

Waterfront

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S BOATING NEWS MAGAZINE

**A Diehard Sailor
Goes Power
Cruising**

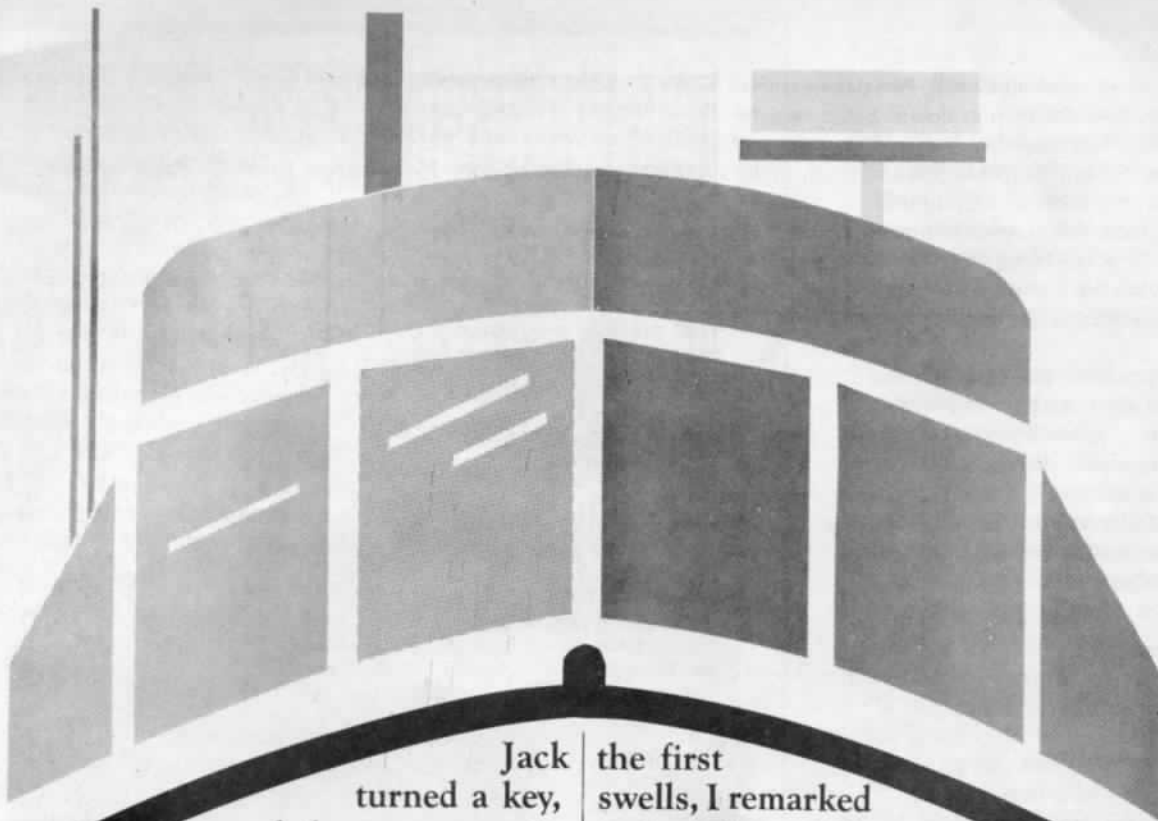
**Simple Steps
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Jack turned a key, and there was a soft growling as the diesel engine sprang to life. We warmed it up for a couple of minutes, then cast off fore and aft and backed out of the slip.

In moments we were under way, heading out of Ventura Harbor on a gorgeous early spring day. We passed several sailboats, the crews hoisting their mains, casting off mainsheets and passing sail ties below.

While they worked, we just sat back and kept an eye on the engine temperature.

As we reached the open sea and the bow lifted to

the first swells, I remarked to Jack how different this was from my usual cruising in sailboats.

"We would still be worrying about setting the jib at this point," I said.

He laughed.

"I used to be a cruising sailor, too.

