

Leg 2: Bermuda to the Azores

1,800 Miles and Counting

On May 16, a fleet of 18 trawler yachts set out on a record-breaking cruise of a lifetime: an Atlantic crossing. The Nordhavn Atlantic Rally — the ultimate boat owner's rendezvous cruise — would take these trawler crews on the buddy-boating adventure of a lifetime. In the third part of our series on this incredible odyssey, rally organizer Jim Leishman of Pacific Asian Enterprises in Dana Point, California shares his Leg 2 cruise experiences aboard the Nordhavn trawler Atlantic Escort.

By Jim Leishman



FT. LAUDERDALE • BERMUDA • AZORES • GIBRALTAR



Elated with the success of the first leg of the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally from Ft. Lauderdale to Bermuda, all boaters involved were determined to enjoy our weeklong stay at Royal Bermuda Yacht Club. For the crews of *Atlantic Escort* and the two additional escort vessels, *Autumn Wind* and *Sans Souci*, fleet repairs were minimal, leaving ample opportunity to explore and play once we docked.

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To solve transportation problems, scooters were rented and the island's roads, beaches, forts, towns, restaurants and pubs were thoroughly investigated. Our Caribe 14 rigid inflatable boat was in constant use, exploring the bays and reefs and some of Bermuda's renowned diving spots.

Famous for its wreck diving and nearly 80-degree water, Bermuda offered us close to 200 feet of visibility, and most agreed that conditions were perfect. After throwing in a healthy portion of nightlife, our stay in Bermuda was delightful.

As the week passed, my thoughts began to drift to the serious business

on the horizon. The next leg — Leg 2 — was the longest passage of our transatlantic voyage. I thought about how 18 diesel power boats had never before crossed the Atlantic in a convoy, and my pre-departure anxiety began to return. I looked forward to getting the fleet under way, because my jitters always subsided once we had left the dock.

Walt Hack, our New Jersey-based weather forecaster, was concerned about the amount of activity over the North Atlantic. An intensifying low was developing near Newfoundland's Grand Banks, and while it was predicted to pass far to the north of our course, I couldn't help but worry

about it.

The evening before our Division 2 departure on May 30, a formal dinner was held at Royal Bermuda YC. Crews of each rally boat attended the event dressed in traditional blue blazers, ties, Bermuda shorts and knee-high dark socks.

I had the honor of sharing a table with the commodore and vice commodore of the yacht club and enjoyed hearing about the club's history. Dating back to 1844, Royal Bermuda YC has earned the reputation of being one of the most prestigious clubs in the world and has hosted the biannual Newport Bermuda Race for almost 100 years. The halls and meet-

ing rooms of the club are filled with yachting history, and it was a heady experience to be welcomed into this establishment.

THE PLAN

The waters around Bermuda had been whipped up by southwesterly winds as a result of the lows far to the north, and rough conditions were predicted for our Sunday morning departure. To our surprise, the morning brought light breezes, and our Division 2 fleet left on time at 08:00.

Leaving Hamilton and retracing our arrival route back to Five Fathom Hole required about 12 miles of careful navigation through Bermuda's buoyed channels. Once at sea, we found excellent conditions with a light breeze and comfortable following seas off our starboard quarter.

Hack suggested we run true east staying below 32 degrees north latitude until we reached a west longitude of 55 degrees before proceeding directly to the Azores. This course diversion would only add about 40 nautical miles to this leg and would ensure that we stayed well to the south of the low pressure system while taking advantage of the westerly winds and swell that was predicted along this parallel.

Within our Division 2 boats (or the "slow fleet," as it came to be called), the speed of the fleet was dictated by



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our smallest vessel's speed or range capability. In this case it was *Uno Mas*, a Nordhavn 40. It was agreed that the boats in the slow fleet would target their speed at 6.3 knots.

Leg 2 was more than 1,800 miles — almost double the distance of the Florida to Bermuda leg. The 7 knots the slow fleet averaged on the voyage to Bermuda would not be practical on this longer leg because of fuel consumption.

The larger and faster Division 1 fleet aimed for a speed of 8 knots, rather than the 9-knot average of the first leg. It was decided that the Division 1 boats would leave on June 1 — allowing them to catch up to us as we closed in on our Leg 2 destination — the Azores Islands.

