

TWICE
AROUND IN
"ADIOS"

By THOMAS S. STEELE

Some 55,000 miles across the oceans in two circumnavigations of the world earned Tom Steele the Blue Water Medal, cruising's highest honor. Here he begins the story of his adventures

(THE BLUE WATER MEDAL AWARD: "Moved and seconded that the Club found . . . a medal to be known as 'The Blue Water Medal of the Cruising Club of America,' to be awarded annually, in the discretion of the Board of Governors, for the year's most meritorious example of seamanship, the recipient to be selected from among the amateurs of all nations.")

Before Thomas Steele was born, the Blue Water Medal was established by the Cruising Club of America. And after having sailed around the world almost twice, this young man from Newport Beach, Calif., was awarded it in 1962. His 32' double-ended auxiliary ketch "Adios" has been his home for many years, and in her Steele left Newport Beach in 1950 after making the personal promise that he would continue westward "as long as I am physically able and my vessel floats." He was, and she did, and in June of 1955, after a total of 340 days at sea, he completed his first voyage by returning to California. His second journey, following a somewhat different track, began in 1957, usually with his wife Janet as his only companion.

The following is his story of life aboard "Adios" during both passages, of the boat herself, and of the course she led them on. —Eds.)

*"Slack her sheets to the evening breeze
On a tide that's ebbing speedy
Point her bow toward the setting sun
On a slant for old Tahiti . . .*

I DON'T KNOW who wrote those words, but whenever I recite them to myself, they bring to mind a siren's song that cannot be denied, the call that has led *Adios* some 55,000 miles across the oceans and twice around the world.

As far back as my memory goes I had the young boy's dream of sailing the Seven Seas, but upon reaching the age of being able to do something about it, I became more and more aware of the stumbling blocks that stop most of such dreams from ever materializing. Once under way, however, I developed a simple but almost fanatical code which essentially stated that as long as I was physically capable and my vessel would float, I would continue west until I reached home again. Sometimes it was almost as hard as trying to give up smoking, but it worked and a dream came true.

Adios is 32' overall, powered by a Universal Utility four (recently replaced by a Kelvin P-4 diesel), and was built by James Rorick in Newport Beach, Calif., from plans of a Hanna 30' Tahiti ketch. She was launched as a bare hull in 1948. Mr. Rorick tells me the reason for the extra two feet in *Adios* is that the keel timber came two feet too long. He couldn't bear cutting it so he lengthened the hull accordingly. This small innovation (with a few others thrown in) bars *Adios* from being a true Tahiti, but she is undeniably a ketch.

I spent one year rigging *Adios* and making her interior habitable, adding two wooden bunks and a rough tier of pine shelves for stowing cases of food. This was in 1950, when I was carefree and 23. *Adios* made her shakedown cruise to Honolulu in 27 days, the first leg of a planned world circumnavigation.

As far as crew is concerned, I never sailed single-handed, for I was always able to find someone interested in the adventure of an ocean passage. Completely contrary to the contention of most of those who sail alone, I have been compatible with all the crew members that have sailed with me, perhaps because wages never were involved. Each man had to pay for his part of the food and we shared alike in hardship and challenge. Our goal was simple: sail on, and the more miles the better. Then, as now, I had a fine hull, rigging and sails, and what I lacked in money was made up for by youth and its blind faith in the future. For instance, starting the cruise from California I had a total of \$57 in cash, and when I left Honolulu it was down to \$5. In Suva I sold a case of canned milk to buy ship's biscuits, and we arrived in Brisbane, Australia, with 97¢, just enough to write our families the news of our arrival. The moral is simple—if you are dedicated enough you can cruise with what you have, though I must say that now I am glad to have this method of seagoing well behind me. Whether I would tackle it today under the same conditions is hard to say.

I found nine months of work in a Brisbane boatyard and then sailed through the 1,400-mile length of the Great Barrier Reef to Thursday Island in the Torres Straits. This



photo by the author
"Adios" leaving Suva, Fiji, bound for Noumea

is wonderful cruising country, well marked for day sailing, with anchorages available by night in the lee of a reef, sandspit or island. But the drawback is that one is forced to become shark conscious. Local folklore as well as newspapers are full of gruesome accounts of swimmers being taken, and the existence of this ominous threat was a major disappointment to me. Until then I had felt free to swim anywhere, any time. A man I knew set out for America from Sydney alone on a small yacht and weeks later was found lying half across the gunwale, drifting off the coast. Presumably he had gone for a swim and was fatally mangled by a shark. Perhaps we were overly cautious, but in spite of the practice of many yachtsmen we confined our bathing at sea to a bucket.

