

August 17, 2010
From Japan to Taiwan
Two days on board and the livin' is easy

By Jeff Merrill

(Ed. note – this is the third of a multi-part series on the very first Nordhavns ever to return to the factory where they were constructed. California-based Nordhavn sales representative Jeff Merrill, traveling aboard one of the boats, Nordhavn 62 Seabird, had the privilege of participating in the historical event which took place July 3, 2010, and documented the days preceding, during and following the occasion. Click to read [Part One](#) and [Part Two](#).)



It is always a relief to leave port and head out to sea. All of the planning and preparation just swirls in your mind as you set your course for the next waypoint and get settled in. As we got going we reconfirmed that we were looking at about 330 nautical miles with a running time of likely 41 hours assuring us a daylight arrival - all good news. We departed the sea port of Ishigaki, Japan from a location of 24-20.569N 124-08.739E with 7708.5 hours on the main and shortly after departing changed our AIS destination to Taiwan.

Being on Seabird for a couple of days before departure was really a smooth way to get acclimated. Jonn and I knew where everything was, had become better acquainted with Steven and Carol and really felt like part of the GSSR team.

Carol made a great dinner for us aboard and as the sun set on the first day of July we knew that in less than 48 hours we would be back ashore, and in a new country. Steven and Carol do most of their cruising on their own. The seamanship required for a husband and wife to travel far on a boat evolves into a single minded focus embodied by great trust and teamwork. They can handle everything by themselves, but also enjoy having guests so it was not much of a shift (in fact, adding a third watch stander allowed them to enjoy each other's company a bit more). One of the reasons I thought this would be a fun trip was so that Jonn could see how a Nordhavn feels at sea AND join me on watch to get a better feel for what it is like to run a small ship non-stop out in the ocean – a rather cool way to experience “Take your son to work day”.



The seas were very calm as we sailed into the night; I retired to my berth for a short nap before coming up to the pilothouse a little before midnight. I always try to arrive a bit early for watch, it helps me get a chance to wake up, regain focus and I enjoy hearing what the preceding crew has to say in the way of boat performance, targets and weather. Our schedule for a three-watchstanding team

was three hours on and six off, very civilized with a good six hour break between shifts. One of the benefits of following this schedule for a short two day trip is that you rotate around the clock so you're never "stuck" during a time period that's harder than another.



As I checked in with Steven at midnight he handed me a goofy hat in the shape of a cake with candles on top that said "Happy Birthday". He wished me a happy birthday and ordered me to put the hat on. Always nice to be thought of and I wore that floppy hat proudly during my entire watch, sometimes laughing at the thought of what I must look like. I tried to rally Jonn to wake up and join me for my celebratory midnight-to-three watch, but he was out fast and lying on the saloon settee where it is a more comfortable ride so I figured it probably was best to let sleeping teenagers lie and happily conducted my watch solo. Well, not really solo because I had Wayne Davis on Grey Pearl and Jeff Sanson on Sans Souci to keep me engaged in conversation via the VHF. Normally a night watch is a fairly meditative time transition- you check your course, check the radar, look at your gauges, take a sip of water or grab the binoculars, but mostly stare blankly ahead. Not on the GSSR! The VHF chatter was almost non-stop – Jeff must have gotten some good sleep on his plane ride over from Seattle because he was cracking Wayne and me up with his humorous asides and observations. Jeff Sanson and I both have daughters who compete in high school sailing and I bumped into him last fall at Newport Harbor Yacht Club (I recognized him because he was wearing a jacket with the unmistakable GSSR logo). At some point during that watch I realized that they must have been doing this type of chatting all across the Pacific, and why not? It was comforting being part of a fleet rather than being an isolated blip on the sea. At any given time all three boats had capable skippers to confirm our course, scan for other boats and look out for each other. We had fallen into a loose formation and I could see the two boats' running lights, but what I really enjoyed was their company, even if only via radio. I felt like some late night 1970s trucker on the CB: "what's your 20 big buddy?" This is a great way to cruise!

Our running speed aboard Seabird was 1550 RPM and we were slipping through the seas at about 7.2 knots. Getting three boats to "synchronize speeds" takes a little fine tuning and usually one boat sets the pace for the others to match. Several hours into the trip Steven got a bit concerned about our main engine exhaust pyrometer temperature and really didn't want to push much faster than 1550 rpm to avoid overheating so we essentially became the pace boat for the fleet. We had the generator on the whole time with nice air conditioning throughout the boat.

