

Lucky To Be Cruising On A Cat

By Johan van Niekerk

What do you do when you find yourself in a foreign country where there's a lack of haul-out facilities and the need to do pressing repairs on the hull of your yacht and engine?

By making an offering to Neptune, the Roman deity of the ocean, you may be rewarded by the splitting of the sea, whereby an island of sand emerges. However, if such a sandbank/shoal indeed has surfaced, you may need to be more thankful to the moon than to Neptune. It is when the moon is closest to Earth that we witness high tide, while when the moon distances itself further away from us, the gravitational force decreases in strength and allows for the opportune moment you may be looking for.

After adventurous sailing of about 5 440km from Walvis Bay, Namibia, to Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, my family (dad, mom and little brother) and I found ourselves in exactly such a situation. There was salt water mixing with the main side oil. How it happened we weren't sure, but suspected the saildrive seals were faulty, allowing water to seep through. Every time we replaced the oil, it would turn murky in no time. And it just so happened that the moon retracted her magnetizing effect on Neptune's water when we spotted a rather large shoal ahead of the anchorage. We were safely anchored off the island of Itaparica and decided to get a closer look at the shoal.

Should you require the natural services of a shoal, here are some things to ponder.

Getting Started

It is recommended you ensure there are no local regulations against beaching your yacht in the area. If this is not an issue of concern, then you can go ahead and begin inspecting the shoal at low tide. Take note of any obstructions, natural or unnatural that may harm the hull during beaching. Get to know the shape of the shoal. At what angle does it get deeper? The shapes of shoals are never the same, so you will need to use your instincts. Ideally, the location should be as horizontal as possible.

Your Yacht

The weight distribution of your yacht will play a big role. Analyse where most of your weight lies and see if you can adjust this. Each time we beached our 40' Maverick catamaran, our two 420-litre Diesel tanks weren't full. By filling the two 500 litre water tanks closer to the bow of the boat, we compensated for the weight in the stern, evening out the weight distribution.

Know the shape of your hull

Where are your propellers, bulkheads and the dagger board? These all determine the positioning of the yacht. For example, the placement of our yacht on the sand allowed for the propellers and rudder to be in the air. This is recommended as no damage can occur and it allows maximum space for repairs and maintenance. Should this be a problem, simply dig holes in the sand where your rudder will be. You will have plenty of time for this as the tide drops. The challenging part about beaching is positioning.

Positioning

Once you know the shape and angle of the sandbank, work out where the yacht can be without losing too much balance. You want the yacht to remain as horizontal as possible. Our first attempt in Itaparica was a big success. We approached the sandbank while the water was waist deep and in the process of becoming low tide. We positioned above the spot we decided on and switched off the engines, got into the water and let out the anchor which helped with stabilization.

As the tide dropped slowly we adjusted the yacht's position by pushing her from the sides and pulling her by the anchor until she rested comfortably on the shoal. The small hill of the shoal was right below the centre of the yacht and bulkheads, allowing the yacht to lean forward slightly. This left the rudder and saildrive wide open to work on.

We drained out all the oil from below. Sixty percent of what came out was sea water. So we took the saildrive apart, replaced the watertight seals and hoped this would solve the problem. The hull was also open for us to remove all barnacles. But you should know that anti-fouling work is not allowed in a natural environment such as a shoal or beach. For that, use proper haul-out facilities.

Tides

You should have a knowledge of tides and how they work, for something to take into account is the tidal flow/current.

When positioning the yacht on the shoal, it is recommended that the hulls of the yacht be parallel to the direction in which the current flows. This lessens the possibility of any unwanted 'tidal bashing' against the yacht



Beached & Stranded until high tide.



Beached on Itaparica Shoal.



The angle of the sandbank is important when beaching.



Sitting perfectly on the sandbank.



Exploring the Suriname jungle.

when the tide returns. If you decide to beach with hulls perpendicular to tidal flow, you may require a second anchor in the stern, thereby counteracting the tide pushing against the yacht. If the yacht is aligned as mentioned first, the tide will simply flow under and pass the yacht, slowly releasing you from the shoal. Should the yacht still be stuck in the sand as the tide gets higher, attempt to push from the sides as a slight nudge is all that's needed. A dinghy is very handy for this and big fun for children. We know this because our yacht weighed 11,000kg.

Observe how much time you have between low and high tide. Watch for Spring and Neap tides - this may be both advantageous and disadvantageous. How strong is the tidal current? For example, a large river will have more tidal flow than a large bay. We spent seven

days sailing in one of Bahia's large rivers and were astonished at the rapid tide movement.

Finally, don't forget to take pride and be thankful for what nature has to offer us. When we spent the time hovering in mid-air in Itaparica, my little brother returned to the yacht after hours of playing in the sand with a bucket. When he showed us what was in it we jumped with joy. The bucket was filled with little clams. Soon we had a delicious feast; garlic and mushroom clam sauce over steamed rice. Enough to make us do it all over again.

Beaching on A Real Beach

By replacing the saildrive oil seals and the oil, the problem seemed to be fixed. However, two weeks later we found the oil murky again. This meant another look at the saildrive to

examine it more closely. We were anchored at Morro de Sao Paulo, about 100km south of Itaparica. There were no shoals in the area, so it became our first attempt at beaching on a real beach. If the chosen area is calm and protected, it will be beneficial to beach with your stern facing land. Make sure the angle of declination of the beach isn't big, as it may become scary. As the tide drops, the bow of your yacht will go lower until resting on the sand. The stern will be higher than the bow with the angle depending on the slope of the beach. Therefore it is important to find a flat and shallow beach. It will be necessary for you to do some digging to ensure the rudder and/or saildrive doesn't get stuck in the sand. It was harder doing maintenance on the props in this setting, as space for movement was minimal.

