

# Praise be for power

It's the workhorse of the boat, but you never know when your engine will let you down – so better keep the Yanmar gods happy, says **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn**

After their ghoulish curiosity about storms and pirates abate, people are always interested in our engine.

And once they mentally re-label us as a “sailboat – but with an engine”, they tend to seem far more relaxed about our family’s watery fate. It’s like the engine is somehow the trump card, the safety net, the aquatic equivalent of the landlubber’s car, which they couldn’t possibly be without.

But, of course, we didn’t buy a sailing yacht to simply ‘drive’ everywhere. Letting go of the idea that a diesel engine is your “get-out-of-jail-free” card takes some getting used to.

Sometimes the engine is the only sensible form of propulsion. Our close quarters manoeuvres, in an anchorage or marina, are always done under motor power. I remember the first time that I steered a boat out through a crowded harbour and was never more grateful for a sturdy engine, nor more aware of the close proximity of so many large, expensive and protruding yachts around me.

It’s important to remember that it is possible to perform all such moves under sail, although it requires considerable skill and nifty seamanship. Most of these operations we haven’t done purely under sail since we first did our training, as you get into the habit of doing everything in the easiest and sometimes laziest way you can when you live aboard. However, we do like to sail onto anchor and off again when the conditions are right – just to keep our hand in. You never know when your engine might fail and you’ll be forced to sail when you weren’t expecting to. This happened to friends of ours. Arriving at New Zealand after more than a week at sea, they found their batteries had conked out entirely and they had to sail onto the quarantine dock.

Primarily we do aim to sail as much as we can and what allows us to do so is being flexible, waiting until we have the right wind and weather conditions to sail as much of every passage as possible. We don’t rush to turn the key and we’re quite happy to bob idly in the doldrums for days as there is no pressing schedule.



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Yet we’re also practical about it. I am sure you would like to think that we sail everywhere and we would like to believe this ourselves. But it simply isn’t true.

The motor is a godsend in the notoriously fluky winds of equatorial cruising, or as our only line of defence against an adverse running current. It’s invaluable when we’re pushing to get the anchor down before sunset or simply to get an extra kick of momentum through a sloppy sea. Our trusty engine is a workhorse that I wouldn’t be without.

Other times we use it to motorsail closer to the wind than we could if just under sail. Turning to the dark side and motoring is not a simple decision to make, as although it can be a definite help it isn’t a trump card that always pays off. Our motor is only 42hp and our boat is a 42ft cruiser that requires a lot of momentum

to keep her going, so under engine or motorsailing there will be some sea states that it just won’t be strong enough to conquer. Friends of ours in Mexico experienced this too when just 15nm south of Acapulco, their destination after three days at sea. They’d been fighting current and a head wind for most of that time and then they ran out of fuel. They persisted, sailing into wind, current and choppy swell, but after two days and hardly a mile’s progress they swung the tiller around and they eventually reached their previous port, seven days after having left it – pretty soul-destroying stuff.

However, my problem with the motor is that it costs money to run and that every hour it runs it’s getting closer to that inevitable moment when it breaks down in a way that lies beyond my knowledge of fixing it. And then, at that point, we will find out if we can really sail!

So I sometimes treat it like a shrine to the great deity of diesel engines: I buy it the best filters and oils that money can buy and I change them religiously. And we are picky about the fuel we put in, which can sometimes present a challenge in remote parts where the quality declines. But we try to treat it kindly, in the hopes that the knight in shining Yanmar will help out each time we fire it up.



**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)