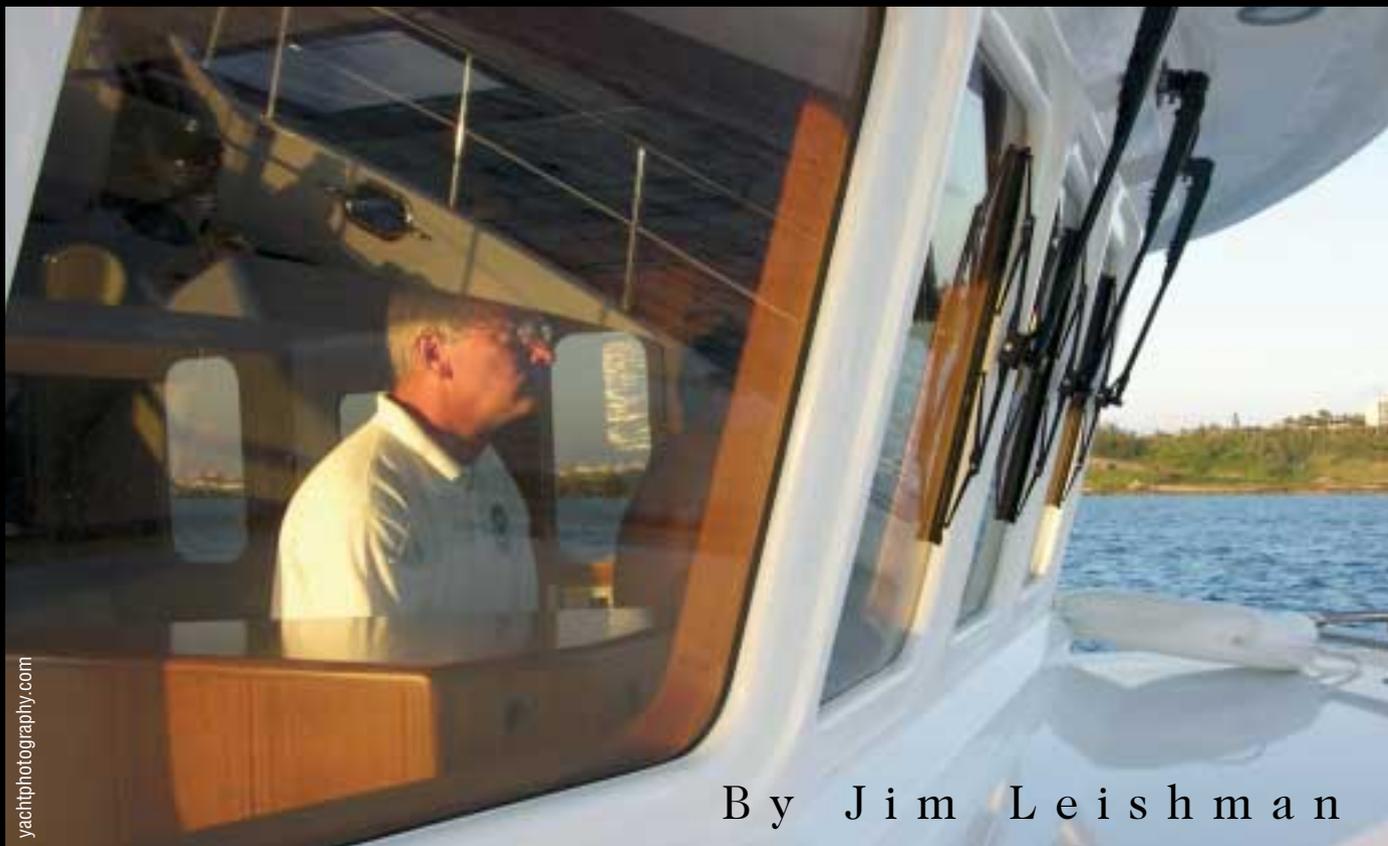


Leg 1: Ft. Lauderdale to Bermuda

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 second part of our series on this incredible odyssey, rally organizer Jim Leishman of Pacific Asian Enterprises in Dana Point, California shares his Leg 1 cruise experiences aboard the Nordhavn trawler Atlantic Escort.