We used long ropes to tie the yacht to a nearby palm tree. This secured the yacht when the tide rolled out and came back in. As the tide returned, we experienced the yacht jumping up and down in the bow. This was rather uncomfortable as it bashed against the sand. The reason for this was the dramatic angle at which she was lying on the sand. Had this been horizontal, there would've been none of that. Just remember even shoals can be angular, so make sure you position the yacht well. While taking a look at the saildrive once more, we noticed oil running slowly down the outer side of the saildrive leg. We traced the oil and found a hairline crack in our port side saildrive. What now? We drained and replaced the oil once more and sent an email to Yanmar.

At the end of the day, a local longboat approached us filled with crayfish. My father prepared a butter and garlic sauce and we grilled them on the barbeque, sipping on a glass of one of our last South African white wines, while watching the sunset paint the sky.

Just One Engine

If anyone had told me about a 40' catamaran sailing for six months between distant lands

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Taking the saildrive apart.

with only one engine, I would have thought it a daunting challenge.

We had no choice but to pull up our socks and we adjusted well, quickly getting used to the unavailability of our port side engine. We cleared out of the Brazilian customs at Salvador, Bahia, and set sail for Iles de Salut, a group of small islands off the coast of French Guyana, which proved to be the first destination where we longed for both engines. Heading into an unfamiliar anchorage is always a nervous, exciting time. Iles Royale, one of the three islands, was no exception.

As we approached the islands, we noticed a strong current pushing onto our starboard side, with little wind. We had no port engine to counteract it and we continued to drift away from the anchorage, towards the rocks! We panicked and tried using all the starboard engine's power, but to no avail.

Our only choice was to turn the yacht away from the anchorage, towards the rocks in an anti-clockwise direction, turning in a slow circle. We passed very close to the sharp rocks, and turned the bow into the current. Our captain maintained the yacht in a position so that the current approached just off the bow, slightly onto the port side. This helped us to reach the anchorage.

We learnt that day how to put the current to best use, and Mother Nature was there to help. From then on, we always used either the wind and/or the current on our port side to propel us forward. We dropped anchor among the other yachts and were surprised by a South African named John in a dinghy. He had heard about the *Catlyn* sailing from South Africa.

A trail loops all around Iles de Royale and is easy to do in one day. We enjoyed many green coconuts, throwing rocks to bring them down. Squirrel monkeys came to have a look at us and eat the left-over coconuts. We walked among the deserted buildings that served as a penal colony long ago and noticed a small rodent like animal that we'd never seen before, called an agouti.

My brother and I spent a lot of time in the water, while our parents relaxed under the island's long palm trees on hammocks. We celebrated our German friend's 68th birthday along with his wife on their yacht *Tika*. So many years between us, yet the experience of sailing connects us so uniquely.

A couple of days later, we set course for Paramaribo, Suriname, French Guyana's neighbouring country. It was a two-day sail and there were three yachts together. *Catlyn* enjoyed the company of *Out of Africa* with a South

African couple, and *Tika*. It was steady sailing and we anchored just off the Suriname river, with the muddy river water rushing past us.

The next morning we waited for the tides and prepared to go upriver and anchor at Domburg, a few hours away. We were accompanied by the incoming tide and stayed clear of the large cargo ships. We motored under the impressive Suriname bridge to the anchorage. The tide was still coming in, which meant, in order to anchor, we needed to turn around. Our Captain pushed the starboard engine in reverse for a few seconds, thereby setting up the angle at which we were going to turn and then returned it full throttle to forward. The engine growled as we did the counter-clockwise turn, pushing against the rapid current. Once again, using the current slightly on our port side, we advanced towards the anchorage position.

One thing in our routine that had changed slightly with only one engine was anchoring in the presence of strong currents. We had no time to waste. As soon as *Catlyn* was in position, the anchor had to be dropped immediately. The good thing about strong currents in a river is that you can instantly tell if the yacht is dragging. The current easily pushes the yacht which has a loose anchor gliding on the river bed. But if the anchor sets properly, the bridle will quickly pull tight.

Suriname was a pleasant country with lush forests and places to explore. We rented a 4x4 and did our own with a few friends, driving to remote areas away from everyday tourists. On our way back we had a punctured tyre. It turned out to be a long night as our spare tyre also burst a few minutes later. We were stranded, but fortunately, another 4x4 came to our rescue. They went into town to exchange our tyres and we enjoyed their company so much that we invited them to our farewell party. We were in Suriname for only a week, because we needed to get to Trinidad.

The next few days we were back into the deserted oceanic landscape. Somehow the image of such a vast and plain sea seems to resemble that of the emptiness of a dry desert. While one is the complete lack of water the other is only water, both are the extremes of nature. Thankfully we had a yacht that could carry us through this wet desert. And sure enough life emerged from the ocean as my little brother of 11 caught a beautiful Mahi-Mahi. I had the graveyard shift from 00h00 to 03h00 each night, enjoying the silence shared by the sea and the stars.

Our last day before reaching Port of Spain, Trinidad, was exciting as we had a 25-knot wind on the beam with little swells, making it a perfect day of sailing. We had already arranged with the ship yard, Peakes, for our much-needed haul-out and were scheduled to be slipped the next day. Luckily our saildrive was still attached and the Yanmar dealer could help us.

On the day of the haul-out, there was a slight current onto the beam making things difficult. We lowered the dinghy and I hopped inside, assisting by pushing from the port side. The cranes wrapped thick belts around the yacht's hull and slowly lifted her out of the water.

We were happy to have made it after six months with one engine. ↓

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