A little work on the Darwin "outback," a customs official fed up with his job who wanted to sign on as crew—and *Adios* set sail across the Indian Ocean, watch-and-watch, to Durban via Timor, Christmas Island and Mauritius. Up until this time (and well after) *Adios* had nothing so frivolous as a pillow or cushion aboard, nor had we the money for such luxuries as twin staysails or self-steering equipment. Yet the miles slipped by, we were healthy, and we had a dry boat. Looking back, it was a great experience but an exhausting one. My crew and I never spoke or saw each other for 29 days, from Christmas Island to Mauritius,

except when relieving one another at the tiller or while eating. Welcome was a day of calm, a chance to sleep for a full eight hours without the feel of a speeding hull surfing down each sea and the sound of the seas climbing aboard the decks as they raced with us. But days of calm are rare in the Southern Indian Ocean.

It is a well-known fact that wild days are also a frequent occurrence off the Cape of Good Hope, and I had been amply warned by other seafarers (both contemporary and historical) of the dangers there. I left Durban, South Africa, for Capetown with a crew who, though inexperienced in the ways of the sea, was not to be dissuaded by my tales of what might lie ahead. We pulled slowly away from port against 30-mile winds.

It began badly. The seas were high and, in recovering from repeated blows, *Adios* rolled momentarily on her beam ends. My crew, attached only by a lanyard, was thrown into the water and then was lifted by it (and by me) back aboard just as quickly as he had gone over. We had lost the pram, its exit leaving a path of damage. Three days later, 40 miles south of East London, we were becalmed.

At that point we had a rendezvous with the 45-foot ketch *Sarie Marais*, which had left Durban with us, and she kindly towed us through the night. The barometer was dropping dangerously, and when only four miles from Port Elizabeth, a spot where we had both hoped to take cover, the sky fell apart and the wind took on gale force. The wind must have reached 80 m.p.h.; the waves were certainly 60-foot walls. After hour-upon-hour of this, it took all the concentration and energy I could muster just to keep *Adios* head to the seas.

I became completely exhausted, turned the tiller over to my crew, and went below. Then it was that I once again felt the yacht climb the sea. Suddenly the cabin seemed to shake apart and I knew that we had capsized. *Adios* righted quickly, but not before the sea had claimed mizzen mast, rudder and tiller. My crew was pinned in the cockpit and we were adrift and picking up speed. We set sea anchors (one was a mattress) and went below, out of the freezing cold. It was up to *Adios* now.

With the realization that we were heading toward reefs and the shore, we planned what we would attempt if we struck. Much later, however, we saw the light of Cape Recife (six miles SW of Port Elizabeth) and realized thankfully that a lee shore was no longer an immediate danger. After many hours we finally coaxed the engine to work and eventually arrived at Plattenburg Bay, to read that we and our friend *Sarie Marais* were missing. (She later made port in Capetown.) As we both had been

(Continued on page 89)



photo by the author

"Why steer endlessly when a self-steering rig will do it for you?"



The solid line shows the route of "Adios" first voyage; the dotted line follows the track of the second

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went out and we had to tow her back for repairs against a rising southerly. When she was underway again, I discovered the owner paid no attention to charts, knew nothing of tides, and put on or took off sail in any order he pleased. Knowing we might get separated in the fog one meets on the Chesapeake in the spring, I laid out courses for him on his charts, but I was soon pretty sure he just followed after. I had to admire the way he got out of difficulties, and he was such a pleasant chap that I had no desire to leave him. Moreover, I don't think I could have; his boat was faster than mine. He just jogged along in my wake.

There came a time in the Delaware that a phone call made us separate: he had to get home to Connecticut. We were in Cohansy Creek, with Delaware Bay wide open before him. I worked out the time for his favorable departure, laid his courses, explained how to find Cape May Canal mouth, but he seemed to pay little attention. Finally, I grew exasperated.

"You better heed me a little more closely," I said with asperity. "The Delaware is no playground for a stranger."

His face lighted up and he smiled.

"You don't understand," he said, slowly.

"No. How come?" I ventured, feeling quite confused.

"Don't you see what's sitting on my shoulder? Right there?"

He tapped his left shoulder.

"I am afraid I don't," I countered. The man was gone, clear gone.

"My guardian angel," he said. "He'll see me through."

I think my mouth dropped open. I bleated out, "O.K., and the best of luck." To add my hope to his faith was inadequate, and beside, as I have said, you couldn't help but love that man. He was biblical.

