

Crossing the Atlantic



David Patriarche, left, aboard the yacht Quetzal, plans to cruise some of the smaller French rivers with his wife and two children.

Sailing the ocean blue

D

David Patriarche says he wants to do a big sailing trip but doesn't necessarily want to sail around the world. With his extensive chartering in various locales on many continents though, he seems to be doing a circumnavigation in tiny little pieces.

One day he may stitch all of these trips together.

Patriarche, who sails a Hunter 34 from the Whitby Marina, has chartered over the years in many different countries, including Turkey, Greece, Thailand,

various island nations throughout the Caribbean, Croatia, and elsewhere around the globe.

This summer, he and his wife Joanne, and their two sons are planning a trip along the smaller French rivers that are connected by a series of canals.

A couple of years ago he did a trip with author and marine journalist John Kretschmer, who published *At the Mercy of the Sea*, a true account of three sailors caught in a hur-

ricane dubbed "Backward Lenny" because it travelled from west-to-east.

Kretschmer, a former delivery boat skipper who has logged more than 300,000 offshore sailing miles and has done 20 trans-Atlantic crossings, now charges about \$4,200 for a week on a "training passage" aboard his Kaufman 47 yacht called Quetzal.

Patriarche read Kretschmer's book and contacted him a few years

See **OCEAN** Page 10

OCEAN From Page 9

ago about joining up as crew. He says he wanted to learn about ocean sailing from someone who had extensive experience in the world's oceans, although he admitted to some nervousness signing up.

Initially, he asked his friends to join him on the trip but they all declined and thought crossing the Atlantic late in the season from the U.S. to St. Martin didn't sound like fun.

"I asked a lot of friends and they said 'you are crazy,'" Patriarche says. "And they are all my sailing friends."

So, without some friends as company, he says he felt a little trepidatious not knowing the rest of the crew he would be sailing with, and wasn't sure about sailing around the clock as the boat and crew made their way across the Atlantic late in 2015.

The plan was to sail from Nova Scotia to St. Martin in the Caribbean, with a stopover in Bermuda. That was the plan, but weather played havoc with that route.

Patriarche along with a small crew of other recruits left from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia in late October after the pattern of chilly northerly winter winds was establishing itself in the region. Cool arctic air had arrived and the thermometer hovered just above freezing.

Patriarche said he was wearing about three pairs of long underwear and the same

amount of layers of other clothes to cover up his body when they shoved off the dock.

"Prior to leaving we went out for the last supper and, well, that's kind of the wrong term," says Patriarche, in a recent talk he was giving to other sailors in Whitby about the trip and about his family charter in Croatia.

"We had some nice winds when we left and he (Kretschmer) had just started his safety briefing when he happened to mention about the storm.

"John said you know that Hurricane Patricia was in the Pacific and, well, it's heading this way." Patricia grew in strength over the Pacific and became the second-most intense tropical cyclone ever recorded with a minimum atmospheric pressure of only 872 mbar.

It slammed into Mexico as a Category 4 hurricane, and ripped through Texas before turning north and building up some strength again. The tropical storm raced up the eastern U.S. coast to Atlantic Canada, still packing a punch.

"So we elected to sail along Nova Scotia and hug the coast and hide out," says Patriarche, who used to work for Ouyang Boat Works in Whitby that constructed Aloha Yachts in the early 1980s. He had previously owned a Grampian 26.

It's a good thing they did hug the coast.

The winds were still in the 20-40 knot range from this storm as it headed towards them.

They pulled into Shelburne, Nova Scotia, a well-protected harbour that is a popular port with the local fishermen. While they were there, tethered to the dock, the boat was rocking in 20 knots of wind and six-foot waves, says Patriarche.

"Hurricane Patricia just kind of kept going. It never lost its legs."

Patriarche, who works in the insurance industry, first took sailing lessons in 1976 in Whitby and took some time off of the sport to raise his growing family. He and wife, Joanne, have two boys, aged 15 and 24.

He did a charter in the British Virgin Islands in 2006 and got back into sailing after taking some years away with the family.

"I took some time off and I got hooked again."

For his Atlantic crossing, Patriarche took a personal beacon tracking device with him so that family and friends could follow him as he and the rest of the crew made their way across the ocean. His wife was to fly and join him when they arrived in St. Martin.

While the yacht was hugging the coast, Patriarche says the locating device stopped sending a signal that gave the yacht's posi-

See ATLANTIC Page 12



The Atlantic crossing provided little time to sleep and was rough at times but Patriarche says he felt safe at all times with the skipper.



ATLANTIC From Page 10

tion. He says this worried his family and some coworkers and clients, who were able to watch his progress on their computers.

