

2025 Pacific Puddle Jump Rally

Fleet Letter #2

Pre-Departure Vessel Readiness — We are happy to tell you that during the 28 years that we've been involved with the annual Pacific Puddle Jump migration to French Polynesia, there have been relatively few major breakdowns within our fleets, which typically include a wide range of boat types, crewed by sailors with vastly different amounts of offshore experience. That said, though, on any nonstop passage of 3,000 to 4,000 miles all sorts of gear failures can happen.



Registered Puddle Jumpers can pick up an official burgee at this month's seminars.

How can you minimize such possibilities? Just as every captain is responsible for every decision during the passage, we have always considered it to be each captain's responsibility to assess

the preparedness of his or her vessel before departure, as well as the competence of his or her crew.

If time and your cruising budget allow, we think having a comprehensive out-of-water survey done during the months before departure would be money well spent, by enhancing your peace of mind. Plus, making the crossing with fresh bottom paint on could shorten your passage time considerably. But if a pre-voyage haulout and survey aren't possible or practical, we'd recommend getting an in-water "trip survey" done by a trusted marine surveyor, or a highly experienced old salt whom you trust, in order to confirm that all essential gear and machinery is ready for the crossing.

Plan C: If you're not likely to have any sort of professional or semi-professional assessment done before setting off, you can at least do your own stem-to-stern inspection. During the process, listen carefully to your gut! If you get a gut feeling that something should probably be serviced or replaced, then by all means deal with it before you head offshore — especially hard-to-inspect items like liquid storage tanks, rudder post assemblies, plus masthead antennas and instruments.

Save These Dates — If you will be anywhere near Banderas Bay, Mexico or Shelter Bay, Panama this month we hope you will make a special effort to attend one of our South Pacific Bon Voyage events.

The Pacific Puddle Jump has teamed up with members of the South Pacific Sailing Network to present these highly-informative seminars, which are free of charge and open to all west-bound cruisers.

The Programs offer a wide variety of info and insights related to making the passage to French Polynesia and cruising its islands and atolls, plus up-to-date info on cruising Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, New Zealand and Western Australia.

• **February 15** at Panama's Shelter Bay Marina (Caribbean side of the Canal), and

• **February 19** at the Vallarta Yacht Club in Nuevo Vallarta, Mexico.

Please see the attached flyers for additional details.

Over the years, we've seen that some of the most common breakage or gear failures offshore often have to do with items that were never problematic at home, such as: refrigeration systems, goose-neck fittings (main boom attachment), mainsail roller-furlers, autopilots and standing rigging. Boat-owners sometimes seem shocked when reporting: "I can't believe my autopilot crapped out. It never gave me a moment of trouble back home." But think about how many swells an autopilot has to steer through during a 3,000-mile passage. (Interestingly, detailed post-passage surveys tell us that most crews do very little hand-steering.)

Another essential piece of hardware that tends to be out of sight and out of mind is your gooseneck fitting. When sailing inshore waters, that big chunk of metal can grind back-and-forth a gazillion times without incident. But offshore, where sea conditions tend to be more extreme and metal-on-metal stresses are exacerbated, these fittings sometimes fail, particularly on older boats, and especially if made of cast aluminum.

Various elements of standing rigging occasionally fail during the Jump, especially on boats first jumping off into blue water from California or Mexico. Why not so frequently on boats heading west through the Canal? The theory is that most of those boats have recently crossed the Caribbean and the Atlantic. So, if sailing thousands of miles offshore were going to cause rigging failures, they probably would have done so already.

Needless to say, rigging failures can be very dangerous. And in addition to the possibility of someone getting hurt, keep in mind that once you make landfall under a jury-rig, it will be an enormous hassle to have a spar, coils of wire and/or sails shipped or flown to the Marquesas — then you'll need to find someone qualified to install it. So don't let us spoil your fun, but we would suggest that you don't get too carried away seeing how fast you can make the crossing. Better to chill out a bit and enjoy the cruise

We'd also recommend that before you throw off your docklines, hoist sails and head for the western horizon, you sit down with your crew and talk through all the "what-ifs", relating to the crossing, that anyone can think of. Doing so is a good way to make sure everyone is on the same page in terms of appropriate emergency procedures. For example, everyone should know where the fire extinguishers are located and how to use them, where the first aid kit is stored and what it contains, and how to make a distress call via the communications gear on board.

One final note on the subject of preparedness. It's probably safe to say that a typical modern cruising yacht doing the Puddle Jump is better equipped with safety and communication gear than the boats that made the crossing several decades ago. In fact, much of the gear that we all now consider to be indispensable wasn't even invented a few decades ago.

One challenge, as we have seen during recent emergency scenarios, is to not only keep your ditch bag close at hand, and packed with essential nav and comms gadgetry, but also to work out of system with your crew, so those essential devices always get stowed fully charged!

Sailors find their land legs by hiking to a Marquesan waterfall.



Traditional music and dance are highly revered in these islands.

The Passage Crew Conundrum

Over the years, a high percentage of Puddle Jumpers have made the crossing as what you might call "a mom-and-pop operation." That is, with no additional crew. But sailing several thousand miles with a three-on, three-off watch schedule can not only be exhausting, but also potentially dangerous. So some boat owners become tempted to add crew shortly before setting sail.

If you find yourself in that situation, here's our advice: First, if possible, recruit reliable sailors with whom you've sailed before — preferably offshore. One of the most frustrating things that can happen on a long crossing such as this is adding a crew member that you don't know much about, then having him or her spoil the trip with their bad attitude — questioning the captain's orders, refusing to do certain boat chores, drinking in their cabin, and so on.

We have heard both positive and negative reports from boats that picked up additional crew in Panama (generally adventurous backpackers). If you're tempted to do so, we suggest that you at least take them out on a couple of day-sails before adding them to your crew list. It's worth noting that some skippers have reported that they prefer "trainable" beginners over highly-experienced know-it-alls, who might question the captain's tactics or navigation.

Before you make any final decisions, we think it's fair to ask the potential crew for a list of ailments they have and give you a list of all prescription medications they are on. Also, confirm that they have enough cash to support themselves in the islands. Unless you know them, we suggest that you do not include them in your bond exemption, and instead require that they buy a plane ticket to their home country to present to immigration authorities when you clear in after making your initial landfall.

Lastly, those who are serious about finding a crew position should make it clear during the first interview that they are not interested in romance, but simply a ride.

— Andy Turpin, PPJ 2025