

*Our 40th Year*



## BCMS NEWSLETTER

April 2009

As part of our Annual May Long Weekend Sail-In, the Annual General Meeting of the British Columbia Multihull Society will be held at 20:00 hours on the beach or nearby facilities at Port Browning, North Pender Island on Saturday May 16, 2009  
Agenda will include:

- Report to members
- Budget Approval
- Financial Statements
- Election of Officers

All Members of the Society in good standing are encouraged to attend.

**We hope to see you!!**

Check out all upcoming events at <http://www.bcms.bc.ca/events.html>

### 2009 Semiahmoo International Regatta

April 25th - 26th 2009

The Semiahmoo Bay International Regatta 2009 is organized and conducted by the International Yacht Club of British Columbia. The fleet will be divided into divisions and classes according to PHRF rating handicaps at the discretion of the Race Committee. This is a Vancouver Area Racing Council (VARC) event and VARC division splits will be used for competitors registered with VARC.



Spring is arriving in Victoria and it is time to start planning for the annual multihull classic at Swiftsure. Those of you who read Multihulls Magazine were reminded last month of the close finish with three competitors crossing within two minutes of each other.



**SWIFTSURE**

And in the Rosedale Rock Race, only two boats managed to finish, both being multihulls.

There are two races open to the multihull fleet. Our long course goes as usual to Neah Bay and is about 105 NM. For those wishing to have a more relaxing weekend and have more time for the on-shore activities, the inshore Rosedale Rock Race is also available. It is closer to 20 NM and should finish in daylight. It goes to Pedder Bay and return, with the course depending on available wind.

The activities start on Friday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May with the annual Multihull Dinner at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. We found this venue to be better value and quality than the Empress Hotel, so will do it again this year. I expect the cost to be close to the same as last year (around \$40.00 CDN). We will be happy to accept American currency at par value. Multihull enthusiasts who are not racing are also welcome.

The race sequence starts Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May at 09:55 with our start at 10:15, the same as last year. We had considered a later start to avoid the usual light winds before noon, and to allow time for a leisurely breakfast, but the tides at Race Passage dictated otherwise. There could be a catered breakfast however in the large tent before 0700. I will keep you informed.

The steering Committee has put a lot of effort into pre-race activities. There will be bands on Thursday and Friday in the Bimini. Please acknowledge our major sponsor, Pacific Western Brewery, by testing their product on both evenings. It is only because of them and our other sponsors that we manage to keep entry costs as low as they are. There will also be a BBQ on one of those nights in the tent.

Royal Vic has over the past ten years made the multihull fleet one of the most prestigious. We were called "The Darlings of the Fleet" in the Times Colonist a few years ago. Let's keep this tradition up and have a good showing for the race this year.

Please contact me with any questions, comments, or suggestions.

Regards.

John Green  
Swiftsure Multihull Chair  
Home: 1-250-544-4324  
Cell: 1-250-415-5204

# Small Cruising Cat – Great Big Ocean

by Carllie and Garrett Hennigan

Tethered on our parachute anchor to a heaving sea midway between Mexico and Hawaii, we were losing heart. We were not stuck in a storm system that would pass in 12 to 24 hours; this was a stationary weather system of intensified trade winds that would not shift for days, possibly weeks. As huge waves rolled under our small cruising catamaran, our spirits flagged. We were losing confidence in ourselves and in the forward momentum of our crossing. We had expected our first ocean crossing to be pretty easy, having set out during the prescribed time when, as one friend put it, this passage is supposed to be one of the most benign in the world. It wasn't.



Yet, here we are enjoying our third month in Hawaii, having safely sailed those 2,700 miles. As cruisers discover the joys of sailing and cruising on catamarans, many are venturing offshore. Despite the fact that the ancient Polynesians sailed the uncharted Pacific in their double-hulled sailing canoes for thousands of years, the myth remains that catamarans are somehow unsafe. Perhaps this stems from people seeing lightweight beach cats flip or pictures of capsized racing multihulls. These high-performance boats are very different from the modern cruising catamaran. How did we prepare ourselves and our boat for the crossing? There is a growing base of knowledge on the special considerations in sailing offshore in a catamaran, and here we cover some of those points and share the knowledge we gained in sailing our 32-foot cat on our first offshore passage.

