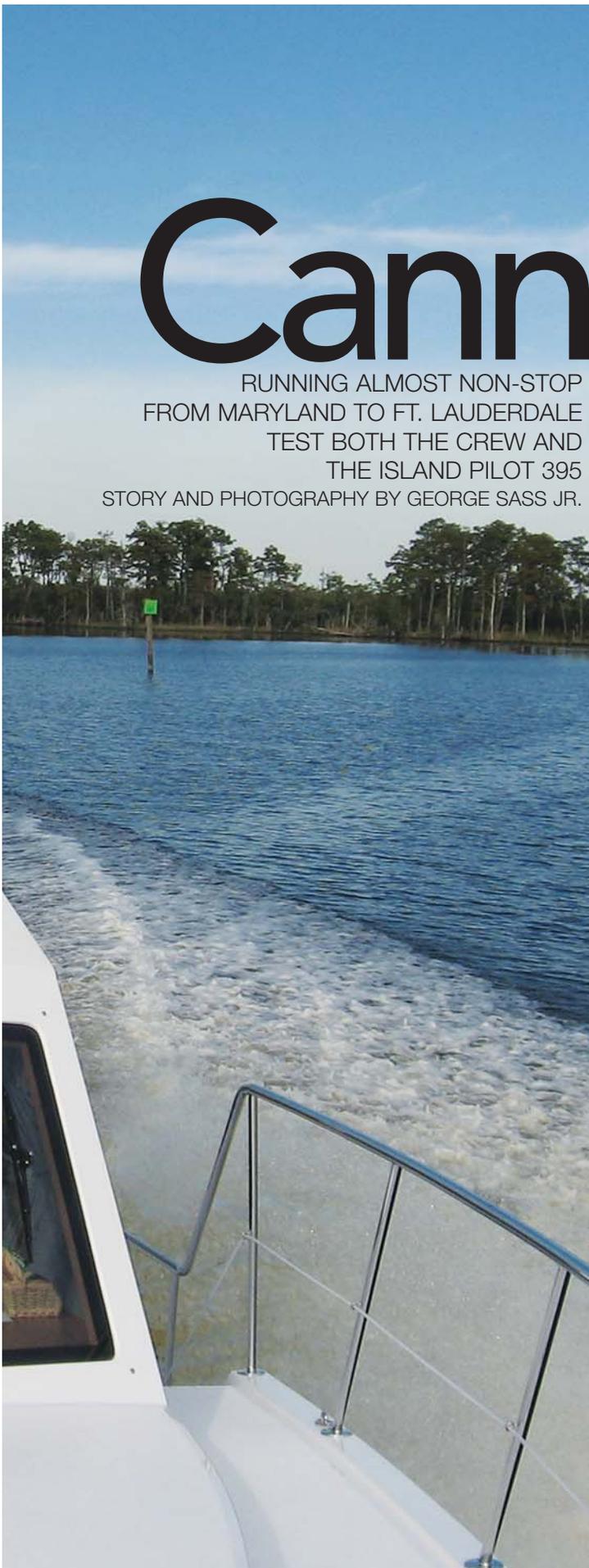


Cannonball Run

RUNNING ALMOST NON-STOP
FROM MARYLAND TO FT. LAUDERDALE
TEST BOTH THE CREW AND
THE ISLAND PILOT 395
STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEORGE SASS JR.



Leaving the maze of the annapolis show. (above)

The conversation last July while sitting on a new Island Pilot 395 went something like this:

"I need to get this boat to the Lauderdale show right after the Annapolis show," said Reuben Trane, the developer and builder of the Island Pilot 395. "And with two new boats coming in, it's going to be tight."

"Really? Hmm, hey I'll take the boat to Lauderdale," was my quick reply, not even thinking about my calendar and a host of other business obligations.

"Great idea, done," shot back Reuben, quicker than I had expected. Oops, now I'm committed.

