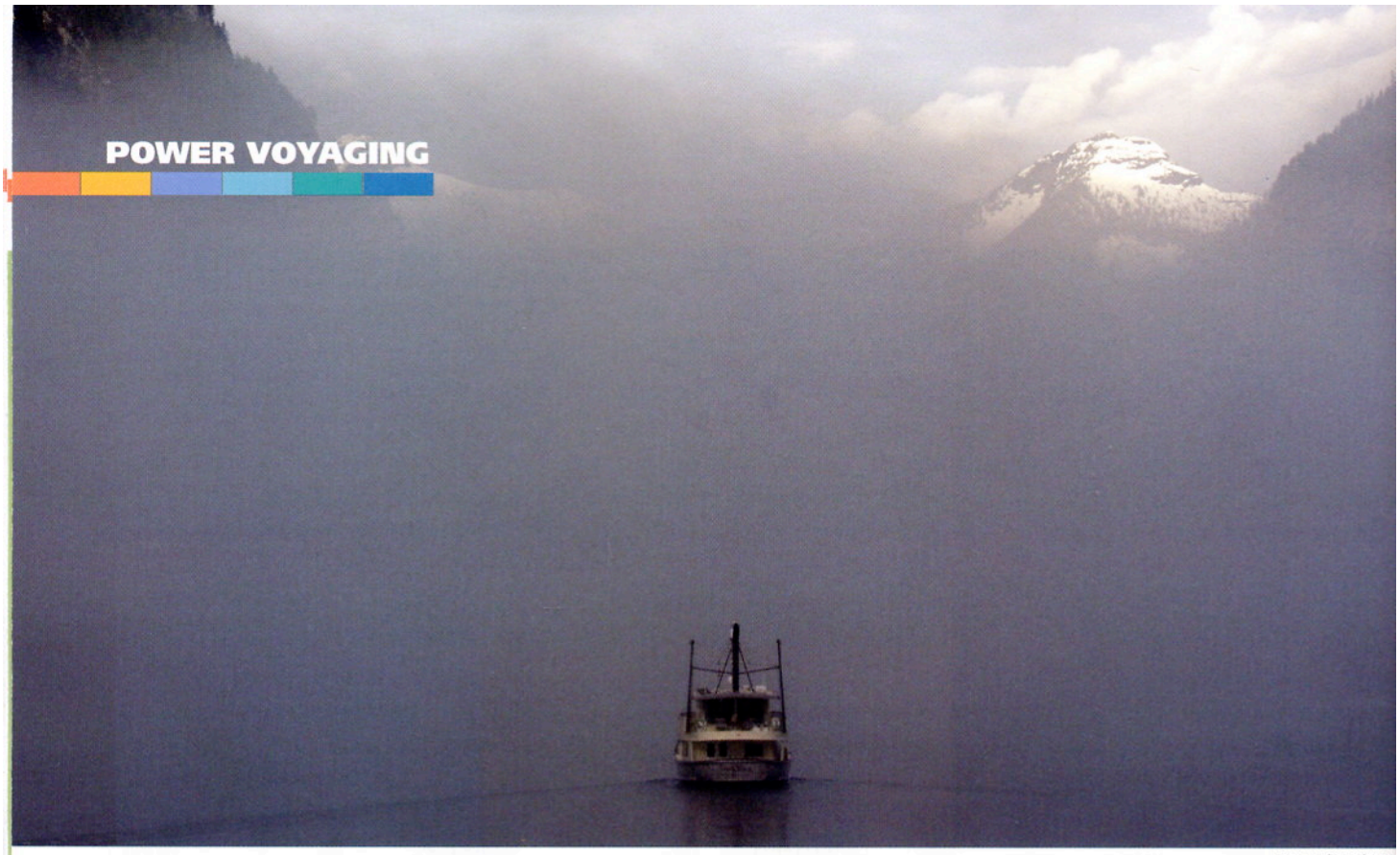


Steve and Carol Argo

# Along the Aleutians, voyaging from Seattle to Japan

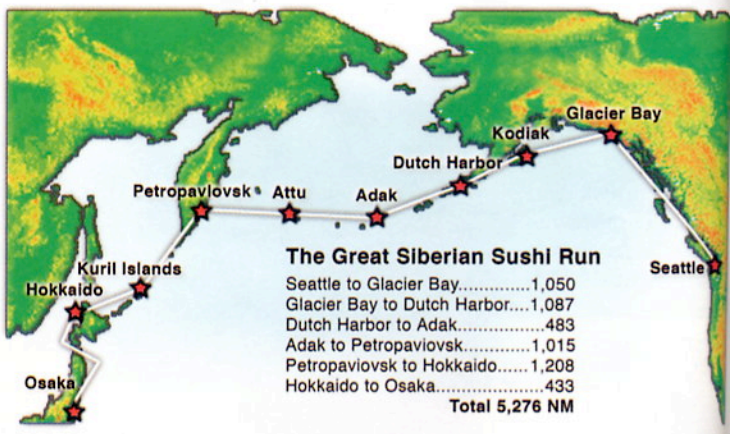
BY TWAIN BRADEN

The Nordhavn 62 *Seabird* enters the fog at Chatterbox Falls in British Columbia. *Seabird*, along with Nordhavn 68 *Sans Souci* and Nordhavn 62 *Grey Pearl*, will cross the North Pacific this summer by way of the Aleutians and Japan.

When Braun Jones envisions the shorelines rimming the Pacific — and its countless archipelagos of islands in between — he sees the outline of an amply-proportioned human body. The forehead is the bridge of the Aleutian Islands stretching toward the Kamchatka Peninsula to one side and the arc of Alaska's coast on the other. The haphazard belt of islands, from Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia and up to Japan, many thousands of miles apart in some cases, stretch across the Pacific's vast belly for a distance of more than 13,000 miles. For Jones this shape explains how he chose the northern route, just 5,500 miles, aboard his Nordhavn 62 *Grey Pearl* to get from the West Coast to Japan.

"It just seemed like a better idea to cross at the narrow part — across the forehead," Jones said, carving the shape in the air with his hands. "I realized we wouldn't have to spend more than about six days at sea."

For Jones and for the other two power voyaging couples joining in on this trip, the key was preparation — their Nordhavns had to be ready to tackle a lonely and sometimes dangerous passage. Engines, fuel systems, and every other system on board had to be checked to ensure there were



no surprises should they be caught by a howling Bering Sea gale.

