

Log of the *HILDE M²*



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EXTRA! EXTRA! FIRST PASSAGE COMPLETED!

The "First Passage" turns into the "First Panic"! We wait 19 days for word of the *Hilde M²* and Karl, who reach San Juan safely and call home November 17.

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THE PROBLEM is that they were bound for Tortola, BVI, and should have reached there in about 12 days.... Aside from wondering and worrying (can I stand this for 2 or 3 more years?), we landlubbers are of course fine. Meanwhile, the *Hilde M²* is having her problems, and Karl is having Major Adventure # 1.

Three events take place that are significant bums.

First, an "Easterly" storm while he is in the Gulf Stream lasts 50 (count them, five oh) hours.

Karl: "The waves were incredible." Me: "I am glad I wasn't there." Karl: "You would have died..." They are coming from all directions but he doesn't see the one that gets him.

Probably it was the kind that goes straight up and then curls over, for it comes down on him vertically and smashes him into the floor of the cockpit, wracking the dodger, etc. He didn't have all the companionway boards in so vast quantities of water pour below, etc. He bails out and keeps on, but as you can imagine everything below is soaked, with a sort of spray or mist if not directly by the water. And those of you who know, know seawater never really dries out.

Secondly, as the storm blows itself out, the engine dies due to dirty fuel taken on at Beaufort and homogenized in the tank during the rough seas. (This is extra frustrating for K has always tried to be so careful, lugging diesel fuel in jugs from automobile stations -- but we thought filling up with name brand fuel in such a large marine station would be safe.) After cleaning the gummed up fuel filters K cranks the engine -- first with the starter but then repeatedly by hand to conserve the batteries -- but there is no spark of life.

This means the only electricity available is what is left in the batteries. He switches everything off except the speed/distance log, and switching on the Loran just once each day for a few minutes to check his dead reckoning and sextant-based navigation. Critically, the short wave radio is down from this point on, which is why he never is able to let any of us know what's been happening.

Discouraged, he turns back a day and a half -- then after dreaming what he swears was advice from his dad -- decides the rough Beaufort inlet without an engine or radio is nothing to deal with on purpose, and turns southeast again.

So there are no lights at night; the kerosene lamp he hangs in the rigging won't stay lit in the wind gusts. The most dangerous single incident occurs when he hears a terrific horn blast one night and pops up the companion way up to see a huge ship looming off the port bow. One positive thing, the ship goes on about a half mile but then turns back. They are blinking signals at him but he is too spacey from seasick medicine and generally too fuddled at that point to clearly read their message, finally he gets it together enough to send a Morse code "O" and "K" with a flashlight -- with another blast on the horn they disappear to the southwest.

Judging from accounts of many encounters with commercial shipping, few ships ever take the trouble to check out small yachts in possible distress. Karl wishes he could have sent a letter to the company commending the master's action, but he doesn't even know it's name.

Thirdly, just to set everything off, somewhere during the fifth night out a pin shears from the constant buffeting in the stormy seas, and the control pendulum is lost from the Aries self steering gear. In the morning K is able to rise to the occasion and finds that he can balance the sails and lashed tiller in such a way as to hold an approximate course -- at the expense of not being able to steer directly where he wants to go.

All in all, about two weeks of fairly serious challenge, no self-steering, no instruments, never more than 2 hours of sleep, feeling bad about not being able to let us know, etc., etc. Fortunately the weather is warmer and the winds more moderate as he slowly works his way toward the well marked harbor entrance of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

He is rewarded by a spectacular sunset his last evening out, and during the night the lights of San Juan appear off the bow and slowly grow closer. Finally, in mid-morning of November 17 he laboriously tacks into the harbor, dodging the local boat traffic and tucks into a small friendly marina in Santurce -- weary but exultant and defiantly in one piece -- to make repairs, do eleven (11) loads of laundry, wash the cabin walls, order a new pendulum from England, send the Tiller-Master autopilot off to California to be fixed, and generally lick his wounds and get things back together, etc.

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As for me, my feet haven't touched the floor since he called!! He's on his way over to Tortola now and is sending more info which I'll pass on to you soon.

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