Oh, he made it. Got aground in New Jersey, but everybody does. Rammed some concrete obstacle near Hell Gate on the wrong tide, but he made it into the Sound and home. I often wonder. Do you think he really saw that guardian angel? Really?

TWICE AROUND IN "ADIOS"

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battling the elements, we were unaware that at the same time other lives were being lost in the seas nearby in what was considered to be the worst storm in many years.

Because of our financial condition, it required one year to repair all the damage before carrying on across the South Atlantic through the West Indies, the Panama Canal and home to Newport Beach. This voyage covered a total of five years and three months. Of this time 340 days were spent at sea and the total direct distance was 27,809 nautical miles at an average speed of 3.4 knots.

Many innovations were added to *Adios* for my second circumnavigation, this time accompanied the entire way by my wife, Janet. Because of my wife's presence on the second voyage I assumed a more relaxed attitude. Why not sit on a cushion instead of grinding salt into the seat of your pants? Why sit for hours without a back rest, and why steer endlessly when a self-steering rig will do it for you? Facing statistics, I found only a small percentage of my time had actually been spent at sea since beginning the first voyage, so why not allow port comforts to be built into the boat as long as they didn't affect seagoing ability?

Adding up laundry bills, and seeing my wife spending hours with a scrub brush, brought home the fact that a small electric washing machine, built into the head as a drawer and using an electric water pump, would pay for itself many times over. What about all that hot engine-cooling water? Why not run it through a coil inside an extra fresh-water tank before it goes overboard, or into the heat exchanger? You get free hot water for a deck- or inside-shower and at the same time increase your total water capacity.

Assuming you have auxiliary power, it is good to run the engine daily and so, presumably, you could run a

BRASS BILGE PUMPS

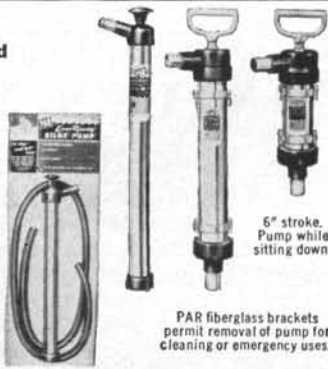
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generator off the motor for charging your lighting batteries. Since your engine is running why not also belt-drive a compressor, operating a combination deep freeze and refrigerator with holdover plates to keep cold until next battery-charge time? Such innovations can go on endlessly, but to calm down the hardy advocate of the "no engine, no electricity" school, it must be admitted that at any time all this gear can become inoperative. Then he too can have the kerosene lights and warm drinks that he prefers . . . yet on a hot day, 1,000 miles from an ice cube, that tepid tea certainly could be improved. (*Adios* has always had auxiliary power that has enabled her to visit many places that would otherwise have been almost impossible, and the added safety factor of inshore maneuverability is considerable.)

Twin staysails or self-steering square sail? To my knowledge they work equally well yet have drawbacks under certain conditions. But since most people are familiar with twin staysails and few seem to know of a self-steering square sail, I will elaborate on the latter. *Adios* has used one successfully for over 30,000 miles.

We have a 20-foot yardarm, suspended from a bridle, which is hoisted on the forestay, using the jib halyard. This yardarm can be left aloft or raised and lowered at sea. To the yardarm a square sail is set flying, hauled up to the yard by three halyards, one of them being in the center of the head of the sail. The foot of the sail has three sheets. The center one is belayed tight, as is the center halyard. With the two clew sheets leading aft through blocks to the tiller the square sail, in effect, forms a V-shape and works on the principle of twin staysails. This rig is extremely effective and positive in its steering ability. In addition to being used before the wind, the yard can be braced well around, and with the tack or weather clew led to the end of the bowsprit, the sail flattens beautifully, will claw right up into the wind, and can be used in combination with the fore-and-aft sails.

Offshore navigation is most often accomplished by obtaining a morning sun line-of-position and advancing it to the noon meridian altitude and/or afternoon 1.o.p. When in proximity to land, or in fine weather, I occasionally use stars, moon and planets, if the horizon is good. *Adios* has no depth sounder and the chronometer is checked with a short-wave radio receiver.

Since *Adios* usually has only two people aboard, I find it preferable to forget the clock and maintain no set watches. When one person wants relief he merely calls the other. This removes the drudgery of the job and also avoids wasted sleep or energy, caused by a person who is wide-awake calling one who is sleeping soundly.

