



# Sullivan's Travels

By John & Annie Sullivan

**I am sitting on the back deck of our motor catamaran 'Catalina', which is anchored some 12 miles up the Berkley River in the Kimberley, thinking how lucky we are as Australians to live in such a wonderful country.**

I ask myself where else in the world could I cruise a boat for thousands of miles through some of the best fishing and diving water in the world, do it with reasonable safety without fear of being shot or arrested, meet some of the nicest people ever, and to experience in the flesh the thrill of seeing huge crocs, whales, dolphins, sharks, marlin, giant squid, giant clams and thousands of fish of all varieties to be caught at will. I can tell you this...nowhere but here in Australia.

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**The Voyager 10.4 would have to be a near perfect choice for a trip of this magnitude, combining economy of operation, safety and 'sea legs'.**

I reflect back 24 months earlier when my wife and first mate Annie and I first started to plan this adventure to the Kimberley. Not unlike a lot of boating and non boating folk, for years I had imagined cruising my own boat around this great country, just taking my time and exploring all the remote places one only reads about. When it actually came to being a reality I was not only extremely excited but I remember being just a little terrified.

When we planned this trip we had very little idea of what we could expect in terms of prevailing weather, sea conditions and safe anchorages along the way. There was the logistics of fuel availability, water, provisions, mechanical help should we need it, and emergency medical help if necessary. There were also customs requirements up north and non-fishing areas and restrictions that had to be studied. We read as many books we could get our hands

on and whilst helpful and very informative, none fully prepared us for the real down to earth adventures (and surprises) that we were to be confronted with.

Other preparations included buying all the charts and cruising guides we could get our hands on pertaining to the proposed cruising areas. The local knowledge one can glean from some of these publications is extremely helpful. Finding skippers who have traversed the far northern coastline was difficult as you could imagine, as the few that have done it are unknown to most of us.

The few that I did talk to frightened the hell out of me with horror stories about some sections. Overall though, I felt that one could not get too much advice. I would have loved to have had the knowledge and experience back then that I have now.

So the idea of this section each month is to take all those would be



adventurers out there that have been dreaming of doing a trip like we have, and through our experiences, try and give you a down to earth, no holes barred, 'warts and all', fully informative travelogue that will help you plan a safe and enjoyable cruise to the Kimberley and back. Oh, and the MOST important addition to this type of adventure is a patient and extremely understanding 'first mate'. Annie was wonderful considering some of the bad weather sections and the damned crocodiles that quite often stalked the boat. We also took our little dog, 'Ralf'. On reflection, this was not a good idea. As much as we loved his company, his presence hampered the overall trip and sightseeing, and in bad weather he panicked. Also almost all the islands on the Queensland coast are National Parks and don't allow dogs ashore. Crocodiles also love dog.

Like most great boating adventures the first big decision was to choose what type of vessel would be best suited to the task. This was not easy, as everyone we spoke to seemed to have a different idea or solution. In the end though, the general consensus was to use a catamaran. Not being sailors, we opted for a power cat.

The decision would have been the same had we been into sailing as the northern waters of Australia has such strong currents and tidal movements

*Editor's footnote: John is 63 years old and has been boating for 50 years. Apart from the many thousands of private hours he has accumulated he also holds a professional skippers ticket and has driven fishing and charter boats on and off for 30 years. His love affair with the sea and his undying affection for fishing and boating make his life experiences seem to many an enviable accumulation of adventures. I am sure the continuous stories of his trip over the next many issues will be followed and enjoyed by all our readers who aspire to do a similar trip.*

in a lot of areas, and the trade winds are relentless from the south east for 9 months of the year. Let me explain these "tradewinds".

No one ever mentioned them down south and the people up north are used to them so they don't mention them either. They are a yearly weather phenomenon that blows 20 to 30 knots of south east wind across the continent from the Whitsunday's to Cape York and across to Darwin almost every day from March through to November.

Now, if you were not a boating person you would think that was a nice sea breeze and let it go at that. However, when you are a boater, this wind puts between 2 to 4 metres of

sea in front or behind you, depending on which way you are going, and all you boaters out there know that can be very uncomfortable, especially going into it.