Within 30 seconds, I signed on to take the new two-stateroom model of the Island Pilot 395 (see "Unconventional Wisdom," July/August 2006 for a complete review of the single stateroom model) from the Annapolis Boat Show to the Ft. Lauderdale Boat Show, a distance of around 900 miles. What neither Reuben nor I knew at the time, however, was that due to the move-in dates of the Ft. Lauderdale Boat Show, I would only have about four and a half days to make the trek. This trip was going to take on the tone of an endurance rally versus a leisurely cruise where we could ponder the change of seasons and color of the water. Nope, this

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The procession of boats heading south in Chesapeake, Virginia (above left). The *Island Pilot* proved her worth while slicing through head seas in the Atlantic. Note the position on the chart above.

was all about fuel management, beating the clock, and keeping the boat running.

In order to stack the cards in our favor, I needed to enlist the help of another lunatic who would enjoy this type of endeavor. Of course the obvious option when lunacy was involved was our publisher, Sean O'Leary. We tried to make it work, but other commitments stood in the way. Then I called *BOAT DIGEST* contributor Steve Creel, another wise choice to stack the cards in our favor. He answered me as quickly as I answered Reuben. We were on for our own Cannon Ball Run.

Steve flew in from Nashville and we met up with Reuben on Sunday, October 15th for a few hours before the show closed. "I wish I was going with you guys," said Reuben, while we reviewed the *Island Pilot's* systems. I recognized this wanderlust. Like Reuben, it is also always tough for me to stand at the dock and wave goodbye to friends heading out on a boating adventure.

Reuben and his wife, Cheryl, provisioned us with enough food for several weeks, including six pints of Ben and Jerry's ice cream. Because the *Island Pilot* is powered with twin outdrives, which means the engines are beneath the cockpit, there is a massive "basement" under the saloon sole, complete with a washer and dryer, and more than enough space for provisions and spares. Steve and I familiarized ourselves with the boat, stowed our gear, and waited until we were unleashed from the show.

SUNDAY

I went back and forth about when we should leave after moving out of the show. My original thought was that I don't want

to hop on board a boat that I've never been on, then depart for a 140-mile leg into the night. I thought we may want to wait until 6 a.m. the next morning. We realized, however, that we needed to maintain a state of perpetual motion for almost the entire trip. So against my better judgment, we headed south toward Norfolk and the start of the Intracoastal Waterway.

We departed Annapolis a little after 7:00 p.m. along with a fleet of other boats making similar runs. The moonless sky was pitch black. While trying to get my bearings, I remembered something a pilot friend of mine once told me, "just trust your instruments." I also realized I needed a refresher course on commercial lights as we paralleled the shipping channels of the lower Chesapeake Bay. Boy, did I confuse myself, and finally got on the horn with a few of the vessels to sort things out.

That first night we pulled back on the throttles for several reasons. First, I'm not a fan of blasting into the darkness at 25 knots. Call me a coward, but it doesn't make sense to me, especially with all the other traffic that night. Fifteen years ago, I would have been blazing my own channel, music blaring, with nothing but a paper chart to get me through the night. Today, give me a cup of coffee a comfortable helm seat and 15 knots, thank you.

MONDAY, DAY ONE

The vividness of the sunrise while entering Norfolk Harbor, with a tug and barge in the distance, was spectacular. Absent of the summer haze, the orange and purple strokes of color were bright and crisp as we navigated our way past the military and commercial vessels that make up the fabric of this busy port. As



Top, left to right; Dolphins follow the boat off the Florida coast; Steve takes a night watch from the comfort of the lower station. Bottom, left to right; calm in the ICW; a brief fuel stop in Florida.

we approached the first in a series of draw bridges, swarms of boats began filing into the procession like a team of bathing beauties in a Vegas water ballet.

