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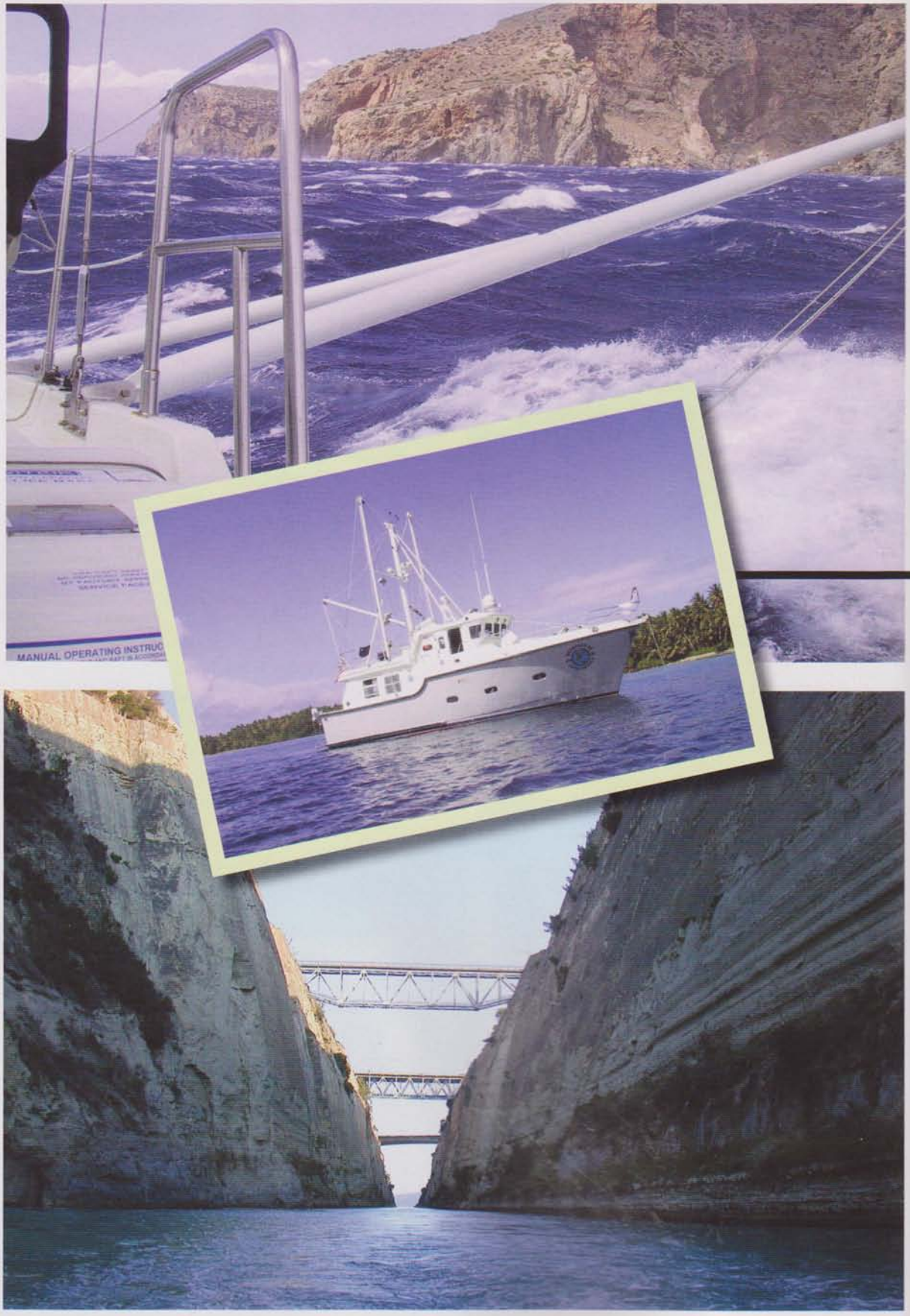

MANUAL OPERATING INSTRUC

Nordhavn 40 Circumnavigation Affirms Both A Hull Design And Heroic Marketing

Twofold Triumph

By Milt Baker

Pacific Asian Enterprises' Jim Leishman has long been known as the company's Vice President for New Ideas, and back in 2001 he came up with one of his boldest–a fast-track, high-profile circumnavigation in a stock Nordhavn 40 that would seek to break two records for production powerboats: the smallest to circumnavigate and the fastest trip around the world.