CALM BEFORE THE STORM — After a generous helping of Bermuda culture and scenery (top), the crews embarked on the second leg of the rally, which proved not to be as trouble-free as they hoped. *Autumn Wind* (left and bottom), the Division 2 escort boat, fouled its main propeller just a few days before that group was supposed to arrive in the Azores. After conditions improved the foul was removed and the boat arrived to a marina full of cheering rally participants.



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EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Three days out of Bermuda, our medical team was called into action with reports of severe abdominal pain in Charles Metcalf aboard *Four Across*, a Nordhavn 50. Our fleet doctor, Kevin Ware, responded by asking Metcalf a series of medical questions over the radio. Dr. Ware concluded that he would have to examine Metcalf in person, a possibility that we had planned for.

In the moderate seas we were experiencing at that time, our small Achilles inflatable was easily hand-launched by the crew from its perch above our cockpit. My son and crewmember aboard *Atlantic Escort*, James Leishman, motored Dr. Ware over to *Four Across*, and, timing the seas carefully, he was able to step easily aboard through the amidships boarding door.

Within 45 minutes, the pain was diagnosed as a kidney stone, and pain medication and antibiotics were provided to Metcalf, who was back on his feet the following day.

By midweek, the Atlantic had taken on the appearance of an enormous millpond. *Atlantic Escort's*

The crew of *Strickly for Fun* summoned us over the radio and asked if they could photograph our vessel with our entire crew on the foredeck. We happily agreed, and once we were in perfect position, ruthlessly were assaulted with a barrage of water balloons in a well-planned ambush.

tender was launched for waterskiing, angling, crew transfers and photography.

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loons in a well-planned ambush. I had just witnessed such an attack the previous evening while watching the movie "Master and Commander" in the saloon of *Atlantic Escort*.

The glorious day continued with numerous swimming parties, evening barbecues and an unforgettable experience on the North Atlantic.

The evening watches proved to be as enjoyable as our days. During a period of high pressure, calm seas and clear skies, the mid-Atlantic is free of ambient light and offers a brilliant view of the stars, planets and galaxies above. The time was passed with hourly log entries, engine room inspections and occasional adjustments to course and speed calculations to maintain a proper separation between the divided fleet.

Even for the solo watchman, there's always someone to talk to on the radio, and relaxed conversations among crews could be heard on numerous working VHF channels.

As planned, we turned in a direct course for the Azores upon reaching 55 degrees west longitude. Our speed was a bit off, in response to a west-setting current, but because of fuel



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FUN AND GAMES — Though Leg 2 wasn't without its troubles, the crews did manage to work in some recreation. James Leishman (left) found the time to swim between technical challenges. Dinghy rides also were a way for the crews to interact during pleasant weather, as Eric Leishman, Jenny Stern, Amy Zahra, Leah McGettigan, Garrett Severen and Brad Smith demonstrated.



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AZORES



Jim Leishman photo



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PARADISE ISLAND — Though the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally crews experienced their fair share of ups and downs during the second leg, when they reached the Azores (top and near left), it all seemed worth it. The amount of greenery on the island can be attributed to the abundant rain the island receives throughout the year (on average, humidity on the island is 77 percent).

transferred water successfully to *Four Across*, and the same procedure in transferring fuel again was followed.

On our first attempt, the towline wrapped around *Uno Mas*'s stabilizer, which our divers (James and Eric Leishman) cleared. Once the towline was secured, the fuel line was passed to *Uno Mas*. Within 20 minutes, the job was done. Because of this transfer, *Uno Mas* could increase speed in order to make our scheduled arrival in the Azores.

requirements, increasing speed was not practical for our smallest vessel, *Uno Mas*.

Taking advantage of the fair weather, we decided to transfer about 100

gallons of fuel, allowing *Uno Mas* to increase speed. *Atlantic Escort* had been built with a special fuel transfer system in anticipation of such a need. On our first leg, we had

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

The wind and the seas began to freshen as numerous lows to the north pushed the westerlies farther south than normal. West to southwest



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Time Flies — Even though Leg 2 was the longest leg of the rally, the crews were often on the go. Cruising into the marina at Horta on the island of Faial in the Azores (top left) was a feat in itself for the Division 2 boats, which had been slowed by numerous technical difficulties. Amid the problems, some of the crews managed to find time for tubing from dinghies (bottom left) and other watersports. Leishman, as the organizer, was the busiest, but nonetheless found time to enjoy the trip (above). At the heart of Horta is its busy government-operated waterfront (right), which is frequented by recreational and commercial vessels.

winds were forecast all the way to the Azores with a high slowly pushing its way into position from the south. The building seas proved a challenge for our autopilots and stabilizers, but coming under our stern, conditions aboard remained quite comfortable. Approaching the islands, Hack began to warn of more serious weather approaching with near-gale conditions probable.