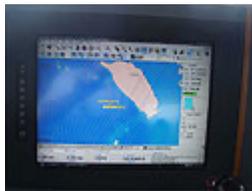


There is a system on Seabird that I have never used before called a Watch Commander. It really is a glorified egg timer which works quite well. You have to push a button every fifteen minutes or an alarm sounds. A few minutes later the alarm sounds again – much louder - and not only would it wake the skipper up (if for some reason he or she fell asleep), but it would be loud enough to wake up the people sleeping down stairs – Steven

told me he can hear it from the master stateroom so he has the peace of mind that if something happens to the skipper he will know about it pretty fast. The Watch Commander is tied in to the compass light breaker so when it gets dark and you turn on the compass light the Watch Commander is activated. This is a smart device to have on a boat like a Nordhavn and I caught myself thinking that I was playing the role of Desmond on the TV show “Lost” who had to enter a code every 108 minutes to prevent the island from blowing up. Steven also has a red light LED flashlight on the dash (I’ve seen red covers for a regular flashlight before, but never a dedicated red light) and it worked great at night on watch for looking around the dash. Another “seasoned” boat set up on Seabird is that all of the instruments are “de-beeped” so when I changed radar rings or any other nav settings I didn’t hear any annoying beeps – but I did forget the Watch Commander twice and was quick to push that button at the first sound of the alarm!

Before I knew it Carol was up and I did my end watch engine room check – it was about 120 degrees in the ER and everything was fine. I was happy for that because I didn’t want to spend much more time in there.

One of the big decisions before you depart is to determine the weather. The captains council (Ken, Braun and Steven) had been looking at a pretty good weather window that had opened, but if we took on fuel a day later, that delayed departure might have put us into more wind and rougher seas so we felt fortunate to take off when we did. As it turned out the only real surprise to the fleet was that we were running against a 1 – 2 knot current almost the whole trip. Taiwan as a destination was something none of us had ever done, in fact, I would be pretty surprised if anyone reading this has or even knows anyone who has sailed to Taiwan. As beautiful a country as Taiwan is, it is not known as a cruising destination for boaters. Sure many of the most wonderful trawlers and sailboats ever produced had their keels laid there, but our fleet was going to be amongst the first to return to the island.



Taiwan does not support boating from a cruising sense like most of us are used to. I have been told that if you depart from a harbor in Taiwan you have to return to it. That doesn’t allow for a lot of adventure. Another big factor is the regional politics and proximity with mainland China. This is a sensitive corner of the world and I have also heard that the harbors and ports are closely watched and that any boat traffic out of the ordinary could be construed in a negative way, something we didn’t want to get tangled up in. As we consulted the weather and our course before we left, we got an email from Rachel Tan, one of the top administrators in the office at Ta Shing. I’ve known Rachel for over ten years; she is very efficient, very thorough and can both speak and type English well so she had been very involved in the “homecoming” from the beginning. Rachel was acting as our ground support contact and had alerted the Taiwanese Coast Guard that we were coming to visit. In her email, sent before departing, she told us we really had a choice between two courses, we could either come across the northern tip of Taiwan above Keelung and then pass by Penghu islands and sail down the west coast (the Taiwan Strait between Taiwan and China) or sail south down the back side of Taiwan on the Pacific side to the southern tip of Oluanpi and then round up past Kaohsiung and head north along the western Taiwan coast. Each course had its plusses and minuses and it was about the same distance so the captains agreed that

we should take the route with the most favorable weather – which turned out to be the eastern route (and I don't think it hurt a bit that we would be on the far side of the island away from mainland China).

Rachel had asked me to call her on her cell phone when we hit some key waypoints so she could alert the local authorities and finalize our arrival arrangements. Ken, who as we all know is an internet junkie, solved this communication issue by emailing Rachel from onboard Sans Souci while we were underway – much easier!

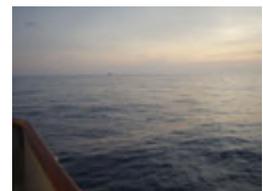
One of my big work thrills is getting on different Nordhavns to see how the owners have set them up and I usually learn a bunch of new tricks, techniques and procedures. By following the GSSR and keeping track of what other Nordhavn owners have been doing I decided that for this trip I should buy a SPOT satellite GPS messenger to broadcast our position (www.findmespot.com). I picked one up and to get Jonn a bit more invested in this travel project on the other side of the world, had him register it online and take on the job of figuring out how it works. All of the GSSR boats use SPOT to send out GPS coordinates to provide updated positions of where they are while underway and it works great. (We learned after our arrival that the Ta Shing staff was tracking all three boats progress by logging on to their blogs.) It's a bit like any new electronic gadget - it takes a little getting used to and I wish I could just push two buttons, wait 5 seconds and confirm that my lat/lon and message were sent (it will get that easy someday I'm sure), but you have to wait to first get satellite coverage confirmation via a green light and then wait about 20 minutes to confirm your report went out. Jonn was our SPOTter and upon return home we heard from the family and friends whom we had sent our location to that it was a reassuring highlight to know where we were and it also gave a bit of a geography lesson via the Google Maps feature to many who didn't know how this part of the world fits together.



about 30 miles

the ocean, but mostly it was lots of water. We did spy some whales, some porpoise and – for good measure – a few seabirds.

