

FC News

Editor: Ron Walton

No. 30

Spring 2007

Welcome to issue number 30 of the FC News.

It's spring: where is your Falmouth Cutter? In the water and being sailed I hope.

Many of you have probably heard by now that the Sam L. Morse Co. has closed its doors. Demand for small, well built sailboats with classic lines like the Falmouth Cutter and the Bristol Channel Cutter can no longer support the business. More and more the new sailboat market is being defined by 40+ foot Hunters (and other similarly ugly boats) built for buyers whose only taste is in their mouths. Long live the designs of Lyle Hess.

Speaking of Lyle Hess designs, Lin and Larry Pardey were at the annual sailboat show here in the SF Bay area. And this time they brought their own Lyle Hess designed cutter *Taleisin*. What a treat to finally see *Taleisin*. In fact, other than the tall ship *Lynx*, *Taleisin* was the only boat I went aboard at the show. If you ever get a chance to see *Taleisin*, do so.

This newsletter contains letters from the owners of *Narwhal* and *New Salt*. Mike Latta, owner of *Narwhal*, brings us up to date on his cruise to Mexico, which began in the autumn of 2002. And Shemaly Laurel announces that she has sold her *FC New Salt* and also writes about her sailing plans for the future.

The new owners of *New Salt*, FC #30, are Eric and Susan Sine. They have not contacted me yet, so I don't know where they live or where *New Salt* will be homeported. And *Jack Russell*, FC #17, has new owners as well, Sascha and Kate Ebert of Olalla, Washington. Welcome to the fleet Eric, Susan, Sascha, and Kate.

I also received an e-mail from Mary White. She is now back online with a new computer at her home in California. Good luck on your book Mary. I look forward to reading more about your voyage with *Sapo*.

Finally, *Bandit*, Sam L. Morse Co. FC #2 is for sale. The ad appears at the end of this issue and on my Falmouth Cutter dedicated website at: <http://homepage.mac.com/rwsailor>

Thank you. And remember, if you don't report FC news to me there won't be any FC News.

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Narwhal, FC #1

A long-delayed update: After casting off from the increasingly expensive, chaotic, grid-locked madness of the Estados Unidos in the fall of '02, *Narwhal* and I headed south. Wandering down the coast, I checked out the gear, making short stops along the Southern California coast and the backside of Catalina. *Narwhal* performed beautifully, of course, though the weather was light most of the way. I pretty much main-lined it to Mexico, with only a fuel stop at Turtle Bay, before pulling into Cabo.

Now there's an expensive pest hole that I definitely don't want to ever see again. The outer harbor is now mostly filled with sport fisherman and richy-rich "trawlers" at packed moorings. It was night when I arrived so I tried to stay at the empty and closed fuel dock until they opened, but they don't allow that, as they have an arrangement with the only marina in town. It cost me \$50

dollars for about 6 hours in a berth, and I didn't even "check in" with the Port Captain. So even though the weather was on the nose, I headed north for La Paz immediately after refueling.

Wrong choice.

After two days and a night of increasing head seas and much trouble with my Raymarine auto tiller, I suffered a bad knock down a few miles off the southern tip of Isla Cerralvo. It threw me across the cabin. Busted the staysail stay, cracked a chain plate, lost some running lights and felt I might have cracked a rib or two. Big learning experience. Now I know what "norther" means in Mexico. As both *Narwhal* and I were sorely banged up and in need of repairs, and Mazatlan was the closest, downwind port on mainland Mexico...off we went. So my introduction to this delightful city two days later was, though painful, a happy happenstance.

It's since become my home port and favorite Mexican town...by far.

Mazatlan is unique in that it is two cities in one. The first, the part that most tourists go to, is the "Gold Zone." This is a several miles long stretch of fancy beach front hotels, restaurants and gringo-oriented business stretching along the beachfront to the north of "Old Town" Mazatlan. Gringos flock to it in the winter months, yet rarely straying far from their beach hotels, t-shirt shops and sports bars serving things with umbrellas.

The "Old Town" and business/living part of Mazatlan is centered along and next to the beaches and large harbor to the south. Here is the Mexican Mazatlan. Here is the place where thousands of Mexican families come all year to play and vacation. Especially in the early fall and spring. Much of the old part of town is mostly restored to its original colonial state. Located around the obligatory cathedral and plaza are a huge mercado, government buildings and the nearby Plaza Machado. This beautifully restored plaza, surrounded by sidewalk restaurants and coffee houses, is the home of the Angela Peralta theater, an 18th century opera house named after an international diva who fell in love with Mazatlan and stayed. Next door to it is a large music and dance school populated with some of the most charming and sexy little tutu-clad dance students that you'd ever want to surreptitiously ogle. Sitting in the shade of this plaza with a cup of Mexico's Chiapas region dark roast coffee and the Herald Tribune newspaper is one of my present life's greater pleasures.