I gave it up when sailing just seemed like too much work. Maybe I am getting old, but I find the quiet life at sea just what the doctor ordered these days."

That was some confession from a man who has cruised

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thousands of miles under sail. Not that the move to power has slowed him down: Since owning his Grand Banks trawler, Jack and his wife have ventured far afield, to Mexico and north to the San Juans and British Columbia.

Hundreds of California sailors are making the same change from sail to power, for a variety of reasons: for comfort, or because they have a family, or simply because the discomforts of sailing no longer appeal.

Now, on my way to the Channel Islands for a weekend, I could try to find out for myself what the appeal is of this "other" kind of cruising.

Once clear of the entrance, Jack set a course for Little Scorpion and engaged the autopilot. Then we just lounged in the deckhouse, eating sandwiches and drinking cold beer from the refrigerator.

To port, a fine 40 foot cutter was hard on the wind, slicing its way toward Anacapa Island. It was a sparkling, blue day, with a 15 knot westerly raising a slight chop, and we were pitching slightly, but not uncomfortably.

After an hour at eight knots, Jack disengaged the autopilot and let me take the helm. By this time we were on the flying bridge in the open air, high above the water.

The trawler responded to the slightest movement of the wheel. The secret seemed to be to use as little helm as possible, anticipating the movements of the swell before they hit the bow.

Headed as we were for Little Scorpion, the motion



Sure, a power boat is more spacious and comfortable than a sailboat, and it can go farther and faster during a weekend cruise. But can it beat the challenge of passage-making under sail or navigating while the boat is heeled 20 degrees to port?

was smooth and few corrections were needed. I experimented, altering the course to the south so the swells came on the beam.

The two foot swell would have caused little problem to a sailboat, but the trawler began to roll. It was a clean movement, but one that was distinctly tiring after a few minutes.

Jack explained that the best way to avoid this was to head at an angle to the swell, tacking, as it were, across the seas. This strategy involves more miles, but at eight

NG THE SWITCH

From Sail to Power

A lifelong sailor tries cruising
without the sheets

Story ~~and photos~~ by Brian Fagan

knots the amount of extra time on a channel crossing is negligible, and the payoff in comfort enormous.

Back on course, we were soon in Windy Lane, with a sharp chop at an angle to the bow. Some spray broke aboard, but there was no need to reduce speed.

It was a strange experience, almost like intruding, to cross Windy Lane and not be wearing foul weather gear, tucking in reefs and sailing hard on the wind. All Jack did was to refill our drinks.

Little Scorpion was almost empty when we reached it in the early afternoon. Jack explored the anchorage slowly, sounding depths until he chose a sheltered spot tucked behind the outlying rock. Anchoring was simple with the trawler's easy maneuverability, and everything was ship-shape in a few short minutes.

The techniques for anchoring were exactly the same as for a sailboat under power, with the need for ample scope accentuated by the boat's high freeboard.

"A good snub and more than enough scope are the name of the game," Jack said. "Just like our sailboat days."

He told me twin screw boats are even easier to handle: "You can turn on a dime." He had settled for a single screw because of the cost, but advised, "If you



Anchoring a power boat is quick and easy, with no need to worry about sails and sail handling. Pelican Bay, shown here, was one of the many sights included in the one-day trip around Santa Cruz.

can afford twin screws, get them."

It was at anchor that I really appreciated the difference between sail and power. No narrow bunks or cramped galley here. We ate in the deckhouse with glass all around, the meal as elaborate as one ashore.

We had space enough aboard for

everyone to stow their gear out of sight, and the bunks were as wide and comfortable as beds at home. At sunset we sat out on the flying bridge and admired the colors on the mainland mountains, high above the other boats in the anchorage.

It was only when a light chop came in from the northeast at dawn that we rolled a little, waking me from a deep sleep. Jack told me that he would have laid out a flopper-stopper if conditions had been that

bad earlier in the night.

