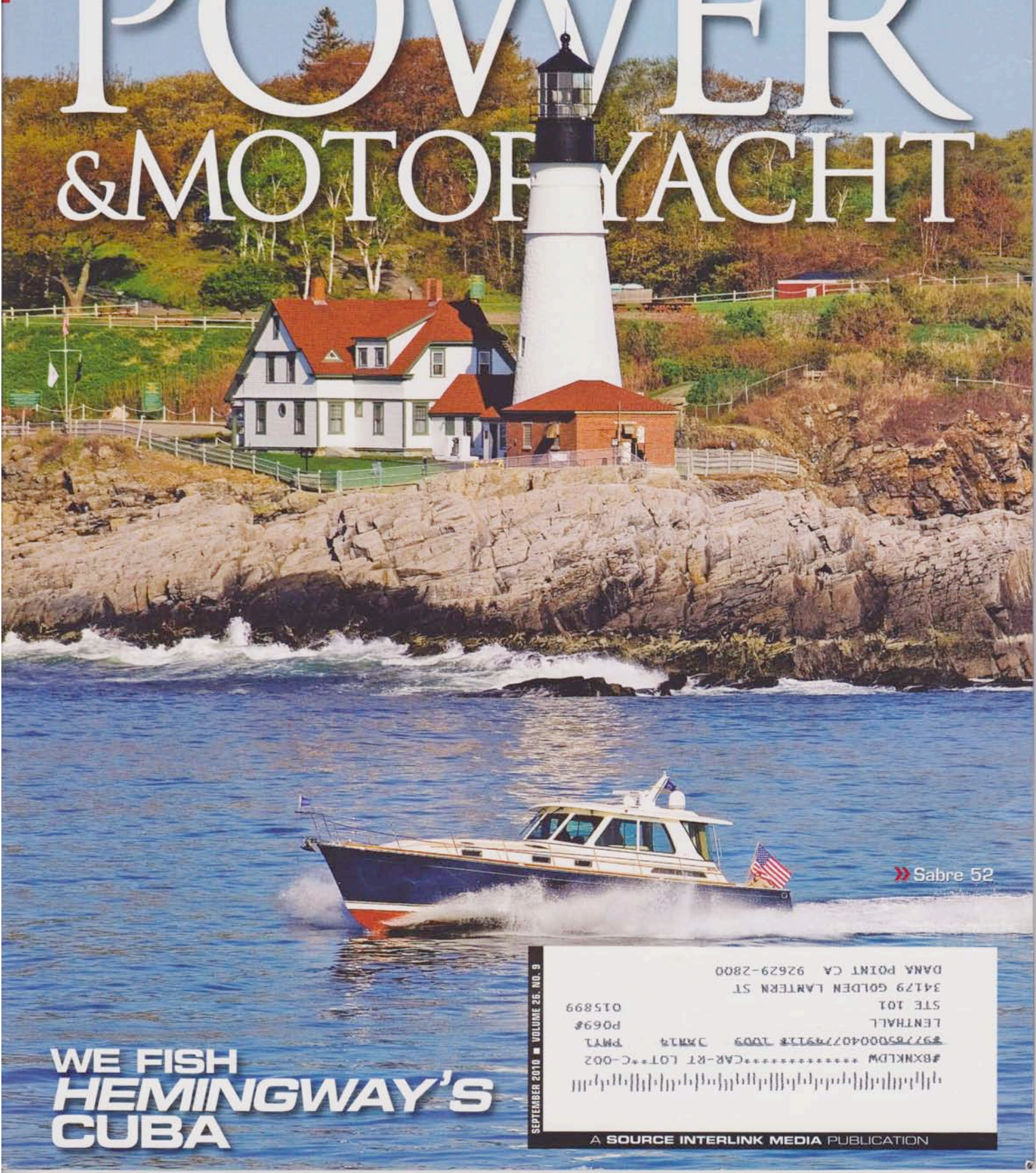


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BIG DECISIONS

Glossy pamphlet and magazine photos are only the start of true passagemaking.

STORY BY **ALYSSA HAAK**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY **SCOTT POLLACK**

There's more to crossing an ocean in your own vessel than meets the eye. Indeed, the enormity of the enterprise is challenging, perhaps even off-putting. However, if you're planning on a transatlantic voyage or setting out for some other far-flung destination, there's a time-honored method for setting the whole thing in motion—you simply break it down into smaller more manageable parts.



**“THE FIRST ISSUE IS FUEL—
THE SIZE OF THE BOAT AND HOW
MUCH IT CAN HOLD.” —BRUCE KESSLER**

The list we've come up with here is a fairly short and simple one. It starts with choosing the right boat for the passage you envision. Then there's stocking your new boat with the appropriate food and equipment; dealing with various aspects of the modern technology you'll find onboard; selecting a crew; and finally, dealing with some seemingly small but decidedly significant incidentals.

There's one other thing you'd most likely want to do before setting out—listen closely to some folks who've made a few passages themselves, folks like Jim Leishman (one of the co-founders of Nordhavn, arguably the preeminent builder and promoter of passagemaking vessels in the world today), Bruce Kessler (whose gorgeous green-hulled Delta trawler *Zopilote* was one of the first modern passagemakers to circumnavigate the globe), and Milt Baker, (one-time owner of Fort Lauderdale's famous Bluewater Books & Charts) who partici-

pated in the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally in 2004 and subsequently put together his own transatlantic rally in 2007.