It was a gutsy proposal–a doozy, as the *New York Times* called it. But that begs the question: Did such a voyage make sense?

At that point Pacific Asian Enterprises (PAE) had built more than 20 of its 40-foot bluewater cruisers and owners loved them, but not one of the 40s had crossed an ocean or even completed a significant offshore passage.

Ever practical, PAE partner Joe Meglen had reservations. "Having known Jim for 20-plus years at the time, I was used to him coming up with a lot of ideas. I thought this was just (another) one of his concepts," Meglen says.

"I had concerns about both the financial costs, and the burden the company would endure by taking key employees away from their jobs for weeks at a time. Circumnavigating in a 40-foot vessel, even one as capable as the Nordhavn 40, is inherently risky, and we could not discount the small possibility that someone might be hurt."

PAE President Dan Streech, Leishman's other partner, liked the idea immediately but also had concerns. "I didn't have any reservations about the capability (of the boat) or the people involved," Streech says. "My only reservation was the cash flow aspect of taking a finished boat out of circulation for the better part of a year."

A lesser man might have dropped the idea right there, but Jim Leishman is one very persistent guy, and it wasn't long before he had Meglen and Streech drinking the Kool Aid. All three partners came to believe that not only could a circumnavigation like this succeed on many fronts, it could pay big dividends. And each went on to captain the Nordhavn 40 for a significant part of the circumnavigation, as did Leishman's brother Jeff Leishman, PAE's chief designer.

"Jim owned the project," says Streech. "And when he takes on something like that he lives and breathes it and worries about it 24/7. Failure was not an option. I knew it was in good hands."

"A successful voyage of this magnitude would set Nordhavn apart from its competition and strengthen its brand," says George Sass Sr., principal of Sass & Associates, a marine advertising agency that listed Nordhavn as a client. "Of course I also thought about the dangers of such a voyage, not only to the physical safety of the crew, but to the brand's reputation if things didn't go

Top, Nordhavn 40 heads for shelter in the lee of the Greek island of Kasos. Note that her paravanes are deployed for stability. Later she transits the Corinth Canal, a shortcut through Greece. At center, Nordhavn 40 waits out tropical storm Faxi at Ailinglaplap Atoll in the South Pacific during an earlier passage.

well. But I knew these boats, and above all, I knew Jim and the Nordhavn crew. If any boatbuilder could pull this off, it would be Nordhavn."

NAYSAYING NAYSAYERS

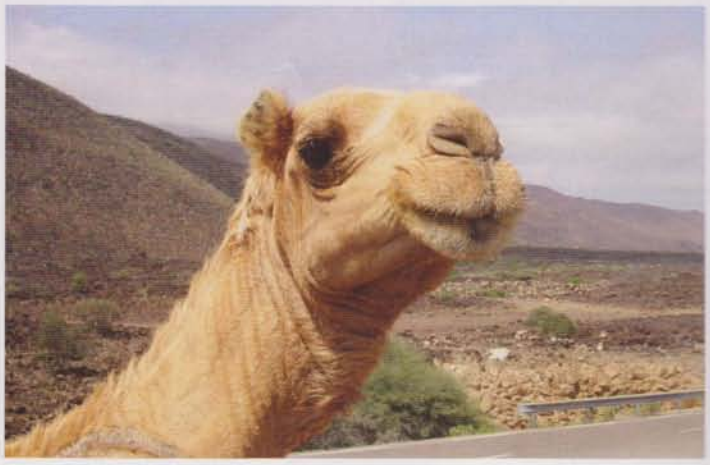
Once the announcement was made, Nordhavn owners and the yachting press were quick to embrace the circumnavigation, but there was skepticism too. A circumnavigation in a 40-foot powerboat–and on a timetable? What are they thinking? What is the relevance? What about the risks?

