

# LESSONS FROM A LIFE AFLOAT

**PETE GOSS HAS DECIDED TO CHANGE HIS VOYAGING PLANS AND SAIL NEARER TO HOME, BUT HE REFLECTS ON WHAT HE'S LEARNED**

**After two and a half years and over 17,000 miles of cruising from the UK to the Caribbean and the US east coast, we are often asked what we have learned. The truth is that, thanks to lots of reading, videos and generous advice, we have affirmed as much as we've learned.**

If the call of the sea beats in your heart, embrace it and spread your wings while you can. In our case, changing family circumstances means that the Pacific is now one step too far. We need to be closer to home and have decided to sell our lovely Garcia 45 Exploration, *Pearl*, downsize and explore Europe on a seasonal basis. We could never stop cruising; our plans just need to adapt.

And that's the nub of it: cut your cloth to suit your time, budget, family, work, sailing experience and inclination. Not long ago, we found ourselves anchored with a couple who had set out for a year and are still cruising decades later. Within a tight radius there was the happiest of weekend cruisers, a liveaboard family and another couple who prefer six months on and six months off. For us it was a window of opportunity that we jumped into with both feet to discover one of the most life-affirming things we have done.

Immediate family have shared the adventure during their holidays and that quality time with them has offset our absence from home. >

**Pete and Tracey Goss have spent two and a half years cruising and living aboard**







Jason Pickering

**Pearl is a Garcia Exploration 45 fitted out by Pete for long distance cruising**

**Top: fresh baked bread is irresistible, but ensuring ready supplies of the raw ingredients takes planning. Above: alloy construction makes for a tough, low maintenance boat**

## ‘We truly owned time and it was ours to manage’

Long distance cruising doesn't need to mean cleaving of family bonds. We have a website, and WhatsApp has proved to be a lifeline.

While it's fine for visitors to book continental flights well ahead, the final destination is decided a week out. Local logistics are far safer, faster and more flexible than beating into a headwind.

When we left for the big blue yonder, we anticipated returning for a month a year but in practice found this too short. With a few clicks we extended our return flight to rejoin *Pearl* to chime with our instincts. And that's another truth: for the first time we truly owned time and it was ours to manage. Last year, we spent nine weeks at home to participate fully in our daughter's wonderfully unique wedding.

Many ask us about budget. It has been more expensive than we expected. We are not liberal with our cash but decided we would rather have four good years than five mean ones. Of course, you can exist on beans, but such an approach can preclude many of the gems that lie

ashore. The extra expense has been offset by morphing my work to maintain an income with consultancy, teaching and writing. I do a lot more than people realise but I find it adds to the mix of life, provided I regulate it carefully.

We set off on an adventure of exploration hoping to meet people and have made many lifelong friends. Cruisers form a large community of all ages, backgrounds and nationalities. A generous zest for life is the common thread so you are never short of help. Casual gatherings are the norm, there are interesting backstories and so there is never a dull moment. "See you on the big blue highway," is our parting shot and we have rekindled friendships in the most remote of places.

The nonconformist traveller can feel inhibited by structure but we love the Ocean Cruising Club (OCC), the qualification for which is the completion of a 1,000-mile straight line passage. It is an amazing support group with port officers all over the world who are a font of local knowledge. The OCC flag is an open invitation to

members and you never know who will be knocking on the hull next.

They say yachts are always ready but never prepared. Provided safety is covered you don't need to tick all the boxes before departure. Start your trip with baby steps and up your game with experience. This is a big deal. Breaking away is exhausting, so be kind to yourselves. Anchor around the corner for a week to catch your breath before picking up the reins. It's not a test; have fun.

Embrace disparity of knowledge with sensitivity and flexibility, particularly when double-handed. Tracey, my wife, had only done two night sails when we set off but things are levelling out over time. Whereas once, half an hour of night watch was threatening to her, she now has the confidence to stand a full watch. Nights will never be her thing but I love night sailing and happily take the lion's share, so we are playing to our strengths.

The lack of a rigid watch system means that we can cover each other when one of those tired days comes along. Structure is built around meal times and we

**Relaxing at the end of the day with an evening tipple**





Top: Pete and Tracey's family joined them for holidays aboard to share in the adventure.  
Above: Tracey and daughter Livvy



## 'We discovered that the slower we went, the richer the experience'

always enjoy the sunset with a small tipple, music and the wonder of being at one with nature.

