

# To motor or not to motor, that is the question

If we're honest, passage-making often means motor-sailing says Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

**I**magine yourself on our boat. We are off the Pacific coast of Nicaragua. The moon is setting. It's five in the morning, the wind is nine knots from the north-west and we have plotted our latest position on the paper chart on the nav-table. We have travelled only seven miles closer to our destination in the last 12 hours. We know there is a little current against us and the small lighthouse to starboard hardly seems to have moved for a day.

The forecast is for light winds for the foreseeable future. We left knowing the wind would die and took this in preference to the 50-knot winds that kick up in this area between lulls. We are lucky though that the sea is flat. We have a choice: continue tacking up into this mild headwind for the foreseeable future – at this rate the 120 miles we have left will take us nearly nine days – or we crank up the engine and reach our destination in a day. Would you stick to your engineless ideals, or opt pragmatically for motorsailing?

We would love to say that we sail everywhere, but it simply isn't true. We are not day-sailing and going out only when the wind is good. We are passage-making,

covering hundreds of miles and sometimes we have to take a mixed bag of a forecast. In reality, the engine is a godsend, but I do have misgivings about using it. My main problem with the motor is that it costs money to run. Then, every hour it runs, it gets closer to the inevitable moment when it breaks down beyond my knowledge of fixing it, at which point we will find out if we can really sail. Furthermore, our 42hp engine only just provides enough momentum to keep our 42-footer going. It's a definite help but it isn't a trump card by any means. Turning to the dark side and motoring is therefore not a simple choice.



**Every hour the engine runs brings us closer to the point of it breaking beyond our knowledge of repair**

ALI PAPAGEORGIOU/JESS & JAMES

We don't only use the engine when there is not wind, either. We've had occasions where we decide to put the engine on to help with the motion of a sloppy sea state, and the boat steadies up markedly. Other times we use it to motorsail closer to the wind than we would be able to point under sail alone. Or sometimes, it is the last line of defence against an adverse current. Our motor is therefore a useful tool in making passages quickly, comfortably and safely.

Engines, however, like all things on a boat, can fail you just when you need them most.

Friends on one boat were 15 miles south of their destination, Acapulco in Mexico, after three days at sea. After fighting the current and a headwind for most of that time, they ran out of fuel. They persisted to sail into wind, current and choppy swell but after two days and hardly a mile's progress they swung the tiller around and returned to their last port, which they reached seven days after having left it. Pretty soul-destroying stuff.

Around the same time, other friends were passage-making along the coast of El Salvador and had engine failure. They made every effort to fix it but to no avail. They needed to get to Chiapas in southern Mexico where their boat could be safely and cheaply left over

the hurricane season while they flew home. What should have been a two-day passage took them 16 days as they had both wind and current pushing them back. On one particular day they ended up 20 miles further back than where they started the day. They did eventually make it and when we caught up with them a couple of days later they were quite nonchalant about the experience. They hadn't provisioned for so long a passage but had managed to make it work, and they now feel quite ready for an ocean crossing,

which, to be honest, is a lot more straightforward than coastal sailing.

Even if you have the luxury of time to wait for favourable winds, go to sea for long enough and you'll face adverse conditions at some point. And when you do, there is no question; you just have to swallow your pride and stick the engine on. In certain parts of the world, or in certain seasons – like a summer of south-westerlies on the English south coast – the only way to get around the next headland is under engine. Just do the maths first and make sure you've got enough fuel. ▲

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**Jess Lloyd-Mostyn**

Having left England in 2011 aboard *Adamastor*, a Crossbow 42, Jess and James planned to circumnavigate in two years. After crossing the Atlantic they reached Panama, where they decided to start a family. Daughter Rocket was born in Mexico, and son Indigo arrived after in New Zealand. Their journey will take them back out to the South Pacific and on to Indonesia. They have visited 32 countries and covered 18,000 miles. Follow them at [www.water-log.com](http://www.water-log.com).



Trying to use the last scrap of wind, Jess and James motor with both sails up while sailing in Panama