The first morning Carol made us egg McMuffins. Jonn had become a little seasick so Carol got him a half a Scopolamine patch, put it behind his left ear and by noon he was back in good form. There was not a lot to see...we were off of the Taiwan coast and there were other ships out on



Back in the helm chair at 9:00 am I noticed we had crossed into the 23 degree rung of latitude. I find that keeping track of hours, watching your trip log to see how many miles you have travelled and celebrating every time you clear another rung of latitude keeps you occupied and is a fun way to measure various milestones. I went out to the cockpit to watch the beautiful sea that surrounded us and to take in some salt air, and discovered a flying fish had boarded us during the night - too late to revive him so I returned him to the sea.



Looking at the electronic charts (Seabird uses Nobeltec) it was amusing to see us cruising through the East China Sea. A bit further south this turned into the Philippine Sea and then as we rounded the southern tip of Taiwan we were in the South China Sea. The charts, the AIS targets, the islands, all of that seems the same wherever you go, but it is weird to see Chinese characters listed on island names.

We found the going a bit uncomfortable on our present course so we decided to work in a bit closer to shore and reset our course for Green Island and things smoothed out a bit. We seemed to be in a counter current that was working against us and we thought maybe getting in closer to shore might put us into faster water and provide a smoother ride. It never really blew over 20 knots true, but we did have some cross chop that slammed the bow sporadically.



It's a great part of cruising how you can so quickly shift from land mode to boat mode. I love that groove of getting used to the sounds and smells of being underway. I find that after the initial excitement of departure, doing that first watch and then sleeping a bit, my brain resets to boat mode and I can carry on with my new routine for days. What a feeling it is – not to mention truly liberating – to be out on a boat with friends in the middle of nowhere with all the time in the world to get to your destination.

You might have gathered from this post that I'm a lover of the ocean, but as seafaring as I am, I'll admit that being off watch and not sleepy can get a bit boring. Most cruisers like to have an assortment of distractions. Watching shows on DVD is pretty nice, but I prefer to read books. Steven and Carol each have e-book machines and I have a Kindle electronic reader which I loaded up with three books before the trip. This seems to be a growing trend as paper books are not only heavy, but they take up stowage space. All four of us on board had their own IPOD – another nice thing to have in your gear kit so that you do not have to lug around a bunch of CDs. While on watch in the pilothouse Seabird 's IPOD was kept on shuffle. This is another great way to stay alert as the music is always changing I kept especially on my toes when about every 20 songs a Spanish lesson tape hit the speakers. Fast forward and back to the tunes.

A new product on the market that everyone has heard of is Apple's IPAD. Steven has one and he loves it. He's got magazine subscriptions, the internet for surfing sites, etc., and Ken Williams turned him on to the number one download, a game called "Angry Birds". This is a silly game where you use a sling shot to launch different types of "birds" in an attempt to land them atop of - and destroy - pigs...I know what you're thinking: "Jeff, that sounds way too intellectual for me." Granted, but at sea, entertainment can come in the craziest ways, and this game is pretty

hilarious. And I'm telling you, once you start flinging birds it's, hard to stop. The key to all of this technology is electricity – you need to be able to plug in to AC power to charge up your devices and I'm glad Steven had installed an inverter bypass so that we could get AC from the generator, because, quite obviously, a long range cruise without our various I-things, makes for a lot of thumb twittling.



With time on my hands between watches I wandered about Seabird and checked out what was in the lockers and drawers. Carol has done an exemplary job of organizing everything. The Argosys have owned a number of boats over the years and have been on boats all of their lives so what I was witnessing was the culmination of years of experience spent on the water. I always like to see what reference books are on board and it seems like every ship's library (you can't replace everything with e-books) has an assortment of essential reading. The pilothouse on Seabird has all of the usual important references at your fingertips. In the saloon there is an area reserved for cruising guides and even though I have been to Taiwan multiple times, I have never leafed through a Lonely Planet guide for Taiwan. It confirmed several things I know, but also opened up a bunch of other interesting facts and places that I never knew about. I did a little bit of research for the one or two day visit to Taipei that Jonn and I would take after leaving the yard and reading the book reminded me that one of the highlights for cruisers is planning land based excursions once they arrive at a new location.

