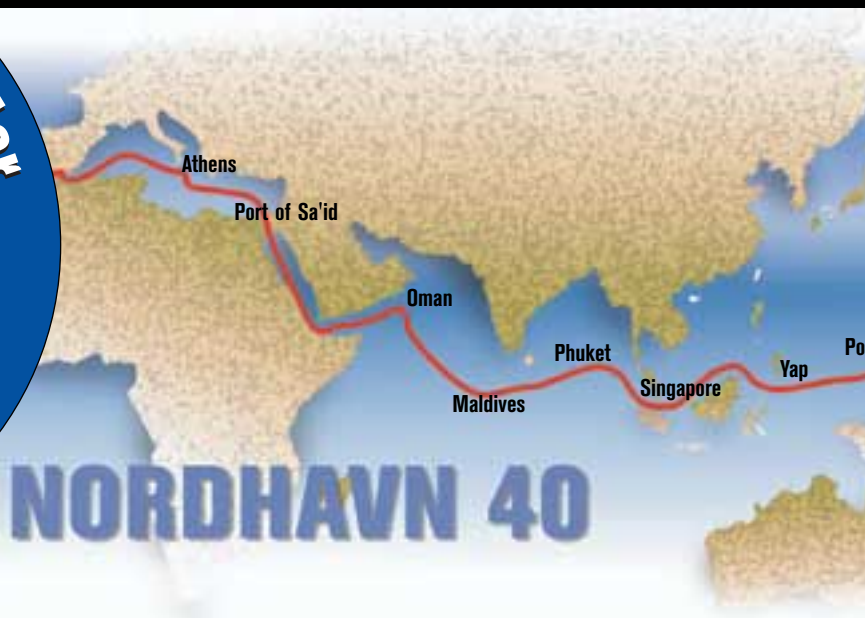
Around the World in a 40-footer



STORMY DAYS AND

photos courtesy of Pacific Asian Enterprises

A TOAST TO SUCCESS — (left to right) Tom Selman, Capt. Dave Harlow and Ray Denet enjoyed their calm sunny days on the water, but they would see rougher days ahead. Much rougher days.

STICKY NIGHTS

On the way from Hawaii to Singapore, the Nordhavn 40 survived a typhoon – and a lack of air conditioning

By Jim Leishman

On November 3, 2001, a Nordhavn 40 began a six-month, 23,000-plus-mile circumnavigation of the globe. At the helm on the first leg of the cruise was Jim Leishman, vice president and co-founder of Dana Point, California-based Pacific Asian Enterprises Inc. (P.A.E.), builder of the Nordhavn line of expedition-capable trawler yachts.

Last month, the crew had finished the first leg of the journey, arriving in Hawaii. Here's what happened once the *Nordhavn* crew arrived in Hawaii and set out for Singapore.

After 2,345 miles and 16 days at sea, *Nordhavn* was greeted off Diamond Head by *Valhalla*, a Nordhavn 46 skippered by Paul Grover, and escorted into Hawaii Yacht Club. Aboard *Valhalla* were numerous guests — including my wife, Sue, who had flown to the islands for our arrival.

Ray Denet, who would join the crew for the next leg, was on the dock to help tie us up. He threw his sea bag aboard, eager to inspect his new home for the weeks to come.

We had a great arrival and dinner party ashore, which went on until most of Honolulu was fast asleep. Our only regret was that guest crewmember Georgs Koleskinovs, the organizer of Trawler Fest, had to make a hasty departure to catch an evening plane. We owe him a night on the town, and we greatly appreciate the weeks he spent helping us.

The next four days were consumed with re-provisioning, refueling, changing oil and tackling various maintenance items on the boat. Additionally, we spent two half-days with free-lance photographer and frequent *Sea* Magazine contributor Rick Gaffney, getting shots in front of Diamond Head.

We spent our last day at the beautiful Ko Olina Marina, where we met crewmember Tom Selman. He is a good friend who owns *Prime Time*, a *Nordhavn* 50.

A CHANGE IN PLANS

My original dream of this around-the-world voyage included me skippering our boat all the way to Singapore. I've never been to the South or Central Pacific, and I have always wanted to cruise there.

However, the events of 9-11 gave us a bit of uncertainty about the security of the upcoming Middle East leg of our cruise. As the overall cruise director, I felt I should volunteer for that leg.

Dan Streech, company president and manager of daily business operations at P.A.E., who was to skipper the boat through this Middle East leg, will instead join the boat in the Caribbean and bring *Nordhavn* up the West Coast.