The original idea was first hatched when, taking out the trash one evening while participating in the MedBound Rally, Jones's wife Tina met voyager John Kennelly. They got to talking, and she learned he, too, owned a Nordhavn (the 62-foot *Walkabout*) and his boat was moored in Japan, having just crossed the northern Pacific with his wife and three children the year before. "I knew Braun would be intrigued by this," Tina said, unaware that his casual interest would morph to inspiration.

But when Jones first proposed a trans-Pacific voyage seriously to Tina, she had quickly stipulated two requirements: no ocean passages of more than a few days and no voyaging alone. She had enjoyed the safety and camaraderie of the Nordhavn trans-Atlantic rally in 2004 and a similar rally in the eastern Mediterranean thereafter, but the long stretches of open ocean, while relatively brief across the Atlantic, would seem virtually endless — and perhaps terrifying — in the Pacific.

## Against prevailing winds

Finding company for the adventure presented a challenge. The voyage is against the prevailing winds and represents some of the least-traveled pleasure-cruising grounds on the planet. Few friends of theirs spoke Russian and Japanese; fewer still seemed to have interest in the storm-tossed waters of the Gulf of Alaska, the Bering Sea, and the northwest Pacific along the Kamchatka Peninsula. But the Joneses pressed their friends Ken and Roberta Williams, owners of the Nordhavn 68 *Sans Souci*, whom they had met while crossing the Atlantic with the Nordhavn rally, and Steven and Carol Argosy, owners of the Nordhavn 62 *Seabird*, and soon hatched a plan — together they would form their own rally, staying together on both the coastal routes and in the ocean passages. The trio departed Seattle in mid-April, and at the time of this writing had just completed the Inside Passage to Juneau, Alaska.