A few blocks away lies the "old" harbor. This large commercial port and estuary is the home to hundreds of big steel shrimp boats, tuna clippers, the Mexican navy, sport fishing boats, anchored yachts and related marine business...not to mention huge floating "wedding cake" palaces, better known as cruise ships. These passenger liners dump thousands of tourists off for a few hours, sometimes 2 or 3 ships at a time, and it's best to hide out in a dark palapa and shoot some pool with a shady local for a while.

Marina Mazatlan, the gated, secure harbor marina where I am presently tied up at a berth with water and electricity with the richy-riches, is situated at the other end of town, on the far edge of the "Gold Zone." They are presently building high-rise condos and support business buildings, at a frenetic pace, all around the marina shoreline. (The word is that it is nothing more than a huge quasi-legal laundry facility for the Culican Cartel drug lords. Whatever.) The government is also building a big new yacht haul-out facility next door that was to have been completed by last September. This harbor addition will make Mazatlan Marina the foremost yachting facility in all of Mexico. It's scary. It probably means that I will have to leave, as the rates will begin to skyrocket as more of the richy-riches learn of it and bring their huge floating condo RV boats here to leave all year and use only on special occasions.

Ah, progress.

But it works for me. Surely you haven't forgotten that singular personality flaw that has always determined my daily endeavors...sloth. And procrastination. And a natural inclination to remain horizontal for as long as possible each day. These hard-won traits have kept me happily involved here as I deal with many of the same daily Mexican cultural proclivities. Life here is so much more pleasant than back in the states. They drive slower. Walk slower. Smile more. People still pass greetings on the street. Asking, in my halting Spanish, for directions, for instance, often becomes an interesting, friendly attempt on their part to make my life more pleasant. The fact that they will often send me off in the wrong direction is only because they never want to appear to be of

no help to a stranger. A typical Mexican would rather be wrong than unfriendly. It's a nice choice.

So, with Mazatlan having comparatively good resources vis-à-vis marine supplies, services, yacht specialists, bus transportation, health care, and the cheapest (till now?) berth rates in Mexico...you can see why I have been using it as my "home port" in between sailing up and down the Pacific coast and the Sea of Cortez during the sailing "season."

Hurricanes are scary. They begin to sprout up in June and increase in size and ferocity thru October and possibly into the first week or so of November. You don't want to be around a hurricane. So, all yachties here must plan their itinerary around this reality. Mexico generally has about 15 to sometimes 20 of these vicious monsters in her waters every year. They are born in the Gulf of Tehuantepec near the Guatemalan border. Then wend their increasingly massive way north just off the Pacific coast. Often they head away to the northwest and eventual coldwater oblivion. Sometimes they don't. The secret is to not be where they are liable to be. Ever. The destruction caused by these behemoths can be absolutely awesome. All you can do is strip the boat of any sails, canvas, windage suffering protuberances, etc. and anchor the best that you can. And think good thoughts. So, many (most) boats either leave the country, or head north way up into the far reaches of the Sea of Cortez (where I usually go), or park them in a "safe" marina, with extra dock lines, and fly back to the states, or wherever, and pray that their insurance covers things.

I don't have any insurance. Single-handers aren't allowed no stinking insurance! At least nothing that any normal sea gypsy human being living on his monthly SS check could possibly afford. So, my insurance policy consists of always attempting to be in the right place at the right time with stout anchor gear. This is a policy that is best described as...iffy. However, it's the best that I can afford, and has so far worked out pretty well.

Three years ago I rode out the major hurricane "Marty" while at anchor way up the Sea of Cortez in Bahia de Los Angeles at an isolated little hurricane hole called Puerto Don Juan. I prepared well, set out both my CQR and a 22lb. Bruce wanna-be, and luckily had no problems. But it was an 18 hour-long experience that I hope never to duplicate. Many boats that had opted for other near-by anchorages or were further south in the Sea were sunk and/or damaged. This year I opted to stay here in the hopefully safe and protected confines of Marina Mazatlan harbor in order to pull my engine, repair some things, write some articles, and use my brain for something other than attempting to out-smart a fish. And wouldn't you know it, three of them came dangerously close, but fortunately missed, coming ashore just to the north.