BOAT SHOPPING

It wasn't until 1974, with the publication of Robert Beebe's *Voyaging Under Power*, based on Beebe's famous circumnavigation onboard his vessel *Passagemaker*, that the concept of crossing oceans in powerboats really caught on. Interestingly enough, Leishman, Kessler, and Baker all share a couple of personal attributes with Beebe that remain relevant today—they all had plenty of time to devote to the passage they were contemplating and a reasonably hefty bank account to support it.

"People aren't in a position to buy our boats unless they are financially successful," says Leishman, "They don't buy on

impulse. They wait five to seven years. And by the time they purchase, they've learned a lot about passagemaking boats."

It may even be cheaper to do a circumnavigation by powerboat than by sailboat. According to Leishman, at least one set of working sails would likely be consumed during a circumnavigation and would cost more than the fuel consumed aboard the Nordhavn. In the early years of this decade, he continues, the total cost of fuel for an around-the-world passage in a 40-foot Nordhavn was just \$12,000, figuring an operating efficiency of approximately three nautical miles per gallon and a speed of 6.5 knots.

"The first issue is always fuel—the size of the boat and how much it can hold," says Kessler.

Leishman agrees, saying that the minimum range a passagemaking vessel should have is 2,300 nautical miles, figuring a safe amount of reserve fuel. Additionally, the vessel ought to have the strength and stability to stand up to the weather likely encountered offshore. Other basic requirements include some form of stabilization to keep the ride smooth. Auxiliary propulsion is another important feature that is rarely needed but gives piece of mind.

PROVISIONING

"I never pass up a good grocery store!" says Joan Kessler, who shares her husband's passagemaking lifestyle. "My basic philosophy in provisioning for going around the world or crossing an ocean is look for all those areas you have available for dry goods and food and fill them up!" As for food, she suggests first figuring out how many meals will be eaten in total and what can be frozen in advance. Then, she adds, when it's time to actually purchase enough food to back up the information you've assembled, make sure you have plenty of rough-water food such as stews and soups that are served in bowls and won't slide off plates. Boxed crackers and breads should be on hand for even rougher going.

Loading the boat follows shopping, logically enough. And according to Kessler, nonskid mats should be placed under everything: computers, books, and even the items on the glass shelves of your fridge. And she also says you should stow stuff under end and coffee tables, pack shelves tight and keep them that way, use tensioning curtain rods to keep books and other items on shelves, halt rattles and scratches with bubble wrap, and corral chairs and other items with bungee cords.

TECHNOLOGY

"Today's electronic technology and the ensuing decrease in isolation is both a blessing and curse," Leishman explains. "Thanks to \$800 satellite phones, your friends and family worry if they don't hear from you. But then again, you couldn't work and you couldn't get good news without them." He continues and says that this communication allows for more people to voyage across oceans as they can communicate with work and family. In 2008, Leishman was on a trip through the Northwest Passage when he heard about the stock market crash—news that ruined his trip and news he could have done without until returning to civilization.





Bruce Kessler agrees but adds that the benefits of modern engine technology are much more straightforward. "If you are underway, it's not a good idea to check levels by stopping an engine." This creates an interesting maintenance challenge, but one easily solved with a little forethought and planning.

These include, according to Kessler: installing mechanical gauges in the engine room because they are easy to check while underway; creation of a typed schedule of duties to be checked by each watchstander (with room for notes); the installation of a long-running engine-lube system that'll go 500 hours, or 20 days, without a filter change; and the stocking of analog backups for digital systems wherever possible.

THE CREW

Kessler also suggests taking professionals instead of family as crew on your first passage. Bad weather can turn ten days into 20 quite easily, he says, and friends or relatives may be forced to return to their lives ashore, leaving you abroad without a replacement. It's easier, he argues, to hire either professionals or experienced mariners because when you pay them, they travel on your schedule.

An interview process is the best way to determine who's experienced and who's not. "And you've got to remember," advises Kessler, "that people who have the time for passage-

"THE FIRST RULE OF CRUISING IS TO NOT MAKE SCHEDULES. SCHEDULES FORCE YOU TO MAKE BAD DECISIONS" —**BRUCE KESSLER**

making are usually of an age where health problems are developing. It's important to know about their medications and conditions."

Your deckhands also shouldn't consist of your cousins or other family members unless they are experienced boaters. You want your crew to have various skills; you don't need four people who can cook but none who knows how to change a fuel filter or navigate by a paper chart.

Kessler's wife adds that it's also important to talk to prospective crewmembers to make sure there are no dietary problems or special preferences. For a vegetarian, she says, canned food is easy, fresh veggies are hard. The latter don't last long.

INCIDENTALS

So let's say you've bought the boat, provisioned her, familiarized yourself with her technology, and chosen a crew. There are still perhaps a few final details to consider.

"The first rule of cruising is to not make schedules," Kessler advises. "You do not want a schedule. You have to wait for things to be correct. Schedules force you to make bad decisions."

Trying to stick to a schedule was one of the underlying reasons that teenage sailor Abby Sutherland encountered problems while trying to set a circumnavigation sailing record, according to Kessler. She set out to cross the Indian Ocean despite an unfavorable change in seasons and encountered news-making difficulties as a result.

Before you single up all lines, consider these last two safety-related issues. When Baker was organizing his transatlantic rally a few years ago, his small fleet encountered 40-knot winds. Fortunately, however, Baker had hired a professional weatherman to track storms and alert his fleet to dangerous weather patterns. "He saw [the gales] coming," Baker recounts. "He routed us north to have the wind at our back rather than on the bow."

And then there's the learning curve. Ideally you build experience incrementally, Baker concludes. "Start with inshore and coastal trips first. Add in nighttime. Then try going to Bermuda. You'll be fine." **PMY**

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