

On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson



"A day like today keeps the oil man away," said Marie, the waitress where I get my morning coffee. It's just a short walk across the street from the boatyard where we moor our 1954 Huckins sedan cruiser. The Blonde, my wife, has a real job and so has to be up and about fairly early. She prefers tea in the morning, and if I make a whole pot of coffee, most of it goes to waste. And because we live aboard, I'd rather not cook in the morning with the boat buttoned up, because if you do, the smell lingers all day. So, I've gotten into the habit of meeting a bunch of guys where we discuss the state of affairs concerning everything from politics to the weather, which was the subject this morning.

So far this winter, it hasn't been very winter-like. Oh, there have been a few cold nights and plenty of precipitation, but so far, no measurable amount of snow. Because of this, we've been underway in *Patty O* more this winter than we ever have...even several overnights.

Patty O's winter cover is designed so that it comes off very easily and goes back on just as easily. But so far, it's only been on once. Right now it's folded up and secured at the end of the dock, waiting for the weather to turn nasty.

There are people, I know, who are shaking their heads at this, but winter cruising can be quite delightful, providing you take a few precautions. The most obvious one, of course, is to know what

the weather is going to be doing.

In the 21st century, we have a lot of neat ways to find out what good old Mother Nature is going to throw at us. There is, of course, the weather channel on TV. They've done a pretty good job of turning weather reporting into entertainment, what with their on-the-spot reporting and weather specials. You can get some pretty good information there; in fact, once you get past the hype and tease that seems to be the rule of most TV networks, that's about all the information you need, if you're going to stay ashore.

If you have access to the World Wide Web, there are virtually hundreds of sites waiting to overwhelm you with weather information. Ever since weathermen have been drawing their maps, people have claimed, "They can be 100% wrong and still get paid!" That may have been true a long time ago, but not today. Of course, the localized weather you hear on your car radio and see on the six o'clock news very well can be off a bit because it's pretty much a general forecast. But for the most part, weather forecasts have become exponentially better over the past 15 years or so with the advent of computer modeling and satellite observation. You can, if you want to spend a lot of money, get personalized weather that will tell you to the minute when the wind is going to blow or when it will rain.

Several years ago I was on a delivery trip

from Newport to Bermuda and the owner had subscribed to one of the expensive weather services. We'd make contact with them in Boston via SSB radio three times a day. This was a 40-foot sailboat, and as such, we could carry nowhere near the amount of fuel necessary for the trip. So, where and when the wind would blow was of paramount interest to us. The third day out we were moving around in calm winds, just to the south of the Gulf Stream. The voice on the SSB assured us that the wind would begin to blow in our area at five that afternoon, would be out of the east, and would quickly increase to 20 knots and remain there for most of the trip. "Yeah, right," I thought as I hung up the mike. We sat around all day with every stitch of sail set waiting for five o'clock. We made a game of it: "Well, it's two hours to wind..."

At four-thirty, we looked around at each other. We had missed the three o'clock SSB schedule due to atmospheric conditions, so we had no idea if our date with the wind was still on. Five came, and then ten after. Now, a gentle breeze blew across the deck... from the east. By six o'clock the anemometer atop

Continued on page 41

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