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# THE GREAT 10,000-MILE ASPEN POWER CATAMARAN EXPEDITION

THIS COUPLE IS  
BRINGING THEIR NEW  
BOAT HOME—  
THE LONG WAY!

BY PETER A. ROBSON



W

hen customers on the East Coast buy one of Larry Graf's Aspen powercats from his Burlington, Washington, factory, they typically have it trucked across the country. However, when David and Sue Ellen Jenkins bought their 40-foot Aspen C120, they decided to take the long way around.

David grew up around his family's boats in the Annapolis/Chesapeake Bay area. Most recently, he owned a 28-foot Albemarle express cruiser. However, his wife, Sue Ellen, wasn't a real fan of that boat—the twin 350 Mercruiser gas engines were simply too noisy and it was hard to have a conversation. David had been thinking about replacing that boat for some time. He first started looking at Glacier Bay catamarans (where Larry Graf was an owner) after reading articles in boating magazines about Larry and his Bermuda Challenge success. The Bermuda Challenge is an offshore powerboat endurance race created by Boating magazine in 1996. Larry was the first to accept the challenge and made the 728-mile non-stop trip from Virginia Beach to Bermuda in 37 hours aboard a 26-foot Glacier Bay catamaran powered by twin 90-horsepower Honda outboards.

David appreciated the Glacier Bay design, but when he read about Larry's new company and their super-efficient power proa design, he decided to take a closer look. "It coincided with the fact that I'd sold the business [see sidebar] and sold my Albemarle," said David. "I was semi-retired, not getting any younger and looking to do something else." He convinced Sue Ellen and brother-in-law Blake Eder (a professional boat captain), to visit the Aspen plant in Burlington. Said David: "The Aspens were clearly being built for quality. I



know from building and re-designing equipment in my business that it's all about the team members you have and how much passion they have and whether they are building for production or for quality. Larry and his crew were clearly building for quality and durability, and you could see that at every turn."

David and Sue Ellen first considered Larry's 32-foot Aspen, but they felt it was a bit small for their needs, so they ordered a 40-footer and named it *Knot Wafflen'* (after David's former company).

**THEIR PLAN WAS** to do a long-distance shakedown cruise to Alaska, then head south to Mexico and the Sea of Cortez where the boat would be trucked to Galveston, Texas, in the Gulf of Mexico. They'd then cruise from there to Florida, and then up to Annapolis—a total distance of some 10,000 miles. They estimated it would take about 18 months to bring the boat home. The idea was to do the trip in a number of legs that would allow David and Sue Ellen to travel home to Annapolis in between. While most of the legs would be done by David and Sue Ellen, family and guests, some of the

