



Clouds gather over Banderas Bay, Mexico, and a westerly begins to build

Our world hanging by a thread

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn explains how a missed forecast, thrift and incomplete maintenance nearly cost her family their floating home



Had the rope rode chafed through at the bow, Adamastor would have been lost

ALL PHOTOS: JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

It was November 2013 and *Adamastor*, our Crossbow 40, had spent the whole of the hurricane season in La Cruz marina, on the north shore of Banderas Bay on Mexico's Pacific coast. 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. We were also making our first manoeuvre as a sailing family rather than just a couple, which felt that bit more intimidating.

However, we had decided that we had to leave on 1 November when the marina fees go up, as we simply couldn't afford to stay on the dock. It was just a small move to the anchorage outside the marina entrance so we were lackadaisical about checking the weather forecast. We slipped our lines, motored off without incident and dropped the hook a mere ten minutes later. Shortly after we were back in our dinghy, heading to shore for the local farmers' market that

took place each week. I felt particularly proud of us having performed the whole operation of getting me and a three-and-a-half month-old baby off the boat and into the dinghy so smoothly.

When moving such a short distance it's easy to put certain jobs on the back burner and dismiss them as being of little importance. James had been working on



An increase in berthing fees obliged Adamastor to leave her snug berth in La Cruz marina

mending our windlass, a job that he was still part-way through. But we had reasoned that, as we knew the anchorage had good holding and we could drop in about 7m (23ft) of depth, it would be no problem to bring the chain and anchor up by hand. Also, our dinghy was in a real state of disrepair. It had a number of small punctures that we hadn't got around to mending yet, which were patched with duct tape. It was still fine for short distances as long as you pumped it each time you got in. For getting to the market it would be fine.

We failed to realise 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 from the west with any strength, there's a huge amount of fetch that slams directly into the anchorage. We felt the wind increasing while we were at the market and stayed on



The duct tape repairs to Adamastor's tender aren't up to the job, making it unseaworthy

shore, 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 the reality set in. We usually board via *Adamastor's* sugar-scoop stern but with the entire aft end of the boat bucking up and down wildly, jumping up by some distance and slamming back into the water, it was a daunting prospect. The waves were very steep and extremely 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. 'There is no way I'm getting back on that boat!'

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 lifejacket and ventured out to the boat once more. It was more than two hours later that he came back, looking dazed and stunned. 'We've just had the luckiest break of our sailing lives,' he said.

He explained that 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 metres of chain spewed out over the bow followed by 50 metres of rope. The snubber line was nowhere to be seen. Thankfully the bitter end of the rope was very securely fastened to the boat. However, the most unnerving thing of all was that it 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 meagre 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 her. We couldn't believe just how close to disaster we had come. ▲



Now Jess and James use twin snubbers and always cleat off the chain

Lessons learned

- Money is important, sometimes tight, but it can't be the only decision-maker. Deciding to leave the marina before the rates changed was a false economy. And if we'd paid to have the dinghy repaired properly we'd have had a more stable platform for boarding the boat.

- It's good to be aware of prevailing wind and swell directions but conditions can change quickly and dramatically. Even in a marina or a sheltered bay, always be aware of the forecast.

- When working on the boat make sure all screws and bolts are fully tightened or you could regret the consequences.

- Don't rely on just one snubber. If rough weather is forecast we use two. Cleat the chain off so there is no force on your windlass gypsy if the snubber fails. We now use plastic pipe at the chafe point on our bow roller and we periodically check the fastening of our bitter end.

- If you're expecting strong winds, it's wise to have a least one person aboard standing anchor watch. James wishes he had while Rocket and I stayed ashore.



Jess, husband James and daughter Rocket have now sailed the Pacific to New Zealand

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Jess and James left Falmouth in 2011, intending to sail around the world in a couple of years. After reaching Panama, they decided to take longer over the trip and start a family. Now, more than 18,000 miles, 32 countries and two oceans later, they're in New Zealand. You can follow their adventures at www.water-log.com.