**OUR VESSEL** We built our Richard Woods-designed Gypsy catamaran and launched her in 1999. She is of modern design and construction, the hulls being constructed of cored foam fiberglass, and the cockpit and bridgedeck cabin of wood, 'glass and epoxy composite. During next seven years sailing in our home waters of British Columbia, we tweaked *Light Wave*, adding an arch and hardtop, a catwalk and a bowsprit with a free-flying screecher, and reinforcing and upgrading her in many other ways to prepare her for offshore sailing. In July 2006 we literally cut the tie to land and set out on a two-year adventure to Mexico, Hawaii and back to Vancouver.

Sailing down the rough and windy northwest coast of America identified a few further areas that needed upgrading. Even with our best intentions to cruise light (we

hadn't gotten to the stage of cutting our tooth brushes in half to reduce weight) our cat was still heavily loaded for long-term cruising. While a keel boat can absorb an extra 1,000 pounds above designed weight and not feel that different, a catamaran's performance suffers, especially a smaller one like ours: it sails slower, there is more hobby-horsing, and because it sits lower in the water there is more slamming to the bridgedeck in big following cross seas. We addressed these limitations during our trip, thanks to the simplicity of the Woods design. In one week on the water at a San Francisco marina, we cut out the bridgedeck nacelle floor and raised it five inches. And during seven weeks on the hard in Guaymas in the Sea of Cortez from mid-April to mid-June 2007, we extended the aft hulls four feet and raised the whole cockpit and central cabin sections another six inches.

We started psyching ourselves up for our maiden ocean crossing when we returned to the Sea of Cortez in September 2007 after having spent the hot Mexican summer months at home in B.C. Although we had made many two or three-day passages and done lots of night sailing over the years, the thought of sailing out into the big blue sea with untold fathoms of water under our hulls and no land for over a thousand miles was still daunting.

**HEAVY WEATHER TOOLBOX** The most important point of seamanship in considering heavy weather *is to avoid it* by sailing passages only in the recommended times (Jimmy Cornell's *World Cruising Routes* is the definitive guide); and, equally importantly, to move out of areas during their hurricane, typhoon or cyclone seasons. Even with careful planning, bad weather can still catch up with us. Successfully handling it in a catamaran requires special consideration. Though techniques such as heaving to and lying ahull can be used in a catamaran, its relatively lighter weight causes it to not only surf in smaller waves, swells and wind but also to surf faster. This requires early use of a speed-limiting drogue off the stern in moderate conditions and a parachute anchor deployed off the bow in a full-blown storm to stop the boat and keep the bows into the breaking waves.

The following describes our experience with the cruising catamaran's heavy weather tools--a drogue and parachute anchor--when we sailed from Mexico to Hawaii in March 2008. Before leaving the Sea of Cortez we had extensively practiced deploying our 48-inch ParaTech Delta on 150-foot non-stretch 3/8 inch polyester line and our 12-foot ParaTech Sea Anchor with 350 feet of super-stretchy nylon rode, a retrieval float and a 400-foot 1/4-inch polyester non-floating trip line.

Our catamaran was ready: all equipment had been checked and double-checked and spares purchased. After walking the streets of La Paz and taking cheap and cheery taxis home from supermarkets for a week to provision *Light Wave*, we left the city on March 2, 2008 and, after two overnight stops heading around the tip of the Baja Peninsula, on March 4th bade gentle Mexico "*Adios y gracias para todo!*" as we sailed past Cabo San Lucas.

The Woods Gypsy is designed for safety: the hulls are separated from the bridgedeck by 6-inch walkways, which means you can walk forward very safely to the bow in heavy seas with four feet of hull deck between you and the water, the tradeoff being that you have to go outside to get from one living area to the other. We actually like this arrangement as it gives us more privacy in each living area, and one of us can be actively living life, so to speak, in one area while the other is resting in another. We had beefed up *Light Wave* by completely surrounding the cockpit with hefty 42-inch-high railings made with 1 1/4-inch stainless tubing. For our crossing we also tied several sets of ropes at shoulder height to provide additional safety in the more extreme movement in big seas; and we had a firm rule that we never ventured forward out of this “cage” of railings and lines without attaching our inflatable life vests onto the our jacklines running to the bows.