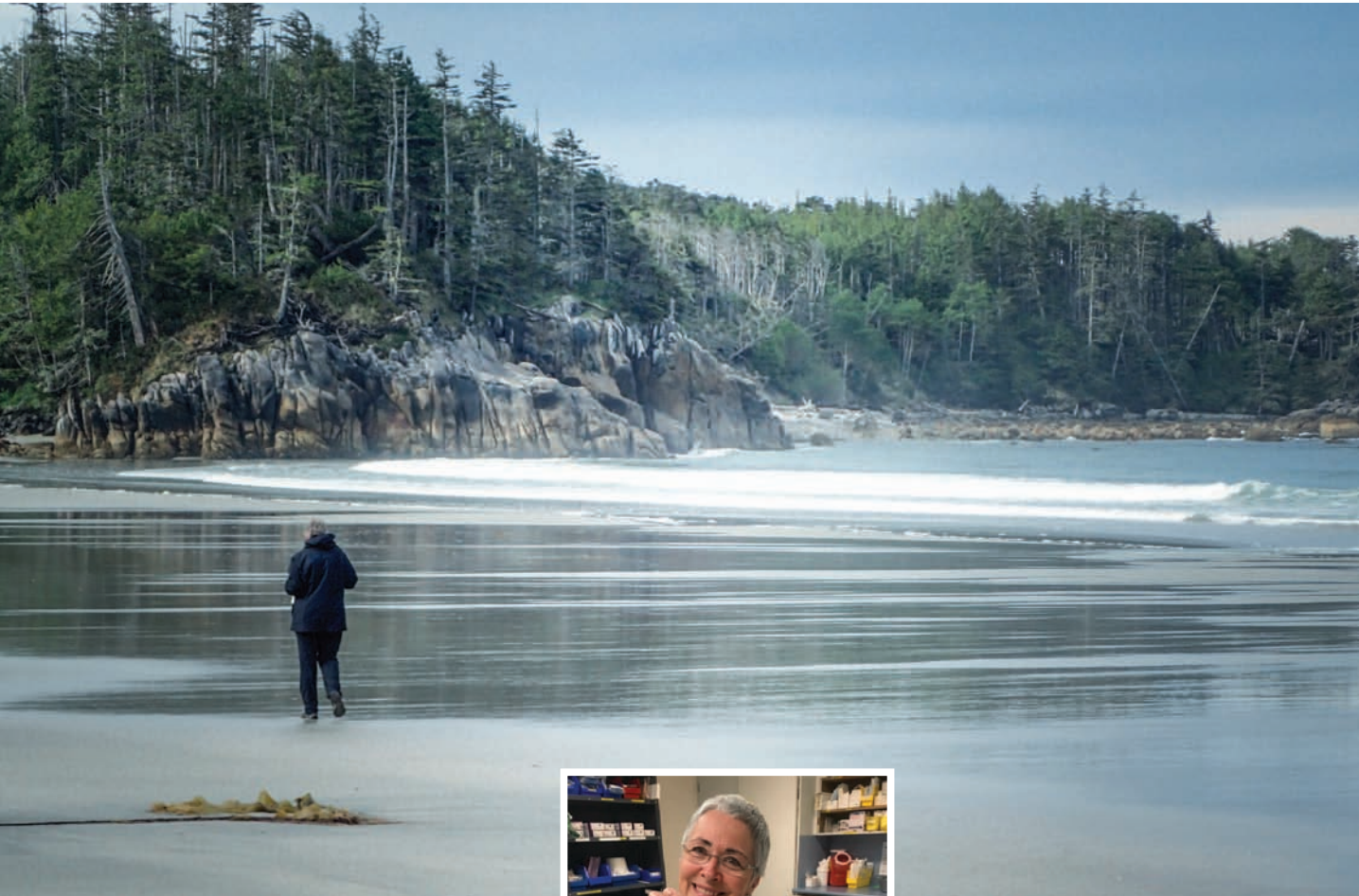
The scale of everything in Alaska is huge, the distances deceiving, as *Knot Wafflen'* dodges ice and heads up Tracey Arm. Left: Sue Ellen and David.

other legs would be done by Larry Graf and select boating writers.

**THE FIRST LEG** went according to plan, David, Sue Ellen and family cruised up to Alaska, then took a break while Larry ran the boat. This writer, who reviewed Larry's first C120 for *Pacific Yachting* (see the August 2015 issue) was familiar with

the Aspen brand and was invited aboard for several days with Larry while *Knot Wafflen'* was in Alaska. We had the opportunity to explore some amazing glaciers and cruise-ship-fuelled towns and generally observe how the boat performed. There were no issues with the boat or any misadventures—other than our drone being attacked by angry seagulls while we were filming at the Sawyer Glacier.

After Larry left, David and Sue Ellen returned to Alaska to start the cruise back south. However, everything went sideways in Butedale on B.C.'s remote mid coast. The couple were avid hikers ▶



Top: Strolling a beach on the west side of Calvert Island. Above: Sue Ellen at the hospital in Bella Bella.

and decided to hike up to the lake above Butedale. The trail was extremely muddy and slippery. Sue Ellen slipped on a wet log and snapped her wrist and tore tendons. They hurried back to the boat, with Sue Ellen in great pain, and set off for the nearest hospital, at Bella Bella, a distance of more than 75 miles. Not wanting to get caught travelling in the dark, they sped south at almost 20 knots. Said David, "The speed of the boat really paid off. If we had been on a traditional trawler, I wouldn't have gotten there before dark, I would have had to pull in overnight." As it turned out, they made it to Bella Bella just before dark and in short order the hospital was able to set her wrist. This threw the proverbial wrench into the plans, as Sue Ellen was unable to carry on.

