EXTEND THE LIFE OF YOUR BOAT'S CANVAS // A NONSTOP RUN ALL THE WAY UP THE COAST

Sea

AMERICA'S WESTERN BOATING MAGAZINE

12 TIPS: HOW TO BE A BOAT SHOW BIG SHOT

LIFT ON, LIFT OFF

GET THE LOWDOWN ON THE LATEST DAVITS

NEW BOATS CORVETTE 340
GRAND BANKS EASTBAY 46 SX
SEA RAY 410 SUNDANCER // CABO 36 EXPRESS

1,000s OF NEW & USED BOATS FOR SALE INSIDE

$5.99 USA and Canada

0 71896 48430 4 01

seamagazine.com JANUARY 2012

PICKUP & DELIVERY

A little luck and a lot of skill helped us move Tiger north.

BY JOHN BEATTY

What would you see

if you drew a line from one of the wealthiest towns on the West Coast to the small village of Neah Bay, Wash.? If the line were on a chart and did not cross any land, you would have an approximation of the first voyage of Tiger, a Nordhavn 64 that was delivered new from Taiwan to Nordhavn's facility in Dana Point, Calif., and had commissioning work done in several different locations, the last being Newport Beach — 1,100 miles from its destination of Neah Bay. I made the delivery voyage.

Neah Bay, Wash. (top), is where *Tiger* ended its journey. But its journey — the North American portion anyway — began in Dana Point, Calif. (left), more than 1,100 miles south.

LEFT **The last landlubber to see *Tiger* was standing on the Newport Bay breakwater. He waved. Good luck was his message. There was some luck mixed with some skill involved in this trip.** RIGHT **The sun was setting as we passed Long Beach and Los Angeles.**

My only other ocean experience was taking *Fluke* from Brookings, Ore., to Seattle in 1998. *Fluke* is the Krogen 42 my wife, Linda, and I own. On that trip, I hired a skipper to show me the ropes. What I volunteered for on *Tiger* was a much longer voyage, covering the West Coast, but it was something I always wanted to do.

Three people made the nonstop trip to Neah Bay. Why nonstop? The 1,100 miles would use a little more than one-third of *Tiger*'s range. Stopping along the way might have been interesting, but pulling into a port at that time of year — April — when the wind and seas could pick up, could have meant being stuck in port for a couple of days or more. The job was to move the boat north to its home.

The owner/skipper of *Tiger* is a retired airline pilot. Lucky, a Transpac sailor, and I, another retired pilot, made up the rest of the crew. Lucky had some ocean-sailing experience. The skipper and I had crossed a few oceans, too, but at a much higher rate of speed than the 9.5 knots the Nordhavn offered and at a much higher altitude. Navigation and mechanical systems knowledge in the air and on the sea are similar, though. We were both up to date on electronics, radar and radio communication.

Lucky and I were not very involved in the rather-thorough preparation work. The owner's considerable experience with other boats and his previous trips along the coast left little to chance. The actual trip was easier than getting ready. We expected a few challenges:

- **EVADING WEATHER**, especially off Point Conception where some boat builders use sea conditions to test vessels' seaworthiness and hull strength.
- **STAYING CLEAR OF CROSSING TRAFFIC** into Long Beach, San Francisco and Portland.
- **AVOIDING CRAB-POT FLOATS** off the Oregon coast at night.

HELPING HANDS

"Here is your five-day forecast." You hear that every night on the news. The marine forecast is very different, however, and a big deal to anyone making a coastwise trip. The 64 is capable of handling rough conditions, and banging through head seas for 100-plus hours would be a true test of man and machine, but I knew the skipper wanted to plan the trip to avoid rough seas. To do that, he used the services of a weather router. Why rely on luck if you don't have to?

The question for our expert forecaster was "When can we leave Southern

LEFT **Nobeltec AIS kept the crew updated on ships around *Tiger*, such as *Chinook*.** RIGHT **Engine room cameras provided an added layer of safety during the trip.**

TOP **The water was flat as we passed Vandenberg AFB just north of Point Conception.**
BOTTOM **North of San Francisco, the weather turned and kicked up much bigger seas. By day three, the weather cleared, the seas calmed and the weather router gave a green light to Neah Bay. North of Portland, about 20 miles offshore, a tired-looking sparrow hitched a ride. It rested for about an hour and left.**

California with a reasonable chance of a five-day window of pretty good weather?" The answer was both simple and complex. Simple in that it was a date and time. Complex due to the many considerations that went into the final answer. The forecaster gave us a three-day prior alert (get ready), a one-day notice (get set) and then said it was time (go). While en route, we got daily updates via sat phone telling us to keep moving north.