Across the Atlant



By Jim Leishman

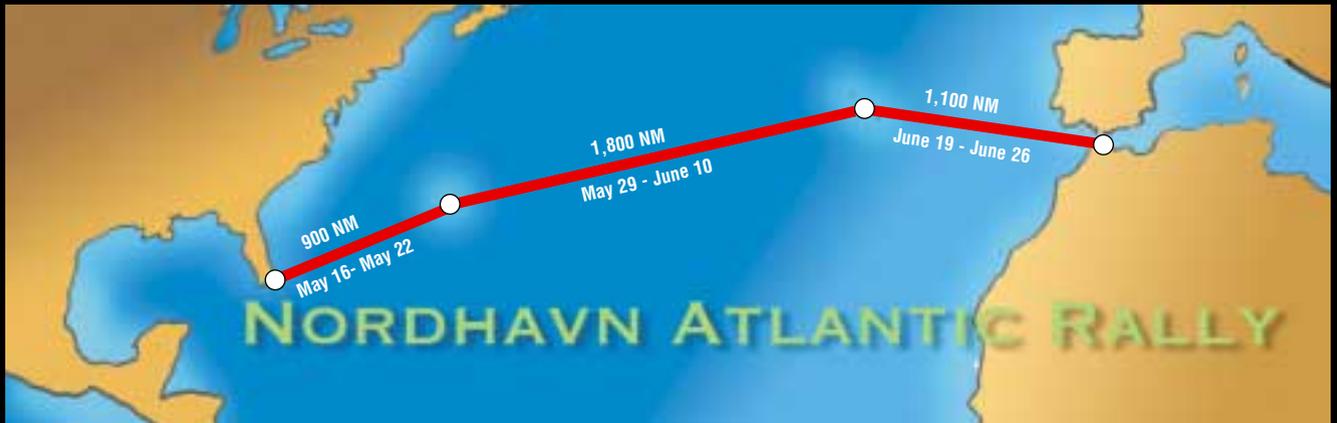
ic in 18 Trawlers



Jim Raycroft photos



FT. LAUDERDALE • BERMUDA • AZORES • GIBRALTAR



Thousands of pre-cruise details had been dealt with, as our departure date of May 16 drew near. Arriving in advance of the fleet at the Bahia Mar Hotel in Ft. Lauderdale, I fought the dread that was building with-

in me. Along with the excitement that precedes a long ocean voyage on a small boat, the concern and realization that things can go wrong always serves to temper a buoyant mood.

On a single vessel — one that I've prepared and I am in charge of, these pre-departure jitters are minimal. But this time the voyage was different, and the potential for problems was exponentially greater, with 18 vessels and crews — every one of which I felt responsible for. I found myself unable to sleep and noticed occasional flushes of adrenaline while thinking of the unpleasant possibilities.

On the final roster of participants, the fleet consisted of one Nordhavn 40, five Nordhavn 46s, one Nordhavn 47, two Nordhavn 50s, one Northern Marine 55, three Nordhavn 57s, one Krogen 58, three Nordhavn 62s and

a 92-foot custom vessel designed by Ed Monk and built by McQueen in the Pacific Northwest. We had 18 capable passage-makers with the range, strength and stability to safely cross the North Atlantic.

This was a fleet of motorized pleasureboats embarking on a voyage never before attempted — and one that thousands of supporters and critics alike would be watching carefully.

The easterly trade winds had been blowing hard for the entire month of May, creating 6- to 8-foot seas and an ocean of whitecaps off the beach at Ft. Lauderdale. It seemed inevitable that our fleet would have to endure a pounding. I found myself

visiting the upper floors of the Bahia Mar Hotel and gazing seaward — hoping for a break.

The wind blew through the marina and tore at our burgees and flags as we went about the business of final provisioning, inspections and preparation of the vessels for departure. It was an intense week, with dozens of seminars covering subjects from medical first aid to diesel mechanics.

There were dinner parties, cocktail parties and briefings. Film director Bruce Kessler worked constantly, conducting interviews and filming the preparations and activities for his upcoming documentary of the voyage.

Despite the hectic schedule, no one could help but notice that strong and relentless easterly wind.

Our schedule called for a May 16 departure of the fleet's smaller boats (Division 1) followed by the larger boats (Division 2) the following day. We estimated an arrival in Bermuda together on the morning of May 22.

For weeks, I had worried about a delay in the Florida departure, because accommodations in Bermuda at Royal Bermuda Yacht Club had been confined to a narrow window. Numerous fleets of rally and racing sailboats would be arriving at the yacht club in June. A significant delay in our arrival could find us without accommodations and the need for alternate berthing.