PassageMaker Executive Editor Peter Swanson saw the relevance. He put it this way "Hemingway, who hunted trophy fish and Nazi submarines, would have understood Nordhavn's press-on-regardless circumnavigation–testing the limits of man and machine was part of the 'Hemingway lifestyle.'"

Jim Leishman saw a parallel to Charles Lindbergh's pioneering nonstop flight across the Atlantic in 1927, an event that catapulted the pilot to world renown. In his mind, a fast circumnavigation by a little Nordhavn 40 would represent the same kind of challenge: taking risks, being first, setting records. That's the relevance he saw. The risks, he was certain, could be controlled.

What PAE's partners wanted was to show the world that an off-the-shelf Nordhavn 40, the company's smallest full-displacement model, could go completely around the world reliably and in safety. Since the 40 was a new design, untested at crossing oceans, they were also eager to see how she would handle the oceans. And they wanted to come home with a book of lessons learned, lessons that could be applied to designing and building better Nordhavns.

As it began to come together, PAE branded the event called the Around-The-World Expedition, or ATW for short.



Above: Villajoyosa on the coast of Spain provided refuge in bad weather. Below: This Omani camel provided amusement during a long layover in the desert kingdom.

SIX-MONTH TIMETABLE

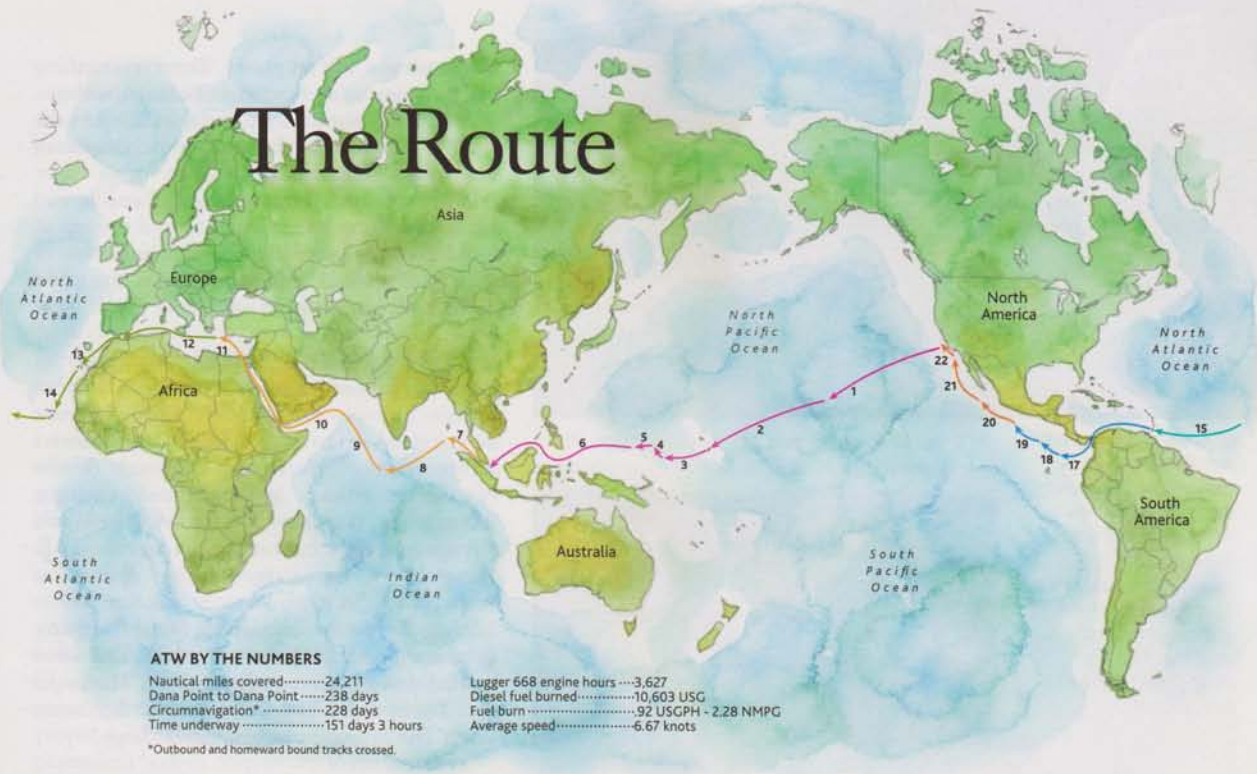
Something it would not be–a leisurely trip. Pouring over *World Cruising Routes*, pilot charts and other references, and discussing the challenges with expert weather forecasters, Leishman became convinced that a November departure from California would offer very good odds the trip could have a good weather window all the way around. He believed the circumnavigation, all 24,000 miles of it, could be done in six months, but it would be tight.