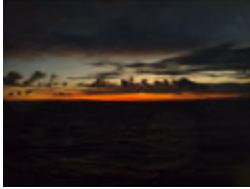
Two other cool features that I learned more about on Seabird are Magic Jack and Sling Box. I don't have all of the facts for either system except to say that for serious cruisers, both are worth looking in to. Magic Jack is an inexpensive telephone alternative (cheaply priced like Skype, but using cell phones). Apparently Steven learned about this great alternative from talking to relatives of soldiers based in the Middle East and at first he thought it was one of the hokey "as seen on TV" gimmicks until he downloaded it and started using it. Sling Box is a web based TiVo type program that allows you to record TV shows from on your home VCR and then allows you to watch them later while you are aboard.

By noon on July 2nd we had run 140 nautical miles and we all got a thrill around 15:30 when we split through a pod of whales. Periodically during the trip we would talk with Sans Souci to see if we could get closer for a Wi-Fi fix and download email. That evening Steven went back to the cockpit to grill some hamburgers and hot dogs and we had a birthday celebration complete with a delicious custom-made cake Carol had ordered for me from a bakery in Okinawa.

Jonn had brought a laptop and was busy watching DVDs of Gilligan's Island while I was on watch listening to the iPod Shuffle, when a song came on that made me do some deep thinking. It was Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Cradle" - you know that song where the well-intentioned father is never around, but vows to spend time together with his son when he gets back home and his son grows up to be just like him. It made me think again about how fortunate I am



to be able to share an experience like this with Jonn and also reminded me that life is short. It's too easy to plan around things that you hope to get to and maybe never will. I guess that's one reason Carpe Diem (seize the day) seems to be such a relevant phrase.



It got to be heavy dusk a little after 8 pm and we could see the vague outline of the mountains of Taiwan in the distance after enjoying a gorgeous sunset. I went to bed and awoke at 3am on July 3rd for my watch. Jonn was zonked so I let him sleep and I enjoyed the solitude of an easy watch, chatting on the VHF and just sitting in the helm chair (a custom Recaro chair ordered specially from Porsche for Seabird's original owner that was a very expensive – and at the time, extravagant – purchase. It's something that has become almost expected on boats over the past ten years with most Nordhavn owners installing custom Stidd or Crown helm chairs in their pilothouses. At 4 am we were approaching the southern tip of Taiwan and it was slightly bumpy and a few more ships started to appear on the radar as we approached the active seaport area of Kaohsiung. At the same time we started to see lightning in the distance, the storm we were trying to beat was starting to arrive from the south.

Jeff Sanson was driving Sans Souci, the lead boat in our formation and called for some course corrections to deviate slightly from the waypoints we had all preprogrammed before setting out – just cutting the corner a little, something you do once you get to an area and realize you can save some time. Our deepest point south on this trip as we turned the southern corner to make our way up the west coast of Taiwan was 21-48.200N 120-55.341E and by 6 am we hit 255 miles on the trip log. We also reset our clocks as we had now shifted one hour east in time zone.

Steven and I had a lengthy discussion about owners manuals and how important they are to learning about and understanding your boat. When he bought Seabird, there was not an owner's manual aboard so he created his own as he traced every wire and hose. Fortunately the importance of an [operator's manual](#) is a top priority for Nordhavn (and has been for the last 10 years) so most of our boats have a comprehensive three ring binder complete with easy to read explanations and detailed CAD drawings outlining how systems have been set up.

One of the pleasures of cruising is having time to just chat and get to know the rest of the crew on a more personal level. While Steven and I were talking, a Crosby Stills Nash and Young song came on and Steven told me all about August 20, 1969 when he and some of his buddies loaded up into a VW bug and attended Woodstock – a little bit of his story that I didn't know, and we laughed about various experiences from our past, including some interesting stories about his work in the manufacturing industry where he built up a small company to a point where he could sell it so he and Carol could follow their dreams of adventurous cruising.



By noon we were opposite Kaohsiung and our blue radar screen had dozens of red targets scattered across it, making it look like it had a bad case of Chicken Pox! Jonn and I played a game of Monopoly on Carol's IPOD while relaxing in the saloon – the electronic version has

really cool properties, it's a much more modern "worldly" edition with international cities including, most appropriately, Taipei! I took a shower and refreshed myself with a Coca Cola and a Clif bar and Carol made a great stew for lunch.



The excitement on board Seabird was building as we were now just a couple of hours away from arriving.



Jeff Merrill is a salesman at our Nordhavn Yachts Southwest office in Dana Point, California.

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