

Oh My Darlin! By Jeff Merrill



Frank Sain knew his darlin' was out there. No, we're not talking about wife Barbara, whom he refers to by that term of endearment, rather, the other girl of his fantasies. Headed for retirement and longing for life at sea, Frank set out to find his dream boat.

Years of studying the trawler market led him to Nordhavn and after inspecting the 40-foot Around-The-World boat at the 2002 U.S. Powerboat Show in Annapolis, Frank was hooked on Nordhavn's smallest passagemaker.

With permanent vacation quickly approaching, Frank couldn't wait for a new hull to be built, so he linked with salesman Jeff Merrill to find the perfect brokerage boat. The search ended at Nordhavn's northeast office in Rhode Island where hull # 11, the former Double Dragon, was docked. A successful spring seatrial in the snow locked the deal.

While Nordhavns do have a reputation for going anywhere, Frank, a former sailor with an established cruising history, was not looking to cross oceans in Darlin' right off the bat. Delivering the boat to its new home port of Beaufort, NC, seemed like the perfect way to break her in. And though it was just a two-week trip down the coast with frequent stops in between, it was more than enough for Frank to get a feel for the performance abilities of the Nordhavn.

With number one crewmember, Barbara, unable to make the trip, Frank recruited three buddies to go along for the adventure. By some standards, it was a modest cruise, but it did serve as Frank's first true shakedown of the boat. The weather was moderate, the scenery familiar, but a love for the ocean isn't discriminatory as Frank's summary of the trip reveals.

June 6th – Departure from Portsmouth, RI, in the fog to Block Island, RI. A short trip across the sound that was loudly celebrated by dinner at the 'all you can eat lobster place' and then a good night's sleep at Payne's marina.

June 7th – Coffee was on at 6am and heeding the advice of locals, we avoided the 'Race' and went north to Watch Hill and hung 264 degrees all the way to Port Jefferson, NY.



June 8th – An early 5:30 am departure to avoid the ferries arriving in the East River with a smile on our faces as we pressed on to Hell's Gate. We couldn't have timed this one any worse; Darlin' was making 7.5 knots without blinking, but forward progress was closer to 1.5 knots. The water was 'boiling', the river is 35' – 40' deep, but there are big

boulders that cause great turbulence between slick areas. Darlin's bow bounced 20–45 degrees in these boils and my grip on the wheel was tenacious – particularly when I heard five blasts from a 250' freighter coming up from astern. The New Yorkers on the shore were cheering. I'm still not sure if they were for me or against me, but Darlin' behaved beautifully and we found their way to Lady Liberty to anchor for the night. You can't get close enough to get any good photos due to the Coast Guard's presence, but it was a highlight of the trip.

June 9th - Off to Atlantic Highland, NJ near Sandy Hook. The ultimate destination was Atlantic City, but a 100 mile run arriving at an unknown anchorage at night didn't seem like the challenge we were looking for, so we pulled in...just in time to see a Nordhavn 62 take off.

June 10th – An uneventful trip to Atlantic City. It's tight getting into the harbor, but a local fisherman's knowledge was very helpful. The casinos started changing colors at night, which looked kind of tacky at first. But after a few celebratory libations everything started looking mighty "purty"!

June 11th – In the fog and on to Cape May. Visibility was down to two boat lengths – love that radar! Stayed about 2 to 3 miles offshore and watched the radar like hawks. The Cape May entrance has two rock jetties, which showed up great on the radar ...we ghosted in with crewmember Darrell on the bow – looking and listening and blowing that horn. As soon as we got into the harbor, the fog lifted and we turned around to see a huge wall of cloud behind us.

June 12th – Up the Delaware River staying out of the shipping lanes and on through the C&D canal arriving in the Sassafras River and anchoring just in time to watch a huge storm blow through. It's fun to be nice, dry and warm with box seats in the wheelhouse watching the weather through the windows and on the screen of my new best friend, Mr. Radar!

June 13th – Off to Kent Narrows, MD – a big power boat spot with lots of bars...

June 14th – To Solomons Island where the happy crew anchored in the "designated" anchorage spot and took the dinghy ashore to provision. On the way back we were waved ashore by a kind old tug boat captain who offered us his slip for the night. WE got tied up just in time to watch a huge blow pass through – taking with it a couple of sailboats which had slipped their hooks. Joining the tug captain up at his living room view (one he has enjoyed for over 80 years) he told the happy crew that looking out his window is better than TV!

June 15th -16th – Deltaville/Gwyn Island, VA. I traded in my Livingston dinghy for a 10' hard bottom inflatable and I had a "big time" figuring out the boom winch/davit operation.

June 17th – To Norfolk, VA. Lots of huge Navy ships – real, real BIG including an aircraft carrier. Got a little too close and were stared down by an official inflatable with serious armed US service personnel on board.

June 18th-20th. Down the ditch – not very exciting, but an easy jog home to Beaufort, NC. I

bought a flyswatter in Coinjock that provided the needed sporting relief for the whole crew. All in all, a smooth, easy and trouble free trip. I ate like a horse, lost 10 pounds and had to dry out for three weeks...and we never ran aground once!

So you don't have to endure the adventure of a lifetime to enjoy the cruising lifestyle. But that doesn't mean Frank, Barbara and Darlin' aren't ready to take on headier journeys as they toy with the idea of sailing to Europe as part of the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally next spring. For the time being, weekend excursions like the one the Sains recently enjoyed with their two K-9 crewmembers will suffice. "So long as everyone walks off the boat still talking to each other, we'll keep on cruising."

Stop by Darlin' and meet Frank and Barbara Sain at the Solomons, MD Trawler Fest September 24-27.

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