



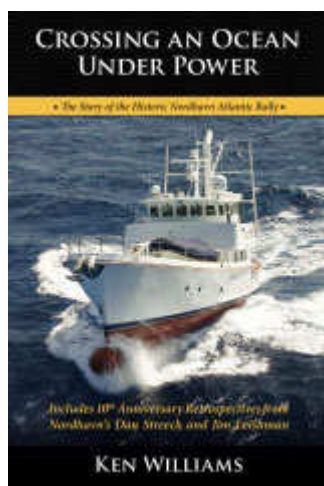
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Crossing an Ocean under Power

by Ken Williams

Book review by Jeff Merrill



When I first heard that Ken Williams was going to do a 10th anniversary edition of his now classic book I was immediately flooded with incredible memories of the NAR (Nordhavn Atlantic Rally). Though I did not participate in this monumental and historic ocean crossing I remember quite well the optimism and pioneering spirit of PAE as we organized this first ever power boat fleet across the Atlantic. Being able to re-live the event with Ken's great new book revision reminds me of the enormity of this incredible accomplishment and makes me marvel at the ground breaking organizational dynamics that all came together to produce an essentially trouble free 3,800-mile Atlantic crossing for 18 trawlers, 15 of them Nordhavns.

I remember reading the first edition of this book upon the Rally's conclusion. After following the day by day, blow by blow accounts, I felt like I already had read the book and found it a bit anticlimactic (after all, I already knew the ending). Michael Jones, the father of Google Earth, and an acquaintance of mine who is a super knowledgeable boater was the impetus for this publication. At Michael's urging Ken dusted off his original manuscript and with a seasoned author's approach produced a color photo edition which not only flows better, but also benefits from the advantage of hindsight and a decade of reflection.

Comparing both books really isn't fair. The first edition seemed a bit sterile, maybe because it was printed so soon after the event or because I was so saturated with NAR stuff at the time...and it had more of an "email collection" feel, rather than a piece of non-fiction – but that is not the case with the 10th anniversary edition which is fresh, has an improved format, is "cleaned up" and is much more enjoyable to read. *Sans Souci*, Ken and Robert Williams' Nordhavn 62, was a floating internet hot spot as they crossed the Pond and Ken's obvious infatuation with the internet and daily blasts allowed him to continually update the world.

Ken Williams is a gusher, meaning he is prolific and his musings are both entertaining and honest. Prior to departure he admits his relative inexperience (having gone no more than 8 to 10 hours non-stop prior to the Rally) and you wonder how Roberta and their trusty dog Shelby feel with Ken constantly typing away, but his insights from reporting in-the-moment do a great job of capturing the essence of what it is like to be at sea on a long voyage. Ken's writing style is folksy and unpretentious. You feel like you are on board listening to him recount what is happening in real time – like hanging out one on one with a close friend (but in this case broadcasting out to over 5,000 worldwide followers who gobbled up every post). There are many insightful observations about Nordhavns and the trawler lifestyle as well as the intriguing dynamic of travelling with a boat full of strangers (which becomes self correcting because everyone on a small boat becomes very well acquainted in short order!).

Most of the Nordhavns in the NAR were owned and operated by couples, and the preparation for this big event began months before the actual start date, with both Ken and Roberta helping insure *Sans Souci* was up to the challenge. Nordhavn hosted a series of meetings and seminars at the Bahia Mar hotel in Fort Lauderdale to brief the crews and I laughed when Ken commented that while attending these training classes Roberta was constantly elbowing Ken asking, “Did you write that down?” and “Do we have one of those?”.

As side note it is really fun to read this knowing what I do about Ken and Roberta since they arrived in Gibraltar to complete the trip. I did a short leg as part of the GSSR fleet – one of many small armadas of Nordhavns that were inspired from the NAR - and they have grown from self proclaimed “novices” to what I would call “crafty veterans” amassing over 50,000 miles on two *Sans Souci*'s (the 62 that did the Rally and the Nordhavn 68 they built after the event). Ken freely admits that “long range cruising is addicting”. *As a salesman I would like to emphasize that everything you read here is true and you should re-read that last sentence and act on it!*

Situations pop up – like a fried 24V alternator and Ken walks us through the diagnosis and repair thinking and includes a “hindsight” perspective. There was fun interplay between the boats on VHF – in addition to daily role calls - there was apparently some great banter amongst the boats. They all stopped for a swim in the middle of the Atlantic. Stuff happened, divers cut away fishing nets and swam over to other boats to solve electrical problems and near then end a rough stretch of sea created an uncomfortable obstacle of enduring rough weather and knowing that eventually it will stop. Being in proximity of a group of other boats, all on the same mission and all ready to offer support – whether making a cup of coffee for a boat whose coffee brewer went kaput or lining up another boat for an on deck portrait, only to launch a water balloon barrage instead, showed the camaraderie of the group even though each boat was individually responsible for itself, the collective team fleet gave a strong sense of confidence to all of the participants. All of these happenings are well detailed with candor and flair – if you weren't one of the lucky participants you will wish that you had been, if you were one of the crew you will be reminded of some of the best days of your life.

The NAR was simply a brilliant concept from the mind of PAE's Jim Leishman (who also created the ATW Nordhavn 40 Around The World trip). Credit for the organization of the NAR runs deep, but aside from PAE employees (who featured prominently in the success) the organizational planning of Milt and Judy Baker, plus Bruce and Joan Kessler, just to name two

couples and it's not really fair because there are so many other key players – showed the world that a fleet rally is quite possibly the safest way to cross an ocean in a small power boat. Weather, as always, has a huge influence on any open water passage and the late Walt Hack provided sage advice for the fleet. Once you go there is usually no turning back and at trawler speeds you can't really out run any weather systems so the importance of good meteorology cannot go unmentioned.

Reading the 10th anniversary edition reminded me of many little things that happen at sea which you forget about when you return to shore. The new chapters at the end of the book are a great addition providing a more fitting conclusion to the original happy ending. For a multi-media experience the documentary that Bruce Kessler produced is still available in DVD format from PAE. It is called "Living the Dream" and you can order from Nordhavn directly. The DVD gives a lot of additional depth highlighting the experiences of all of the participating boats and really compliments Ken's book.

Setting down the book I paused to do my own reflection on the past ten years at Nordhavn. The NAR completed during boom times, and the momentum of orders from those glory days carried PAE pretty far along through the worldwide recession. The very active chat room called the "Nordhavn Dreamers" came about after the Rally, available for anybody to join and opened more doors and insights into what happens on board, both Ken Williams and Michael Jones are regular contributors to this group. As a boat builder, maybe the most significant development is the creation of several new models since the NAR...and perhaps the most relevant is the Nordhavn 68 aft pilothouse, which was a result of Ken and Roberta's experiences on their 62 and wanting to change a few things to make a better boat (the 68 continues to be one of our best sellers). Thanks Ken and Roberta for sharing your experiences with all of us. This is one of those books that is a great introduction for your friends and family members who want to know more about what it is really like to travel at sea – it's about as close as you can get to enjoying the excitement of an ocean crossing without getting wet!



Jeff Merrill has a strong affinity for books about trawlers and owns copies of both editions of *Crossing an Ocean under Power*. Having travelled over 14,000 miles at sea on various trawlers, Jeff can relate to the many issues owners face while underway that are discussed in this book. Please feel free to contact Jeff directly if you would like to know more. You can email Jeff.Merrill@JMYS.com, or you can call or text his cell phone + 1 949.355.4950. You can also

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Note: This review originally appeared on the Nordhavn website in September, 2013 and has been updated.