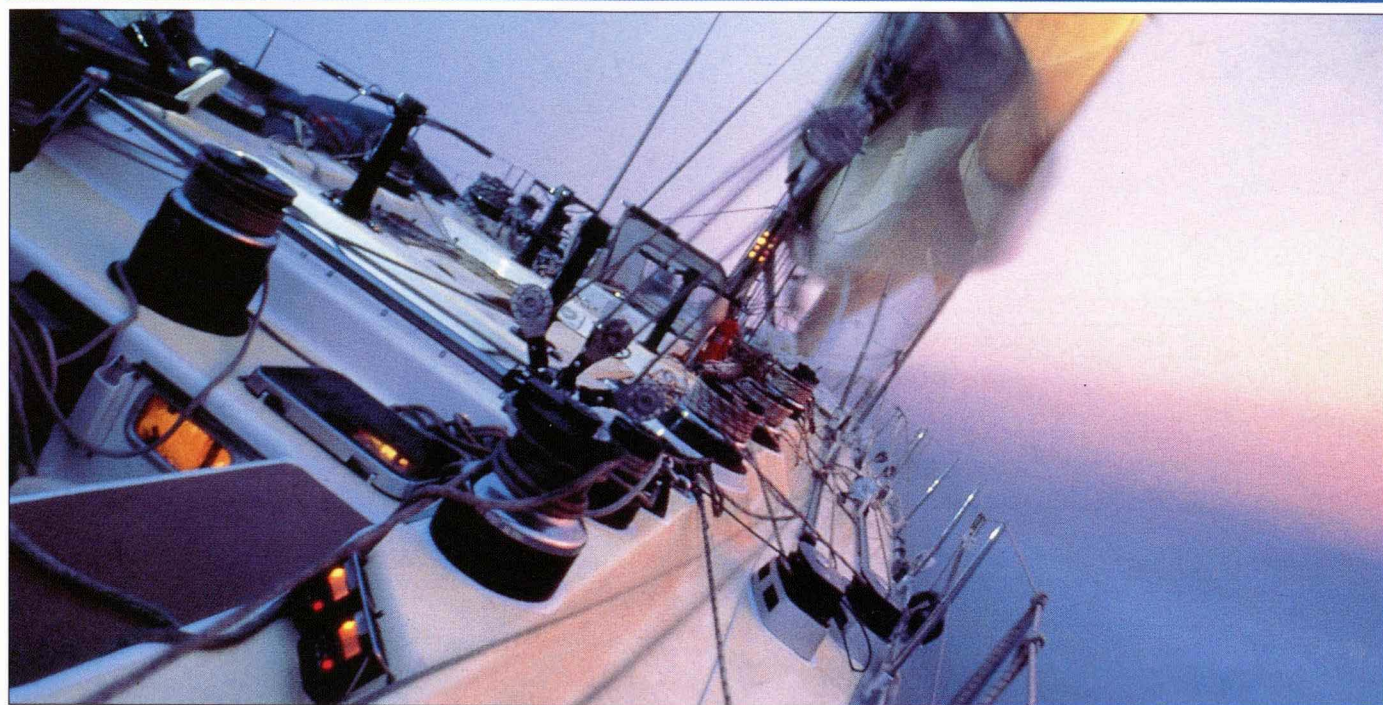


SPINDRIFT

by Brian (Mugs) Hancock



"The cure for everything is salt water - sweat, tears and the sea."
Isak Dineson

I dream of the future in colour and the past in black and white, and wonder what it means. Is it a longing for our innocent past - hiking barefoot under the hot African sun, or sailing calm cool nights on a clear cold ocean?

Perhaps, or perhaps it's just memories fading with time. Memories that have been purged through a filter that weeds out sad and bad times, and replaces them

with good ones. A selective process which optimists have refined. A process close to the heart of all sailors who venture out to sea. A process by which I have come to live my life.

There's a desire in many of us to reconnect with simpler times; a subconscious need to realign ourselves with the natural rhythm of the earth. A need to sever the shackles of society and sail beyond the reach of land. We need to shed the clutter of life and cast our lot with wind and waves. It's time to go sailing. I feel the tug and answer the call. I toss my

lines ashore and point the bow towards a distant landfall. Soon the traffic jams of life will disappear over the horizon, and I will be alone at sea. Alone with the elements. Alone with my thoughts. Alone with the gods.

A gentle zephyr throws shadows on the water. I see the darker patch moving towards me and feel pressure on the sails. My boat heels in response, slowly at first and then with more urgency. Water rushes by. Bubbles murmur on the hull as we cut the surface. Waves slap against the bow. The slap, slap, comforts me. I hear the creak of the halyards and the moan of the autopilot, and feel at home. They are familiar sounds. They are the sounds of life on board. I scan the horizon for sea-life and ships, but see nothing. It is an uncluttered world out here, and a purely honest one too. What you see is what you get. There is time to think and time to reflect. Time to reconnect. The organized pattern of shipboard life, a clear focus and a defined goal, allow my consciousness to flourish. I know that what I do with my time will define not only the passage I am making, but my spirit and character as well. It is an opportunity to look inside my head and see what's in there, warts and all.

My childhood dreams were filled with a longing to escape from the constraints of growing up, and I yearned for the weekends when I could get away to the familiar surroundings of the yacht club. Boats gave me wings, and I craved the freedom and independence I felt when sailing. The moment I cast off, I had the intoxicating feeling of being in control. On the water I was in charge of my own

world, and the magical properties of wind and waves combined into an addictive potion. The same feelings carried into adulthood, and remain with me to this day. They are spiced with the need to be different and a desire to challenge myself - an unarticulated wish to be someone. Crossing oceans and sailing around the world provides the perfect means. It is a place where my neighbours soar and frolic, and the highway is endless, and I always return to life on land a better person.