It has seemed to us that good food and a well planned and convenient galley are important. *Adios* uses a three-burner butane gas stove with a large oven, and we try to carry the best available food to produce as good a meal as

possible under existing conditions. While many consider butane gas too dangerous aboard a small boat, I feel that carelessness with *any* fuel must be avoided, and the convenience of gas cooking far outweighs its risk. The butane tanks aboard *Adios* are stowed in lockers on deck; and the copper tube which carries the gas to the stove below has a small petcock immediately outside the porthole over the galley stove, where it can be easily turned off from below when the stove is not in use. We carry a four months' supply of butane and find that, except for very rare instances when a small Primus helps eke out the butane supply, we have had no fuel shortages.

I suppose we will always be making slight changes and improvements on *Adios*, but the thing to remember is that we are doing what we want to do. It was only after the completion of my first voyage in June, 1955, that it occurred to me that here was a special way of life, precarious though it may seem by normal standards, and not something to be put aside and renewed only sporadically. Of course, money can be a stumbling block, but actually, there are few places where a man cannot support himself if he is willing to work. I have worked at a variety of jobs in a variety of ports, each earning a little more time on *Adios*. It all depends on what you feel is most important.

(To be continued)

THE OTHER MAN'S BOAT

(Continued from page 55)

no worries because none of them are needed. The dampness problem and lack of hot water so common to many boats is solved with a coal-burning Shipmate which is now manufactured fully-insulated so that its use on a hot day is not impractical. Two people can live aboard indefinitely and two more can sleep in the cockpit, under an awning, in sufficient comfort for a long weekend but not much longer. And for day sailing, the cockpit will accommodate six adults. Actually I do most of my sailing over weekends from my mooring at the Seawanhaka-Corinthian YC in Oyster Bay, N. Y., but I usually try to get beyond the limits of Long Island Sound—say to the Vineyard—at least once in a summer's sailing.

As to sailing qualities; a number of friends who own the inevitable popular yawls of recent design, which all our racing rules tell us are chic, have had to revise their opinions on the speed of cats as well as their ability to go to windward.

I have made only two changes to Charlie Wittholz's design—the Sudbury vent is now installed on a hatch which can be opened in hot weather, and the tiller has been replaced with a wheel, which means less work off the wind for the helmsman. No other changes are contemplated.

The boat was beautifully built by Roy Blaney, working entirely alone in his shop on the shore of Boothbay Harbor. Roy owns and sails a cat of his own, and a good deal of his love and respect for these boats went into *Prudence*. She is a first-class piece of construction.

Should any reader be interested in catboats, more information about The Catboat Association (with over 100 members) may be had by writing to John M. Leavens, 14 Rowan Road, Summit, N. J.

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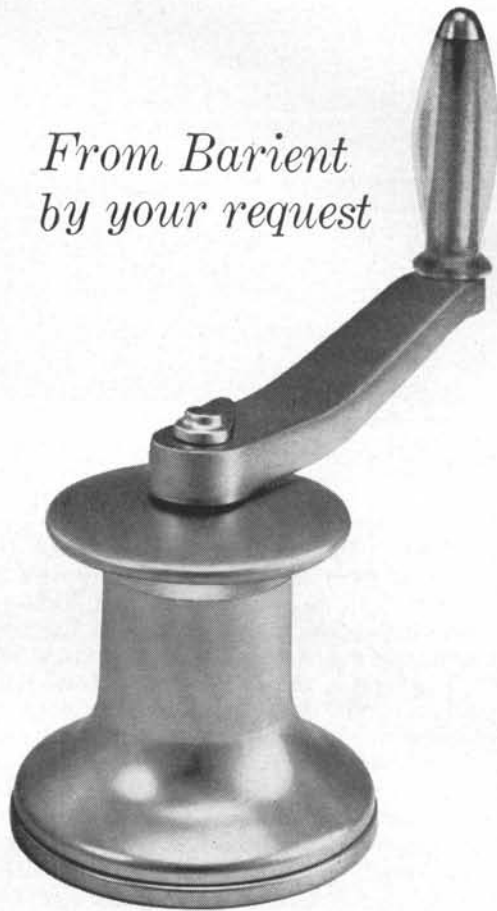
GADGETS & GILHICKIES

(Continued from page 53)

at sea. It is an aluminum plate 4½" x 6½" with a triangular hole, graduated to give the distance-off of objects whose height is known (a lighthouse for example). By holding the plate at arm's length and training it on the object to be measured, distances ranging from 53 yards to over 21 miles can be quite accurately estimated.

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