Fortunately, David's brother-in-law, Blake, his wife Pat and other family members were able to join the boat at various stops along the way south, how-

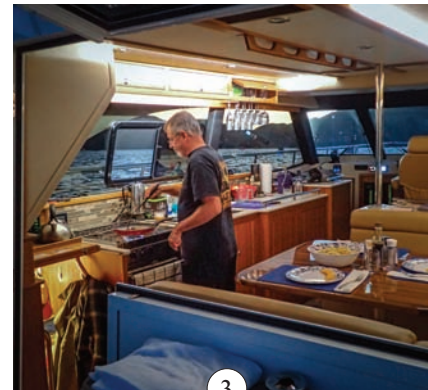
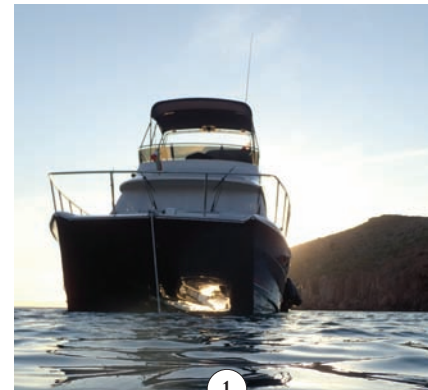
ever, without Sue Ellen, the trip became a bit more like a delivery than a meandering cruise. The rest of the trip to Mexico went smoothly and once they left B.C., David and his brother in law, and at times David's nephew Ian Jenkins, hopped down the Washington, Oregon, California and Mexico coasts before rounding Cabo San Lucas and arriving in the Sea of Cortez.

Along the way there were a number of weather challenges but David said he never worried about the boat. "I wor-

ried about me as an operator, but I really didn't worry about the boat." One rough spot was off Eureka, California, as he and Blake bucked into heavy seas on their way into port. They buried the bow in a large wave and took green water three feet over the bow and over the cabin. On the same leg, but before turning into Eureka, they took a big wave over the starboard stern quarter, filling and then draining out of the cockpit.

David said that from a boat handling standpoint, the most fun he had was heading south with the wind and current in Dixon Entrance, between Alaska and B.C. "We were running in some pretty heavy seas and, by adjusting the speed, I was able to surf on top of a single wave at about 17 to 18 knots for about 20 minutes."

**THERE WERE A** couple of long runs along the Baja Coast where fuel was a concern; most notably the almost 300-mile leg from Ensenada to the first available fuel at ▶



1. A kayaker's view of *Knot Wafflen*. 2. Aspen Powercat designer and builder Larry Graf. 3. Chef David prepares fresh-caught tuna off the Baja coast. 4. Sometimes you need a rest. 5. David and brother-in-law Blake Eder celebrate at the end of the first leg, La Paz, Mexico.

Turtle Bay, and then the almost 500-mile leg from Turtle Bay to Cabo San Lucas. David, Blake and Ian were aboard for those legs. The boat's fuel capacity is 230 US gallons and at a speed of 16 to 18 knots, it can travel 1.3 to 1.7 miles per gallon. That gives a range of about 300 miles, with 30 gallons in reserve. Slowing to six or seven knots, the mileage increases to about five miles per gallon. Knowing this, Blake and David strapped two fuel bladders on deck and these added an additional capacity of 125 gallons. When they got to Turtle Bay after two overnight stops, they had used just over 200 gallons (and refueled at a cost of US\$7/gallon). The non-stop run to Cabo was much longer and during the night they were being pushed by eight to 10 foot seas on the quarter which made driving a bit "too squirrely" so they steered directly downwind, about 30 degrees off their preferred course so that the seas were directly behind and the ride became much more comfortable. They also managed their speed to make sure they would have enough fuel to get to Cabo. In the end, they didn't use the fuel bladders and actually had more fuel when they arrived at Cabo than they had when they stopped at Turtle Bay, even though they had traveled an additional 200 miles. ▶

## THE WAFFLE MAN

**David Jenkins** started out in business with his father, a salesman/distributor for FS Carbon company. The company, which was founded in 1937, started by producing premixed waffle and pancake mix under the Golden Malted brand. In the mid 1960s, the company patented a "flip-over" waffle making machine. David was in his early 20s at the time and he and his father worked out of their garage and rented the machines and sold mix to hotels and restaurants in the Washington area. David eventually purchased the company with partners and changed the business model from renting their



machines to providing them for free, as long as the customers bought their Golden Malted brand mix/batter. Over the years, David and his partners continually improved the design of their flip-over waffle makers. When it was time for David to sell out and semi-retire, the company was the largest waffle machine company on the world, with 100,000 machines in service in more than 40,000 restaurants around the world. David even wrote a self-published book about the business and his business philosophy. It's called *The Accidental Waffleman* and is available at [accidentalwaffleman.org](http://accidentalwaffleman.org).

