

Hanging by a thread

To the editor: As we sized-up the scale of challenge facing us in getting back on board, I yelled to James, “There is NO WAY that I’m getting back on that boat!”

It was November 2013, and our yacht had been tucked up safely in a marina



in Banderas Bay, Pacific Mexico, for several months during hurricane season. During this extended marina stay I gave birth

to our first child, a baby girl called Rocket, in mid-July. Leaving the stability of a marina after so much time is always a struggle as you feel slow and rusty; also, making our first maneuver as a sailing family rather than just a couple made it that bit more intimidating.

We had decided, however, that we had to leave as Nov. 1 marked the change of season charges and we simply couldn’t afford to linger on the dock. It was just a small move to the anchorage outside the marina entrance so we were lackadaisical with checking the weather fore-

cast. We slipped our lines, motored off without incident and dropped the hook a mere 10 minutes later. Shortly after that we were back in our dinghy, heading to shore for the local farmers’ market. I felt particularly proud of us having performed the whole operation of getting a 3-1/2-month-old baby and me off the boat and into the dinghy so smoothly.

When moving such a short distance, it’s easy to put certain jobs on the backburner and dismiss them as being of little importance. James had been working on mending our windlass, a job that he was still partway through. But, we had reasoned that as we knew the anchorage, its good holding and that we could drop in about seven meters of depth, it would be no problem to bring the chain and anchor up by hand.

In addition to this, our dinghy was in a real state of disrepair. It had a number of small punctures that we hadn’t gotten around to mending that were patched with duct tape. It was still fine for short distances, as long as you pumped it each time you got in; for going to the market it would be fine.

We failed to realize when we dropped anchor that the wind had turned and had begun to blow into the bay from the west, something that very rarely happens there. Banderas Bay is 15 miles across its mouth, stretching 20 miles inland. When the wind decides to blow into the bay with any strength this creates a huge amount of fetch that slams directly into the anchorage. We felt the wind increasing while we were at the market and stayed onshore, hoping that it would soon pass. But, as the sun was getting lower and we walked back, we could see the violently swinging masts on the other side of the breakwater. We got in the dinghy and slowly puttered towards the anchorage.

As we neared the boat the waves were huge, the dinghy was losing air fast and reality set in. Our yacht has a sugar scoop stern, a small platform to make climbing on and off easier. However, given that the entire aft of the boat was bucking up and down wildly, jumping up by some distance and slamming back into the water, it was a fairly daunting prospect. The chop was very steep and extremely



Above, Adamastor, a Crossbow 42, stripped down for hurricane season on Mexico’s Pacific coast. Above right, the anchorage at Banderas Bay, Mexico.

Jess Lloyd-Moyster

close together.

I looked at the bouncing stern to try and work out the timing for stepping back on board, the very first time I'd be doing it with our infant daughter, but I simply couldn't. Shaken and deflated, almost as much as our poor dinghy, we limped back to the marina, having agreed that we'd spend the night on a friend's boat. James borrowed someone's dinghy and went back out on his own to check that the chain snubber was holding.

The wind whistled through the masts all night long, the sustained gale still blowing into the bay and sending all the yachts at anchor leaping around. In the morning, with the water still rough, James donned his life jacket and ventured out to the boat once more. Two hours later, he came back looking dazed and stunned.

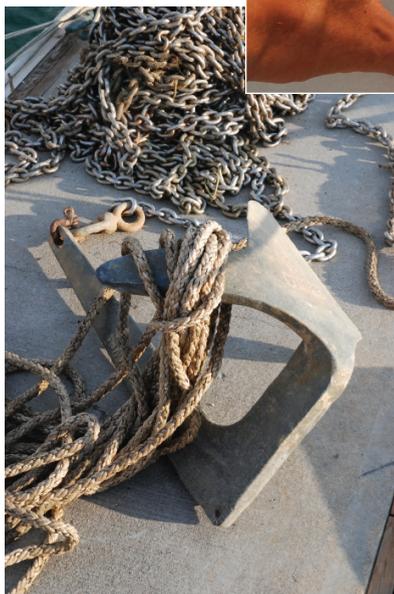
He explained that we'd just had the luckiest break of our sailing life. The anchor chain had either jumped off the windlass gypsy with all the bouncing or the brake hadn't been fully tightened after James last worked on it. The result was that all 60 meters of our chain had spewed out and then all

50 meters of our rope rode on top of that. The snubber line was nowhere to be seen. Thankfully the bitter end of our rode was very securely fastened to the boat. However, the most unnerving thing of all was that the rode was caught and chafing through on a point of our bow roller. When James got to the boat that morning there were literally only a few meager strands connecting our boat — our family home — to the chain and anchor. If what remained of the rope had worn through then

the yacht would be on the rocks, with the still-pounding sea bashing against it. We couldn't believe just how close to disaster we had come.

We learned a few hard lessons that day that, as every part of our sailing life does, continue to teach us how to be better prepared and informed:

- The deadline of leaving a marina before the rates change proved to be a false economy on our part. Yes, money is important and, in our case, sometimes tight, but it can't be the only decision-maker. Likewise, if



we'd spent out a bit more cash on our dinghy or its mends then we'd have had a more stable platform for getting onto the boat.

- Prevailing wind and swell directions are good to be aware of but by no means does that imply that conditions won't change quickly and dramatically. Even in a marina or a shel-

Above, James arrived just before *Adamastor's* anchor rode chafed through and put the boat on the rocks. Left, *Adamastor's* ground tackle. The chain was fully run out, but the bitter end was secured.

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tered bay it just makes good sense to always be aware of the forecast.

- When working on anything on the boat try to walk away from the job with all screws and bolts fully tightened up —just in case. You never know when forgetting to re-tighten something may be a problem.

- Don't rely on just one snubber line for your anchor chain. We now have two independent snubber lines on if the weather is forecast to be rough. Plus we cleat the chain off so there is no force on our windlass gypsy even if the snubber should fail. There is plastic piping at the chafe point on our bow roller just in case, and we periodically check the fastening of our bitter end.

- In hindsight, James wishes that he'd spent the night on our boat instead, while Rocket and I stayed on shore. If you're expecting strong conditions then, like doing an anchor watch, it's wise to have a least one person stay on board to keep monitoring that your anchor and chain are holding well.

—Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn and James left England in 2011 aboard *Adamastor*, a Crossbow 42, intending to circumnavigate in a couple of years. Their daughter, Rocket, was born in Mexico and logged her first sea miles on their Pacific crossing in 2014. They got married in Fiji and are currently in New Zealand where they just added to their crew list with their son, Indigo. Now, more than four years, 18,000 miles and 32 countries since they set off, you can follow their progress at www.water-log.com.

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