



PHOTOS: JESS BARBER

**ABOVE:** Jess, James and baby Rocket, born in Mexico



*The couple dropped the hook in Panama after eight months' cruising*

## Jess Barber



Jess Barber and husband James left Falmouth in October 2011 on a Crossbow 40, intending to sail around the world in two and a half years. Though fairly new to sailing, they reached Panama in eight months. They stayed in the eastern Caribbean for eight months more, deciding to take longer over the trip. Their daughter, Rocket, now six months old, was born in Mexico. They plan to cross the Pacific in March.

# Sailing through phosphorescence

## Jess Barber enjoys the light show on passage

Americans call it bio-luminescence. When we crossed the Atlantic, we called it green fireworks. But the Atlantic was just the warm-up act. Without doubt, one of the biggest changes of going into Pacific is that the sea is full of spectacular phosphorescence each night.

It's a light show that can be appreciated in many different ways. At anchor we've seen the

strange effect of a wind line, a glowing gust on the water like Luke Skywalker's lightsabre moving towards us. In a steady wind the white horses become eerie, green-glowing froths of light in the darkness. In bigger seas these spumes of emerald light become lit-up waves that crash towards the hull and explode.

Boats themselves take on a more ghostly form, too, as they leave luminous trails behind like gleaming jet trails. The intensity of



*ABOVE: the Pacific puts on awesome light shows for sailors each night*

the glow is always in proportion to how fast the movement is, so it's even more remarkable when you see fish in the phosphorescence.

First we saw jumping fish; or rather the bright flashes of light where they landed. Then we saw hunting fish, their fast movements leaving a mark like a torpedo. Sometimes you can only discern what fish you are looking at in the blackness by their light shapes. In this way, we worked out we were looking at five squid one night.

The dolphins put on a good show too. They move so fast and criss-cross so quickly that their glowing streams look like eerie snakes. Often you see nothing, but hear their blow-hole breathing, then a blast of green reveals their re-entry into the water. A shoal of fish encircled us once, weaving a glowing carpet of trails at different depths around one another. Then there are times when the water is still but the phosphorescence remains; a million tiny stars, ever denser the deeper you look.

Probably the most magical thing we've seen in this spooky light were three huge eagle rays that danced towards our bow at anchor one night. The light outlined their wing tips and tails and we watched them twirl and sway as they moved fast or slow, seeming to appear then evaporate with each moment.

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