Steve and I navigated from the lower station. Two large, plush helm chairs kept us secure, even in a seaway (more about that later.) “They need to have an Iron Chef challenge on board a boat,” laughed Steve, while handing me a plump egg sandwich, home fries, and fresh OJ that rivaled any diner fare back home. With a fresh pot of coffee and a full stomach I began to wipe away the early morning fog that settled over me after a long night on the water. Each new morning on the water, as the sun began to warm both the boat and my soul, I dialed back the vigilance-meter a few degrees—now that I could see beyond the bow.

Our first stop was the Atlantic Yacht Basin, where we topped off with 258 gallons of diesel. We agreed that if we had another 100 gallons on top of the 400-gallon capacity, our options would have increased for the trip to Lauderdale. I always figure on a 10 percent reserve when calculating fuel. So automatically, we wiped off 40 gallons.

We needed to get offshore and away from the speed restricted ICW as soon as we could, and that would be in Morehead City, North Carolina. We were hoping to reach this inlet by the end of the day Monday. Instead, we got caught up in the deluge of boat traffic heading south, speed restrictions, bridges and other barriers that forced us to slow to nearly displacement speed. Our plans of heading out from Morehead City that night were quickly eroding that first morning. “Don’t worry, we’re going to be fine,” said Steve, in his calming Alabama draw. “I have

never missed a deadline.” Steve was witnessing my type-A personality boil to the surface while we sat backed up ten boats deep at a draw bridge. I was pacing the deck like a caged tiger, kicking myself for creating yet another endeavor that involved deadlines. In the publishing business, our entire life is dictated by a series of deadlines, and somehow yours truly found a way to introduce a major deadline to a cruise. “Boy am I dumb,” I thought to myself.

That night we took the longest stopover of our trip—10 hours. We anchored in a little cove in North Carolina’s Pamlico Sound. Except for our fuel stop, we had run for 24 hours straight. It was a relief to anchor out in complete solitude with some good tunes playing, while we cooked up a big dish of lasagna and washed it down with a cold Corona. Later, the wind began to increase, forcing me out of bed a few times to check on the anchor. It held firmly, and the Island Pilot began to grow on us as she became more familiar and as we began to trust each other with every passing day. I think boats have personality, and the Island Pilot was revealing herself as a spunky, yet solid and tough little lady.

TUESDAY, DAY TWO

At 5:30 a.m., the skies were overcast with wild swaths of gray signifying a cold front. We checked the engine fluids, stowed any remaining gear, cleaned up a bit, and got back under way.

Already we began to form a routine as we became more familiar with the boat. Steve has been running boats for more than 30 years, and I refer to him as the “Boat Whisperer.” By the second day, he determined the Island Pilot’s sweet spots and knew

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what speeds required tabs and/or outdrive trim, and where we got the best fuel economy.

The Island Pilot is not unlike most other deep-V hull designs. The intermediate speeds of between 13 and 20 knots are the most inefficient. But our problem was that due to weather and speed restrictions, this was our average speed for the first few days. Therefore we needed to pay extra attention to our fuel consumption.

After picking up another 212 gallons at the Portside Marina in Beaufort, North Carolina, (a great, hospitable stop!) we ducked our nose into the Atlantic at the Morehead City Inlet. Well, the wind was blowing at 20 knots, with higher gusts on our nose, and seas of 6 to 7 feet. We forged ahead for a little bit, but we were only making about 8 knots in the large, stacked seas. (I'm not about to throw a boat off the top of large seas.) Her entry was good, and the boat impressed us both, but we were physically uncomfortable.

In a sign of getting older, we turned around, deciding we would run down to the inlet in Southport, North Carolina. When we put these large swells behind us and trimmed the outdrives slightly, the 395 was like a freight train. "You're doing great baby," whispered Steve, giving the Island Pilot a little pat on the helm.