The Division 1 boats ran fast and hard to make it into our port of Horta before the worst of the weather hit. *Atlantic Escort* would be the last boat to tie up and maintained pace with *Uno Mas*. *Autumn Wind* (the Division 2 standby escort) also would remain at pace; however, three of the faster Division 2 boats decided to move ahead of the pack.

With 400 miles to go, *Strickly for Fun*, *Four Across* and *Sea Fox* (a Krogen 58) asked permission to run for the Azores ahead of us. While I didn't recommend this, I didn't forbid them to go.

As predicted, the southwesterly winds increased to 35 knots, accompanied by 12- to 14-foot seas. With about 150 miles to go, *Uno Mas* called to warn us that it had lost its inverter and could not produce 120 volts AC, the most significant impact of this being the loss of the hydraulic cooling pump needed to operate its stabilizers.

The boat was rolling around uncomfortably, but was still perfectly seaworthy. Without AC power, it would lose its freezer and have to endure discomfort for the last 24 hours

of the voyage. We tried to talk the crew of *Uno Mas* through the procedure of bypassing its inverter, which would allow them simply to run their generator. Unfortunately, they lacked the tools and expertise to make the repair.

My engineer and first mate Justin Zumwalt, who helps build Nordhavns, knew exactly what had to be done and wanted to get aboard *Uno Mas*. It was too rough to hand-launch the Achilles, but Justin offered to swim over to the boat with a waterproof tool pouch to rectify the problem. After about a half hour of watching the movement of the boat and the seas, as well as considerable debate over safety and proper procedure, it was agreed that this expert diver and surfer could safely carry out the mission, and within 20 minutes, *Uno Mas's* systems were fully operational.



Sea conditions continued to be rough as night fell. Around midnight, we received a call from *Satchmo*, a Nordhavn 46, with news that it was indicating a high fuel vacuum and changing its filters was not helping. An hour later, the crew told us they had lost power. In order to provide assistance, *Atlantic Escort* had to catch up to the rest of the Division 2 fleet, while *Autumn Wind* stayed with *Uno Mas*.

We finally had come within 5 miles of *Satchmo* when that boat's crew called to advise us that they were under way again and that the problem had been the result of mis-managing their fuel supply and return manifolds.

Relieved, I had gotten into my bunk when *Autumn Wind* called and calmly reported it had fouled its main propeller and was running on its wing

engine at 4.5 knots. We turned *Atlantic Escort* 180 degrees against the wind and plowed back toward *Autumn Wind* — 25 miles to our west.

At sunup, *Atlantic Escort* was running alongside *Autumn Wind*. *Uno Mas* had run ahead, and we had the duty of escorting our standby escort boat into port. At the speed we were forced to run the boats, we found ourselves traveling downwind and increasing speed to maintain good stabilizer and rudder control. I asked my son, Eric Leishman, aboard *Autumn Wind*, if he thought he could go into the water to clear the foul. His lack of enthusiasm made it clear to me that he felt the procedure was unsafe.

By mid-morning, the conditions seemed to be improving. James Leishman and Justin Zumwalt, both aboard *Atlantic Escort*, studied the movement of *Autumn Wind* and

assured me that they could safely inspect the propeller, and if possible cut the foul away.

I eventually agreed, and, with wet-suits and dive knives, the two went to work. *Autumn Wind* shut down its main engine and maintained position using only its bow thruster. After carefully inspecting the situation, the two divers successfully cleared the foul, which consisted of about 50 pounds of polypropylene line.

Autumn Wind was soon under way on its main engine and we ran together to the Azores at 10 knots, arriving in the marina to a cheering (and safely tied up) fleet at about 16:00 on Friday, June 11, 12 days out of Hamilton. ♡

Next month in Sea Magazine, we'll follow along as the Atlantic Rally fleet embarks on the final leg of its voyage, from the Azores to Gibraltar.