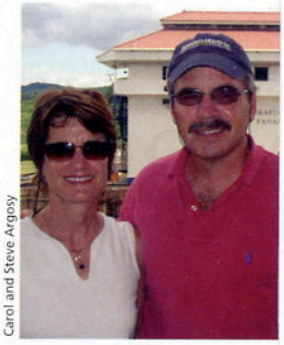
According to Ken Williams, owner of *Sans Souci*, fewer than 20 recreational powerboats have made the passage, both because of the isolation and because of the rough weather. Fewer still have made the voyage west to east.

But one of the pleasures of commanding a 60-plus foot Nordhavn is the comfort of having all the accoutrements and systems of any ocean-going ship — albeit on a smaller scale. Each vessel is a veritable fortress of redundancy and well-engineered systems, from watermakers to generators in the engine rooms to AIS and mini-VSAT unlimited broadband in the pilothouse. Niad stabilizers will quell rolling in the ocean passages — the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Strait, for example — and each vessel is equipped with Arctic-strength survival gear, including oversized enclosed life rafts and full survival suits in the event of emergency.

For more prosaic comforts, Tina Jones quips that she also saved room aboard *Grey Pearl* for the cappuccino maker, her Sub-Zero refigerator, and a ("lightweight") goose-down comforter. "I've watched too many episodes of the *Deadliest Catch*," she added. For his part, Braun Jones admitted to stocking the boat with every conceivable seasickness medication: "Ginger pills, ginger gum, ginger tea," he said, "but I personally believe in ephedrine."

## Meticulous planners

Each of the couples are meticulous planners, and have considered the considerable demands of what will be both a wilderness experience ashore and serious ocean passagemaking at sea. It would be easy to dismiss the voyage as a gentleman's lark, each vessel overstuffed with double-redundant gear from a landsman's fear of not having adequate seamanship skills. But each couple has voyaged extensively, logged many thousands of miles on open-ocean routes and coastal voyaging along foreign shores, and so well knows the risks. They're just exceedingly well



Carol and Steve Argosy

Braun and Tina Jones

Ken and Roberta Williams

At top, Steve and Carol Argosy of *Seabird*; middle, Braun and Tina Jones of *Grey Pearl*; above, Ken and Roberta Williams of *Sans Souci*.

prepared and have done their research. Williams, who has written several books on power voyaging, recently completed marine engineer training; Tina Jones upgraded her USCG master's license to 100 tons; and Braun Jones, whose earlier sailing career included ownership of a 43-foot Mason sloop that he used for numerous Caribbean voyages, became certified in wilderness medicine.

This voyage does raise the stakes considerably for the trio. "All of us have cruised extensively," Williams told me by e-mail from Petersburg, Alaska, just south of Juneau, "but it has generally been fairly calm running. On our Atlantic crossing, we had calm rolling seas virtually all of the time, and even stopped a couple of times for a swim!"

Fast-moving storms adds a measure of anxiety to the voyage that simply did not exist in the low latitudes of the Atlantic.

"This will be the group's first exposure to the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea," Williams said. "We've timed our voyage to give the best weather possible. However, I've been watching the weather in the Gulf of Alaska, and am looking at sustained 30-knot winds as I type this. My guess is that we would not be very happy if we were out there now. Even in the good months, the lows seem to move quickly and strong storms seem to arrive with little notice. Along the Aleutians, we should always be fairly close to an anchorage, but across the Gulf of Alaska we'll be making a three-day passage, with no place to hide."

