

Tips For Prospective Blue Water Cruisers

By Wendy Hinman and Garth Wilcox



WENDY HINMAN AND GARTH WILCOX SAILED 34,000 MILES OVER 7 YEARS ABOARD THEIR 31-FOOT WYLIE-DESIGNED BOAT, VELELLA, CIRCUMNAVIGATING THE PACIFIC OCEAN, WITH A FORAY INTO THE SOUTH CHINA SEA.

WENDY IS CURRENTLY WRITING A BOOK ABOUT THEIR ADVENTURES.

Since we've been blue water cruising for over 7 years and 34,000 miles, we have had numerous people ask us questions as they prepare to go cruising. Cruising is definitely not for everyone; it is a different lifestyle that comes with

its own trials. Purchasing and outfitting a boat is a tremendous commitment and financial investment, and many fortunes have been lost in discovering it is not one's ideal mode of sightseeing. A Round-the-World ticket with a backpack can satisfy a desire to explore other cultures without banking one's future on it. Once you go cruising, if you like it, returning to the lifestyle you lived beforehand can be very difficult.

Here we'll share a little of what we've learned about cruising. One could write a book to adequately cover this topic and several good ones already exist. While we've learned a lot from reading

about cruising, much of what we've learned has come through using our boat and continually reevaluating what kind of lifestyle we want to lead and can afford. Please see other items on this article for information on boat preparation, the equipment we carried and what we thought of it, as well as communications, weather, and provisioning.

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR CRUISE PREPARATION

We'd suggest you find ways to experience cruising before making any commitments to help you decide if

the lifestyle is really for you. Chartering a boat without all the amenities and services for a period of 3-4 weeks can allow you to experience a more authentic look at the cruising lifestyle including getting your own fuel, provisions and water under various circumstances, generating your own power to meet your needs, laundry,

complete instruction manual. Cruising articles in the major sailing magazines are helpful but can be intimidating. In a perfect world . . . We continually remind ourselves that magazines are mainly funded by advertising and they want to avoid advocating anything that might be considered unsafe to protect people lacking in common sense.

Decisions about how to best prepare a boat for voyaging depend significantly upon individual lifestyle choices. We postponed several decisions about buying expensive items and have since added some and decided others were not necessary based on the way we live. Our list of modifications is



repairs and navigation outside of home waters. A big part of cruising is being self sufficient and in modern society we have diverged a long way from that. Making an extended passage offshore can give you an idea of what life is like at sea and how you might adapt.

The most useful books we found for preparing to go voyaging were: Beth Leonard's "Voyager's Handbook" (very thorough and complete), John Neal and Amanda Swan's "Offshore Cruising Companion" (specific

PREPARING THE BOAT FOR VOYAGING

It is impossible to have the perfect boat before you leave to go cruising since it is hard to anticipate everything. You have to just call it good enough and set off sailing at some point. Experience will teach you about your boat and your needs. Our nearly 2-month long shakedown cruise revealed many issues that we addressed before really leaving the conveniences of home. You may find it helpful to visit the section where we discuss the modifications

always evolving based on how we are using the boat, deciding what is important to us and our evolving goals. We've found that planning stops once every year or year and a half in places where we can do a major boat overhaul helps us manage many problems until we can properly address our needs and helps keep maintenance from overwhelming us. (For example, we left with a brand new mainsail, but old jibs and staysails, since we weren't really sure which we'd use.



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practical information for getting your affairs in order and securing supplies) and Steve Dashew's "Cruising Encyclopedia" (a great reference available on CD). For all kinds of fishing, the "Cruisers Guide to Fishing" by Scott and Wendy Bannerot is a

(boat.htm#modifications) we made to our boat before departing. Keep in mind that people have different priorities and each boat comes with its own set of strengths and weaknesses, so someone else's advice may not work for you.

Once we got to New Zealand, we had a very good idea of what we needed and found good quality workmanship at lower prices than the U.S. Had we purchased sails before departing, we'd have made inappropriate choices).

BOAT MAINTENANCE

There is no such thing as being finished doing boat work or to prevent having equipment problems. People joke about cruising being the opportunity to fix your boat in exotic places and that's not far from the

engines seem to be the most at risk items, but people have had problems of all sorts. The simpler the boat, the less there is to break and fix. Waiting for parts has put a major crimp in many a cruiser's dream cruise. And lying with your head in the bilge or in the engine compartment, while never

checking for and dealing with leaks, corrosion, mildew, wear and deterioration, laundry, varnishing, cleaning the galley and head areas, fridge, floor, rug, etc., making food and beverages we can't otherwise get (like bread, tortillas, ginger beer), polishing the stainless, scrubbing the



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truth. We are trying to keep sophisticated equipment (upon which we are often dependent for our safety) functioning often under very primitive adverse conditions. It is easy to break things when they get so much use, especially in a moist saltwater environment. A little oversight or mistake can cost big and that can happen more frequently when functioning on minimal sleep as you

comfortable, can be twice as unpleasant in the heat of the tropics, especially when it entails ripping apart your full time home. If you believe you can't live without it, make sure you have some kind of back up in mind so you can keep cruising anyway until you get a decent opportunity to address the problem effectively. We always have a project list and our priorities are always changing

waterline/bottom/rudder and transducers, scrubbing the dinghy, airing out clothing lockers, inventorying provisions and checking for rusting cans, punctured packaging and deterioration. The stainless steel rusts quickly in saltwater and can stain nearby cloth and hull areas. We'd recommend rinsing or wiping down with fresh water any time you have an opportunity to prevent



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do on passages. Everyone experiences breakdowns and they can be time consuming and depressing, especially when you can't deal with them properly. It can be frustrating and overwhelming sometimes trying to fix things in places that barely have a hardware store or a decent means of transportation. Electronics, watermakers, refrigerators and

depending on the challenges we're facing. To keep the list manageable, we try to schedule major overhauls each year or so in a location where we can get parts easily.

We also find it helps to do a little each day so we don't get overwhelmed. Regular chores include important or easy repairs, getting and stowing supplies (food, water, fuel, parts),

corrosion and using Wichinox with a generous freshwater rinse. One can catch fresh water to meet these needs. It is amazing how high spray can get and how it can permeate everywhere. Zipper cars will freeze if not rinsed with fresh water or protected, but they can be removed and replaced if necessary.

To be continued.