

MIDGET MAGELLANS IN DURBAN...

Pictures and
Interviews by
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Writer, painter and luxury hotel chef Jean Gau (below), who has seven single-handed Atlantic crossings to his record. Jean Gau (bottom left) with two of his 36 paintings of his first Atlantic crossing in a 40 ft. schooner, photographed

in the cabin of Atom in Durban last month. Bottom right: The 30 ft. ketch Atom, designed by the American John Hanna, in which Jean Gau is making his second trip alone round the world.

South Africa, happily, sits across the round-the-world route taken by deepsea yachtsmen. Every year we are pleased to be able to welcome these tried and proved cruising men, and this summer in particular Durban has already had a remarkable invasion by the doughty midget Magellans, young and mature, spruce and weather-worn...

It does not often happen that a yachtsman with seven single-handed Atlantic crossings to his record sails into Durban harbour. But Jean Gau, in his 30-ft. ketch *Atom* on his second trip round the world, has called at Durban for the second time.

His arrival ended the longest stretch in all his 28 years of sailing—113 days from Thursday Island to Durban without stopping.

Why did he take so long? "I am not in a hurry," said Jean. "I make sailing as easy as possible while I sit below writing my articles for French newspapers and working on a book of my adventures. I just set the jib and mizzen, that's all. I don't have to watch so much... it gives me more time."

The *Atom* is a 30-ft. ketch designed by John Hanna and built in 1938. Jean bought her in 1945 in America.

The skipper is a Frenchman by birth, but a citizen of the U.S.A. and a chef at one of the leading hotels in New York where he works for four years and then takes off four years to sail.

He is planning to be back in New York in October 1966. "I have to work another six months to get my pension," he said.

Jean started sailing in a 40-ft. schooner (also single-handed) in 1937.

A record of his first Atlantic crossing in this schooner has been kept by him in 36 paintings which magnificently capture the different moods of the sea. All are done in coloured pencil from sketches made by him during the trip.

They were exhibited for three months at the Maritime Museum in Paris. After his return he will publish them in book form.

In all his 28 years of single-handed sailing Jean has never used a lifeline. "One hand for myself, and one hand for the boat is enough," says he.

He is cautious in other ways, for he carries two engines for two charging plants, two sextants, two radios ("one let

me down once") three chronometers and three sets of sails. (Sail area is 470 sq. ft.)

He has never felt the need for a self-steering device. "My boat takes care himself, if he is off course he call me. I say: 'What do you want?' I talk to him. I don't care... nobody hears!"

He also carries a five-gallon oil container ready to be lashed on deck, as this is what saved his life during the hurricane which sank the full-rigged school-ship *Pamir*. "In schools in the States when discussing hurricanes one talks about the *Atom* and the *Pamir*," said Jean. "I will tell you the story":

"It was the 21st of September 1957. I was on the last leg of my first round-the-world trip, 300 miles north of Bermuda. I had to go only another 300 miles to New York to finish the trip.

"Through radio messages I knew hurricane Carrie was on her way. At noon that day I was spotted by a big plane guarding the coast. She flew low over me, moving her wings up and down, trying to tell me something.

She must have called the seaplanes because at five o'clock that afternoon a seaplane came, circled, and dropped a hurricane ribbon. This consists of a red ribbon one foot wide and two or three yards long which is attached to small buoy. That warning means: 'You are on the track of a hurricane.'

"I did not feel good. I went down to the cabin and took two shots of whisky, which made me feel a bit better.

"I lowered all sails and rigged the jerry-can with oil between the shroud turn-buckles on the side of the wind. I made one hole underneath and one on top and the oil dropped at one drop a second. It spread on top of the sea and covered an area of a quarter-mile. The breaking waves did not break when they reached the sleek of oil which drifted sideways with the boat, thus protecting it. I reckon this saved my life."

When the wind came through the wind velocity needle reached 120 knots. In the centre of the hurricane were thousands of seabirds. For four hours the boat took a list of 60 degrees.

