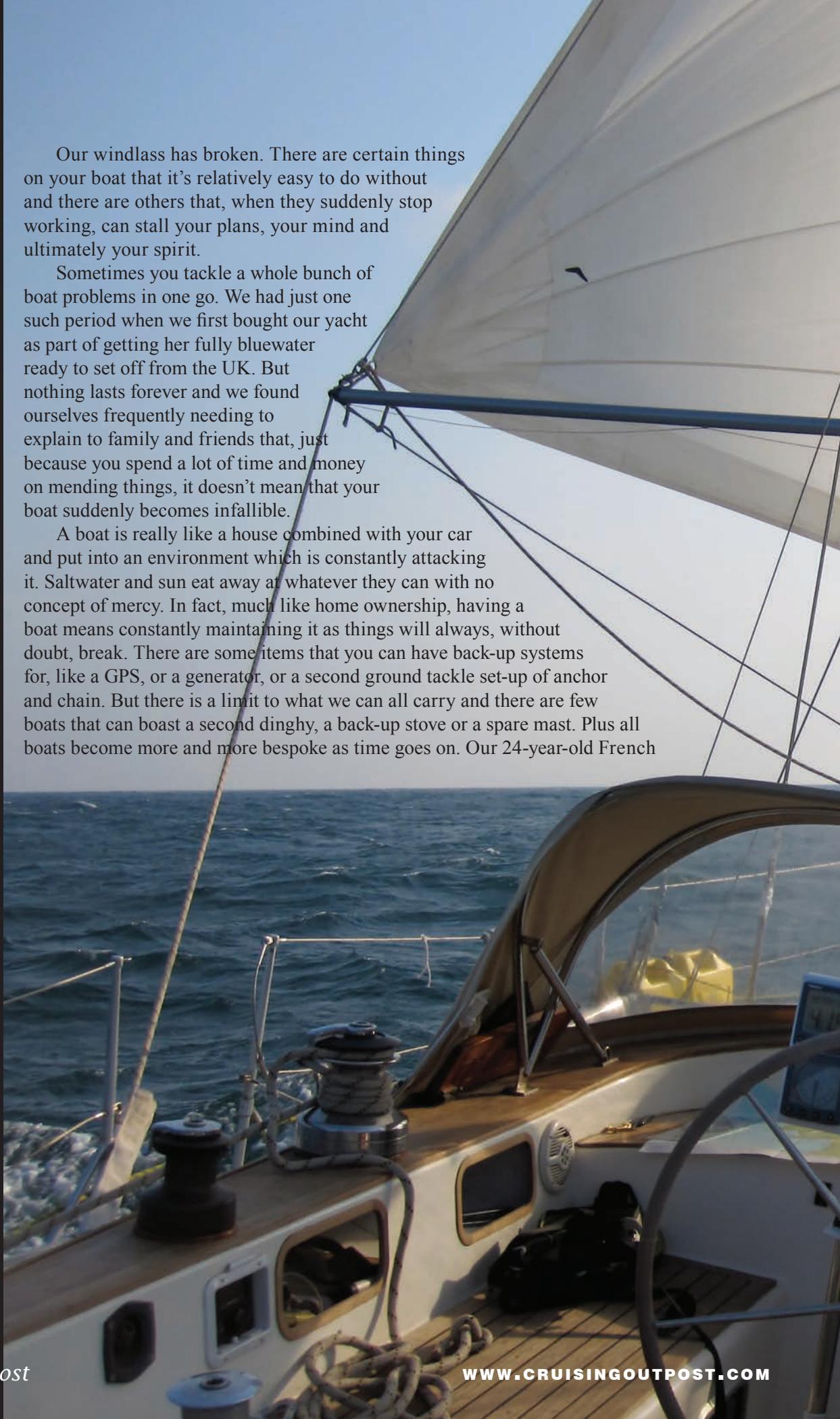


# Don't Let It Break You!

Our windlass has broken. There are certain things on your boat that it's relatively easy to do without and there are others that, when they suddenly stop working, can stall your plans, your mind and ultimately your spirit.

Sometimes you tackle a whole bunch of boat problems in one go. We had just one such period when we first bought our yacht as part of getting her fully bluewater ready to set off from the UK. But nothing lasts forever and we found ourselves frequently needing to explain to family and friends that, just because you spend a lot of time and money on mending things, it doesn't mean that your boat suddenly becomes infallible.

A boat is really like a house combined with your car and put into an environment which is constantly attacking it. Saltwater and sun eat away at whatever they can with no concept of mercy. In fact, much like home ownership, having a boat means constantly maintaining it as things will always, without doubt, break. There are some items that you can have back-up systems for, like a GPS, or a generator, or a second ground tackle set-up of anchor and chain. But there is a limit to what we can all carry and there are few boats that can boast a second dinghy, a back-up stove or a spare mast. Plus all boats become more and more bespoke as time goes on. Our 24-year-old French





*All systems "GO"  
sailing to Cuba*



# Don't Let It Break You!



*Above: Jessica at the helm in Antigua. Below: James on winch - St Kitts. At the bottom you see their boat being hauled on a travelift for out-of-water repairs. You can find haul-out facilities all over the world.*



windlass on a British boat built in South Africa with a Japanese engine, that is currently in Mexico, illustrates quite well how complex a collage of additions and modifications you can be dealing with.