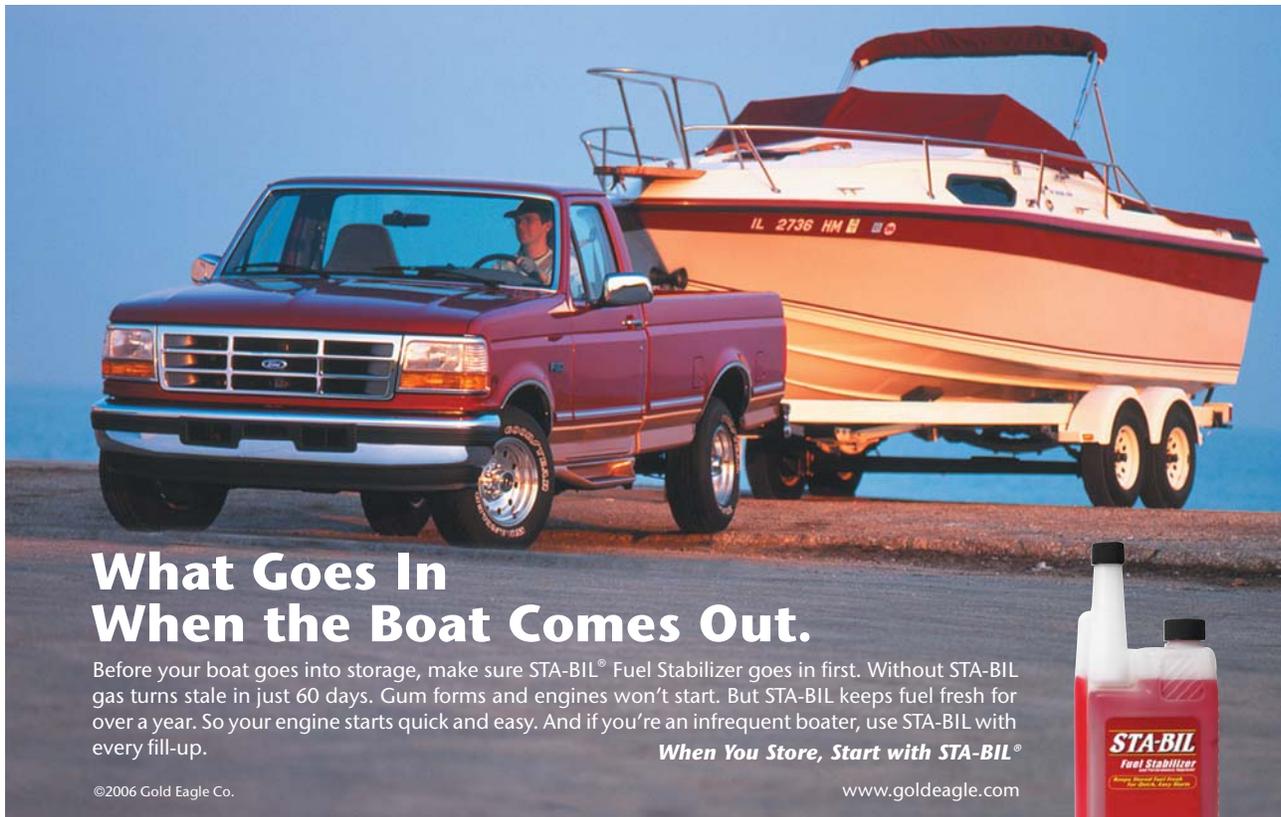
WEDNESDAY, DAY THREE

We were back on the ICW and stopped at 3 a.m. for a few hours outside of Southport, North Carolina, to rest our eyes. (I do not recommend traveling the ICW at night unless you real-

ly have to.) At one point, Steve was seeing black dogs running across the deck and, I, well just couldn't see. We both went down hard for three hours, and got back under way after going through all the systems and engines. The Volvo D6 DP 350 hp diesels were purring along and only took about a quart of oil each for the entire trip.

