

# PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP RECAP —

There's a very big patch of ocean between the West Coast of the Americas and French Polynesia. And despite the fact that sailors have been migrating across it for generations, no one can give you an irrefutable plan for crossing it *painlessly*.



ESTRELLA

**Carol of the B.C.-based 'Estrella' hoists a beer to celebrate arriving at latitude 00°00' — a joyous benchmark of her long crossing.**

Based on nearly 20 years of reporting on this epic passage — which we call the Pacific Puddle Jump — we're convinced that there's no ideal date to jump off and no perfect place to jump off from that's consistent from year to year. As a five-time Puddle Jumper once told us, the best advice is probably "Prepare for the worst, and deal with whatever weather you encounter once you get out there."

**When problems arise — as they inevitably will — you simply deal with them. There's no Vessel Assist in the middle of the ocean.**



INSPIRATION AT SEA

This is not to say you shouldn't study weather data all the way across. Of course you should. But you still might get unlucky. As one cruiser we met in Tahiti this year put it, "Hey, sometimes you have to go through hell to get to paradise!"

As you might have guessed, many boats reported an abundance of sloppy, confused seas and a paucity of idyllic trade wind sailing. Many, but not all. One group that left Puerto Vallarta, Mexico reported having glorious sailing for days on end, where they barely had to trim a sail, while another group that left from the same port a week or two later faced light air, funky seas and way too many squalls in the mysterious ITCZ (Intertropical Convergence Zone). Speaking of which, as any Shellback (equator crosser) will confirm, strategies about how far west to cross it are sure to spark hot debate in every sailors' bar from San Francisco to Panama.

If you're considering making a Puddle Jump of your own someday — or just want to study this subject from the comfort of your recliner — check out the crossing data on page 112 (plus the data in recaps of other years at [www.pacificpuddlejump.com](http://www.pacificpuddlejump.com)).

More than 200 boats signed up for our loosely organized Pacific Puddle Jump rally this year, largely so they could associate with others in the fleet and be eligible for the bond exemption, clearance, and duty-free fuel deal we have worked out with a Papeete yacht agent.

After meeting at our PPJ Send-off Parties in Puerto Vallarta or Panama, many boats kept in touch along the way via SSB nets, often relaying weather info, as well as sharing tales and advice.

In June, we caught up with more than 100 fleet members in Tahiti at the Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous, and heard about both the highs and lows of their 3,000-mile passages. In addition, we surveyed the fleet to bring you the heartfelt, first-hand insights that follows.

One thing we're always curious about is how expectations about the crossing compared with the actual experience:

*Convivia*: "We had expected the kid dynamic to be more trying than

it was. As it turns out, the kids love passage-making and fall right into an easy and generally low-key routine."

*Water Musick* — "With three children we were concerned about lack of access to treatment facilities in the center of the Puddle. In reality we didn't even think

*"The SE trades are a mythical beast that we never encountered."*

about it out there, and we were more focused on meals, homework and running the boat."

*Panta Rhei* — "The passage was substantially easier than we expected."

*Estrella* — "The SE trades are a mythical beast that we never encountered. The ITCZ was often not fully formed and also was often in the Southern Hemisphere."

*Ladybug* — "We were surprised at how



PANDION

LATITUDE/ANDY

# THE PLEASURE & THE PAIN

much difference it made how far east or west one was while crossing the ITCZ. Boats farther west had much better times than when we crossed."

*Bright Angel* — "The winds were generally lighter than anticipated (both north and especially south of the equator). The ITCZ was not as scary as anticipated, just a pain."

*Wondertime* — "Coming from the Pacific Northwest, we'd always been leery of . . . encountering high winds on the crossing. But as it turned out we were more worried about not having enough wind. We saw 5-15 knots about 90% of the trip."

*C'est la Vie* — "I was surprised at the lack of sea life we encountered, as well as how rough it can be waiting out the doldrums. They are not dull — in fact, quite rowdy with the remaining sea

**Spread: Fire on the equator — a Galapagos sunrise. Inset, left: Lorca brings lunch aboard 'Pandion'. Right: When you arrive at Fatu Hiva you realize why they call French Polynesia paradise.**

movement and no wind."

*Gato Go* — "The passage seas were rougher than I expected with seas from two to three directions, both north and south of the ITCZ. But the winds were generally in the 15- to 30-knot range."

