

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

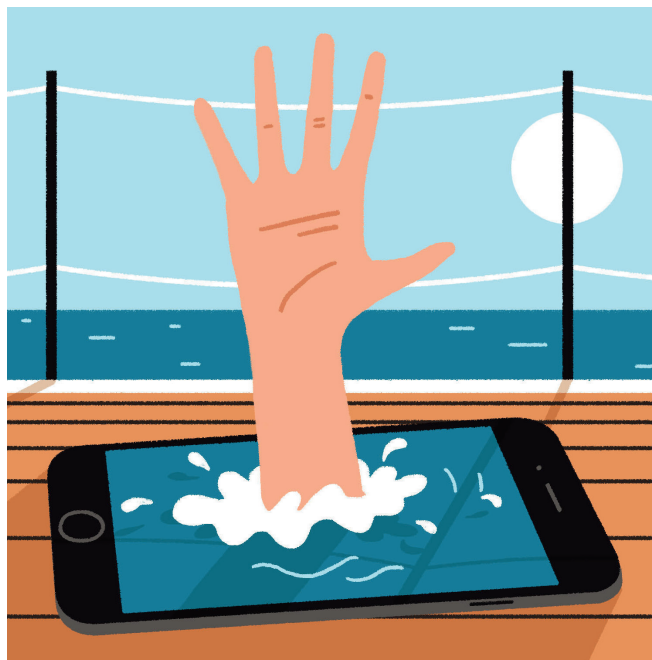
The rise of the sailing YouTube star is a notable phenomenon. But there is a danger that all of this relentless self publicising means that the sailor rather misses the point of going sailing in the first place

For many the choice to plunge into boat life is because they feel that something is askew in their 'work/life balance'. Imagine the cruel irony when documenting and reporting on your sailing activities becomes as demanding a task as a full-time job. In fact, how is it possible to write about your lifestyle without all the blogging, videos or articles encroaching on the lifestyle itself?

It's a challenge faced by many modern sailors. We all know stories like this, a young couple buys a boat for liveaboard cruising. They make YouTube videos and keep a website with a regularly updated journal of their progress. They have an Instagram account and take selfies of using a pressure-cooker, filleting a fish, or paddle-boarding in a tropical sun-drenched location. There's a 'donate now' or possibly a 'buy us a beer' button on their homepage and the videos encourage you to subscribe and become patrons and fans. Now their boat buying escapade can provide them a monthly income, but the catch is that they have to keep pumping out the content, extra rewards and perks, new photos, videos, locations and anchorages all the time.

But how can anyone sustain this amount of production pressure? What do you write about when you're not out sailing due to cyclone season, because you've shredded your mainsail, a global pandemic halts travel or you have a baby? What if you're just longing for a day off or feeling lazy? Perhaps there are many young sailors desperate to get away from this trap of constantly delivering more and more 'news' and long to get back to the simple pleasures of the sea around them. Have we grown used to having cameras in our faces and no longer draw any line between the public and the private?

Yes, it's a far cry from the challenges of solitude faced by the Slocums and Knox-Johnstons of this world and for many it seems the absolute antithesis of the boat life. Surely we got into this to get away from all that pointless noise and burden? Surely we're actively seeking out the places where we can disconnect, unplug, go off grid, the 'white space' that allows us to find clarity and breathe? After all, isn't being a sailor partly about embracing some



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of the last wilderness there is? I often tell people that it took us eight months and 8,000 miles before we began to relax into boat life. The switch from a normal city job means you're accustomed to living at a certain pace. Plus the seasons are relentless so there was a push and a deadline to get down to Europe, then across the Atlantic and then safe for storm season. The trouble is that push-push-push and go-go-go only allows you to engage with the vehicular aspect of your boat home. It's only when you slow down that you begin to luxuriate and dawdle in the joy of living on the water, of only going at three miles an hour if the winds drop or in fact not going at all but idling at anchor with nothing but your immediate surroundings to occupy you. It's like blinking your eyes when you step out into the sunlight, the release of all the schedules and targets that

governed your land life.

So why aren't there photos of these young sailing couples showing them stuck inside, editing videos on their laptops, cropping images or sitting in bed typing up the day's events until 2am? Why is there no acknowledgement of the elephant in the room, breaking through the fourth wall, honestly showing that the commitments of providing constant entertainment, of parading their lives in front of a demanding army of armchair sailors and critics is taking its toll?

I think it's a new modern twist on reality television, which, let's face it, has always been less about reality and more about make-believe idealised versions of people's lives. We care more about entertainment value and drama than whether or not something is true or authentic. Or even good. Is it sustainable? In a word, no. Our appetites for more stories, more couples, the next big thing can only extend so far. Sure, we all know of a select few that seem to be harvesting a princely monthly income from their efforts, and deservedly so given the amount of energy and time needed to devote to it. But for each one of them there are dozens more, maybe even a hundred, desperate to make it 'big' from documenting their lifestyle. All the while oblivious to how much of it is sailing straight past them.



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

ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL PARKIN