So, after the Dana Point-to-Hawaii leg, I left *Nordhavn* and returned to Dana Point. However, I lived the voyage each and every day thereafter as I provided weather information and assistance for the long Pacific leg of the cruise. I would rejoin *Nordhavn* and relieve our crew in Singapore.

ON TO SINGAPORE

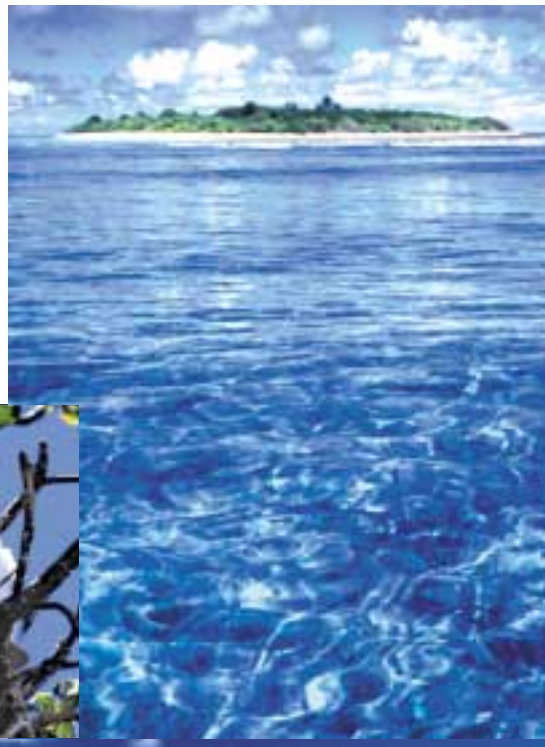
With a good forecast and 2,000 miles to go, *Nordhavn* (with a full load of fuel and supplies) departed Ko Olina at 1 p.m. November 23. The crew was bound for the island atoll of Majuro, within the Marshall Islands chain. Dave Harlow was the new skipper, with Ray Denet and Tom Selman as crew.

The first leg to Hawaii had been plagued with unfavorable winds and currents — and this next leg, too, would prove difficult. Within three days of Hawaii, a weak low came through, creating more southwesterly winds and an east-setting current. As *Nordhavn* worked its way through lower latitudes, the temperature and humidity soared.

During the heavy weather — and, in particular, the heavy rains — it was necessary to close up the boat. This made things quite uncomfortable aboard. It became apparent that our lack of air conditioning was a mistake.

This boat was originally built for a summer's cruise to Alaska — and when we decided to take it around the world, the space requirements and expense of an air-conditioning system seemed excessive. We had thought that, at sea, with constant trade winds, we could get by without it.

Nordhavn made landfall at Majuro on December 5, after spending 13 days at sea. The conditions improved, with strong northeasterlies filling in. However, the sea conditions were rough and there were constant rainsqualls. Waiting in Majuro was boating journalist John Wooldridge, who would



board *Nordhavn* for the voyage to Pohnpei. If he only knew of the excitement he was in for.

CALM BEFORE THE STORM

After routine fueling and servicing at the commercial docks and a little sightseeing and provisioning, Capt. Dave put to sea for the island of Pohnpei, about 800 miles to the west. The northeasterlies were stronger than ever, and conditions were rough upon clearing Majuro. With winds at 30 knots, and with 10 to 12 foot seas, the crew settled in for a tough five-day passage.

Back in Dana Point, my job was to provide daily weather reports and assist our crew. Aside from the strong but somewhat typical trade winds (all looked normal), we saw no tropical disturbances or advisories — nothing to indicate a problem. I gave the crew a green light, via our Iridium satellite phone and Stratosnet e-mail.

Within a few hours after departure, to my amazement, the Joint Typhoon Agency of the Navy and Air Force issued a tropical depression alert — the center of which was expected to track upward and across the path of Pohnpei, right where our boys were headed.

This was more intense weather than I felt comfortable to predict, so I called a friend: weather forecaster Walt Hack in New Jersey. He went straight to work, trying to sort out this late season tropical depression (TD).

We needed time to watch this situation develop, so I recommended that Capt. Dave divert his course slightly to the island atoll of Ailinglapalap, where there was a safe anchorage within a large lagoon. This tiny island is about 170 miles west of Majuro and only about 15 miles north of the crew's track line to Pohnpei.

Capt. Dave agreed. Within 12 hours of his arrival at the island, the TD had built strength and direction — heading off on its predicted northwest track. Hack believed that the TD was no longer a threat, so I reluctantly released Dave to resume a heading for Pohnpei.