For the first ten days of our westward passage we coped with this year’s *La Nina* “reinforced trade winds” of 20 to 25 knots. Sailing in these east-northeast winds and waves would have been fine, but we were constantly jarred by cross swells generated by the last of the winter storms far away in the North Pacific. It was like tubing behind a water-ski boat, going around and around in circles as the waves get all mixed up, only in this case the combined waves were 10 to 12 feet high. As the sun set on the 11th day, the winds cranked up to 30 to 35 knots as the gale developed. Exactly as practiced, we deployed our drogue off our starboard aft quarter to slow us down to 5 knots and prevent surfing down the ever-steepening waves. By then it was pitch black night, and being deprived of sight, our more acute hearing was assaulted with the sound of the water and wave tops crashing, gurgling and rumbling around and under us. Conditions had deteriorated so much by midnight that we decided the drogue was not sufficient, and it was time to lie tethered to our parachute anchor off the bow. Fortunately, a seasoned offshore catamaran sailor had advised us to set up all the lines for the parachute anchor before putting out to sea--running from the bows through a bridle back to the cockpit along the deck edge (tied with small twine that would break when the rode was loaded), ready to deploy from the cockpit while running downwind--to avoid having to go out onto the bows in the teeth of a storm. Now, we share this vital piece of advice with every catamaran sailor we meet.

Before we could deploy the parachute we had one small problem: we had to retrieve the drogue first as we did not want to risk it tangling with the parachute. However, because we did not want to go sideways to the seas to slow the boat down, we were unable to pull the drogue in against the force being generated by our 6 knots of boat speed. And so we waited.

By 4 a.m., with winds of 35+ knots and the seas building, we decided to risk putting out the parachute with the drogue still trailing behind us. We easily deployed the parachute anchor system from the aft deck, again exactly as practiced, and *Light Wave* slowly turned her bows into the wind and virtually came to a stop. We were now, in effect, anchored to the surface of the water. Fortunately, the parachute rode did not foul with the drogue line, and we were able to retrieve the drogue without difficulty when our speed dropped to near zero. Now we were safe. It was a relief just to relax and rest until

dawn as *Light Wave* rose and fell on each huge wave. We quickly established a routine of crawling forward every two hours to check the heavy rubber chafe guards that protected the bridle lines.

**WE'RE OUTTA HERE!** We endured 28 hours on our parachute anchor mid-ocean, pinned to the sea like bugs to a corkboard as *Light Wave* was relentlessly buffeted by the huge waves roaring under and around her. Through monitoring weather channels and the ham nets of other cruisers and by downloading weather faxes we determined that this was not a low-pressure system, front or hurricane that would blow through in 12 to 24 hours, but a huge unmoving area--1,000 by 1,500 miles--of very reinforced *La Nina* trade winds that may not move for a week or even a month. Declaring our first and only axiom of the trip, "There is no point in being safe in the middle of the ocean if you can never leave," we decided that in spite of our qualms it was time to go. Fortunately, we had used a full trip line from the parachute back to the boat, so it was relatively easy to retrieve all the components of our parachute anchor and set sail into the sunshine. Boy, did it feel good to be finally under way again!

As night approached, the winds and waves were still up, so we re-deployed our drogue off the stern, only this time with a bridle run through two snatch blocks. What a difference! Our speed was not only controlled to a smooth 5 to 6 knots, but all the side-to-side sluicing motion stopped.

**LESSONS LEARNED** Although we still faced 1,350 miles, once we cleared this area the seas gradually moderated and the rest of our crossing became a continuous routine. We sailed faster during the day and usually shortened our sails for the night watches. As we progressed toward our idyllic tropical destination, we mulled over our handling of the unexpectedly big winds and seas we had encountered and concluded that we would have been far better off in these conditions to use our drogue properly deployed on a bridle, rather than our parachute anchor. In our "newbie" fright at our first encounter with big wind and waves mid-ocean, we could hardly wait to get that parachute anchor out so we would be safe on the sea, just like other catamaran sailors whose experiences we had read about in the *Drag Device Data Base*. Now that we are more seasoned blue water sailors, we know better. A parachute anchor is still the ultimate survival tool for a catamaran in anything over 45-50 knots, but in 30-45 knots a drogue deployed with a bridle off the stern controls your speed and direction while allowing you to continue sailing at 5-7 knots (depending on the size of the cat), which is exactly what you want. It is essential to carry a drogue and parachute anchor of sufficient size and with enough rode to do the job (the manufacturers will tell you exactly what you need for your catamaran); to practice deploying this equipment in non-threatening conditions; and to set it up ready to deploy from the cockpit before you go to sea.