**KNOT WAFFLEN** pulled into La Paz, just up the coast from Cabo, seven months after leaving Anacortes for Alaska and having travelled more than 6,000 miles. The boat will be spending three months in the Sea of Cortez. "During that time," Sue Ellen said, "I'm looking forward to getting back on the boat with David and this time I will be wearing a bathing suit instead of a ski coat!" When David isn't aboard, Larry and his team, as well as other family members and guests, will

use the boat to explore the area. In early February, they will cruise across the Sea of Cortez to San Carlos, and turn things over to Larry's team who will remove the flybridge and put the boat on a truck bound for Galveston. There she will be put back together, dropped back in the water and *Knot Wafflen* can resume the journey. From there, David and Sue Ellen will hop along the coast as far south as Key West (stopping at their second home at the Clearwater Yacht Club), then

through the Bahamas and then up to their home port of Annapolis before hurricane season starts in June. The trip will put more than 10,000 miles under *Knot Wafflen's* keel.

**SO HOW DID** the Aspen perform? Said David, "Aspen has been really responsive to anything we need. There were no major problems, other than issues with their alternators. The high-output unit burned out twice in Alaska and it wasn't until it was replaced by a Volvo high-output alternator (which is a bit slower to charge the batteries) that the problem was solved for good. Twice, masses of jellyfish got sucked up into the generator's raw water strainer and caused the generator to overheat and shut down. Of course, those issues were not directly related to the overall construction and performance of the boat. However, an electrical gremlin showed up a few times. It was solved—just as we do with our computers—by pulling the plug, or in this case removing and reinserting a major bus fuse, and then powering up the electronics. "It's a crazy anomaly," said David, "but once we solved the mystery, it hasn't caused any problems."

David said it is hard to pick his favourite experience. He refers simply to "the joy of boating." "We got to many, many remote places where there was no one around, there were amazing waterfalls, empty beaches and dozens of interactions with whales and dolphins. It got to the point that things that were initially grand became normal. For example, there were hundreds of great waterfalls and at some point we simply stopped taking photos." However, relating this to *Knot Wafflen*, he stresses that Larry's boats are not just another great waterfall that one gets used to. "There are no other boats around like his. He has patented the design and I'm very, very glad that we hooked up with his boat for this trip. It's an amazing boat. I couldn't be a bigger fan of Larry."

**IN THE FUTURE**, each winter, David and Sue Ellen will bring the boat from Annapolis down the Intracoastal Waterway, around the tip of Florida and up to Clearwater. One thing is certain; even after this trip, David and Sue Ellen will have a lifetime of adventures still ahead of them. For those interested in following *Knot Wafflen's* adventures, check out the blog, hosted by David's brother-in-law Blake at [bristolboatdelivery.blogspot](http://bristolboatdelivery.blogspot).

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**JAN 26 - SLOW BOAT TO GREECE:** A Family Escapade in the Med  
Join BCA members Bill Eisenhauer and Gabriela Hirt as they set sail with their two school-age children on a 15 month journey from Sardinia to Greece aboard their 12 meter ketch, exploring lost civilizations and some of Europe's most active volcanoes. These are just a few of the surprises that await modern-day seafarers propelled by the winds of antiquity.

**FEB 9 - A 10 YEAR "ACCIDENTAL CIRCUMNAVIGATION"**  
Sailor and adventurer Cresswell Walker shares his tales on how to sail around the world without trying too hard, cruising more than 50,000 miles in a 10 year "accidental circumnavigation" with his partner Irena. Hear tales of dodging hurricanes, pirates, and bureaucrats - learning how not to be scared half to death while having the time of your life.

**MAR 9 - BERGY BITS & BUBBLE NETTING:** Sailing Adventures in SE Alaska  
Join BCA members Norm & Beth Cooper in their toques and down vests as they explore the frosty wilds of SE Alaska in their latest cruising adventure aboard Sarah Jean II. Heart stopping stories and breathtaking scenes, captured in hundreds of dazzling photos, will keep you entertained! See bears scoop salmon from raging rivers, thread your way through menacing bergy bits to the towering glaciers of Tracy Arm and see pods of humpback whales herd fish with bubblest!

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