The Joint Typhoon Agency releases an update of tropical depression, storm and typhoon tracks and speed every six hours — and I found myself anxiously awaiting each new report. In the middle of the night, I headed downstairs to check the latest news.

I was shocked to find out that, within 24 hours of *Nordhavn*'s departing Ailinglapalap, the tropical depression had been upgraded to a tropical storm — now named Faxai. Even worse: It had turned to the west, then south and then back to the east. Sustained winds of 50 knots were being reported, and Faxai was heading around to the east of Pohnpei.

I called Hack to confirm what I found out — and he was more surprised than I was. This isn't supposed to happen.

I immediately consulted my com-

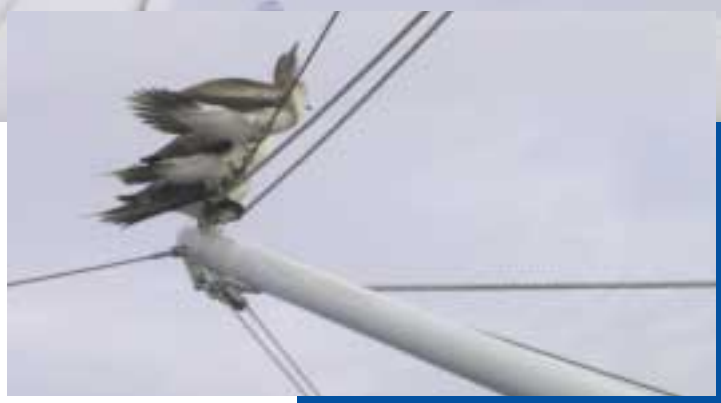
CALM AFTER THE STORM — If you're wondering why Ray Denet (above) and the others bothered to face the challenges of tropical storms and the lack of air conditioning, it's because of the beautiful sights they encountered along the way — many of which could only be experienced by boat.

photos courtesy of Pacific Asian Enterprises

puter and worldwide charts (which were contributed by C-Map) and noticed the Island of Kosrae, about 150 miles south of *Nordhavn*'s track, would be the only refuge from Faxai. We calculated that, at a full cruising speed of just under 8 knots, the vessel could make Kosrae before dark the following day — and could stay out of the predicted storm track.

In the hours to follow, Faxai continued to disobey the law of storms and continued to track farther east than anticipated. It was now headed directly for Kosrae, and it was predicted to arrive at the same time as *Nordhavn*.

We had no choice but to push on. With seas at 18 to 20 feet and sustained winds in excess of 40 knots, landfall was made at the western harbor of Lele. The winds were howling and the rain was torrential, blocking our onboard radar's ability to penetrate it.



SEAGOING STOWAWAYS — Booby birds hitched a ride on *Nordhavn* mid-ocean as the boat cruised from Hawaii to Majuro.

The entire crew strained to see the entrance buoys. Capt. Dave felt uneasy about the plotter's accuracy, so he spun the boat around and began heading out, into the rising sea. There was another harbor on the lee side of the island, and he felt it safer to push on rather than make a fatal mistake here.

Just then, the crew looked aft from the cockpit and saw a break in the rain. The entrance buoys and channel came into view. Capt. Dave went to full throttle and spun the boat again in the huge seas — surfing in with his knees knocking. Capt. Dave got them into Lele safely and dropped anchor.

Amazingly, Faxai parked itself over Kosrae and stayed for five full days — at times dropping 1 inch of rain per hour. The boat was in a small basin with a seawall behind, anchored in 30 feet of water. Due to the lack of swinging room, only about 150 feet of chain could be laid out — but fortunately, the big 110 pound Bruce anchor never budged.

It was a stressful time for the crew, as the boat could not be left unattended. The wind would tumble over the high island peaks and blast down on *Nordhavn* from all angles. At times, when squalls would pass through and the winds would increase, Capt. Dave felt compelled to run the engine in anticipation of a dragging anchor. Additionally, there were two other sailboats within the anchorage, and there was concern that they might drag into our boat.

The heat played a major role again, during the heavy rains. The humidity was unbearable — but with nearly horizontal rain coming from all angles, even one open port would have soaked the boat's interior.

By this time, Capt. Dave and Ray Denet had adapted somewhat to the heat. However, big Tom Selman from Seattle and John Wooldridge, who'd had so little time to acclimate, found the heat to be extremely oppressive. Tom said he was going back to the Pacific Northwest and was going to lie in the snow all day — making snow angels.