The first of them managed to stay far enough off shore as it headed north and only laid a little gale force wind and a whole lot of rain on Mazatlan. But it definitely raised our collective anxiety levels here in the marina as it moved closer. Those few of us "summering over" here spent a couple feverish days stripping our boats (including those of the clueless commuter/snowbird types who leave their boats for the summer with roller-furling, awnings, etc. up!) of extraneous canvas and gear and tied extra lines to the docks. I even rigged a line from my stern to a hefty palm tree on the nearby shore. Don't know if it would have done any good had "John" hit us with his 130+ mph winds...but it sure did look cool.

Then, two weeks later, Hurricane Lane threatened. It was a level 3 storm, meaning winds up to 150mph and thankfully only got as close as about 25 – 45 miles out to sea. It got a little scary here in the marina, as we didn't know if it would change direction a tad bit and march right over us, or continue on to hit the coast a few miles to the north of Mazatlan...which it eventually did. In preparation we again all stripped our boats of awnings, sails, etc., anything above decks that would grab wind and then hunkered down to wait. The main concern, besides the hard to imagine affect of over a 150mph winds, was the fear of big surge waves smashing into the marina from the sea. These could possibly lift the docks right off the pilings and turn the entire harbor into a mass of fiberglass kindling. (After my riding out "Marty" back in '03, I sailed back down to La Paz and to haul out, and saw the unbelievable destruction that it had caused there. Many of the boats in Marina de la Paz had been turned into a toothpick factory explosion. Where the docks used to be was just debris and masts sticking up out of the water. Dozens of boats were sunk.)

So, the evening before "Lane" was to hit, the Harbor Master had a meeting with us and mapped out what onshore buildings would be available that we could safely run to, if and when the storm became too much and began to overwhelm the boats and docks. Luckily the hurricane stayed

far enough off shore that we never experienced anything over 60mph here in the marina. Just a lot of rain. But it was a tense time. It's good that all my remaining hair is already gray.

By now you are beginning to understand the major sea changes and weather patterns that determine *where*, *when* and *why* I decide to go diddy-bopping around different parts of Mexico at different times over these past few years. Just be assured that I am not madly sailing north and south as I hide from nasty weather. I am taking the time to stop and smell the tacos in between. In fact, I have become quite good at it. However, nothing helps like the ease of being tied up in a marina.

Too much ease, in fact.

Because I've gained 15 or 20 lbs just since sailing back here in April of '06 after having spent the previous year anchored in different lagoons and bays along the Mexican Riviera south of Cabo Corrientes down toward Manzanillo to way back up in the Sea of Cortez. So, instead of my daily rowing to a beach, and back, I now walk to my favorite taco stands. And it shows. You should see my waistline, now. (Well, perhaps not)

Last summer I had the little Yanmar 1GM engine pulled out in order to have it gone over, fixed up, new mounts and made all spiffy again with a new paint job. I cleaned and painted the engine compartment too, so when it went back in it's now a very snappy looking installation. I had planned on afterwards hauling *Narwhal* out at the new boat yard here in the marina last fall and having her completely surveyed and checked, inside and out by now. If she surveys well, and I find that she can stand another 5 years of hard cruising, then I'll make the decision to head south towards South America. Or west again? The only real question is...will my body be in as good shape as hers will be? I went for a complete physical check up last week, and I seem to be still cooking along OK. As they say, "Time will tell."

I am just now, after all these years of rowing back and forth to the beach in my roll-up inflatable, buying myself a well-used 2hp outboard motor. Though rowing helps to keep me somewhat in shape, I have run into a few occasions (Like a heavy out-going river tide or beach landing shore break, that my increasingly puny body is not up to the job. Yes, this aging thing is a real confront for me of late. It's not that I am feeling poorly or anything. In fact, considering that I am now 71, I feel great. It's simply that this sailing lifestyle makes constant demands on my lessening physical abilities. Obviously I am doing things differently at sea, such as slowing down, and being more careful as I move about. And always with my harness clipped on. However, the basics of safe and proper seamanship are non-negotiable. The sea doesn't give a shit one way or the other. And once you're out there...you're out there. It's not like I can change anything when it gets bad. It does its thing and you must deal with it. But, it's getting harder. Certain tasks, like setting a jib pole are becoming difficult, to the point that I increasingly say, "Ah, the hell with it."

