



Journey's beginning: Tony Wall, Juliet Beyler, Myle Hammond, and Tom Seegrist

## ABACOS TO BEAUFORT, NC: GULF STREAM EXPERIENCE

by Tony Wall

I learned a long time ago in my 30 year sailing career that it's no fun to spend long periods of time beating to windward offshore into foul current. So when I received a phone call from a

young man who had purchased, sight unseen, a late model Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 36i, and was asking about an offshore course to go from Marsh Harbour, The Abacos to Annapolis, via Beaufort, N.C., I was very happy

to entertain the possibilities.

Prevailing winds in the Bahamas are easterly, becoming fresh southwesterly north of about the 30 degree parallel. Counter to what one would think, the summer months (hurricane season) offer more settled conditions than the winter and early spring, when powerful frontal systems sweep across the continental U.S., making for uncomfortable and even dangerous conditions with the inevitable fresh north and northeasterly winds fighting the northeast setting Gulf Stream.

### SETTING OFF

The buyer, together with his long time friends, who were all certified through the American Sailing Association's Bareboat Certification (ASA 104), planned to complete the Advanced Coastal and Coastal Navigation classes during the voyage, and had selected a well-maintained Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 36i from the Moorings charter fleet.

The Jeanneau 36i, with its injection molded hull and topsides providing outstanding rigidity and strength, is an excellent platform for a coastal/offshore trip. A nice little interior feature was the extending port side settee, allowing for two very comfortable six foot three inch long "sea berths" for off watch comfort underway.

After arrival into Marsh Harbour, time constraints meant there was no chance to do an initial "shake-down cruise". We had to be very meticulous completing the extensive "pre-sail checklist", which included servicing the fuel system, and ensuring we had an adequate stock of belts, hoses and filters.

We set the rhumb line, 550 miles to Beaufort, North Carolina, and divided the trip into three portions—first the



rhumb line north northeast to what we estimated to be the eastern wall of the Gulf Stream, and secondly plotting a vector to cross the Gulf Stream on a more westerly heading, allowing for set and drift. A mistake here would add significant distance to the trip, or even risk missing Cape Hatteras altogether. Meticulous log keeping allowed us to keep a close eye on the amount and direction of current we were being subjected to, making corrections as needed. Finally, the third portion involved lining up the entrance to Beaufort, NC, and hoping for a daylight arrival.

As we left the protection of Little Bahama Bank on the first evening out, for the crew's first ever offshore experience, there was a palpable sense of excitement, heightened by the nervous tension of knowing there was no going back now, particularly with an ominously shrinking window of favorable weather.

We established watches, and discussed traffic and weather briefings, as we settled into the assigned watch periods, making hourly entries in the log for speed, position, and especially engine hours. When speed over ground dropped below three point seven knots, the engine hours particularly proved to be invaluable, as we discovered later. The end of the first 24 hours run saw 135 miles distance made good and celebrations all round!

We used current charts from Pilot Reports, as well as a full color chart showing the Gulf Stream position and the hot and cold eddies. There are two ways of knowing you're in the stream; speed over ground increases as you head more north northeast, and the stream can be five to 10 degrees warmer. Unfortunately, the eddies can produce stubborn counter currents, and we encountered a frustrating second day bucking almost two knots of adverse current.

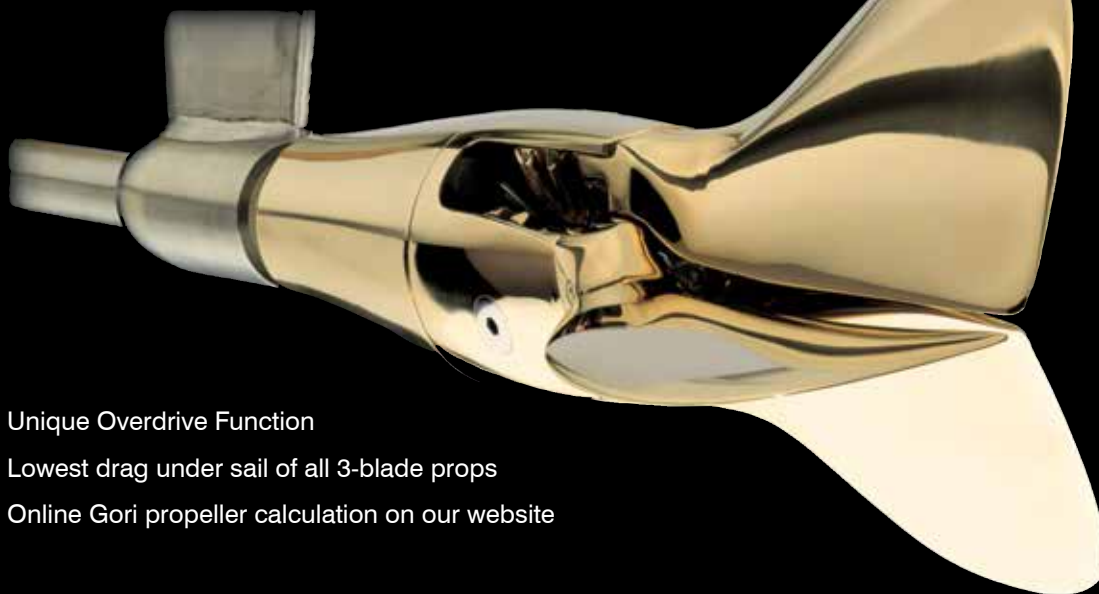


New owner  
Myle Hammond  
at the wheel

The third day we found the main stream, and as expected our "speed to the mark" increased considerably. This came at a cost though, as our new rhumbline meant almost downwind—a real workout for our over-worked preventer line!

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makers face at some time: Sail efficiently but uncomfortably to the target, or bear away to a broad reach to mitigate the uncomfortable, roly conditions. The decision was made to keep the course to ensure we arrived at Beaufort in daylight.

**ALWAYS LOG ENGINE HOURS**

On checking the water separator prior to departure, we found evidence of contaminated fuel, and so requested the good people at Moorings to conduct a basic fuel service. We monitored the fuel gauge, but paid close attention to engine hours run in the log, keeping the all-essential spare fuel filters close at hand.

At the end of the third day with the fuel gauge still showing 75 percent, we took the

precaution of adding 10 gallons from the jerry cans on deck. After a nerve-racking episode when the engine shut down, we changed Racor filters again, and I drained solid lumps of detritus from the bottom of the separator. The engine re-started and we eventually motored into a welcoming Beaufort, NC. Upon completing a full fuel system overhaul, we discovered we were down to the last 10 gallons, of which only about six gallons was usable fuel.

Finally, a very successful first off-shore voyage with lessons learned, and everyone keen to undertake more adventures. **BWS**

*Correction to "Preparing to Sail South" August 2015: Cold core eddies, pinching off bodies of cold water from the north side of the Gulf Stream, that then drift on the south side of the Gulf Stream, rotate counterclockwise. Warm core eddies, pinched off the main current on the north side of the stream, rotate clockwise.*



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