Finally, Faxai regained its direction and sped off to the northwest. Moving higher in latitude, it attained typhoon strength — and then super-typhoon force, with sustained winds of up to 190 knots. Guam battened down the hatches in anticipation of Faxai — but it turned north, then headed back east and then died.

John Wooldridge had run out of time and had to leave *Nordhavn* in Kosrae. He never made Pohnpei — but he still had plenty to write about.

Despite the weather, each crewmember had time to do some solo exploring of Kosrae (while the others watched the boat), and each found great beauty in the tiny island. Rugged and mountainous, covered with a canopy of lush jungle and overflowing with waterfalls and springs, Kosrae is a tropical paradise with friendly and

NO WORRIES — *Nordhavn's* crew stopped to mingle with the Ailinglapalap locals, who happily live the pure joy of island life.

photos courtesy of Pacific Asian Enterprises

happy people.

YIPPEE FOR YAP

Capt. Dave, Ray Denet and Tom Selman departed Kosrae and enjoyed a routine passage the remaining 300 miles to Pohnpei. After a quick turnaround, *Nordhavn* was bound for the Micronesian island of Yap — 1,200 miles farther to the west.

Because of the delays caused by Faxai, Tom Selman was out of time and would have to leave the boat upon its arrival in Yap. In his place, P.A.E. technician Brad Smith would meet the boat, bringing a new Marine Air 16,000 Btu air-conditioning system. Normally, we would do a factory installation of three units — but this single unit would be enough to cool the boat and allow the off-watch crews to sleep in 70 degree comfort, despite the 95 degree deck temperatures.

A couple of days out of Pohnpei, Capt. Dave noticed an oil leak in one of two hoses attached to the remote-mounted oil filter. The leak started off as a drop, but the volume increased by the hour. As fate would have it, we had spare hoses aboard for our steering system, stabilizers and transmission coolers — but nothing for the oil filter.

We decided to reroute to Chuuk, where the famous Truk Lagoon lies. There is regular air service into Chuuk, so Alaska Diesel could ship new hoses directly to us.

While we were in Chuuk, the crew had the opportunity to see some of the World War II wreckage that Truk Lagoon is so well known for. After receiving the hoses and completing the 10 minute task of changing them, *Nordhavn* was off for Yap. With continued fair weather, the vessel made landfall on January 7.

COOL CRUISING

At Yap, Tom Selman left us after six weeks of invaluable help — and aboard came Brad Smith, with his tools and air-conditioning system.

Capt. Dave had been away from home for almost eight weeks and Ray Denet had been away almost six weeks. With only about 2,000 miles left until *Nordhavn* would reach Singapore, the two became even more eager to get back.

Yap turned out to be a terrific place

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to spend a couple of days sightseeing, so work on the air-conditioning system was deferred until at sea.

After departing Yap on January 9, with the best weather of the whole Pacific voyage, Brad Smith — with Capt. Dave's help — installed the air-conditioning system in a couple of days. It was a revelation to cool the sleeping cabins and get complete relief from the tropical heat. The saloon and wheelhouse would rarely use the air conditioning while at sea, but based on our experience, I'd highly recommend having air conditioning in the sleeping cabins of any boat cruising in the tropics.

Now in front of Capt. Dave was the first region of the cruise where we had concerns about security: the Philippines.

We had originally planned to avoid the southern part of the islands, where there have been reports of some terrorism and pirate activity. The southern part of the Sulu Sea has been regarded as dangerous for many years and is usually avoided by pleasureboats.

The route we had selected was through the San Bernardino Strait, then we planned to zig and zag our way to the north end of Mindoro, to the port of Galera. After leaving Galera — we would run down the coast of Palawan, to Singapore.