I might add that *Narwhal* is still as simple and Spartan as when I left. I have only what I need, meaning: no life raft, no radar, no water-maker, no EPIRB, no refrigeration, (the ice chest under the chart table is filled with books) no SSB, no frills. I do have a C.A.R.D. radar detector, VHF, hand-held GPS (3), a tiller auto-helm (2), wind vane, the usual compass, DF and knot meter, 3 reefs in the main, 1 reef in the staysail, roller furling jib and heavy ground tackle systems (3). As it is, I had to raise the water line the first two times I hauled out for a bottom job every two years. (Must be the books.) I consider myself a very cautious and patient sailor. I never enter an anchorage at night. I generally heave to 5 or 10 miles off shore and wait for daybreak before closing a coast. I'm in no hurry.

However, I am wondering about this cruising life-style as I complete this summer's re-fit and attempt to make a decision as to what's next? Part of me thinks I might be content to finally settle down in some delightfully funky place in Mexico and contentedly dissolve into the local fabric...and another part is getting itchy feet and starting to peruse old charts and cruising guides of Central and South America and points south or west. Decisions, decisions.

Now that my engine removal project is complete, *Narwhal* is almost back to being a moveable feast. All I have left to do is have her rudder, hull and thru-hulls checked out. And have a surveyor do a complete rigging perusal and total going over. Waiting for the new haul out facility boat yard here to get finished is frustrating. Now it's said to be opening sometime later in March. Right.

This past summer has really gone by quickly. The main reason is that I've been busy (a very

comparative phrase) with using my long-latent talents, writing and designing while here. And the results have been both fun and rewarding. I wrote a "how to" feature article on anchoring technique that's been bought by **Latitudes & Attitudes** magazine. They say it's going to run..."soon." So, keep your eyes peeled. You'll probably know before I do. I have also been writing articles for Mazatlan's gringo magazine that keeps me in beer money and local celebrity bragging rights, such as they are. I was also busy with a local marine repair business re-naming, re-designing and writing/producing a kind of low-grade corporate identity program for them. This is how I've had all the boat work done, for barter, on *Narwhal*. It's worked out well for both of us. And my brain is getting a well needed work out, as it had been operating at a less than minus level for some time now. Observing the antics of fish, fowl and coyotes is a great pastime and lots of fun, but not too conducive to maintaining appropriate neuron activity. Or not.

So the next couple of months are going to be spent here spiffing up *Narwhal*, writing, eating too much and beach-goofing while I determine if she and I are up to dealing with another 5 years or so of roughing it in the outlands. After all, how much daily diving, clamming, fishing, beach-combing, hiking, reading, palapa perusing and sleeping can a man take? I don't know, as I haven't reached full saturation as yet.

Meanwhile, what are you up to these days? Every time I think about your beautifully varnished boat, I look over at *Narwhal* and pet her. She looks more like a well-used Nantucket work boat than a yacht these days, what with my stripping off all the topside varnish and letting her go grey. By the way, I careened her, all by myself, while up in the Sea a couple years ago to clean the bottom. She took to the ground like she was designed for it. (Oh, that's right. She was.)

I wish that tomorrow we could simply sit down together in a water-front bar/palapa somewhere and discuss the fun of it all over something cold. If any of you get down this way, please stop by. Be sure to knock firmly on the deck, as I will probably be taking a siesta. And if anybody wants to ask questions about *Narwhal*, just e-mail me. In the meantime, stay tuned. And go sailing a lot. Life is too short.

Later.

Mike Latta

Thank you Mike for the update. I have seen your name mentioned in Latitude 38, both in the magazine and on their website, as a source for various bits of information about cruisers in Mazatlan. I am glad to hear you are enjoying the cruising life. I will keep an eye out for your article in Latitudes & Attitudes, although I don't see that magazine very often.

Wish Mijita and I were there with you. Presently I am chauffeur extraordinaire, gardner, and handyman for my 84 year old mother. As well as varnisher extraordinaire for Mijita. If you and I both live long enough, maybe I will yet meet you down there for that cold one.

Ron Walton

New Salt, FC #30

Another great issue! (*Winter 2007 issue.--Ed.*) But so sad to read Mary's message. What an intense outcome.

Here, *New Salt* is sold. The new owners are Eric and Susan Sine. It's not clear where the boat will end up -- possibly back in the Pacific Northwest -- but they may sail in New England for a bit before that, or, as Eric put it, wherever the wind blows them. I'm happy that *New Salt* is going to get back on the water -- where a boat belongs, after all -- but incredibly sad to see the boat go.

I had put the Chebacco process on hold, what with all the boat attention required to get *New Salt* organized, but am now getting back into gear. Another potential builder has turned up, who might be really nice to work with. This far inland, the choices are pretty much limited to general carpenters with an interest in trying out boats. But since the Chebacco plans are designed for home building, that should work out just fine. And the Peep Hen is scheduled for an application of that new ecologically friendly bottom paint called e-paint, in early April. Because I'm determined to get

on salt water this summer!