We've found that the real trick is all connected to attitude and how well you are able to adapt to a mind-set of just plain rolling with the punches. Things break, and no amount of money or diligence will make this fact avoidable if you want to actually use your boat and go sailing. But if you can lessen the emotional toll that each breakage takes on your outlook, then it becomes an awful lot easier to deal with what the seas want to throw at you. Consider each one to be a lesson in disguise.

This is particularly useful when planning for an ocean crossing. You walk around and go through the boat both above and below decks and ask yourself, "What happens if this breaks?" Some of these running repairs and damages you can prepare for and others will be tests of your engineering ingenuity. It's amazing how much you can do with duct tape...

But there are some failures which, due to either limited finances, geographic remoteness or sheer lethargy, you simply learn to live with for a time. You see, there is a happy accident that is born out of things breaking: you learn. It seems that a large part of determining how essential each individual piece of kit on board truly is would be to have it break and see how well you can manage without it. Also, by taking apart the carnage and studying the remains of the latest item to stop functioning, you really do manage to discover a whole lot more about your boat.

We were without refrigeration for a good eight months of our journey so far. We'd had a chest fridge that was working when we left England, but it was behaving funny by Gibraltar. When we were crossing the Atlantic we shut it off altogether, fearing that we were losing battery power when the issue was really a faulty voltmeter. By the time we were mid-Caribbean the compressor totally conked out, so we just decided



*Life is maintenance, and maintaining your winches and other gear can add years of life to them. On the right, hauling out in New Zealand.*

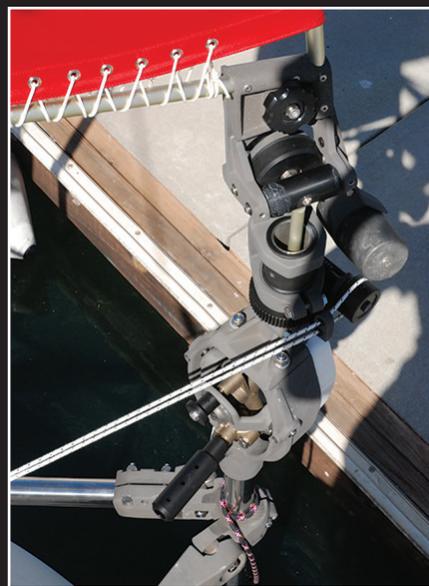
to do without. It proved much easier than you might imagine, particularly as refrigeration is the main power drain on most boats. As we were island-hopping we were always close to land so we simply bought ice to fill up the now defunct chest-housing and used it as a cooler. No problem.

Similarly, our autopilot stopped working. On our last ocean crossing we were sailing with two friends on board, so we were content to hand-steer as there were always enough hands willing. Once we were back down to only the two of us on board, it seemed natural to continue to hand-steer. We both think that we became better sailors as a result of this loss. No autopilot meant that we played with our sail-trim more so that we could balance the boat better, especially when sailing upwind. We had several passages where we didn't need to touch the helm at all.

Our automatic bilge pump had never worked which wasn't much of an issue until the first time that we planned to leave the boat for a long period, which was during hurricane season. Had we not had the deadline of the impending downpours and storms, it would probably still be on the list. And having to use just the manual pump

before then gave us a better understanding of how much saltwater we took in through the stern gland, and how much fresh water came aboard from rain.

I imagine that there are many of us who are content to have a dinghy that needs a top up pumping each time it's used. A chartplotter that's acting up can easily be replaced by an iPhone with the right app and



*Autopilot out? They added a wind-steering system to handle the helm so they could enjoy the trip until the autopilot could be repaired.*

# Don't Let It Break You



*A little mast maintenance - much easier to do with your feet on the ground than dangling from a bosun's chair.*



*Want to know how important it is to maintain your windlass? Just let it go out and you will know full well.*



charts, and the second burner on our stove that isn't working too well can simply wait until we encounter problems with the other one.

So it was with our windlass. Prepared for the seemingly inevitable circumstance of it breaking, we had learned how to let down and pull up the anchor by hand. That's not a straightforward operation when you're talking about 60 metres / 200 feet of chain attached to a 30 kilo / 60 lb anchor. But we had learned from past experience that it would be a sensible skill to master and, as a result, felt far more comfortable doing it that way.

When the windlass did kick the bucket it was no big deal. Until we started talking seriously about the South Pacific, that is. The far greater anchoring depths that we'd be encountering coupled with the added challenge of sailing with a baby made us bite the incredibly expensive bullet and bring a new and shining windlass back to Pacific Mexico when we visited England for Christmas.



*On the left, above and on the right you see the importance of the windlass maintenance. They added a new one!!*



*Below, all things working again, they head to sea waiting to see what breaks next. Hopefully, not this!*

We are now facing the realities of buying any new equipment for our lovely sailboat. The new thing has different dimensions and specifications from the old one (as the original manufacturer no longer exists), so fitting it requires significant adaptations to be made to the anchor locker.

Ah, sigh, you never do lose the hope that each new repair will somehow be simpler, be dealt with faster, be solved with a ‘plug-and-play’ ease and that this one element of your boat will now be flawless and fail-safe. But, in the event that it’s not, at least we can all keep learning. 📖

