

A Trailer Sailer Odyssey:

by Dan Rogers

Dan Rogers here. I continued on a trailer sailer odyssey from Texas that included just about every state on the left half of the US map. Most of the time completely off the grid--no email, no snail mail, precious little cell phone coverage. I did continue to use the SPOT transponder. I'm just getting back to this forum for the first time since last May, when I left SOCAL.



I went into the T-200 with over 25,000 sea miles that I can dig out of personal log books, aboard various boats with mechanical sum logs, and later GPS trip meters. I suppose, there were as many small boat miles accumulated before all the fancy equipment came available. Lots and lots of time on the water. And, that doesn't count driving ships for Uncle Sam. Lots of boats, lots of study, lots of experience.

When people hereabouts asked me what in the hell I was doing--going off to south Texas in summer--I had a ready reply. I've joined just about every boat club that has come along. I've even run a few of them. I already sail my own boats most every day of the year. But, what I sensed with the T-200 was, "This is where all the cool kids are going this year."

I was right about that. You guys are certainly the top of the heap. Lots of really innovative boats; lots of really first class seamanship. And, lots of really nice people. Carl took the time and effort to "find" me through Bob Hicks, the editor of *Messing About in Boats*. Dave Ware, of *Merlin* is a gentleman of the old stamp. And, it was a pleasure working with Jason back on launch day, when we still thought we had a shot at making Gary Cull's cute-as-button mini tug, *Snail Mail*, water tight. And, where would we be if Gary hadn't hauled the lot of us back and forth to dinner on day 2?

With all my sea miles, and all my boats; I made one fundamental error in planning; and one monumental misapprehension in judging the basic ethos of this event. I think both of these revelations would be useful for anyone thinking about making the considerable investment in time, effort, and money this event requires.

First, my screwup. I did read all the accounts and looked at all the videos and stills from year one. I did look at Google Earth for a sense of the route. And, I did obtain NOAA charts of the area (worse than useless.) I didn't know about the fishing maps and I didn't have the proper electronic mapping software for the area. Basically, I didn't do what I have done scads of times before a voyage. I didn't sit down with the best available guidebooks and charts and narrative descriptions and simply memorize the essential elements. This made changing the play while the ball was in motion a lot less likely.

I never head offshore--even for an afternoon sail--without at least plotting an hourly posit on the paper chart. Even with GPS and radar, etc. But, from everything I read (and obviously read into) from last year's vets; I simply

ASSUMED that there would be if not organized nav briefs, then spontaneous gatherings, to discuss the vicissitudes of the next day's route. So, I spent my time preparing boat and rig and trailer and truck. I'd get the nav "part" figured out when I got there. Bad plan.

For what it is worth, I took Lady Bug out every opportunity throughout the winter here when I could approximate wind and wave conditions in the thin water of SOTEX. Sun and heat/humidity had to be "simulated." As a result I showed up with spares for just about everything, enough water to supply an army on the march, bugscreens and repellent, and on and on. I even had an extra outboard to loan out. Lady Bug was an easy 500 pounds over weight--and she's already 1500 pounds dry, on a 14 foot water line. When I had to shorten sail to keep rudder control, she was frankly a little piglet. A slowpoke that needed 3 feet of water. Here is where my misunderstanding of the group think completely ruined it for me. Nobody's fault. Other than mine, that is.



I towed a heavy trailer 1,640 miles across the desert to join a group cruise. And, what I witnessed was more of a cavalry charge. While I was able to offer parts, and expertise, and moral support to a number of the participants during the initial days; I didn't have the misfortune of personally breaking anything or even shipping more water than a little spray. But I quickly became what I refer to as "the slow, fat kid at the back of the scout troop." Everybody streaked on by. I approached a couple boats to be buddy boats, but the first time I stopped to

reef, they simply rolled on over the horizon--no radio follow up, nothin'

I get self-sufficiency. I get unreasonable legal liabilities. But, when I was sitting for my 100 ton ticket, the "correct answer" was: "It is your responsibility as master of a vessel to aid another vessel in distress unless you would place your own vessel or crew in jeopardy." That has been the law of the sea for as long as men have served in ships. From what I read here, the PDRs and Carl honored that tradition. But this general notion that it HAS to be every man for himself, has me flumoxed.

As I said, Dave Ware is a gentleman, and quite a fine seaman in the bargain. He for all practical purposes escorted me through what appeared from upwind to be at best a reef, and at worst a rapidly shelving foreshore fully enveloped in breakers. As I have done for literally hundreds of other sailors over the years; he simply slowed down and allowed me to follow his track. As a resident of Rockport, he was a marvelous fund of local knowledge, and more than gracious when he first showed me where the only real anchorage could be found. Then he introduced me to his wife and some local friends who helped me get back to Magnolia Beach, when I decided to call it a day.

I dropped out because it wasn't prudent to attempt to find the night 3 anchorage in the dark, and I didn't have any reasonable expectation that my speed of advance would avail a daylight arrival. But, moreover, I didn't come all that way to sail by myself. I came to join "the cool kids" in a shared adventure.

It's humbling to be the slow kid nobody wants to walk with. That this is an obvious upshot, goes without saying. That it MUST be, goes without excuse.

Dan Rogers, Balboa 16, "Lady Bug"