We anticipated that nothing else could compare to Royal Bermuda YC for our fleet — and this is where we wanted to be. Fortunately, our weather forecaster — Walt Hack of New Jersey — confirmed that despite initially rough seas, conditions would improve as we worked our way north. He recommended an on-time departure, but routed us a bit to the north, to avoid the worst of the easterlies — adding about 60 miles to our voyage before we turned more to the east and



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took up a direct route for Bermuda.

OFF WE GO

Our Sunday morning departure was one I'll never forget. Our Division 1 crews threw off their lines, and the Division 2 fleet of 11 Nordhavns left the Bahia Mar the next day.

We began our voyage seaward, where we would rendezvous for helicopter photos of the rally's departure. The seas were rough, but they seemed to have settled down a bit from the previous weeks of constant 25-knot trade winds.

On this leg of approximately 1,000 nautical miles, the target speed for our Division 2 fleet was 7 knots. At this pace, we would arrive in Bermuda on the following Saturday.

All of the boats are capable of cruising faster than this, but we wanted

any vessel that might be delayed because of a temporary mechanical problem to be able to speed up and rejoin the fleet.

Even our smallest vessel, *Uno Mas*, a Nordhavn 40, can run at 8 knots, so a one-hour delay could be made up in seven hours of catch-up. The escort vessel would never leave a boat behind — but once a problem vessel was under way again, the escort vessel could accompany it back to the fleet.

On our first two days, we enjoyed a good push from the Gulf Stream —

BERMUDA-BOUND — Prior to leaving Ft. Lauderdale on Leg 1 of the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally, the 18 participating crews (top) participated in various briefings on the voyage. Because of all the preparation that went into this passage-making adventure, Leg 1 of the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally concluded in Bermuda at Royal Bermuda Yacht Club (bottom) without any major problems along the way.



and we made our way to the north a knot or two faster than our target speed. If we got ahead of schedule, we could always slow down — but during the early part of the voyage, we were happy to get a bit ahead.

The first 48 hours of any voyage is a time of adjustment. Almost everyone moves a little slower and is affected to some degree by seasickness, particularly if the sea is rough.

By the second day, we were on a direct course for Bermuda. Conditions were improving and were forecast to get even better.

By midweek, the wind and seas had died down — and we had fully adjusted to the motion of the waves and our watch schedules. Thanks to Dr. Kevin Ware's wife, Kari, our crew was well fed and happy.

LAUNCH TIME

On the third day out aboard *Atlantic Escort*, we elected to launch the Achilles inflatable dinghy that we stowed on top of the tie rods that distribute the load of our emergency towing bit at the transom.

For serious open-ocean towing, we equipped *Atlantic Escort* with a large towing bit, placed well forward of our rudder post (a must to maintain directional control). The tie rods were removable — but while installed, they interfered with the use of the cockpit area.

Our 9-foot Achilles, with a 5 hp Honda outboard, is the rig we chose to deploy in water that was too rough and dangerous to launch our larger 14-foot Caribe rigid inflatable boat from the upper boat deck.

The launch went off without a hitch — and it took a matter of seconds, with three guys simply sliding the inflatable off the stern. My son and crewmember, James Leishman, along with first mate Justin Zumwalt, motored over to our Division 2 escort boat *Autumn Wind*. There, they picked up my other son, Eric Leishman, along with emergency medical technician Mike Ronquio, for a visit aboard *Atlantic Escort*.

This proved to be only the first of many mid-ocean tender launches.

By the following day, the wind was

light and variable and the sea was almost perfectly flat. We elected to launch the Caribe — and we spent a glorious day providing shuttle service from boat to boat for any crew who wished to pay social visits — and, for those interested, there was the opportunity to ride a surfboard or planing tube behind the speeding Caribe. These breathtaking rides were 500 miles off the East Coast of the United States — in water that was miles deep.

LENDING A HAND

We received a call from the crew of *Four Across*, a Nordhavn 50, and learned that they had burst a water line and had lost some of their fresh water. They were able to fix the leak — but they soon found out that their water-maker, too, had a leak, and a new part would be required to return it to operation.

Since *Atlantic Escort* had made provisions to tow and to transfer both water and fuel, we elected to try the repair during this day's calm sea conditions. The procedure involved taking the receiving vessel under tow using our normal towing gear.

