

Santa Cruz to Monterey - Saturday, May 19. It was foggy and drizzling when we arrived at Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor at about 8 AM. The Monterey Bay forecast was for night and morning low clouds and fog, sunny afternoon, and westerly winds 10 to 15 kn. The fog was a concern, but the wind forecast was as good as we could hope for. While we rigged Manatee, Sandy brought me a welcome doughnut and cup of coffee. (I had neglected to eat breakfast before I left home - a mistake.)

For navigation, we had the boat's compass (of so-so accuracy), a hand bearing compass, and an old Nova Tech radio with a direction-finding loop and null meter. In the parking lot, I tuned the Nova Tech to the low frequency beacon on the breakwater, and the signal came in loud and clear. We also had a pocket-size radio that received the VHF weather frequencies. For communication between boats we had a pair of 100 mW toy-type walkie-talkies, which had a range of maybe 50 yd. Since De Marsh had just installed a regular CB in Ipo, I kept both walkie-talkies in Manatee.

The mast of my gunter-rig Potter (#234) has to be inserted through a hole in the cabin and stepped into a slot in the bunk deck. Usually, I have a second person enter the cabin to guide the mast into the slot, but this time I felt the mast seat firmly, so I didn't send anyone below (mistake). Someone did lock through a window and confirmed the mast was in the slot, and the shrouds were subsequently attached without any unusual difficulty.

De Marsh and Stan Butler arrived about 9 AM, and I think they had Ipo (#512) rigged and in the water about 5 minutes later. De brought me a 2-gallon can of gasoline for my Mazda, since we had failed to gas up on Thursday, our last odd day, and the fuel gage was close to the "E." Sandy had the problem of finding enough gas to get to Monterey with the trailer, but we'd passed an open station in Santa Cruz and we had heard about one in Aptos. As for the boats, De and I each had about 2 gallons of 10-to-1 for our Seagulls, so we probably could have motored the entire 22 nmi to Monterey if we had to.

We launched Manatee, said our goodbyes, fired up the Seagulls, and headed out the short channel. I had started the Seagull at full throttle, the usual drill. As soon as the engine warmed a little, I opened the choke and backed off on the throttle lever, but the engine continued to run at full speed; the throttle lever had no effect. Not sure what to do about that, I shut off the fuel and waited for the Seagull to die. I couldn't see anything broken in the throttle assembly but assumed the cable was broken inside the housing.

We were halfway to the mouth of the harbor, our sails were up, and I was pleasantly surprised to find a following breeze. I had expected a headwind at the start because every weather broadcast I had monitored in the past few days reported southerly winds at Santa Cruz even when northwest winds were reported at other stations in the area.

De was ahead, still under power, so I started the Seagull again. Since there wouldn't be much to run into out in the bay I decided to live with the full-speed-or-nothing engine. Experimenting, I found that with the throttle lever retarded the engine would eventually slow down, so I did have a delayed action kind of control. (The problem turned out to be a damaged cable housing.)

Leaving the mouth of the harbor at 9:20, we headed 150° on a straight-line course for Monterey, and began rolling over the swells. We had left the drizzle in the harbor. The sky was overcast but visibility was already about 3 miles. We soon shut down our engines and found the wind to be from the starboard quarter. The wind was gentle but from the right direction, and the breakwater began to fade behind us.

The two boats were poorly matched. With the standard genoa, I could only get a couple of knots out of the sea cow. De, who has a custom-made masthead genoa, did everything but throw out the anchor to hold Ipo back and stay with us. It must have been frustrating to De because he could have covered the first 10 miles a lot faster than we did. At one point, by mutual agreement, I motored ahead for about a mile, then resumed sailing. In 20 minutes or so, De had caught up with me again.

My landlubber stomach soon began to resent the slow motion over the swells, so I took a precautionary Dramamine. (You are supposed to take it a half hour before departing.)

I had planned to do several chores during this part of the trip. I was going to tie lanyards onto everything (radios, hand bearing compass, etc.) so we wouldn't lose anything overboard. I was going to rig lifelines for myself and my crew, Mike O'Neill, (same reason) and another line to trail in the water. I was going to take radio bearings on the various stations around the bay to maintain an accurate fix.

But, except for taking a couple of rough radio bearings, I didn't do any of those things. Any activity that required focusing my eyes up close would start my stomach churning. I was seasick. (I had the same problem on an aircraft carrier, but only for the first six months of the seven months I was on board.)

Fortunately, I didn't really have to do anything during this part of the trip. Mike was happy to remain at the helm, and he held a compass heading better than I could. The swells were maybe 6 feet, but the wind was light and there was no chop yet.

I "fed the fishes" about three times, but always felt better for it. Mike gave me some orange slices, which tasted good. (The nutritious-snack-type peanut-butter-and-chocolate bar I tried earlier was not the right thing at all and was soon "jettisoned." I must have absorbed some of the Dramamine though, because I began to feel drowsy.