All decisions are made jointly and we have a red card system whereby either of us can pull the plug for no other reason than intuition. Nine times out of ten this sixth sense has proved well-founded.

Once a task has been completed we have a debrief to make sure any lessons are tucked away. Under this umbrella we have clear areas of responsibility which can be commented on but not decided upon. This halves the workload, gives ownership and plays to our natural strengths and sense of worth. Disagreements always stay in the cockpit.

Pace has been something we have wrestled with. Our initial default position was to push as if we were on holiday, relentlessly hoovering up fleeting morsels of experience. Within a couple of months we were on our knees and realised that we needed to curb the 'more miles' genie. Pace is a very personal thing and it takes time to establish what works. If you push west with vigour, you will have a well-deserved circumnavigation under your belt within 15 months. That is a laudable

trophy, but what will you have missed? There isn't time to have it all. You have the choice of quality over quantity.

We stumbled into the unexpected discovery that the slower we went the richer the experience. All our wild ambitions have been set aside as we learned to live for the day: the sun blasting through a gap in the clouds to highlight a pretty Maine bay, our next spontaneous anchorage; a crimson sunset mirrored on still water to entice an evening row up the creek.

These are some of our memories: being serenaded by a concert violinist practicing Vivaldi on her holiday veranda. The next morning, while out on my paddleboard, I met a lobsterman who shared his favourite spot with me. Then the mid-morning rattle of anchor chain that drew us on deck to find an OCC member inviting us for lunch. The flexibility in our plans has been enriching.

### MADE FOR INDEPENDENCE

We were surprised to read that, when cruising, around 20% of most people's time is spent sailing and the rest at anchor. In our experience, this seems about right. Like any vessel, a cruising boat must be safe but what sets it apart is that it must also be a home.

Most modern yachts are filled with bunks and designed with the logistical support and safety of marinas in mind. They tend to be holiday boats with strength and reliability stripped out in the interests of cost. They are expected to run from a gale rather than take it in their stride. We have seen this new and accepted norm seduce

people into setting off with woefully inadequate boats.

Long-term cruisers generally prefer lovely anchorages to marinas, so make sure you have a big anchor, lots of chain and a powerful windlass. I love our remote handset, which gifts me control while standing on the bow. A Rocna or spade anchor seem best to me, and we have one of each.

Without the convenience of marinas, many people are forced to lash jerrycans of fuel and water on deck. This is not safe, so opt for large tanks. A watermaker is essential for comfort and health and often cleaner than harbour or marina water.

Ours makes 60lt of water an hour and I prefer it to run in conjunction with the engine. But I have seen a slower Katadyn PowerSurvivor model trickling away to produce large daily volumes for considerably less capital outlay and power consumption. This is also more compatible for boats with lower tankage.

Power need not be the bane of your life if you get it right. We have upgraded our solar panels to 700W and, from chatting to other full-time cruisers, this seems a good starting point. In addition, we have a Superwind turbine which is of the highest quality and very quiet.

We also have a Watt&Sea hydrogenerator so, together with the engine, we have four independent sources of energy. The safety of the autopilot, our third hand, necessitates this redundancy. We also have a complete backup autopilot system – having a crew of only two is a vulnerability that just can't be ignored. My preference would be a for a Hydrovane but that



When connectivity permitted, Pearl was also a home office for Pete while cruising

Jason Pickering



## ‘If you want to do something, do it now, for tomorrow is too late’

wouldn't work for us because we are on the size limit and have a big arch with solar panels and windsurfer on top.

I would never put to sea without paper charts, as they are the foundation of all decisions. In addition to a sextant I always carry a couple of handheld GPSs in a metal box to protect them from lightning.

We carry at least three weeks of basic rations, knowing that remote locations are vulnerable to weather and could run short of food deliveries. Groceries are also expensive so we load up where prices are reasonable and the choice plentiful. My foraging skills have improved to the point that I'm pretty confident of spearing a fish or lobster for supper, and there's nothing more rewarding. Tracey now bakes the most amazing bread. We don't want for anything but it takes a lot of planning and forethought, at which Tracey excels.