*Slick* — "It was much easier than expected. No surprises, except getting caught in a fishing net outside the Galapagos."

*Inspiration at Sea* — "When I did get the winds, the wind vane took over and the knots we were making were amazing until the halfway point. Then five days of no wind, *nada*. The winds came back, along with confused seas — the second half was uncomfortable."

*Evergreen* — "I was very worried about how I would be able to handle the inactivity for all those days at sea since I'm a bit of an exercise nut. . . But in reality



WONDERTIME

**Equator-crossing party aboard 'Wondertime'. Not all parents would take kids so young across an ocean, but they all adapted well.**

I did fine."

*Momo* — "We saw better trade winds and less swell than expected."

*Pandion* — "North of the equator we had great wind and made several 200-mile days. . . Unfortunately, the seas were horribly mixed with three different swells at any given time, and despite our waterline we were getting bounced around as if in a washing machine."

*Red Sky* — "We were surprised how few squalls we actually experienced, and that we had only one lightning storm that caused us any concern — not that we are complaining!"

**I**t's been said that a long passage is often a balance of highs and lows. The highs this year?

*Estrella* — "High points: re-falling in love with our boat as a passage-maker and a good light-air sailer; the challenge; and the feeling of accomplishment when we finished."

*Ladybug* — "High points were wildlife sightings including a huge sperm whale and large pods of striped and other dolphin."

*Wondertime* — "We loved the time about 10 days out when our days became very routine with meals, playtime, naps, radio schedules, blog posting. This was very comforting underway, especially sailing with two young children (3 and 6)."

*C'est la Vie* — "The PPJ evening cruisers' net was a high! It was great to hear from everyone else and their experiences (highs and lows) for the day."

*Gato Go* — "The highs far outweighed the lows. There was a real



GAJU

# PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP RECAP —

sense of camaraderie amongst the participants on the nets. Highs included breathtaking sunsets and sunrises; several visits by hundreds of pan-equatorial dolphins surfing, leaping, and playing; the stars; time to reflect; and sailing where few people ever get a chance to see — for a second time!"

*Inspiration at Sea*: "When becalmed for five days, the colors of the calm glass sea were a painters palette no one would believe to be real. The reflection of the sky on the sea presented colors of the water not ever seen. This is also where we saw the dolphins off my bow (see below)."

*Slick* — "The highest point was obviously arriving, but the fishing was excellent, and this really gave us something to do."

*Evergreen* — "The high points were the beautiful star-filled nights and the feelings around finally doing something

that we'd planned and worked so hard for for so long."

*Pandion* — "There were so many highs: Catching big fish, sunrises and

*"We were so excited to make landfall, but found ourselves wanting to stretch out and savor the approach."*

sunsets, marine mammals playing with the boat, hearing whales sing through the hull of the boat, and sailing at night is magical."

*Red Sky* — "Ten days of great sailing

*Clockwise from upper left: Halfway antics aboard 'Inspiration At Sea'; 'Land ho' aboard 'Bright Angel'; 'Charisma' crew above Daniel's Bay; mid-Pacific cool-down on 'Red Sky'; dolphin in the doldrums; 'Gaku' crew on a Tuamotu campout; Tucker's awesome tatt; the fleet gathers at Moorea's Opunohu Bay. Center: End of the rainbow in the Marquesas; playful rays on a Moorea reef.*

on a broad reach averaging 7 kts and topping out at 10.1. Interrupting the watch schedule each day to spend time together. The night sky is incredible out there."

*Sockdolager* — "High points were the first 10 days, in which we averaged 100 miles a day — in our Pacific Seacraft Dana 24!"

The lows this year mostly had to do with confused seas, especially south of the equator, but there were others:

*Convivia* — "Losing our spinnaker on day two, and Tucker coming down with the flu after crossing the equator."



INSPIRATION AT SEA

BRIGHT ANGEL

CHARISMA

CHARISMA

INSPIRATION AT SEA

CHARISMA

LATITUDE/ANDY

GAKU

# THE PLEASURE & THE PAIN

*Estrella* — "So much light wind, not catching many fish, and being becalmed 50 miles from landfall."

*Wondertime* — "The 200 miles we had north of the equator with zero wind. It was hard to keep morale up during those days."