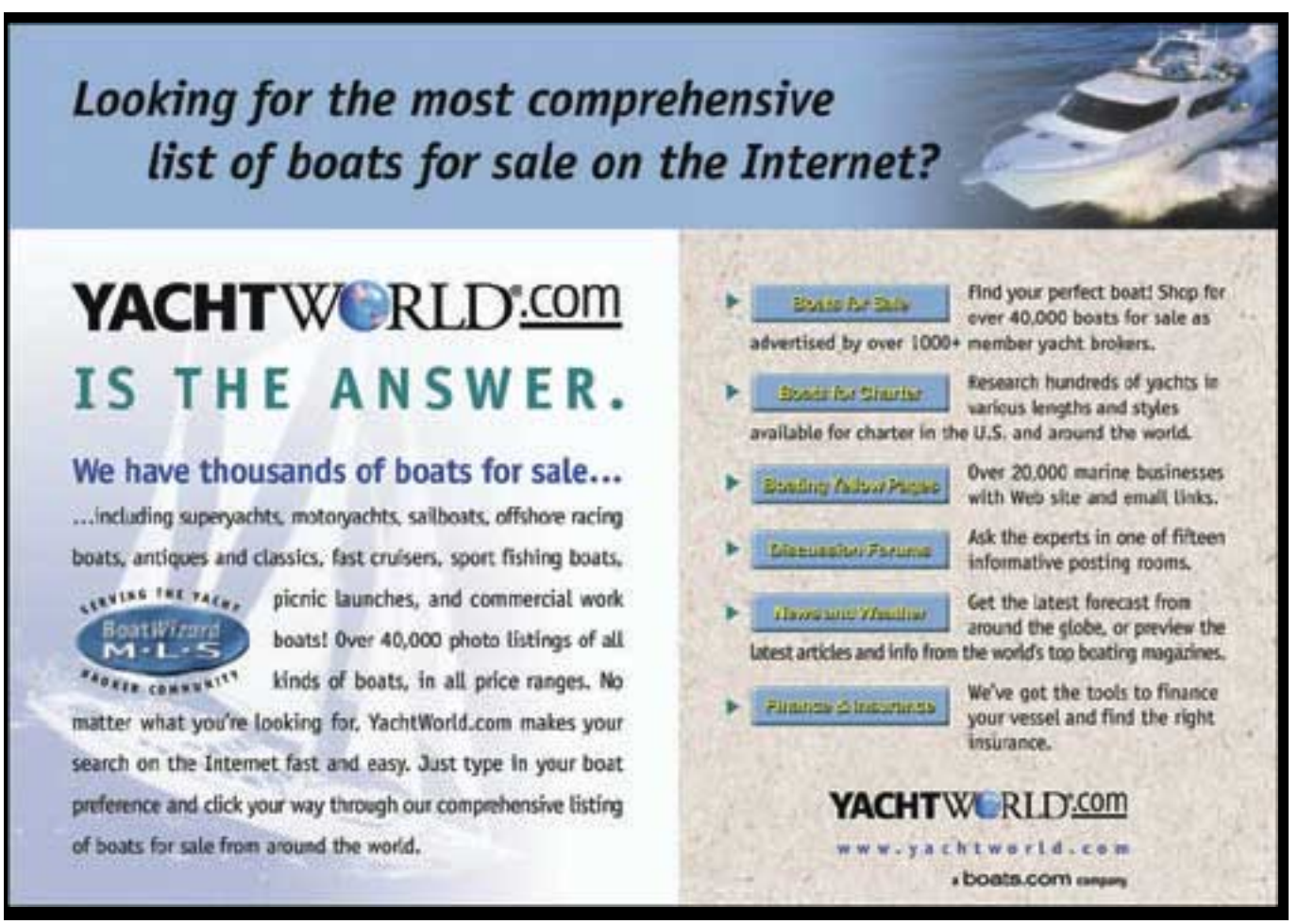
As Capt. Dave approached the Philippines, he was getting a favorable current and sea conditions were flat. From experience, he knew that another stop — involving clearing in; visiting the port captain, immigration and fuel docks; then clearing out — would take at least 72 hours. He calculated that the boat's remaining fuel would take *Nordhavn* all the way to Singapore.

We decided it would be wise to take a more southern route through the Surigao Strait, across the Sulu Sea, down the coast of Borneo and head right on into Singapore. The crew made this 2,000 mile passage nonstop in 14 days, with fuel to spare.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Unfortunately, things did not improve for Capt. Dave after I left him in Hawaii. The long-awaited northeasterlies that provide a fair sea and favorable currents in the central Pacific gave way to a record-setting typhoon and the weeks of wind and current disruption that it caused. *Nordhavn* had a very trying voyage on it's first Pacific Leg of over 8,000 miles. However, it had performed beautifully, with only a few minor problems — all easily fixed en route.

On January 24, Brian Saunders, Paul Grover and I watched *Nordhavn* motor into Singapore's Raffles Marina — and the boat looked fresh, clean and ready to continue on its epic round-the-world voyage. Dave Harlow, Ray Denet, Tom Selman and Brad Smith had delivered the vessel safely, without incident.

The next 6,000 miles of the voyage — and the politically troubled water ahead, which had been the subject of so much debate — would provide our next challenge.

In the months ahead, Leishman will share further adventures of the Nordhavn 40 round-the-world cruise with Sea *readers. For more details on the voyage and a link to the daily cruise update, go to www.goboatingamerica.com*