After topping off our fuel one more time, and grabbing some breakfast at a local diner, we headed offshore into the Atlantic. I breathed a sigh of relief to finally be free from the shackles of the ICW. The wind was still howling and the seas were about 5 to 6 feet, but our course eliminated the quartering motion we had experienced out of Morehead City. Steve put a 3-degree negative trim on the outdrives, and took the throttles to about 1,900 rpm. The Island Pilot cruised along like a thoroughbred at 9.5 knots, sipping 9.5 gallons an hour combined. She felt solid and more like a heavy full-displacement trawler. During the next 24 hours while we cruised for Fernadina Beach, Florida, I realized what the Island Pilot was all about more so than I did during my initial sea trial. This was a boat that was fully capable of cruising at lower speeds and because of the Duoprop outdrives, did not wander or slip from her course. Yet, when the weather allowed, she was a joy to drive (and efficient) at a cruise of around 25 knots.

That day while cruising in the ocean, Steve and I chatted about boats, what makes a better boat, reviewed what we liked about the Island Pilot, what we would change if she was ours, and generally fell into a passagemaking routine. It was great to catch up with my friend and solve all of the world's problems



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and a few of our own, as well. Days like this remind me what cruising is all about. Because your mind is focused on operating the boat, and even simple things, like making lunch, takes effort in a swell, you forget about the pressures we all have at the office or home. We were wrapped securely in the comfort of the boat's saloon and lower station, and only living in the moment. As the weather tamed a little bit, I was able to take a hot shower and we cooked yet another feast. Ah, life was good.

Steve was so consumed by the solace of our ocean passage that when it was time to relieve him of the helm at 1:00 a.m., he told me to go back to bed. He would take the watch for the rest of the night, and was enjoying a stunning night on the ocean about 50 miles from shore.

THURSDAY, DAY FOUR

We pulled into the commercial dock at Fernadina Beach, Florida, for some much needed fuel. We took on 312 gallons, dumped some trash, hosed down the boat, checked the engines, and got back out on the water within 50 minutes, like a well-trained pit crew. For the next few hours, the ocean was like glass and we were finally cruising at 25 knots, burning about 30 gallons an hour. At last, I felt relieved that we were going to make our deadline. Then, of course, the second front arrived on the scene—winds began slamming us at 20 to 25 knots, and the seas began to stack in a short pattern on the nose.

Steve recalculated the fuel burn, and as the night fell off the Florida coast, our options for taking on additional fuel were decreasing. We decided that running at 18 to 19 knots in the stiff

swell was not the best approach. Instead, we would throttle back, conserve fuel, and if the forecast was correct, we could blaze a trail in the morning for our last two hours of running time.

FRIDAY, DAY FIVE

Sunrise found us off the Hillsboro Inlet and we could taste Ft. Lauderdale. "The good news is that the site gauges still show a good amount of fuel," shouted Steve. "The bad news is that tanks follow the shape of the hull, so I'm not really sure. But, we'll be fine George. Don't you worry none."

With that approval, we pushed the throttles forward, rising out of the water to cruise along at 26 knots. This boat is fun to drive at these speeds and watching the miles tick off the GPS made me giddy. At 9 a.m., our scheduled arrival time, we were entering Port Everglades. The cell phone rang, with a slightly nervous Reuben waiting at the dock. "Hey, George, where, ah, where are you guys?" he asked.

"Coming under the 17th Street Bridge, and about ten minutes away," I replied with a little pride spilling over in my delivery.

"Well, alright! Just take a left past the Hatteras display and I'll be waiting for you." So, after 112 hours of running time, two cold fronts, head seas, strong winds, and a lot of traffic, we arrived at 9:24 a.m. After a distance of nearly 900 miles, I'll take 24 minutes late any day of the week.

I'm really hoping the boat needs to return to her summer base in Connecticut, and that Reuben can't make the trip. Except this time, I'd want to add a day or two to the deadline. One Cannon Ball run a year is enough for me. www.islandpilot.com.

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