Radar is the basic tool for detecting and staying clear of other boats, but to help with traffic avoidance, we were equipped with an Automatic Identification System — my first practical experience with AIS. My research on the subject led me to believe I didn't need AIS for my kind of cruising. In the Northwest, the waterways are fairly free of commercial traffic after you get north of the Straits of Juan de Fuca. This trip convinced me to invest in AIS.

We passed Long Beach at dusk the first night without feeling crowded by big ships. The watch schedule started at 2100 hours. We stood three-hour watches until 0900 the next day. The rest of the time, the rule was this: Nap as necessary as long as one guy was rested and stayed awake. The schedule rotated so we each got stuck with the 0300 shift an equal number of times. The skipper and I had plenty of practice staying up all night in our previous lives flying air freighters. I found listening to satellite radio very helpful in staying awake. Looking for other boats in the area to call and chat with was also a helpful distraction.

We passed Point Conception about sunrise on day two, and it was practically calm. We felt lucky. Conception is sometimes called the Cape Horn of the West Coast and can give mariners cause for concern when passing by anytime of year.

ANY PORT IN A STORM

Weather forecasts are less accurate as the time frame extends past a day or two. After passing San Francisco, we

ABOVE LEFT **We came across a Makah Tribe canoe at Neah Bay.** ABOVE RIGHT ***Tiger*** **sits at rest in Neah Bay after an 1,100-mile journey north from Newport Beach.**

were told it might get rough enough to have to seek shelter. There are several small harbors and bays on the way north, but they are not always available when the weather gets rough. In many cases, the harbors are there because it's where a river flows to the sea. The river brings sediment that it deposits at the entrance to the harbor, creating a bar, and the shallow depth makes for extra-rough water at the entrance. Add to that a strong river current and a brisk wind in the opposite direction ... I'm making myself seasick here.

If the seas are bad enough, the local Coast Guard will announce that the bar is closed, meaning no vessels should leave the harbor, and if a boat gets into trouble trying to come in, the Coast Guard may not come out to assist. In these extreme conditions, the local station can dispatch larger boats from other ports to help. As a last resort, a helicopter can be used to rescue the crew. The phrase "any port in a storm" does not always apply.

Keeping this in mind, prudent skippers make an early decision to seek shelter. As we proceeded north, we familiarized ourselves with the next possible harbor should we need to make use of it. Once past Fort Bragg, we studied the entrance to Eureka. On passing Eureka, we looked at Crescent City and so on. But our luck continued. On day three, the weather forecast got so good that our weather router said, "You guys don't need me anymore. It's all good weather-wise from now until your ETA at Neah Bay."

DON'T GET CRABBY

About the time we got the good weather news, we entered the crabbing grounds off Oregon. The crab-pot floats do not show on radar, because the surface of the water is seldom flat. By day, in reasonable visibility, you can avoid them. At night, good luck. Even with bright lights facing forward, it is hit or miss — literally. Wrapping a 600-foot line around the prop can have serious repercussions. Enough line can cause vibration, which leads to a precautionary reduction to idle power and then a shift to neutral. There may be enough resistance on the prop and shaft to cause the engine to stop when it is put back in gear. This is exactly what happened on *Fluke* a few years ago. *Tiger*, however, is equipped with spurs — blades forward of the prop — that cut line instead of wrapping it up.

The chart indicated there was an alley that should be crab-pot free for north-south traffic along the coast, because of an agreement between towboat operators and crab fishermen. Our charted position was accurate (we were not lost), but the zone did not seem to be where it was charted. We heard later that the "pot-free zone" is actually where crabbers put old gear they don't mind losing, but charts aren't strong on nuance. Speaking of charts, the required paper charts covering the entire route were on board — about 80 black-and-white copies at a cost of about $450.

As we neared Cape Flattery, we knew this trip would end ahead of schedule, mostly due to favorable currents and good weather. We arrived at Neah Bay, just inside the Straits of Juan de Fuca, before the fuel dock closed and waited for daylight to continue to Victoria, B.C. The logs floating on the straits and elsewhere on the Salish Sea are almost impossible to see on radar. They can damage props, stabilizer fins and rudders. Most pleasureboats do not run at night on the inland waters of the Northwest.

Neah Bay is a small town that is the commercial hub of the Makah Nation on the northwest corner of the continental United States. There are about 1,000 residents, mostly Native Americans. Their livelihood revolves around tourism and fishing. There are no frills: no nightlife, no condos and no shopping malls. Quite a contrast to the place we left five days before. The nonstop portion was about 1,087 miles and took just under 120 hours. I, for one, was never bored, not even on the graveyard shift.

The way I described the trip to my envious friends was to compare it to cruising up the West Coast in my living room — except my living room is not quite as nice as *Tiger*'s.