A sailing craft would not be practical for ease of management in these conditions. In fact all the sailing skippers we spoke to who have cruised these waters said they used their motors most of the time. A motor catamaran can also carry more fuel and supplies and has a longer range than most monos of the same length and outlay. Safety, sea kindness and economy were also a big consideration. The new breed of power cats available now have great range, unmatched stability, ride and advanced safety for when the going gets rough.

Having chosen the boat and commissioned it to be built we then moved on to the planning and research.

After a lot of looking and testing our boat of choice was a 10.4 m 'Voyager'. To suit our needs for the long trip the planning that went into the additions to our boat was quite extensive. The Voyager as it stands is ideally suited for most coastal cruising with its sea kindly nature,

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***Well. me hearties, land ho! The Sullivan's dog Ralf was an unexpected 'star' of many adventures!***





***Creatures of this kind put 'walking the dog' into an entirely new perspective - and caused no little angst for the Sullivans on a number of occasions. This is a 5m Berkely River specimen enjoying the sunshine!***

great stability and living arrangements, but we wanted to improve the range and internal comforts as well as add the essentials that one needs on an extended cruise.

An example of this is larger fuel tanks and a water maker (desalination plant) for a start, then we opted for the best in navigation and communication gear having back ups in all departments. We installed 48 mile radar as we expected to do some night cruising. We fitted a 2 meg long range radio that in addition to all the marine frequencies had all the amateur frequencies.

We then installed email via a Pactor modem and 2 separate VHF radios and a 2000 watt inverter to power a variety of 240 volt appliances such as a washing machine, electric jug, toaster, microwave etc. No use roughing it we said.

To back this up we fitted 5 x 200 amp AGM batteries assisted by 2 x 150 watt solar panels on the bridge roof. A 2000 watt portable genny tops off the electrics, and also runs the 50 amp 3 stage battery charger when needed.

Aircon was a luxury addition to the main cabin only and will run off the inverter, drawing a measly 550 watts. "Factory" boat air can set you back anything up to \$20,000, depending

on what brand you select, we decided to have a box fabricated through the main cabin wall into the anchor locker area where we fitted a 'window rattler' from Hervey Norman for \$220.

It works extremely well, exhausts into the locker, and costs only one twentieth of marine alternatives. For personal safety on deck additional grab rails fore and aft were added, together with the 900mm all-round side and bow rails for safety in rough weather.

We opted for the extended swim platform, which added another 700mm to the rear deck area and topped this off with a stainless rail at the back to which we attach our dinghy.

We added a live bait tank and plumbed it to a salt water pump. The addition of game poles, or trolling poles as some refer to them as is to improve the strike rate when pulling lures. Fishing played a big part in our trip and added to the table some exotic fish dinners each week.

Other safety considerations on a trip like this called for the filling of the voids in each bow with foam. In the event of a collision in the bow under the water line it will not flood and this will allow time to reach safety and make repairs.

The Kimberley region has many uncharted reefs and underwater hazards and this type of damage is

quite possible. Sealed bulk heads throughout the vessel with their own bilge pumps also add to the security.

Another very important piece of equipment is a good dinghy. We chose a RIB with an alloy bottom, obviously to avoid reef damage. Almost all the beach landings up north have fringing reef and will rip a soft bottom to shreds.

A recommended addition to the dinghy is an inexpensive sounder. The water up north is opaque; you cannot see 6 inches into it. On many occasions before entering an anchorage or river we would 'sound' the entrance with the dinghy first before proceeding. This saved us possible damage many times over. You cannot rely on charts or GPS plotters for a lot of the northern coastline as many sections are marked "not sufficiently surveyed", or worse "not surveyed". This means you should always make sure you anchor before dark and approach every new anchorage with the utmost caution.

So, if I haven't frightened you off the idea of a northern adventure by this stage (and it really does get better) then I invite you to follow our adventures from the Gold Coast to the Kimberley and return. Next issue Annie and I set off on our first leg of a 6,000 mile adventure and we will tell it like it is.

**F&B**