The hull chosen for the ATW was a stock Nordhavn 40, hull number 21, and they christened her *Nordhavn*. She was originally delivered on her own bottom from Dana Point to Seattle as a company boat–a demonstrator, cruising boat and learning platform for PAE employees to cruise the San Juan Islands, Gulf Islands, Desolation Sound and southeast Alaska. For stabilization she was outfitted with both active fin stabilizers and less complex, therefore more reliable, passive paravanes. By the time she returned to Dana Point in the summer of 2001 for final ATW preparations she had about 800 hours on her Lugger 668 diesel and had logged close to 5,000nm. She was well shaken down.

Leishman's concept for the west-about voyage around the world was simple: break it into five separate legs, each with a different PAE captain and rotating crew, with emphasis on gaining hands-on offshore experience for key company employees. *Nordhavn* would carry no fuel on deck, burning only the diesel fuel that could be carried in her built-in tanks, 920 gallons. Barring mechanical problems, boat-stopping weather or health issues, the only stops would be to take on fuel–essentially a fuel-stop-to-fuel-stop circumnavigation.

Weather routing was provided by the late

All photos courtesy of Pacific Asian Enterprises



Map by Steve Stankiewicz

Walt Hack of Ocean Marine Navigation Inc., a company friend and professional meteorologist with decades of experience advising on passages by small, slow powerboats. With dozens of articles anticipated from yachting journalists who would be embedded in every crew, and regular updates from the yacht posted on the company website, the aim would be to share the expedition in real time, to be completely open and transparent, warts and all, for the world to see.

When *Nordhavn* set out for Hawaii from Dana Point on Nov. 3, 2001, voyage director and Captain Jim Leishman was at the helm. He and his crew of three knew they were facing the longest leg of the trip, 2,345nm, and managing the yacht's limited fuel supply would be critical. Almost immediately they ran into contrary weather. Where they expected to find easterly trade winds pushing them toward the Aloha State, they found boat-slowing wind and seas from the west. There were anxious days as the crew carefully monitored fuel burn, but eventually the trades filled in and the yacht made up time, arriving in Hawaii only 15 hours late.

PACIFIC CHALLENGE

However, bad weather would dog the ATW through much of the Pacific–an unseasonal tropical depression followed by a serious tropical storm, and more contrary winds and currents. The little yacht and her intrepid crew endured winds up to a sustained 50 knots, gusting as high as 60, and 18- to 20-foot seas, driving tropical rain at up to one inch every hour. Through it all, little Nordhavn handled it like a pro. "That was a big confirmation in our minds that we were on track with a good hull form," says Jim Leishman.

With the less-than-pacific North Pacific Ocean astern, *Nordhavn* carried on to Singapore, across the Indian Ocean, up the Red Sea and through the Suez Canal, across the Mediterranean, across the North Atlantic, across the Caribbean Sea, through the Panama Canal, up to Mexico and finally back to home California. For the most part, weather was good, but the crews hit rough patches, especially in the Mediterranean and after transiting the Panama Canal. By the time the circumnavigation was complete and *Nordhavn* reached Dana Point, she had covered 24,211nm in 238 days.

Nordhavn succeeded in breaking both records she pursued: The fastest production powerboat circumnavigation and smallest production powerboat circumnavigation. Both records still stand. Other than a single stop to duck tropical storm Faxi in the central Pacific, *Nordhavn* never had a boat-stopping event in more than 24,000 miles.

