

Nordhavn Atlantic Rally

An Atlantic crossing aboard *Autumn Wind*. by Bing O'Meara

On a chilly day last fall, I answered a call from Nordhavn's ad agency asking if I had any interest in joining a fleet of approximately 20 of the boatbuilder's vessels crossing the Atlantic in the spring. I said, "Of course!" Crossing the Big Pond was something that I'd thought about doing for years.

The historic event would be called the Atlantic Rally and would begin on May 16. The first leg would be Fort Lauderdale to Bermuda, 900 nautical miles over six days. The second covered Bermuda to the Azores, 1,800 nautical miles for 17 days. And the third was from the Azores to Gibraltar, 13 days at sea, going 1,800 nautical miles.

I chose the second leg—it was the longest stretch and, to me, most approximated the full crossing. I was looking to get the most bang from the limited time I had available, and I wanted to experience the middle of the ocean—don't ask me why; I just did. (As an aside, when we reached the mid-ocean point, the Atlantic was as calm as a pond. The fleet stopped and formed a circle, had a



(bottom, left to right)
Crewmember Dean Wiley served as an unofficial photographer.
The docks in Horta, Azores.
James Leishman and Justin Zumwalt save the day and untangled our props.
Doc Kevin Ware.

drink, shot off flares and a few hardy souls dove in and took a swim.)

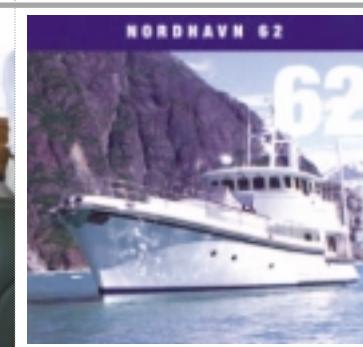
I arrived in Bermuda a day early to rest up before boarding my assigned boat, *Autumn Wind*, a 62 Nordhavn owned and operated by Bill and Arline Smith, a delightful couple from the Pacific Northwest. They had an impressive cruising resumé, having completed a five-year circumnavigation, which they terminated in May of '95 aboard a 56-foot Monk Long Range Pilot House Cruiser, *Sybarite*.

The crew included Brad Smith, master mechanic and sales exec for Nordhavn; Eric Leishman, who heads up Nordhavn's Stuart, Florida operation; and Mike

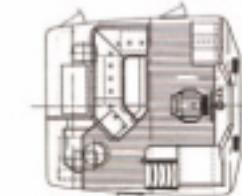
Ronquillo, an EMT. Both Brad and Eric had extensive offshore experience, but Mike had never been on a boat before. This trip would be the equivalent of going to the moon for his first airplane ride.

After introductions and a familiarization tour, Arline told me that I'd been invited to join Jim Leishman, ex-VP of PAE, Nordhavn's parent company, and a few rally committee members and friends for dinner later that evening.

The Smiths and I met the group at a local restaurant a few blocks from the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club, where the rally participants were berthed. The place was casual and comfortable, the



Specifications



LOA.....62'6"	Weight.....150,000 lbs.	Range.....3,000 nm
Beam.....19'4"	Fuel capacity.....2,652 gals.	Cruising speed.....9 knots
Draft.....6'10"	HP.....535	



food outstanding, and the company and conversation even better. The table included TV producer and filmmaker Bruce Kessler and his wife Joy. They're the couple who helped pioneer circum-navigating in small powerboats aboard *Zipalote*, a 70-foot Delta, and later *Spirit of Delta*, a 58-foot Northern Marine, which they helped design and build. Having followed their exploits for years, I was a big fan.

Also at the table were Milt and Judy Baker, owners of Bluewater Books in Fort Lauderdale, the best nautical bookstore and chart shop in the world. They put together the formidable operations manual for the rally.

Then there was retired doctor Kevin Ware and his wife. Kevin, a former Nordhavn owner, would be joining the rally as the fleet's medic.

Most of the group had been long-range cruising for years, and the conversation was fascinating. It was a great evening.

The planning and execution of the Atlantic Rally was flawless, as evidenced by the outcome.