Friends who are seasoned offshore sailors, in addition to assuring us that we would be fine, offered advice on handling watches. The system that worked for us was that from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. we had no structured watches, just like when we are day-sailing; then at 8 p.m. we started three four-hour watches, switching days so that every other day one of us got 8 hours of sleep in during the night. This schedule kept us well

rested; and the daylight hours together gave us time to relax, talk, share meals and plan, and thus remain united.

Sailing a windy ocean in big waves and swells creates a continuous cacophony of water rushing by and around the boat. In our designated sleeping berth in the port hull we used very effective foam ear plugs coupled with a large fan to generate white noise, which made sleeping possible even during the time on the parachute anchor when the waves were rumbling, gurgling and roaring by the boat.

When you are all alone in the middle of an immense body of deep water facing challenges you have never faced before, it is easy to lose heart and consequently become confused. It is important to take one day at a time, to do what you can right now to keep the boat moving, and not to get too high or too low--in other words, keep an even keel (pun intended). During our long-term sailing adventure I had gained greater mastery of seasickness, but we carried a goodly supply of scopolamine patches to make sure I would never be debilitated to the point of not being able to stand watches. Also, in getting to know many cheerful, upbeat women who had sailed offshore extensively with their husbands, I realized that a positive, happy attitude was as essential to the crossing as our storm equipment. Mental toughness is just as important as the seaworthiness of your boat, as your boat and your lives can be placed in extreme jeopardy if you are incapable of making quick, clear decisions.

Our reward for the long days and nights and countless lonely hours on watch crossing the Pacific Ocean has been spending three months exploring the Hawaiian Islands as only cruisers can. Very soon after our arrival we felt the tension of the long days at sea ease out of our bodies and minds, to be replaced with the calmness generated in these tropical islands where ancient wisdom has molded a people whose heritage is music, generosity and gentleness. The lessons we learned on our maiden crossing have seasoned us, and now we look forward to our next crossing of the Pacific to head home.

Check out *Carllie and Garrett's adventures* at [www.lightwave99.com](http://www.lightwave99.com).

## BCMS Romany Cruising 2008-09

### Part 2

Our last anchorage in the US was in Lake Worth. This is a hugely popular anchorage for the simple reason that it is one of the few places where cruisers can walk to the shops. Indeed the cheekier cruisers would wheel their shopping carts back to the dinghy dock.

We checked on line and found that in the next week there would be only one weather window for crossing the Gulf Stream to the Bahamas. Unfortunately to use it would mean a night sail (our first on Romany) with a good chance of motoring into a light headwind for 60 miles, but then the weather should improve before turning windy. The Gulf Stream is about

20 miles wide and runs north at 3.5 knots. So it isn't sensible to try crossing in a N wind as the wind against current effect creates steep (over 6ft) standing waves. I knew that because I'd crossed on Eclipse in just those conditions.

Accordingly we left Lake Worth at 9pm and motored out into the predicted light head wind. It was slow and tedious going as Romany banged and crashed through a sloppy sea.

A vicious rain squall hit us about 4am which forced us off-course but we eventually crossed onto the Little Bahamas Bank about an hour after dawn. Then the clouds melted away, the wind went round and we had one of our best sails for years - 50 miles across the bank in 8-12ft deep water, to anchor for the night at Great Sale Cay. By next morning the wind had picked up, and we had another great downwind sail, overtaking everyone, at times at speeds of over 11 knots. If only we had a spinnaker! Even with goosewinged main and genoa we still averaged nearly 8 knots for the 50 miles to Green Turtle Cay.

We anchored in Black Sound and walked in to New Plymouth to clear customs and pay USD150 for our cruising permit.

The Abaco group of islands in the northern Bahamas are a great cruising ground. Flat water sailing, few sand bars, even fewer coral heads. A wide choice of all weather harbours and some really nice little waterfront towns and villages with friendly English speaking people.

I have spent the last 7 Christmases on board boats, and each year it had been in a different country. Unfortunately my record was spoilt this year as I was also in the Bahamas in 2003. However in consolation, we did go out for a sail on Christmas Day and, looking back through my life, I realised that it was the first time I have ever actually sailed on Christmas Day.

One of the Abaco sailing clubs organises occasional races for cruisers. Jetti eventually agreed we could race Romany, as I promised her that it would be like the Pender BCMS meetings, ie casual and laid back and also that no spinnakers or screechers were allowed. In fact it was more like Cow Bay, very competitive, which gave Jetti a bit of a shock (especially at the start of the first race when a 50ft Bavaria tried barging in on port and then realised it had no where to go, fortunately only making a glancing hit on the boat next to us - but it spoilt our start of course).