In addition, the Williamses have also hired commercial fisherman Bill Harrington, a native Alaskan, to serve as a pilot for the Aleutian run — affording the group an insider's knowledge to harbors of refuge, local weather systems, and on-shore points of interest, such as WWII military sites (an interest of Braun Jones, a Naval Academy graduate).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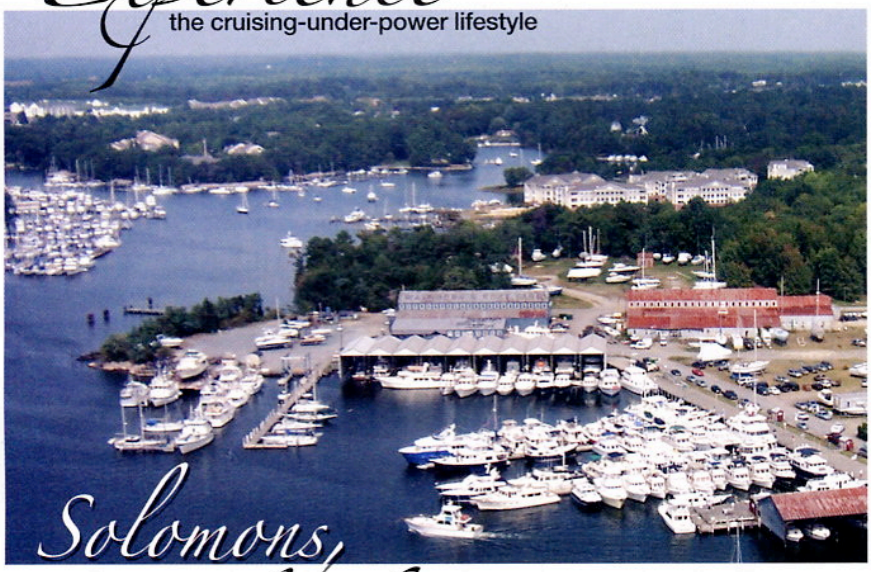

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### Twin engine power

At 68 feet overall, *Sans Souci* is powered by a pair of twin, continuous duty 340-hp Lugger diesels (standard equipment on Nordhavn 68s specify a single 400-hp Detroit Diesel, but Williams wanted the added maneuverability and the "get home ability" of the twins); a Simon Systems monitoring system throughout; dual Village Marine watermakers; and in the pilothouse an Iridium phone, Icom radios, dual Furuno GPS and compasses; a Simrad autopilot; a Dell laptop with MaxSea chart software; and a pair of Furuno radar sets — all linked together with NavNet.

*Grey Pearl* and *Seabird*, both Nordhavn 62s, are powered by slow-speed 325-hp Lugger diesels. Unlike most marine diesels, these feature dry exhaust systems, specifically designed by Nordhavn's in-house design group, Pacific Asian Enterprises. Instead of a seawater cooling system that PAE asserts "introduces the corrosive effects of seawater" and requires a through-hull, an engine-mounted raw-water pump, a heat exchanger, and anti-siphon valves, this closed system circulates coolant through a hull-mounted keel cooler — a system common in commercial applications. Each vessel can carry almost 2,500 gallons of fuel in its four bunker tanks.

The trio planned to voyage separately up the Inside Passage and to meet in Ketchikan, Alaska, for the official start of the rally. When I caught up with them last, in Petersburg, they were planning to steam together to Juneau the following day. From there they envisioned stops in Glacier Bay, Hoonah, and Dutch Harbor, Alaska, and further west, Petropavlovsk, on the Kamchatka Peninsula of Siberia, and then would proceed down the Kuril Islands, to Sapporo and then mainland Japan.

They hope to arrive in Tokyo by mid-summer.

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Courtesy Nordhavn

*Grey Pearl* participated in Nordhavn's 2004 trans-Atlantic rally. On that run, Braun and Tina Jones first got the idea for a North Pacific crossing.