It lasted 48 hours. When it was over he turned on the radio and, on 40 megacycles, heard a voice calling a distress message: "German sailing ship *Pamir*, 86 men on board in hurricane Carrie. All sails to ribbons, cargo shifted on side, asking immediate assistance." The message was sent in German, English and Portuguese.

Then another station called the *Pamir* from the Azores in English. "I recognised friends of mine. 'We have your call, please give us your position.' The *Pamir* did not answer. She went down and only six of the 86 men were saved the next day by an American steamer.

"Later I learnt that we had been 400 miles apart."

Jean's first yacht, the 40-ft. schooner *Onda II* was lost in Spain in 1937.

"For two weeks I had been battling against a storm and I was exhausted. I decided to run for the bay of Cadiz for shelter. I was not far from Cadiz and could see the buildings ashore and at five in the afternoon I went to sleep.

"When night came I could see nothing as it was during the Spanish revolution and everything was blacked out. I knew there was a rock in the harbour. I also knew there was a light on it, normally. But it was not lit and the next minute I was on it, at a nasty angle.

"I took off all my clothes. Put papers, a torch and matches in a tin around my neck and swam 2½ miles to the shore.

"Once ashore I was frozen, but the matches saved my life. I made a big fire and was warming myself, alternatively front and back in the glow of it.

"What I did not know, was that close to me in the darkness was a coast guard watching me. When he saw a naked man dancing in front of a fire in the middle of the

night he fled in terror to get help and returned with four others, who addressed me with fixed bayonets.

"Don't get excited I said, I am shipwrecked.

"One of them lent me his coat. I was taken to a fort nearby, and I was well looked after. The next day I was told that my ship had been washed up on the beach. It was a sad sight. It was her end.

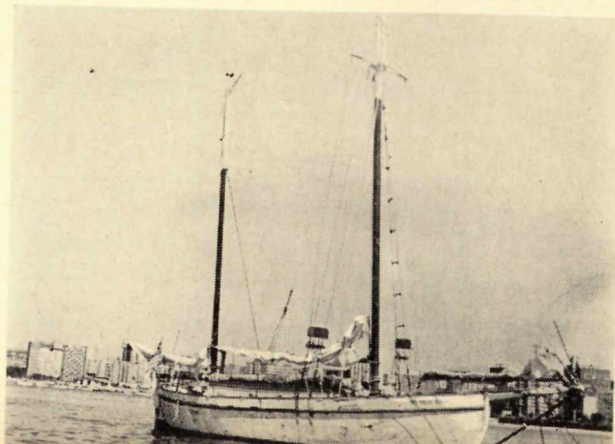
"An interesting encounter which I will never forget was

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The 45-ft. ketch *Salaamat* (above) soon after her arrival in Durban from Malaya.

The crew of the *Salaamat* from Malaya: (from left) John Woodcock, skipper, Dave McLew, Bill Fuller (with sunglasses) and Brian Albinson, navigator. They have retired from Government service in Malaya and bought *Salaamat* to sail back to England.



MIDGET MAGELLANS

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my meeting with the Sanblash Indians in the bay of Darian just before Colon.

"The pilot book warns against going into this bay and the Indians are described as very dangerous. They are known to shrink human heads.

"Well, somehow, I had got into that bay and I could not get out of it. There was a whole long wall of breakers I had to cross to get out, and I did not know where or when.

"So there I was not far off the shore and Indians in canoes started rowing out to me. I had another of my tots of brandy, hoisted the American flag and put a loaded gun ready in the cabin.

"When they came closer I asked them if anyone knew about sailing and how to get out. 'Yes,' said one man, 'I am a sailor. You cannot get out to-day, you have to go to-morrow.' I was invited by them ashore and rather reluctantly I went.



"I was invited to his house and given a bowl with rice, vegetables and small pieces of smoked fish which we ate with our hands. My appetite was rather spoiled when I looked round in the room and saw on all four walls a row of shrunken human heads with long hair. My host saw my stunned look and said: 'Those heads are from our enemy tribe the Chocas. Look, they are over there. You must not go there. They are very bad. They will kill you.'