Is your shoulder settling down? Another trick I used on *New Salt*, to take the strain off of muscles and all, was to keep a six-foot piece of half-inch braided line to tie to the tiller and pass around the windward winch, or sometimes just the cleat, for steering in heavier winds. The autopilot was nice too, but when hand steering was the way to go, that line made a real difference in upper body strain. Not cleated or anything, but with enough friction to make it much easier to hold. Anyhow, just a thought.

Thanks so much for putting the notice about *New Salt* on your web site, and in the newsletter. It helped my spirits in the whole process quite a bit!

Take care,

Shemaya Laurel

*Good to hear that you were able to sell New Salt so quickly. But sad as well, because I understand your feeling for New Salt. I hope you will keep us all informed about your new cruising adventures. By the way, among the photos on the Rogue Wave site was one labelled "On the way to Newfoundland", or something like that. Did you and New Salt sail that far? I don't remember. I just read a book, **Northern Seas, Hardy Sailors**, about boating in that part of the world. A lot of shipwreck stories. Apparently Newfoundland's a very challenging place to sail.*

I hope the Eric & Susan Sine will contact me about getting on the e-mailing list for the FC News. Ask them to send me an e-mail with their address, etc. for the FC Owner's List; that's all I need. But if they want to write more, I will appreciate that.

My shoulder / upper arm is still bothering me. But so far it hasn't prevented me from going sailing. And it seems better than earlier this year.

I am glad to have been of help to you with regards to selling New Salt. Good luck with your sailing this season and I hope I hear from you about new adventures.

Ron Walton

I'll be delighted to stay in touch -- and look forward to continuing to read FC News.

Northern Seas, Hardy Sailors sounds like a good book -- it's one I haven't seen. I did set out for Newfoundland -- with an extraordinary stack of charts, equipment, etc. etc. And then, after a couple weeks of lousy weather and minimal progress, and realizing that I really had put a dent in my enthusiasm by working so hard on organizing all winter, I said the heck with it and came back! Since it was supposed to be *fun* after all... That turned out to be a good decision -- later that season I did sail to Maine, and ran into people who had been sailing in Nova Scotia, and said that there was more fog that year than they had ever, ever seen. I don't mind fog, but constant is a little much!

Newfoundland remains hugely intriguing, but I'd rather go in a boat with two other adults, to make offshore stretches easy on everybody. There are some significant jumps between harbors, particularly as you get toward the eastern areas, which are the ones I'd really like to see. So who knows, I might get there yet.

My more immediate goal, besides just getting back on the water, is to sail in the Bay of Fundy. It's another reason I like the Chebacco -- sturdy enough to get out a little ways, shallow draft enough to dry out with the tide without being so nearly sideways. I just love watching those enormous tides come and go. I got almost to Canada with *New Salt*, where the tides were 14 feet, and absolutely loved it.

On the Nova Scotia side, they have what they call "drying harbors", where the entire ship-size harbor is a mud flat at low tide. Some with piers designed for tying up alongside, and leaning the boat against when the water leaves. I was considering trying this with *New Salt*, but would've liked to have seen it done first -- and what a lot of attention, adjusting lines in the night!

Hopefully your shoulder/arm will heal soon. Do you have a winch on the mast? I got a lot of mileage out of a winch with a long handle -- partly for the mechanical advantage of the winch itself, but also because then I could choose where to apply the most force, in the parts of the travel of the handle where I was strongest. Another routine that was helpful, but probably looked comical to everybody else, was sitting on the forward hatch, advancing my hands up the slack in the halyard

while leaning somewhat forward, and then leaving my arms in a pretty static position, leaning backwards and using body weight to actually raise the sails. Sailboats lend themselves so well to alternative forms of moving lines... sounds like there ought to be a combination that will work well for you, given how much you can do just fine -- and hopefully just the regular routines will turn out to be easy!

Take care -- it'll be nice to stay in touch.

Shemaya Laurel

For Sale

Sam L. Morse Co. Falmouth Cutter #2, *Bandit*. *Bandit* survived Hurrigan Katrina in New Orleans with only cosmetic damage. Many boats in the same marina were not so lucky. But 18 months after Katrina, personal health and the state of New Orleans's boating economy prevent making the repairs and going sailing. Therefore *Bandit* is for sale, as is, for \$18,000. A *dime-on-the-dollar* compared to a new FC. For details call John Hull, *Bandit*'s owner, at (504)638-1813.