These were our first races in Romany so, in 15-20 knots wind and with just the two of us on board, we pulled in a reef (which wouldn't have been needed if we had had a stronger crew). We also felt a reef was sensible because it was the first time we had tried pushing the boat hard, never mind the first time we had to do some close quarter manouvering, first time short tacking etc.

Despite our lack of experience we had a 3rd and a 1st over the line, beating a J800 (albeit quite an old one), Beneteau 37, J32, Bavaria 50, Wylie 40 (all monohulls) boat for boat, and in both races were over a leg ahead of a PDQ36 catamaran and an FP Orana 48.



So what is it really like sailing in the Abacos, and is it worth it?

Well, I suppose sailing in the Abacos is a bit like sailing in the Gulf Islands, the same flat water and usually gentle breezes - quite unlike the BVI for example. Even the islands are of similar size and again only short sails between the numerous anchorages. But the islands are flat, rarely over 50ft high. Few have white sandy beaches (except on windward shores - where no one sails) while most of the coconut palms are planted by resorts; the usual vegetation is scrub bushes and casuarina pines. So it's not very photogenic (unlike the Panama's San Blas islands which truly look like a tropical paradise).

Fortunately, unlike further south it is not too hot, in fact the weather is actually similar to a BC summer.

There are differences if course. The water is clear (well to 50ft anyway) and we soon got used to sailing all day watching the bottom underneath us. We also had to get used to having only 4-5ft under our hulls, sometimes less.

Lots of ex-pat Americans now have houses here, while Canadian cruisers almost outnumber those from the US. Unlike the Caribbean there are very few European boats, and most of those (including me) bought their boat in the US. Many cruisers use their boat solely as a floating home. They come to the Bahamas the week before Christmas, then rent a mooring for 3 months, sit on the boat and then sail (actually usually they motor) back to the US at Easter.

Hopetown is full of cruisers like that and, further south in the Exumas, so too is Georgetown. The problem with Hopetown is that it is a very small harbour (even smaller than Winters Cove) yet there are over 100 moorings. In fact Hopetown is beginning to be a victim of its own success. A real contrast from even 5 years ago, when I was last there in Eclipse. Then there was room to anchor, now a mooring is essential; then there was only one other catamaran, whereas I can see ten as I write this.

So yes it is worth sailing here. Apart from Moorings and Sunsail a couple of other companies charter catamarans, mostly Mainecats and PDQ's. Certainly for a weeks family charter I'd favour the Abacos over the Virgin Islands. But come in March, not January, and pack warm clothes!

However Saturna beckons and next week we sail back to Florida to leave Romany near Jacksonville. Then we fly to San Francisco and drive up to Canada on April 1st. It will be interesting to see how well Tucanu faired afloat and in the snow!

See you on the water!

Best wishes

Richard Woods [www.sailingcatamarans.com](http://www.sailingcatamarans.com)

You can also email him at [woodsdesigns@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:woodsdesigns@tiscali.co.uk)

## 2009 Directors List

**President:** Bob Davis ph: 604-583-9396  
Email: [bob.davis@kwantlen.ca](mailto:bob.davis@kwantlen.ca)

**Vice Pres:** Jamie McKerrow ph: 604-596-1721  
Email: [mckerrow@questairinc.com](mailto:mckerrow@questairinc.com)

**Past President:** John Harker ph:604-940-7084  
Email: [mjharker@telus.net](mailto:mjharker@telus.net)

**Publicity:** Alec Mackenzie ph: 604-538-0917  
Email: [alec@arguscontrols.com](mailto:alec@arguscontrols.com)

**Racing/Sailing:** Karl Uthoff ph 604-323-0122

**Member-at-large and Mid-Island Rep:** Gary Astill Ph: 250-756-8998  
Email: [gastill@shaw.ca](mailto:gastill@shaw.ca)

**Treas:** Marlene Mackenzie ph: 604-538-0917  
Email: [alec@arguscontrols.com](mailto:alec@arguscontrols.com)

**Member-at-large and CBCYC Rep:**  
Glen McDonald ph: 604-940-8621

**Newsletter:** Gaby Kerr 604-534-7120  
Email: [sgkerr@telus.net](mailto:sgkerr@telus.net)

**Membership:** Stuart Kerr ph: 604-534-7120  
Email: [sgkerr@telus.net](mailto:sgkerr@telus.net)