*Gato Go* — "Fatigue and getting caught in a very strong microburst that ripped our mainsail at the second reef point with 1,000 miles to go."

*Lisa Kay* — "Total lack of sea life."

*Slick* — "It was frustrating when the spinnaker halyard kept chafing through. Although going up the mast in the middle of the ocean while under sail was a great experience."

*Evergreen* — "The only low point was when our autopilot broke, but we had the parts to fix it, so were back in business."

*Red Sky* — "Running out of wind, resulting in 11 days of motorsailing and several days of confused seas."

**W**e also like to ask passage-makers if they remember the feeling they had when they first made landfall:

*Water Musick* — "Excitement, but also sadness the passage was over."

*Southern Cross* — "Our first glimpse of land came several hours earlier than anticipated, so that was exciting. And the fragrant smell of the vegetation is something I will always remember."

*Panta Rhei* — "We were pretty awed by *Fatu Hiva*. It is a tropical paradise and stunningly beautiful. Add to that, our friends were there!"

*Sulyna* — "Getting on land is always good. . . Of course landfall was always much more spectacular before GPS — I miss the old days."

*Estrella* — "I remember the sun rising over the peaks and the spicy floral smell of the island; the giddy feeling that we had actually sailed our home to the South Pacific."

*Wondertime* — "We were so excited to make landfall, but found ourselves wanting to stretch out and savor the approach to *Atuona* (*Hiva Oa*). We had light wind from astern, and with our spinnaker up we drifted slowly along watching the island pass by on our starboard, absolutely in awe at its beauty and completely relishing our last hours of the passage."

*C'est la Vie* — "Elation and exhaustion! I (*Jody*) felt much more confident and capable in my sailing abilities, and that I could now sail anywhere."

*Gato Go* — "We were really excited to see the blip of land come up on the radar screen. From 20 miles out you can just see the beginnings of form, much like an early ultrasound in a pregnancy."

*Libertad* — "As we neared *Hiva Oa*, a very large squall moved over the island, completely obscuring it and the entrance to the anchorage. We had a 25-knot breeze moving us at 7.5 knots and we were somewhat concerned to enter and negotiate the anchorage in those conditions. Fortunately the squall moved on, the clouds lifted and the wind slacked just in time for us to comfortably anchor in a very crowded anchorage."

*Red Sky* — "Mixed emotions. Both



happy and sad feelings, as the dream of doing the crossing had become a reality and now it was over."

*Sockdolager* — "Relief. It was a much harder passage than we'd expected (37 days), and we were very glad to be able to rest and relax."

**A**dvice is rarely hard to find within the cruising community. But tips from successful passage-makers are worth listening to:

*Water Musick* — "Enjoy the ride!"

*Southern Cross* — "Thoroughly familiarize yourself with any newly installed equipment before you jump. But don't put the trip off any longer. It's wonderful out here!"

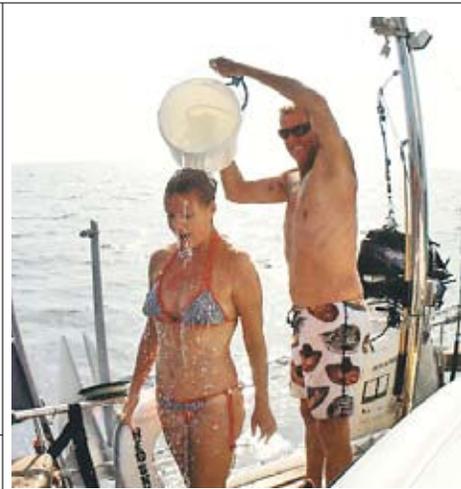
*Stolen Kiss* — "Get access to better weather info (use *Sailmail*). This is a must

to keep abreast of weather changes so that passages can be more enjoyable."

*Sulyna* — "Don't leave too early in the season."

*Estrella* — "This year the best skill we had under our belt was the ability to move our boat in light air and medium seas without damaging equipment."

*Ladybug* — "Make sure you have access to weather info (e.g., *GRIB* files) and pay attention to where you turn to cross



RED SKY



INSPIRATION AT SEA



PANDION

**Like many SoPac cruisers, the 'Pandion' crew couldn't resist getting tattoos.**

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the ITCZ. You can cut days off your passage with good weather info and sensible decisions based on it."

**Bright Angel** — "Go now, go young, and do what is necessary to get the boat safe and seaworthy. But do not get bogged down with the endless project list!"