### A ROOM WITH A VIEW

Numerous spares are essential for convenience, cost and compatibility. There is nothing more frustrating than paying through the nose and losing weeks wrestling a spare through Customs only to find that this year's version has a minor modification and won't fit in the gap behind the bulkhead.

We have boxes of spares and a comprehensive tool set which includes a battery drill, angle grinder and jigsaw, all of which have been used.

All of the above requires space and we are so grateful for a full-bodied hull with a wide stern. This provides volume and welcome form stability when in a rocky or windy anchorage where traditional designs tick-tock to a swell or heel dramatically in a gust.

In fact, being able to watch them at all is a pleasure that comes with a pilothouse.

We have had two yachts with pilothouses. Our first was a Francis 34 and this opened our eyes. It gifts a light, airy space below decks, and the protection makes sailing in inclement weather safer as it allows us to be more vigilant. A wide transom provides for a large cockpit to socialise in. A strong bimini is essential in the Trades, and I love our hard dodger, which makes for safe sailing in rough weather.

Full-time cruising requires a tender that is a fast, rugged load carrier which can manage the worst of conditions. For this, a RIB seems best. We have had to suffer a three-mile round trip in a Force 5, returning with the equivalent of a car boot full of stores. We lost all faith in our new, gutless, temperamental 4-stroke outboard and quickly changed to a 2-stroke Yamaha.

Our dinghy is a workhorse that simply has to deliver and has actually been called upon for a couple of successful rescues. It must launch safely and quickly, making a stern davit essential. An aft platform provides ease of boarding, unloading, swimming and recovery

of an MOB. All of this can be added to an older transom. I always worry about a dinghy on a davits on ocean passages so I love the fact that our F-Rib folds up and can be stowed below.

The centreboard configuration, often misunderstood and maligned, kicks off my final reflection. The benefits are multiple. It has no effect on righting moment, unlike a lifting keel, and it can be raised off the wind to provide only directional stability. It opens up a host of anchorages and safe havens that are precluded to others and doesn't require the complexity of hydraulics. Of all our 'big picture' choices, this is the one that I hang my hat on.

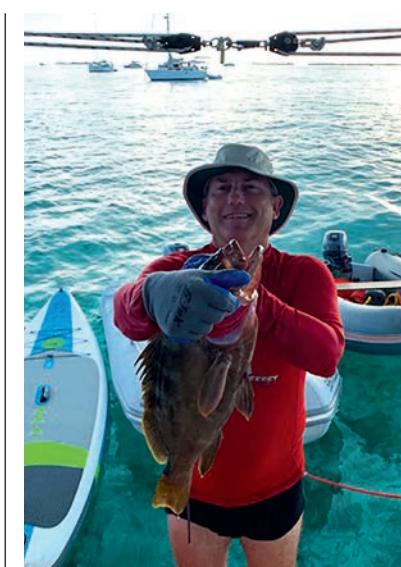
My preference is for a cutter rig with straight spreaders and slab reefing for ease of use and reliability. We also love having a boat with aluminium hull for its rugged durability and lack of maintenance.

One last thought. In 1996, when everything was on the line, and I turned back in the Southern Ocean to rescue fellow Vendée Globe competitor Raphael Dinelli, who was on the upturned hull of his capsized boat, I came to



**Plenty of room to relax in the cockpit is essential... the hard dodger provides shelter from both the sun and inclement weather**

Jason Pickering



**Top: fresh fish for supper – Pete became a confident spearfisherman. Above: Tracey gained confidence in being in charge of the boat**

realise something. Out of that came the knowledge that complacency is the cancer of time. If you want to do something, do it now for tomorrow is too late.

If anything, the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined this truth. Perhaps now is the time to lift yourself out of these strange circumstances by turning that dream into plans. As Peter Blake once said, obstacles are what you see when you take your eye off the goal.

Fair winds. The oceans await. ■

Due to family circumstances *Pearl of Penzance* is going on the market. She is fully equipped and ready to sail anywhere in the world. Coronavirus permitting she will return to Europe from the US this year and will have a VAT paid receipt. If you are interested please email [pete@petegoss.com](mailto:pete@petegoss.com)



Jason Pickering