Heading away from the Nova Scotia coastline, the crew downloaded thermal imaging maps that showed the meandering nature of the Gulf Stream, which travels north on the eastern seaboard at upwards of five knots and flows 300 times faster than the Amazon River, he says. Their yacht was heading southeast and the strong current was a factor.

"If you are in the right spot you can go 12 knots," he says, but the speed can be halved by the strong northerly current.

The Gulf Stream meanders and doesn't follow a straight line as it heads north and east up the Atlantic coastline and then out into the Atlantic and across to Europe. There are eddies that spring off of the main current that skippers can use to build speed.

Sailing about 200 miles west could mean avoiding the strong current and getting a lift and increased speed. The crew ended up sailing a zigzag course that confused those family and friends that were following the yacht's progress on their computers.

"That's a real experience for me because I go in a straight line."

The weather warmed as they crossed the Gulf Stream -- it went up by a whooping 15 degrees -- and the crew saw dolphins visiting the yacht and riding in its bow wave. In a previous trip, a marine biologist had identified 21 different types of dolphins.

The 10-and-a-half-day ride across the Atlantic was cold, wet and not overly comfortable, says Patriarche, who noted the yacht tended to ride low in the water, meaning more water moving up and over the deck and into the cockpit. At times two inches of water sloshed around down below, he says.

"When a sailboat is sailing for 10 days there is no time to hang something up, something that needs drying out," he says. The bed was wet, along with my clothes and most other things. It was not a pleasant cruise at this point."

As the crew neared Bermuda they decided that since they were running late because they hugged the Nova Scotia coast instead of sailing a direct route or rhumb line to St. Martin, they would not stop in Bermuda, instead passing close on their way by.

It generally takes a day to check in with customs agents in Bermuda and go through a safety check before checking out again, which would have resulted in wasted time. Instead, the crew sailed the boat close enough to the Atlantic island that they could use their cell phones for 20 minutes to

quickly check in with family and friends.

With the crew debating the merits of stopping into Bermuda, "the question came down to: Is everyone okay with not showering?"

Everyone was, including the lone female



David Patriarche says he bundled up in three layers of clothing to keep warm when leaving Nova Scotia.

on the trip, who said she might as well miss the shower and smell like the rest of the crew, says Patriarche.

At times the trip was rough. "There was a night when I don't think I touched the mattress. I was just floating up in the air."

He says approaching the end of their journey, he and others crew members became restless and sick of being wet and tired after cheating their sleep because of the necessary watch rotations. During the night, it was difficult to see the waves and water kept washing over them.

It was then that the skipper broke out the scotch, says Patriarche. "Everyone was good after that," he says. He noted that the skipper is a "high-end type of guy" and instead of anchoring when they arrived in St. Martin, they docked at the plush marina.

Patriarche says he got off the boat after more than 10 days at sea and told a marina worker that he admired the floating docks. He was told that the docks were cement piers and Patriarche was the one swaying back and forth, and not the docks.

All of the crew got along during the journey, but Patriarche says it would be okay with him if he never sailed with the others again.

"With these trips you are supposed to build bonds that last a lifetime but I never want to talk to them again," he says. "That was one of the biggest surprises on the trip."

He thought that most of the five other crew members would have some ocean experience, but was surprised to find that he was the second-most experienced, because of his extensive chartering around the world.

He says he does want to sail with the skipper, again, and immediately asked about an Atlantic crossing from North America to Europe. The skipper told him to wait.

He was told that he would eventually get excited about doing another trip, after this trip sinks in. And that happened about six months later, when Patriarche wrote about doing another passage with Kretschmer.

Altogether, the crew had travelled 1,732 nm. and sailed for 267 hours on the trip. They travelled at an average speed of 6.5 knots. In the 10 days at sea, Patriarche says he was seasick once -- and he never gets seasick -- and only slept a total of 32 hours.

"That is one of the hardest things I've done," says Patriarche. "If anyone wants to do something like this, do it with someone like him," he said of the skipper, Kretschmer.

He said he felt safe sailing onboard in 15 ft. waves and slicing along through the water in 35-knot winds. He was scared, however, by his watch

partner, a veterinarian from Texas, who didn't want to clip on to a jackline until after getting into the cockpit.

It's usual on ocean-going yachts for crew to clip a line on their life jackets to a safety line made fast to the boat at the companionway -- before they get to the cockpit.

"He scared the crap out of me. If you go over at night, it's almost impossible to find someone," says Patriarche.

"You are gone...one wave and you are right through" the lifelines and overboard.

Thankfully, there were no accidents or missing sailors on the trip.