**Wondertime** — "Just go! But do stock up on tequila and tortilla chips before you leave Mexico."

**C'est la Vie** — Get the latest cruiser's guides, charts and first-hand information from cruisers who have traveled those waters in the last two years. . . Get familiar with the French language and you will enjoy these islands and their people much more!"



WONDERTIME

**Who knew that a 26-day ocean crossing would be so much fun for a three- and six-year-old? The 'Wondertime' crew has happy memories.**

be and just take it as it comes. It really is a remarkable experience and quite an accomplishment."

**Libertad** — "We believe that if you aren't a good team before you leave, the passage is not going to make you one. . . Our advice is don't look for romance and team work in the crossing. Like all your other provisions, take it with you."

**Evergreen** — "Be ready for anything, but do embrace the passage as the bridge to a whole new cruising area that comes with a good chance for smooth sailing and a big sense of peace and accomplishment once completed."

**Momo** — "After our 12 years cruising, we can say: The South Pacific is a unique place on Earth."

**Pandion** — "Get the six-month visa before you set sail. It's worth the hassle. French Polynesia is so magical."

**Sockdolager** — "Don't hesitate to heave-to and get some rest if you need it. Also: if you carry limited fuel, being becalmed is a character-building experience."

**Red Sky** — "The most important thing you can take with you is a *good attitude*. . . If you do nothing else work hard on your attitude because it is a big ocean, and no matter how large the vessel, after a week in the ocean the space can get pretty small. I once read that the difference between ordeal and adventure is attitude. You alone will determine which your voyage becomes."

**N**ot even one in a hundred sailors will ever make the crossing to French Polynesia. Clearly, such ambitious adventuring is not for everyone. But as you can tell, those who do make voyage often find that the rewards far outweigh the risks, and over time, the unpleasant memories tend to fade, while the joyful ones linger.

— **latitude/andy**

*"Just go! But do stock up on tequila and tortilla chips before you leave Mexico."*

**Gato Go** — "There is so much hype about the ITCZ. It is unavoidable, but the winds are seldom above 30 knots and only for a brief time. Don't head south too soon, follow the conventional wisdom of 125°-130° W. Also, try to limit your expectations of what should

## 2012 PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP PASSAGE DATA

Although many more sailors did the Puddle Jump this year, those who responded to our questionnaire give a representative sampling of passage data.