We were under way at first light, the coffee pot perking softly as we retrieved the anchors. We purred out of the anchorage for a trip around Santa Cruz Island, with the idea of being back in Ventura for dinner. It seemed like a long day to a sailor, but the trawler ate up the miles effortlessly.

What would have been a hard slug to windward in my *Brazen Beast* was a scenic delight in Jack's trawler. We



skirted the coastline as far as Potato Harbor, then set course for Pelican Bay and Fry's as we ate piping hot bacon and eggs.

Jack poked our nose into Orizaba, told me all sorts of stories about Platt's, and cursed the surge that runs into Lady's on even a moderate day. We dropped anchor off the beach at Cueva Valdez before a sailboat nearby had even stirred, so Jack could row ashore and explore his favorite caves. But a rising surge

chased us out after half an hour.

We motored smoothly to windward as the morning breeze filled in. A 36-foot sailboat was lingering off Painted Cave, three members of the crew rowing inshore in their inflatable. The boat was lying to under main, rising and falling comfortably in the swell.

"That's where a sailing yacht is nice," Jack said as he waved at the skipper. "You can lie so quietly in the open sea, whereas we have to watch our heading and speed to cut down on the motion."

We rolled abominably as we turned south into the Santa Rosa Channel, for the Potato Patch was at its turbulent worst. The wind was piping through the channel, and I privately longed for a spinnaker instead of the quiet growl of the diesel.

Jack took the boat off autopilot, so he could ease it down-swell. Again, he headed at a slight angle to the seas to minimize the motion. The wind waves died down as we passed close outside Gull Island and headed inshore toward Willows and Coches Prietos.

At noon, the wind died away completely, leaving an oily calm. But we were soon in Willow's, where fishermen once camped for months on end in the 1920s. We anchored off the beach with the place to ourselves, lowered the dinghy, and went ashore, landing permit in hand.

It was early afternoon when we skirted the rest of the south coast of Santa Cruz, going far closer to shore than I would dare to in a sailboat. We greeted seals sunning themselves, saw pelicans diving off the rocks, and admired the complex, sloping geological strata in the cliffs.

I really appreciated the stable platform the trawler provided for checking navigational details. I was able to photograph several anchorages and update piloting information with a fraction of the effort it takes in a sailboat, with sail trim and steering to worry about.

Jack's cruising philosophy is that you should stop frequently, so we anchored plenty of times. It was easy with no sails to hoist and lower, and a foredeck that wasn't cluttered with genoas and jib sheets.

We paused at Yellowbanks so Jack could check an alternator belt that had been slipping the week before, then it was up anchor for home — a somewhat more uncomfortable journey than the outward trip. The seas were on the quarter, the westerly rising to 25 knots. We cork-screwed uncomfortably until Jack found a course that took the cresting waves almost dead astern.

Once, when a particularly large swell caught us unaware, we skidded down the face at an angle until the rudder bit and brought us back on course. But there was never a moment of concern about the trawler's handling: It was stable and comfortable even in the puffs.

As the sun lowered in the west, the wind lightened progressively. Back in the slip, we were ready for a festive meal ashore in a few minutes, with no wet sails to dry.

At the bar, we happened to meet the crew of the 40-footer we had passed the day before. "How was the passage home?" I asked.

"Wild!" replied the skipper. "We were surfing at times and thought about a reef."

I looked at the crew's wind-reddened faces and envied them for a moment. On the other hand, it had been a very special weekend, and we had gone farther and done much more than I would have in *Brazen Beast*.

Driving back to Santa Barbara, I reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of power cruising. Yes, it was comfortable, and the facilities were wonderful. Yes, it was wonderful to cover so much mileage in one weekend, and to be able to anchor at will without worrying about sails and sail handling.

But I did miss the challenge of passage-making under sail, and navigating while the yacht is heeled 20 degrees to port. Maybe, one day, I will buy a trawler. But for the time being, I think I prefer to sail — if for no other reason than because I have been doing it all my life.

However, Jack taught me one thing: Cautious seamanship and good judgment are just as important under power as they are under sail. And that's what makes any form of cruising a challenge. ■