I decided to quit fighting it and lay down on the leeward seat; I felt OK when I was horizontal. In this position, I could look up at the sails and tend the sheets while Mike steered. This was pleasant, but from time to time I would sit up for one reason or another and the nausea would return.

The boat was surrounded by the sails of hundreds (thousands, probably) of jellyfish. (I learned later that they were Portuguese Men of War, which have poisonous stings; it was no place for a swim.)

About 3 hours out, Mike spotted the two stacks of the power plant at Moss Landing, barely visible through the haze. The coastline had remained in sight (but not well defined) even though we were now about 7 miles from the nearest shore. The stacks were not yet abeam, so we had not reached the halfway point yet, but it was good to see evidence of our progress. We expected the winds to increase so that we would make better speed for the last half of the passage. The wind was now from the west, having gradually shifted as we traveled further out into the bay. Allowing for our leeway, we tried to keep the compass indicating about 170° to maintain a track of 150°. Unlike San Francisco Bay, Monterey Bay has no significant currents, so we didn't have that factor to contend with.

At the midpoint of our passage, if we were on course, we would be 11 nmi from Santa Cruz or Monterey and 7 nmi west of Moss Landing, the only other good harbor on Monterey Bay. Moss Landing was naturally our port of refuge. The tall stacks were a prominent landmark, and in fog we could home in on the low frequency beacon or take bearings on adjacent AM broadcast stations. If the wind became too much, we could run for Moss Landing under jib alone or bare poles, if necessary, from anywhere in the center of the bay. With centerboard down and a following wind, a boat can be steered through quite a wide angle with no sails at all. An easterly (offshore) wind would be something else, of course, but that would be rare and likely to be forecast.

By the time Moss Landing was off the port beam, the wind was about 15 kn from the west, and we saw De and Stan lowering the big genoa. With our smaller jenny, we weren't having any difficulty yet, but it would be easier to change headsails now than later, so Mike went forward and removed the jenny. Mike then went below to get the working jib. Now, I thought, both boats will have the same sail area...or would they?

"The jib is under the mast," said Mike from the cabin.

"Oh no, can you get it out?" I asked.

"I don't think so...maybe if I had a screwdriver."

This was no time to think about what a screwdriver might do to my jib; besides I trusted Mike's judgment. I passed him the toolbox from the lazarette. Mike found a tool and worked some more but couldn't free the jib. "Which edge is caught?" I asked, thinking of performing minor surgery on the sail.

"The edge with the wire in it," Mike replied. So much for cutting the sail. At this point, I had to laugh at the ridiculous situation and the dumb stunt of stepping the mast on the jib. I considered our options: (1) We could use the genoa, but the wind was increasing and we would soon be overpowered, (2) we could sail with main alone, but we wouldn't be able to keep up with Ipo. I rejected the idea of unstepping the mast. This is an awkward job on the trailer; on the now choppy sea, it could be a disaster. I could think of only one other thing to try, and that was to loosen the forestay turnbuckle. I didn't have much hope for that idea because the shrouds remain quite taut even with the forestay disconnected; but Mike went forward,

unwound the turnbuckle until the forestay was slack, then returned to the cabin. He pulled mightily on the jib...and it came free!

While Mike was tightening the forestay and hanking on the jib, De came motoring past our stern and said something about being only half way and we wouldn't get to Monterey until 7 PM (based on our average so far). I took this to mean he wanted to motor for awhile, so when Mike returned to the cockpit I fired up the Seagull. In the meantime, Ipo had moved off to the west, far beyond hailing range. (We never did establish radio communication.) I wasn't sure what De's intentions were so I continued on our 170-180° heading. (In retrospect, I probably should have followed Ipo to seaward to keep the boats in contact.)

I wasn't too concerned about a 7 PM ETA because I had told Sandy to expect us anytime from 4 PM to sundown. (I learned later that Sydney was expecting the ever-optimistic De around 2 PM, and De was worried about Syd worrying about De, and of course De couldn't have known how slowly sea cows move in a light wind.)

Ipo was soon about a mile off our starboard beam and only visible when we were on top of a swell. She was dropping behind, apparently no longer under power, so I shut off the fuel to the Seagull and resumed sailing.

With the freshening breeze and the increased boat speed, my mal de mer disappeared completely; I felt great. The sea was more interesting now, with a wind chop building on the swells. The overcast had burned away to bright sunlight, which turned the sea a deep blue. There were flights of black gulls. A fleet of racing sloops from Santa Cruz was passing us about a mile to shoreward.

The reach we had hoped to have all the way was not to be though. As we progressed further into the southern half of the bay, the wind continued to shift counterclockwise until we were closehailed against a 20 kn southwesterly with accompanying waves.