"After dinner my host showed me the border of their territory and poked in the ground on the other side of the fence with a stick to look for boobie traps. Suddenly an arrow as thick as my arm and with black poison on the end shot from a tree into the ground. It was one of their traps.

"That evening I slept in a hammock outside my host's house. I did not sleep much. I was terrified. When light came and I could see my boat again I felt better.

"My host came with me on board to help me through the entrance. 'When I say now, you turn the engine on as hard ahead as you can,' he said.

"Then we were lifted high on top of a wave. 'Now,' said the Indian, and *Atom* was thrown into the air, to land safely on the other side. My host got in his canoe and on the shore were many Indians waving goodbye.

"When I came below I found the bunks covered with fruit, and there was smoked fish in the sink.

"In Panama they asked me where I got all that from and I replied that I had been in the bay of Darian, they nearly died!"



"My most gruesome experience I had last July, when I ran aground on a reef in the Torres Strait. It happened during the night. The boat was high and dry and when it got light I walked on the reef.

"I found the wreck of a boat. It must have been very old as it was under water and had all opened up. To my horror, it was full of skeletons, and skulls and human bones were spread all over. To think that my fate would be the same made it even more depressing.

"High tide was at midnight and, to my great delight, I managed to get her afloat."

Jean Gau is planning to stay in Durban for two months. After he has worked his six months in New York to get his pension, he will sail to France where he wants to edit his book.

When he gets there he will have done nine single-handed crossings of the Atlantic—surely an unbeatable record, set by a short, thin man who is no doubt the most interesting personality to sail into South African waters.

His great gift for retelling his adventures should make yachtsmen all over the world look forward to his book.



With Frank Casper at the helm, the 30-ft. cutter *Elsie* sails into Durban from the high seas. Another variant on the Norwegian double-ended type . . .

ANOTHER interesting yachtsman sailed into Durban harbour on October 3, Frank Casper from Florida, U.S.A. who has been working his 30-ft. cutter *Elsie* round the world since December 1963.

"On December 17, 1963 I started off on my trip around the world. I arrived at the Panama Canal at the time of the anti-American riots. I had expected to buy food here for my Pacific run but was unable to do so. I left anyway, but not before one really frightening experience.

"One or two Americans were shot every night. The soldiers had told us not to leave the American zone.

"I did leave the zone, to buy supplies, and went into Panama city. I was in a very crowded street. Suddenly there was a big noise. I looked back to see 15 to 20 men running straight at me waving and shouting. Boy I thought, this is it . . .

"They rushed up to me and . . . you forgot your change, they bellowed.

"Then, 4,800 miles later at Nuka Hiva in French Polynesia, picture my amazement when here, on this remote tropical island, I was greeted by a Native in an outrigger canoe and presented with a printed paper! 'Instructions to visiting yachtsmen.'

"I carried on to Tahiti. Since they made this the French missile headquarters the island has changed tremendously.

"Then to Bora Bora and Raratonga, south-west of Tahiti where the famous *Yankee* went aground while I was there.

"In October 1964 I arrived in New Zealand, where I stayed for more than half a year before continuing to Port Morseby, New Guinea and then Thursday Island.

"I really enjoyed the 2,800 miles to Cocos after that. The wind moaned all day and night. Most of the time I carried just a storm trysail. It took me 24 days.

"Cocos was another island that amazed me. I had only just anchored in the lagoon, when a motorboat came out to me and I was invited to come ashore to have a barbecue steak dinner and hot and cold showers.

"I was even more surprised when I was handed a tape recorder for a story for United Press, after the dinner.

"The 2,400 miles from Cocos to Mauritius took me just 20 days, the boat just flew along."

Six weeks in Mauritius, and then a 18-day passage to Durban.

"Where I am going now? I have no definite plans—I may stay a while in the West Indies before I go back to the States."

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