For several days prior to our leaving Bermuda, the winds had been blowing 20 to 25 knots. As luck would have it, they let up on the day of departure, and we had an easy time getting out to sea. However, the stateside weather consult-

ant who was following the various fronts in our vicinity warned of a new one coming our way and diverted us 200 miles south before picking up the rhumbline to the Azores.

We avoided the storm front, and life fell into a routine of watches, meals and sleep. During the day, the fleet spread out and would drift in and out of sight. At night, the boats would close in to within a mile of one another and stay in close radio contact.

Before leaving home, I'd rented an Iridium phone—it was reasonable, and it cost around \$1 per minute to use. On the midnight watch, I would call home, and the reception was clear as a bell. They have finally mastered Iridium.

I'd been fantasizing about a trip like this for years. I had cruised the Great Lakes extensively and experienced their wrath. I had cruised the East Coast from Florida to the Northeast and the Gulf of Mexico, and experienced their wrath as well. I had never been more than 30 miles offshore in the Atlantic, however. Trying to mentally project weather conditions 1,500 miles offshore when you have seen what it can get like inshore can be a concern. I was pleasantly surprised. Although we never had terrible conditions, we did have a few days of 30- to 40-knot winds, gusting higher in spots.

What I learned

1. Ocean cruising requires planning around the weather. For powerboats, June is historically the most passive time to cross the ocean for the route the rally took.

2. Weather is much more predictable offshore than it is closer in, and weather forecasting is much more accurate than it used to be. Onboard electronics are better, and there are also weather experts you can hire to consult with you as you move along your course in regards to what fronts are in your area and ways to avoid them.

3. As you move farther out to sea, the time between waves lengthens, and rollers develop, unlike the Great Lakes, where the waves remain tight in poor conditions and cause pounding. Most

(top, left to right) Eric Leishman and Brad Smith prep lines; *Autumn Wind*; the guys take a fishing trip; the view from the bridge; Brad and Eric take a mid-ocean dip; Bruce Kessler holds court at the dinner in Bermuda; sunset over the Atlantic.

(bottom) Eric takes the wheel, while Arline Smith handles the computer; owner Bill Smith; the Leishman men—Eric, Jim and James; Mike and Eric secure the windlass.

Rollers towered above us, but we rode the waves up and down like an elevator.

problems on the ocean occur close to land, not in the middle.

4. Proper equipment is essential. The 62 Nordhavn had a heavy displacement hull with stabilizers, and at 7 knots, it was capable of crossing the Atlantic once and getting halfway back before needing fuel. There was no rolling or pounding. The boat quartered the waves in rough conditions, and we rode them up and down like an elevator. I found I had no anxiety about the boat or conditions. I have occasionally become queasy and had to stay enclosed. For the rally, I carried prescription motion sickness patches and had no problems.

5. I'd also noticed that at 1,500 miles offshore I felt natural, not out of place. If I felt anything, it was the opposite of claustrophobic. I discussed this with my good friend Fred Kaufhold, a small-boat ocean-crosser himself. He explained that at sea you can only see to the horizon, which is a mere 12½ miles in each direction away from you. Your universe is confined to that 12½-mile circle that moves with you across the ocean. You become quite comfortable, even cozy.

Within the fleet there were two sections: the fast and the slower. *Autumn Wind* was escort to the slower group, which meant our normal 10-knot cruising speed had to be brought down to 6 to 7 knots in order to stay with

the slowest boat. Speed for the slowest boat was determined by fuel burn.

During the course of the rally, there were a few hiccups, but nothing serious or life-threatening. Our boat picked up some polypropylene line in the prop. Late at night, we cranked up the auxiliary, get-home engine, and the next day Justin Zumwalt and James Leishman bravely dove underneath us and cut the line.

There were a couple of stabilizer problems that got resolved, and our autopilot went out on the last leg. Physical problems among the participants, as far as I know, were limited to one mild case of kidney stones.

Any equipment glitches were overshadowed by the superb performance of 99 percent of the gear. The people were wonderful and I will remain grateful to have been included. ⚓