"Among the many facets of the ATW publicity machine was the terrific interactive, real-time website," says George Sass Sr. "Photos, ship log data, tracking information and onboard reports were uploaded to the ATW section of Nordhavn.com. Items were posted, generally within a few hours, and shot into cyberspace via

Retired airline pilot Paul Grover was a volunteer crew for nearly half the voyage.

Nordhavn chief designer Jeff Leishman and volunteer crew Peter Eunson enjoy a feast. At right, after leaving Port Said in Egypt, Nordhavn 40 got caught in some building seas on its approach to the Grecian isles.

the Nordhavn 40's sat phone. There was nothing like it on any other boat manufacturer's website. The cost was phenomenal, but the daily hits the website received and the number of followers of the voyage were unparalleled."

Thanks to the huge number of emails and posts sent from Nordhavn, it was a toss-up as to which cost more: Iridium satellite airtime or the 10,603 gallons of diesel that took the yacht around the world.

INTERACTIVE PIONEER

With real-time blow-by-blow reports from captain and crew appearing on the website almost daily, a busy Q&A forum with answers direct from *Nordhavn* at sea, and dozens of longer articles by embedded yachting journalists, Nordhavn's Around-The-World voyage proved a marketing bonanza for PAE. *PassageMaker, Soundings, Yachting, Power and Motoryacht, Boating, Southern Boating, Motor Boating, Yachts International, Sea, Ocean Navigator, Circumnavigator,* and even the *New York Times* carried articles, most with pictures. "The pages of editorial were in excess of 100," Leishman says, "The promotional benefit was huge."

AN *AWFULLY* STRATEGIC PORT IN EAST AFRICA

Another risk faced by the Nordhavn Around-The-World crew was terrorism. The voyage began just a couple months after 9/11, and the route required stops in the Middle East and North Africa. When the boat arrived at Oman in early 2002 for fuel and crew change, it arrived during a surge of fighting. With the help of the British military, Omani forces were rooting out Al Qaeda insurgents operating in Oman's hinterlands.

The Nordhavn crew planned to buddy-boat with two other cruising vessels also heading west from Oman to the Red Sea. A British naval officer told them not to worry. Should any native vessels threaten, they were to make a radio call, and the British would have an aircraft over them "in minutes."

No terrorists ever threatened, but *Nordhavn* did suffer a stabilizer failure, and so Nordhavn's Jim Leishman decided to stop and wait for parts. His choice was either Yemen on the Arabian peninsula or Djibouti, a tiny ramshackle rump state near the Horn of Africa. Leishman chose Djibouti. First of all, the bombing of the USS *Cole* in Yemeni waters was still fresh in his mind, but also Djibouti had a two-times-a-week Air France arrival for shipping the replacement parts.

Crumbling and corrupt, Djibouti may well have been the worst place Nordhavn's people had ever seen in their lives. Google "Djibouti sh**hole" and you will pull up 78,000 entries containing the phrase. Every day, half the country's population waits impatiently for the daily shipment of fresh qhat, a midly narcotic leaf that people chew to make daily life bearable. Djibouti's ruling clique was propped up a brigade of the French Foreign Legion on permanent assignment there.

The part arrived, Leishman fixed the broken stabilizer and *Nordhavn* steamed north through the Red Sea and Suez Canal to the Med. Little did the crew know they were among the last outsiders to see the old Djibouti. Since then, the United States has established a secretive military base called Camp Lemonier, manned by 3,200 troops and an undisclosed number of special operators. Meanwhile, the Arab states and China are financing a $4.4 billion port expansion.

So Djibouti is booming, and has even become cool in a backhanded way. Elmore Leonard used Djibouti as the setting for his 2010 novel of the same name (Reviewed by Milt Baker on Page 93.) The story is about Somali pirates and features a trawler inspired by the work of real-life yacht designer Michael Kasten. The book led to a hip-hop song also called "Djibouti."

