

# Blue note

The many and varying sounds of life on board become a song of the sea, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** discovers

The general consensus is that the noises of the sea are gentle, calming and peaceful which should make them the perfect complement to a good night's sleep.

Nice idea but I've got news for you; it's very far from the truth.

CRASH – we roll over onto our port side and the fold-out chart table seat slides out – BANG – the boom tries to lurch back over to starboard but is held by the preventer – SMACK – goes the block of our main sheet as it wallops onto the roof of the aft cabin – THUMP – as yet more objects slide from their neatly stashed locations and land like icebergs dotted across the floor.

Life on an ocean crossing is many things. It can be exhilarating, a great consistent sailing wind, breath-taking night skies and the triumph of plotting those positions closer and closer to your goal. There are times when it's exhausting, when the thought of another hour on watch or a new sudden squall to contend with threatens to crush your spirit. But, one thing is for sure, it's unlikely to be quiet.

The greatest cacophony occurs when you have big seas but not quite enough wind to match. These are the conditions where we tie a preventer onto the boom as the sloppy waves constantly have us plunging from side to side, threatening to back the main. This background racket puts you continually on edge simply because it sounds worse than it really is. The boom isn't swinging with great load or force however it still is falling from side to side, giving you a rhythmic clatter that stresses your shackles and your nerves. The headsail protests and collapses, noisily flapping all over as you plummet into the trough of the wave, the sheets making the steel of the standing rigging twang.

Next come the smacks, the wave that catches you just on the beam or that whips its breaker against your keel or your rudder. The sounds here vary from a loud, sharp slap to a duller, more ominous sounding thud of a blow, which leaves you silently questioning "Did we just hit something? Was that a whale, a log, a sea container?!?" Then there are the creaks, the more subtle



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moans and groans of the hull, the interior joinery and the floor panels. This is a more melodic but non-stop grumble, like a talkative old relative with an achy hip. You can try dosing various parts of the cabinetry with beeswax or rubbing candles on edges but nothing seems to cure this particular muttering.

Add to this the screeches and squeaks of the rig and the hum of the mast; the bump-knock-clunk syncopated beat of the autopilot rocking from side to side under the bed; the rush and glug of water along the outside of the hull and the hiss as the boat surfs down a wave. A gust of wind higher brings the slapping of lines against the mast and an almost mournful sounding, flute-like song that whistles

through our A-frame when the wind hits 17 knots or more. Then a thunderous rattle and shake of rain on fibreglass signals the latest squall.

But, having said all that, some of the sounds that you only ever get hundreds of miles offshore do have a soothing note. If the winds are low but steady and the sea is flat you hear the comforting billowing of canvas as you're carried gently along by your sails. The far off sigh of humpback whales or the high tin-whistle and urgent clicks and squeals of a pod of bottle-nosed dolphins can alert you to a forthcoming remarkable encounter. Your lines gently purr and they slowly stretch and flex in the soft breeze.

And there is also the strangest sound of all: the silence. The becalmed boat perches noiselessly on a sea where the water becomes a mirror and the horizon is just an abstract notion as the sky and the sea are all one. Or the stillness and quiet is during the night when the sky is starless, thick with cloud and the yacht seems to pause, a long intake of breath as one weather system passes and the next one is still building. It is a hush full of anticipation, when you strain your ears in hope of the next breath of wind; that first surge of sound that you long for as that next gust means movement and life that will get you sailing again. Because the reality is that we need the noises and all their glorious hullabaloo to keep us going. ✦



**JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN**

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at [water-log.com](http://water-log.com)

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