Williams told me. "Nordhavn boats have run millions of miles. We have the safest boats, crossing at the best possible time, with seasoned crews and careful planning. We are certainly concerned, but I'd position (our attitudes) more as highly focused, and paying attention to detail. Where we are going, the storms move quick, and there isn't a lot of forgiveness for mistakes." ■

*Contributing editor Twain Braden is a freelance writer, former schooner captain and the author of the books* In Peril, *the story of a spectacular marine salvage and* Ghosts of the Pioneers, *in which Braden and his family retrace the route west based on the unpublished diary of a nineteenth century pioneer.*


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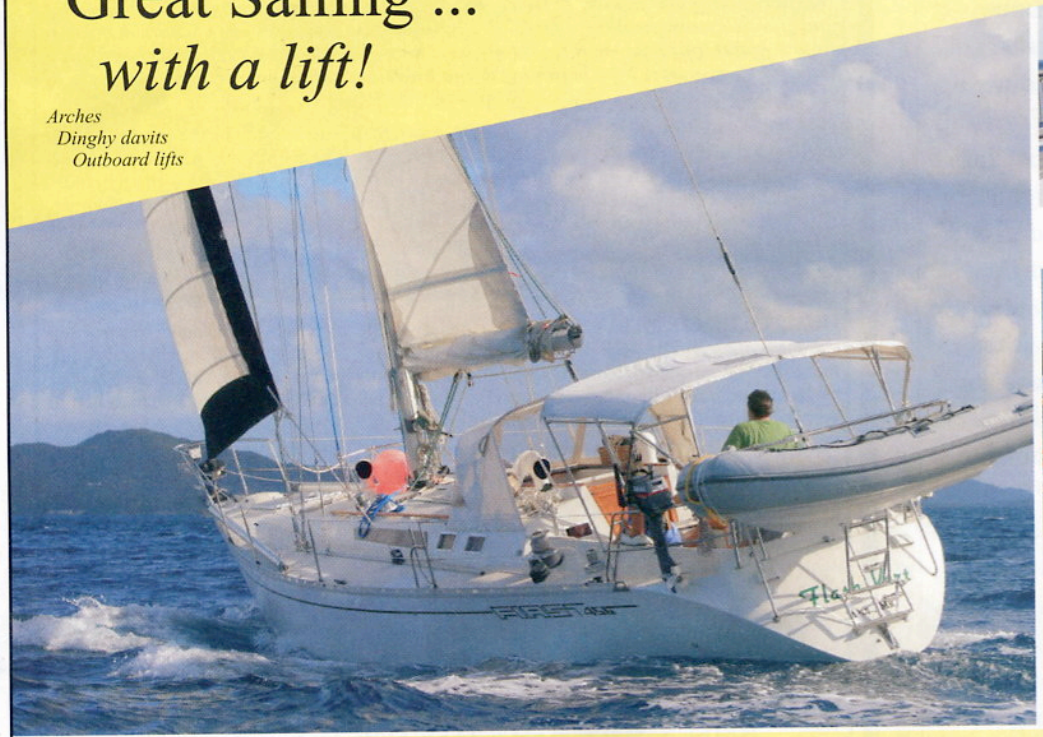
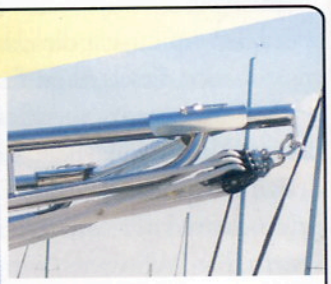
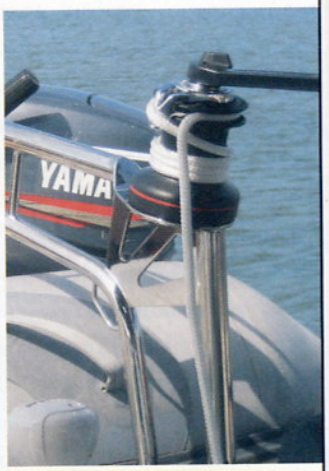




"Quality is in the details."



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