I found myself working hard. I don't like my mainsheet cleated when the wind is strong, particularly on a beat, so I had recently added a ratchet sheave to increase my holding power. The ratchet didn't seem to be as helpful now as I had hoped, but possibly I was maintaining a white knuckle grip unnecessarily.

I was conscious of the hazard of capsizing in cold water, 7 miles from shore. (The nearest land was actually only about a half mile away, but that was straight down. Monterey Canyon is 368 fathoms deep here.) Of course, Mike and I both wore life jackets (with whistles attached). I was wearing my motheaten USN wool turtleneck and watch cap because wool is supposed to provide some warmth even when wet. I would have worn a wetsuit if I had owned one, but De and Stan tell me that wetsuits are too hot out of the water. We also had a sleeping bag on board (stowed in a Glad bag) for use in warming a hypothermic victim. And we had aerial and surface flares, smoke signals, and a Freon horn for attracting attention, and a ladder to bring someone aboard from the water. (Later, Sandy and I tested the ladder at Woodward Reservoir and found it to be almost useless.) The centerboard was lashed back so it would not retract if Manatee should turn turtle.

But I didn't want to have to use any of that stuff so I concentrated on keeping Manatee upright. I also checked frequently for Ipo's sails to reassure myself that De and Stan were doing OK too. They were still far to windward and a little behind, and it was harder to identify their sail with certainty.

The Monterey peninsula was now visible on the horizon, and the outline of a mountain was to starboard of our heading. Mike thought the harbor was in the direction of the mountain and suggested we point higher in order to avoid an eventual difficult tack up to the harbor. I agreed and pointed Manatee's snout at the mountain.

But the sea cow had no enthusiasm for that heading, so I let her bow fall off a few degrees. Now she was driving hard, punching her way through the waves instead of being stopped by them. If I saw a steeper-than-usual wave coming our way I would head up momentarily to take the wave more nearly bow on. The result would sometimes be buckets of water thrown against the backs of our heads. We were both on the windward seat, of course, and as far forward as we could get. But we never got soaked or cold, and we took no water at all in the cockpit (which is not self bailing). The Potter is a remarkably dry boat for its size.

So I quit trying to point at the mountain. Safety required that I keep the boat moving for control. Pinching up just slowed her down and greatly increased her leeway. I was not too concerned about being below our intended track anyway as I anticipated calmer seas in the lee of Point Pinos and possibly a favorable wind shift. We also had the option of motoring up the coast to the harbor.

The sailing was exciting now. I was getting the feel of the boat and the sea, and my confidence increased. We never came close to a knock-down and I was less anxious about capsizing, but I still kept the mainsheet uncleated most of the time.

Gradually the shoreline became more detailed. White sand dunes ahead confirmed that we were headed east of the harbor. Soon we spotted the gong buoy that marks one corner of the Prohibited Area off Fort Ord, and we passed inside the mark by a few yards. This was a definite position fix. According to the chart we were only 1 nmi east of our intended track and 3 nmi from Monterey harbor. The sea and the wind were less now as we moved into the lee of the peninsula.

It was time to tack so we came about (for the first time) and headed west for awhile. I hoped we would intercept Ipo, but she was still pretty far out. We tacked toward shore again but were still east of where we thought the harbor to be. It was about 5:30 now and I didn't want the waiting women to worry any longer than necessary, so I started the Seagull and headed back out to join Ipo. Because of her windward position, I had expected her to overtake us when we first tacked, but being further to seaward she must have had rougher seas that slowed her and increased her leeway. She now appeared to be passing near the same Prohibited Area marker buoy we had passed earlier. As we got closer, the bone in Ipo's teeth indicated she was now under power also. As we met, I put the helm over and fell in line behind her. I had wanted both boats to enter the harbor together, but now Ipo was headed back to the stable and there was no catching her, even though I had the uncertain throttle lever in the wide open position. A sea lion greeted us as we steamed for the harbor.

De lowered his sails as he reached the harbor entrance. I decided to leave our sails up so we wouldn't be dependent on the malfunctioning throttle control in an unfamiliar harbor. Seals were cavorting on the end of the breakwater, and as we turned to starboard toward the ramp I was glad to see Sandy on the rocks waving and taking photos of our approach. It was hard to see toward the ramp because of the sun in our eyes and the salt on our glasses, but I located the dock, shut off the Seagull by choking off the carburetor with the heel of my hand, and edged into the dock, aided by my waiting daughter, Jill.

Getting the boat on the trailer was awkward because of a surge that kept swinging the boat off the rollers. I had to back the trailer back into the water once to refloat the boat, in the process jamming the still extended rudder under the boat and chewing it up on the ramp. Although I had managed to stay dry on the 8-hour sail, I now had to wade in up to my hips to horse the boat into position.

We topped off the day with wine and Mexican food at the nearby Casa de Maria on Cannery Row. There was a Mariachi singer and a beautiful view of Monterey Bay at dusk, but the best part was the satisfaction of completing what was, for me, a challenging passage.