



Problems of the modern yacht : 8th January 2004 Don Street

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"By now", said Don, "we should have the perfect cruising yacht. We haven't because designers, obsessed with sailing performance, never go below decks at sea. So it's great on top but abominable below."

Don is a 4th generation racing sailor who learnt much of his craft in WW2 in the USA in yachts without motors. Of course, it couldn't last and he was drafted – by someone with a fine sense of irony – to the US Navy's diesel engine school. He volunteered for submarines to get away from the engines (though not much sailing involved there Don) and somehow, fairly quickly, managed to resign his way out of the USN altogether.

After a period as a big ship insurer, he took the plane (was it really the "vomit comet"?) to San Juan and the Caribbean. He soon found he could survive and prosper without a proper job and took up sailing full-time. After sailing with many of the major figures in US yachting, he bought "Iolaire" in 1956 for \$3000 down and \$1000 a year for three years. She's now 98 years old, still engine-less, and with 12 Atlantic crossings to her credit; Don is a driven 73 year-old (he says he can still get his feet behind his head) with enough sailing experience to blow the hinges off the gates of hell.

Drawing on this, he advised us on the shortcomings of the modern cruising yacht and how to fix them.

- Try out on-deck gear in rough weather near your home port before you go anywhere.
- Get yourself storm staysails and trysails
- If you want to avoid seasickness get decent ventilators, hatches that open both ways and suppositories
- Fit deep, removable fiddle rails and gimbals to your table and you can enjoy a three-course meal in 45-50 knots – as Don did off the Irish coast – provided your stove is stable.
- Check the stability of your stove by loading it with full saucepans
- Fit a gimballed sideboard for chopping onions etc
- If the gimballed things oscillate, replace the hinges with bigger, stiffer ones Have your leeboards or cloths at least 12" higher than the bunk leve
- Fit a bundling board (your Granny will remember them) in the middle of double berths. "*Even Marilyn Monroe would be just a lump of flesh when it's rough*", said Don
- In teak and holly soles, the holly strips should poke above the teak level by 1/32" or you'll slip (he cracked some ribs that way mid-Atlantic)
- Make crew pump out the heads with 20 strokes to clear it and avoid smells. If you spot them pumping fewer (I suppose you count discreetly), send them back to pump 40 more
- Oil-burning stoves produce moisture; solid fuel ones soak it up. So have both.
- Never let anyone service your life-raft without up-to-date certification on that particular make of life-raft.
- Buy a big bilge pump with large inlet and outlet dimensions. Don recommends Edson with 2 1/2" orifices.
- Remember that your diesel is a water pump if you disconnect the raw water intake hose and plunge it in the flood
- Replace webbing jackstays every year. Rob James died when his failed
- Take several types of anchor (there are 7 anchors of 5 varieties on "Iolaire") and make them as large as you can handle
- Fit a gravity ratchet so the chain can't slip back when you raise the anchor