Boat Name	Boat Make & Length	Captain & Crew	Boat's Homeport	Departed From & Date	Landfall & Date	Days of Xing	Miles of Xing	Equator X Long.	Engine Hours	Best 24 Hours	Worst 24 Hours	High Wd Speed	# of Fish Caught	Breakage & Breakdowns
<b>Blue Rodeo</b>	Deerfoot 50	M. McClellan & A. MacDonald	McCall, ID	Nayarit 3/31	Hiva Oa 4/24	18	N/A	132 W	0 hrs	212	139	37 k	0	main halyard, preventer snatch block
<b>Bright Angel</b>	Mason 44	Bob & Linda Hargreaves	Olympia, WA	Bandar Bay 4/11	Hiva Oa 5/9	28	2,875	128 W	68 hrs	147	67	38 k	N/A	none
<b>C'est La Vie</b>	Amel Mango 53	Bob Bohn	Anacortes, WA	Bandar Bay 4/4	Hiva Oa 4/30	24	2,800	128 W	40 hrs	168	68	35 k	0	wind vane safety tubes, sail tears
<b>Clover</b>	L-36	Shane Barry	Santa Cruz, CA	La Paz	Hiva Oa	29	2,980	129 W	N/A	150	30	30 k	0	none
<b>Convivia</b>	Cal 43	Tucker & Victoria Bradford	San Francisco, CA	La Cruz 3/20	Hiva Oa 4/12	24	2,971	129 W	0 hrs	179	61	26 k	0	mostly plumbing
<b>Estrellita</b>	Wauquiez Pret 35	Carol & Livia	Victoria, CAN	P. Los Cabos 3/15	Hiva Oa 4/10	26	N/A	128 W	6 hrs	147	52	35 k	3	jib Sunbrella, furler lower bearing
<b>Evergreen</b>	Tashiba 40	Jon & Heather Turgeon	Vermont	Galapagos, 4/21	Hiva Oa 5/12	21	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	30	10	10	Autopilot brushes
<b>Gaku</b>	Contest 38	Yoshihisa & Mayumi Miyoshi	Kochi, JPN	N. Vallarta 3/22	Hiva Oa 4/18	27	2,768	125 W	140 hrs	147	67	35 k	2	engine hours gauge
<b>Gato Go</b>	Kennex 445	Craig Wiese & Bruce Merkle	San Diego, CA	PV 4/7	Hiva Oa 4/29	21	2,980	126 W	24 hrs	182	93	41 k	6	macerator failed, spin tear, shackle
<b>Inspiration At Sea</b>	Hans Christian 38	Vicky Plett	Point Roberts, CAN	La Paz 2/1	N/A	12	N/A	89 W	140 hrs	152	85	32 k	1	thruhull broke, reef lines, breaker melt
<b>Ladybug II</b>	Coast 34	Chris Bennett & Rani Kaur	Victoria, CAN	Los Frailes 3/20	Hiva Oa 4/14	25	2,913	131 W	24 hrs	148	84	35 k	0	mainsheet traveler damaged in a squall
<b>Legacy</b>	Catalina 38	Rich & Cyndi West	Los Angeles, CA	Avalon, CA 5/3	Hiva Oa 5/24	22	3,084	135 W	75 hrs	159	98	20 k	2	none
<b>Libertad</b>	Amel Marama 46	Dennis & Virginia Johns	Santa Barbara, CA	Galapagos 4/19	Hiva Oa 5/13	23	3,026	N/A	20 hrs	146	68	30 k	3	watermaker quit; hardware breakages
<b>Lisa Kay</b>	Tayana 55	Larry & Lisa Anderson	San Francisco, CA	Galapagos 5/4	Hiva Oa 5/22	19	3,209	88 W	200 hrs	194	146	30 k	0	autopilot failed
<b>Momo</b>	Reinke 13m	Bruno & Yvonne Wittwer	Basel, SWI	PV 3/15	Hiva Oa 4/9	25	3,010	128 W	147 hrs	143	82	45 k	2	sails' sun covers
<b>Pandion</b>	Chance 68	Rossmann family	Tomales Bay, CA	La Paz 3/10	Hiva Oa 4/27	16	N/A	127 W	80 hrs	221	54	40 k	many	watermaker, blew spinnys
<b>Panta Rhei</b>	Apogee 50	Larry & Karen Nelson	Seattle, WA	Panama City 3/19	Fatu Hiva 5/6	29	4,100	88 W	46 hrs	190	90	48 k	0	watermaker valve, sail tear, genset
<b>Red Sky</b>	Moody 54	John & Leanne Hembrow	Brisbane, AUS	Galapagos 3/27	Hiva Oa 4/17	21	3,042	88 W	252 hrs	176	105	34 k	2	headsail UV strip
<b>Slick</b>	Beneteau 40	Tim Lucas	Boston, MA	Galapagos 4/20	Hiva Oa 5/9	19	3,050	N/A	20 hrs	185	135	37 k	21	autopilot, vang, spin & spin halyard
<b>Sockdolager</b>	Pac Seacraft 24	Jim Heumann & Karen Sullivan	Port Townsend, WA	Cabo 3/13	Fatu Hiva 4/19	37	2,867	129 W	48 hrs	118	-16	45 k	0	none
<b>Sulyna</b>	Tayana 57	Andrew Allan	Phuket, THA	Playita Amador 3/3	Nuka Hiva 4/5	33	4,100	84 W	24 hrs	177	41	28 k	4	none
<b>Stolen Kiss</b>	Hylas 47	Peter & Cheryl Ainsworth	Fremantle, AUS	Galapagos	Hiva Oa	24	3,080	88 W	N/A	170	102	32 k	N/A	none
<b>Southern Cross</b>	Ericson 38-200	Mark & Vicki Reed	Portland, OR	S.J. del Cabo 3/21	Nuka Hiva 4/12	22	2,677	132 W	21 hrs	155	54	25 k	3	genoa halyard snap shackle
<b>Wondertime</b>	Benford 38	Michael & Sara Johnson	Seattle, WA	S.J. del Cabo 3/17	Hiva Oa 4/12	26	2,713	128 W	45 hrs	135	59	25 k	3	whisker pole, saltwater foot pump