This market scene by circumnavigator Ed Steele (S/V Doodlebug*) captures the essence of daily life in Djibouti.*

Ed Steele

"Another benefit was to take almost every important person in our company, put them on that boat and let them experience an offshore passage, to live and breathe the boat for days on end," Leishman says. "Project managers, sales people [and] the designer of the boat, spending weeks on the boat, it all makes a huge difference in how you perceive things. Even as a worker, how you might install something or view systems on the boat. We all spent days and days and days in that boat crossing oceans, and that experience flows into every aspect of what we're doing at PAE."

While every crew member learned from the ATW, in terms of lessons learned, the big beneficiary was PAE. Many of the lessons were of the nuts-and-bolts variety that centered on improving or upgrading systems used every day aboard Nordhavns–switching to a variable displacement hydraulic pump, for example, to save fuel powering the stabilizers.

The next new yacht off designer Jeff Leishman's drawing board was the Nordhavn 43, a design that bears the fingerprints of every ATW crew member. Thanks to ATW crew input, that model included virtually everything on the wish list: a second head, proper helm chair, more fuel and water, and a permanent built-in deep-freeze, to name a few.

Other insights were wider ranging, less prosaic. John Wooldridge, an ATW embedded journalist and a longtime marine editor (and now *PassageMaker*'s editor-in-chief), observed, "This showed me personally, and proved to the world generally, that exploration of the oceans of the world was no longer just the province of cruising sailboats."

Longtime PAE project manager Dave Harlow, captain of *Nordhavn* on the ATW for 63 days, longer than anyone else, was Zen-like, flexing his less-is-more cruising chops. "The longer I was on board the more things we found we did not need and just did not use," he says. "You really don't need that much to keep the boat moving and the crew safe, happy and comfortable."

The unrivaled star of the show, 40-foot Nordhavn, astonished her crewmembers as she carried them downwind and down sea like she was on rails. "We were all amazed at how capable that little boat was," Jim Leishman recalls. "We had some pretty heavy weather–big Pacific swell, real long intervals, and 30 knots of trade winds on top of that. Probably more impressive was in the Mediterranean with those really steep, closely coupled seas, maybe 12 feet or so. They'd come right up to the stern, and you'd think, 'This is going to break right over the transom,' but the boat lifts right up and goes right along." He paused a moment, then continued, "There was never a minute on the trip when anybody had to hand-steer the boat–the autopilot was always able to handle the boat with ease."

SUCCESS DRIVES SALES

Also impressive was the impact of the expedition on Nordhavn sales. "I'm sure others will say it put us on the map," says longtime Nordhavn salesman Jeff Merrill, an ATW crew member. "Heck, it was a large yellow highlighter making a glowing ribbon around the globe. It showed that our 40 could do it, and we were completely open and exposed, so any problems would be magnified and dissected." PAE President Dan Streech hit the nail on the head: "It basically changed and established the image of Nordhavn."

Jim Leishman reports that between 2001, when the expedition began, and 2008, Nordhavn sales increased by 400 percent. No doubt the Around-The-World Expedition played a huge role in that, but it's easy to argue that the increase was at least partly due to another of his bright ideas, the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally 2004.

But that's another story.

Milt Baker has owned and cruised a Nordhavn 47 since 2005 and has been a close observer of the world of Nordhavn for more than a decade.

NORDHAVN 40 SPECIFICATIONS

LOA..... 39' 9"
LWL..... 35' 5"
Beam..... 14' 6"
Draft..... 5' 2"
Displ..... 50,000 lb.
Water ..... 220 gals.
Fuel..... 920 gals.
Waste..... 68 gals.
Power..... Lugger 6-cylinder Diesel
Top speed.... 8 knots
Range.... 2,400nm at 7 knots

With colors flying and the crews from the various legs aboard, Nordhavn 40 makes her return to Dana Point, California. At lower right, Nordhavn salesman Jeff Merrill handles lines locking through the Panama Canal.

All photos courtesy of Pacific Asian Enterprises

Shake Djibouti

Read *PassageMaker*'s February 2003 article on the Middle Eastern leg of the Nordhavn Around-The-World voyage. PLUS: A map showing the Nordhavn 40's route. Just scan this code with your smartphone or click Web Extras at www.passagemaker.com.