We were equipped with a 400-foot length of 1-inch nylon tow line — and each fleet vessel carried a single line

bridle attached to a large "D" ring, mounted on their stem slightly above the waterline. Attached to their "D" ring was a nylon line — shackled below and with a shackle on top — which would receive our tow line.

This method would ensure that our tow line could be easily attached by a crewmember, that chafing gear would not be required at the bow roller or deck and that the towing load would be low and on the strongest piece of hardware possible.

With director Bruce Kessler's cameras rolling, we began the process of approaching *Four Across* and throwing them a "monkey fist" knot attached to a small tag line. This, in itself, took numerous tries.

Finally, after receiving the tag line, the crew pulled the tow line aboard. After a lot of fiddling around, it was attached and paid out — and, finally, *Four Across* was taken under tow. We then passed them a 400-foot length of garden hose and proceeded to transfer about 300 gallons of fresh water.

I took some great photos of the procedure and snapped a few shots of the younger crewmembers waterskiing past, with the towing and watering process in the foreground. After a few hours of running time, our Village



Marine water-maker had our tanks topped off again.

We were elated at how well our system had worked, but we wondered how the procedure would be in rougher seas. We discussed and debated how we could improve our technique and wondered if we'd have to do it again under less-than-perfect conditions.

It had been a perfect day — and to cap it all off, we dined on fresh dorado (or mahi mahi, if you prefer). Caught earlier in the day, the fish was expertly filleted by crewmember and expert angler Scott Shane, marinated in apricot juice, then cooked to perfection.

Despite our constant effort, the fishing was not very productive on this first leg. Catching just three or four dorado in the 15- to 20-pound range was a disappointment, as we trolled almost the entire way.

ROLL CALL

Twice a day — at 08:00 hours and at 20:00 hours — we conducted roll call. At 15 minutes before the hour, the Division 1 and Division 2 fleets would begin a single sideband (SSB) radio schedule beginning with a 4 MHz frequency and then a 6 MHz channel.

If we could not reach each other by SSB radio, a satellite phone call was made five minutes before the hour. However, most of the time, the SSB worked fine.

We would discuss positions, speed and the status of the fleet — and we'd share any problems and unusual experiences. Then, at the top of the hour twice a day, each vessel would be called on VHF radio and would be asked for their position, speed, status and information about any problems that might have occurred.

They would also report their fuel situation — simply the miles they estimated they would be able to travel on their remaining fuel, at the speed and fuel burn rate of the past 24 hours. Then we'd know if we had, say, 800 miles remaining to reach our destination and a boat reported it could only go 900 to 1,000 miles, we might have a problem.

Additionally, during these roll calls, I would give the weather report, which usually came in each afternoon from our forecaster. I received this report via e-mail, and some of the other boats in our fleet received it, too (by request) — but for those that did not, it would be read aloud on VHF radio, and any questions or comments that came up would be fielded at that time.

As it turned out, the position reporting within the division was a bit silly, as we had each other in visual range all the time — but, for dis-

HELPING HAND — When one of the participating boats, *Four Across*, had a leak in its water-maker, *Atlantic Escort* took the boat under tow and transferred some fresh water to its crew to sustain them until its water-maker could be repaired.

cipline, we kept it up throughout the voyage.

For most of the trip, each vessel in my division was captured on our Furuno NavNet radar ARP system. From this, I could make a note of each boat's speed and course. Even a slight course change was instantly revealed by the predictor line running off the front of each target.

Each night after roll call, as darkness settled in, I'd slow *Atlantic Escort* to the rear of the fleet so I could see and count the stern lights ahead.

By Friday morning — our fifth day at sea — the Division 1 boats were closing up from the rear, and we were within VHF radio range. Our plotter was showing an arrival at Bermuda's Five Fathom Hole at sunup. By midnight, the Division 1 boats were in visual range, having to slow down slightly and not pass us up.

In tight formation and with flags flying, our fleet of 18 boats proceeded from Five Fathom Hole to Hamilton, Bermuda — and by 10 a.m., our fleet was safely docked at Royal Bermuda Yacht Club. ♡

Next month in Sea Magazine, we'll follow along as the Atlantic Rally fleet embarks on Leg 2, from Bermuda to the Azores.



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WHAT A TRIP — Once in Hamilton, Bermuda, crewmembers from the 18 boats had the chance to explore the city, even having the opportunity to do things such as watching a parade (left) and taking a carriage ride (right top). En route to Bermuda, some crewmembers participated in watersports behind an inflatable boat.