

# On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson



It's so good to see the sun again and to feel the moderate temperatures that spring brings. The yo-yo weather of the latter part of winter nearly put the two of us into therapy. Although it did get pretty cold for a while, we had relatively little snow with which to contend. Right at the end, though, old man winter hit us pretty hard.

The forecast was for heavy snow, changing to sleet and freezing rain, but the temperature didn't go that low. I was up several times during the night pulling snow off our cover. With older wooden boats like ours, you really do not want moisture getting into all the little nooks and crannies and then freezing. That makes for deck leaks, at least, and major structural damage, at worst.

In spite of my efforts, almost an inch of ice built up on the cover and with a crash, it came down on top of the boat. The cover frame is plastic pipe tie-wrapped together, so it came apart without causing any damage to the boat. I choose this method because I wanted a cover that would be easy to put on and take off by myself and not take all day to do it. It's worked out quite well. I can have the whole thing off in about 10 minutes and

back on in 30, all by myself. The boatyard sages all shook their heads the following morning and said, "I told you so." But they've been shaking their heads at me for a long time. The cover is, in fact, rather light, but living aboard as we do, it's relatively easy for me to keep it clear, of snow, that is. It was the ice that got me.

Much to my dismay, the whole mess had to remain there until the ice melted and I could drag it up the dock into the parking lot. So, it got a lot of exposure. My dear wife, the Blonde, gave a wave as she headed off to work. "Have fun, Sport!" I mumbled a few choice words to myself and thought about how I was going to salvage anything.

By noon, I had everything in the parking lot, had removed what little snow was on *Patty O's* deck and cut all the tie-wraps. Untangling everything, I found that the only casualty was the forward tarp. The razor-sharp ice had slashed a big hole in it, rendering it worthless. Well, we'd gotten almost two years out of it!

I watched the weather prognosticators closely over the next few days. They forecast temps in the 30s at night and 40 to 50 in the daytime. I really didn't want to put

the cover back on, and I wouldn't unless we were going to have snow or a heavy rain with freezing temperatures following. I mean after all, it IS spring!

The following Sunday was one of those beautiful spring days when you're glad to be alive. It was mid-60s with a sky bluer than I've seen it in ages. The day before, the sounds of tearing shrink wrap permeated throughout the yard as people began coming out of winter hibernation. I did a few little jobs around the boat, but my heart just wasn't into it. Sunday morning we awoke late and over breakfast coffee, which, by the way, we were able to enjoy sitting in the cockpit, I said, "Hey, how 'bout lunch among the beautiful people?" That got a raised eyebrow.

"Whatcha got in mind?"

I rarely get to drive the Blonde's Saab. It's not that she cares, but my old Ford Ranger pickup suits me just fine, thank you.

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She still works a real job as a high-profile architect, so she has to look the part somewhat. I hung up my tie a long time ago.

We headed east toward Rhode Island, and after a while she said, "We're going there again, aren't we?"

"There" was the boatyard where we first saw *Patty O'* a few years back. We'd sold our boat, *You Better*, a Sea Ray 32 because I'd fallen victim to downsizing where I'd worked for 12 years, and I figured we couldn't afford such an extravagance. I'd been miserable for months. Then, the following spring we saw *Patty O'*, and it was love at first sight. She's a classic sedan cruiser, built by the Huckins Yacht Company in 1954. She's 41 feet long and is our home. We've driven back to that same yard every spring since.

It had taken a year before *Patty O'* was ours. Her former owner, whom we'd met the first time we saw her, had passed away the following fall and his family wanted no part of an old wooden boat. We've just about re-built or replaced every-

thing on her. New Cummins diesels replaced the thirsty gasoline engines, and a very quiet generator lives below as well; we mostly anchor out when we're cruising.

We drove through the yard and to be honest, I didn't feel a thing. A consortium had bought the old boatyard and had assimilated it into their chain of high-end marinas. Now the place had *absolutely* no character whatsoever. We left, and I knew we'd never be back.

As I'd promised, I turned the Saab toward Newport for lunch on the strip. Newport has changed exponentially since my old Navy days. Back then, it was a pretty wild place on weekends. It would jump pretty well during America's Cup years, too. The year we lost the Cup, I remember standing on the dock watching *Dame Patty* come out of the water and seeing the famous winged keel. But that's all in the past. We had a great lunch on the pier complete with Newport's famous clam chowder.

It was great fun people-watching in the warm spring afternoon. Before we knew it, we were discussing where we wanted to go this summer. "Maybe we should do the

Newport-Nantucket-Martha's Vineyard thing again," smiled the Blonde over her glass of iced tea. "That was a good trip."

We had done that trip once several years ago in company of two other boats when we had *You Better*. It might be nicer to do it again in a much more leisurely manner this time. Back then, I'd had only two weeks of vacation, and in the dog-eat-dog business I was in at the time, the young and restless were constantly biting at my heels. So I was always on the alert for signs of debauchery, and that meant several cell phone calls to the office every day.

"I think you may have something there, lady." I smiled back.

She tipped her iced tea glass and peered over the edge. "Don't I always?"





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