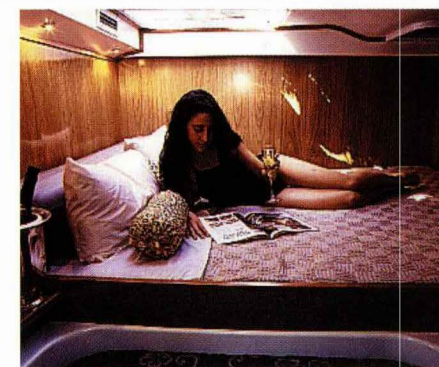
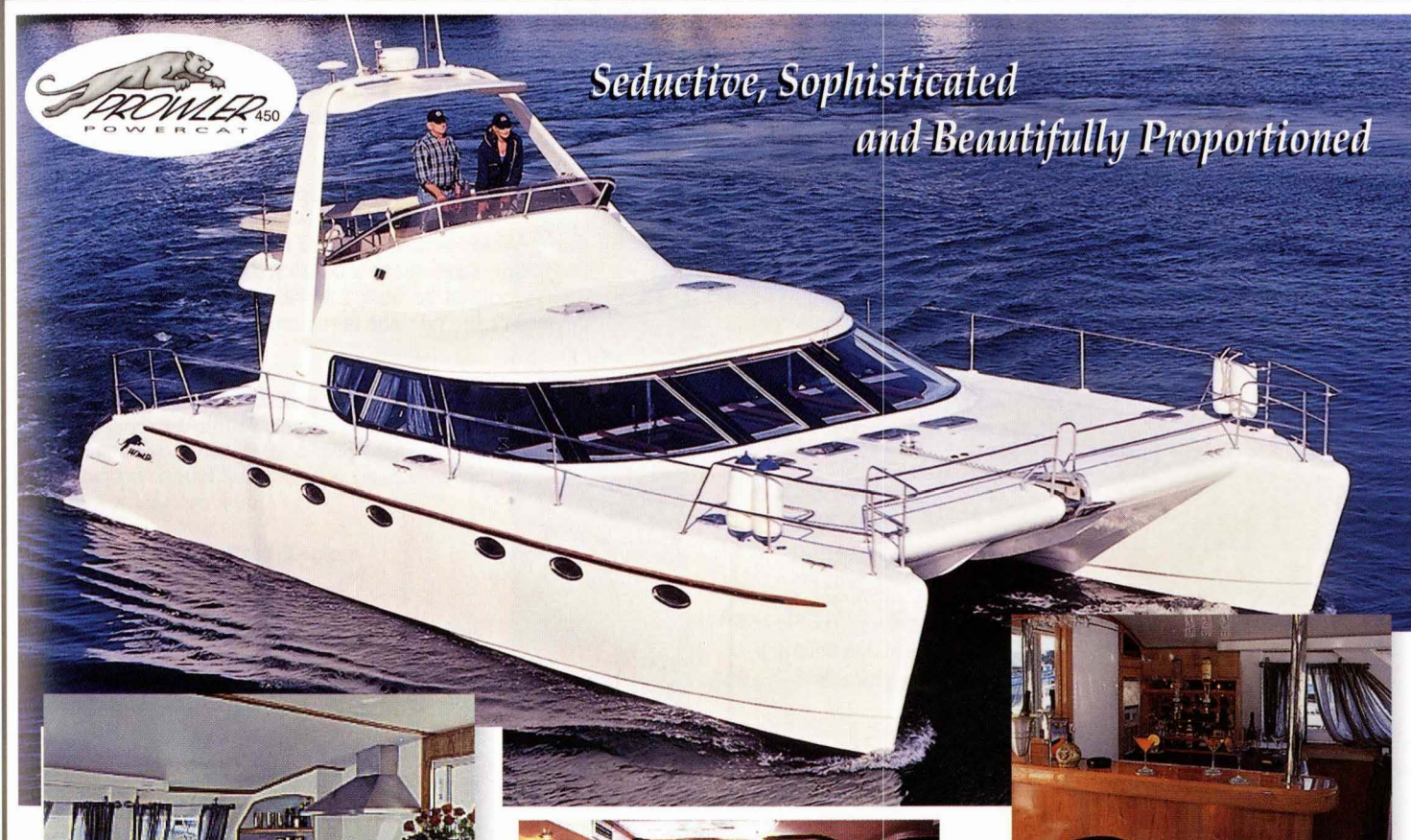
Perhaps trying to define the lure of the sea is too difficult, and maybe I am using lofty thoughts to mask more basic reasons.

Sailing is fun, and the open ocean is a beautiful place to be, especially in the early morning when the light is soft and the sleepiness from a long night fades into the anticipation of another day on the water. There will be challenges ahead, maybe another day like the one just finished. There will be the vagaries of a new weather system to deal with, and hazards yet unmet. The snow might fly again, and the Southern Ocean may kick up into a gray angry cauldron, tossing spindrift high into the air and flinging it across my bow.

More likely though, low swells from a distant storm will nudge my boat towards

the next landfall, the monotonous slapping on the hull gradually connecting with my inner beat. The slap, slap washes away the clutter. It washes away the grime and slime from living on land. I begin to notice an eerie silence in my head as the constant rhythm replaces advertising jingles, and my thoughts become clear and unfettered.

It's an addictive feeling, far from any of the physical aspects of sailing, but somehow a part of it. It's the reason I love to sail. As Havelock Ellis once said. "The most beautiful of the arts. It is life itself." Life at sea goes one better - at least for me it does. ↓



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