

# THE LATITUDE 38 INTERVIEW

## Mike Harker

*As a result of a horrible hang-gliding accident off Grenada decades ago that left him under water and unconscious, Mike Harker spent six years in bed, all but unable to move, and being assured by doctors that he'd never walk again. Although he's paralyzed from the top of his "butt bone" down — except for the insides of his thighs — he's managed, through relentless effort, to resume a normal life. And, to make remarkable passages with his boats.*

*Harker started sailing at 52 by entering the '00 Baja Ha-Ha. Learning as he went along, the following year he single-handed across the Atlantic, then sailed back across to Panama and the South Pacific. After returning to California, he planned a circumnavigation that was, for reasons he'll explain, delayed for more than a year. His goal, now that he's 60, is to complete a 26,000-mile trip around the world in 11 months, sailing half the time and enjoying stops in ports the other half.*

*This interview was conducted in St. Barth when he had 1,000 miles left to go. By the time it was over, and before this was published, he'd actually covered 27,800 miles in 10 months, three weeks — the greater distance a result of doing an unplanned additional 2,000 miles on the east coast of Australia for the fun of it.*

*Harker's worst scare of the trip? When he mistook some wicked hot sauce for ketchup at Cheeseburgers in Paradise in St. Barth. He was choking so badly and in such genuine pain that we were seconds from summoning professional medical help before he began to recover.*

*While making his circumnavigation, Harker's home at Lake Arrowhead burned to the ground. He'll not rebuild. When he's through sailing — which isn't going to be anytime soon, as you'll soon learn — he'll move into one of the units in his triplex on the water in Manhattan Beach.*

**Harker:** Let me start off by saying that you're the first person who speaks 'American' that I've talked to in over 10 months.

**38:** Cool. Well tell us, how did this very rapid and mostly singlehanded circumnavigation come about?

**Harker:** As some readers might remember, I started by doing the '00 Ha-Ha with my Hunter 34 *Wanderlust*. At the time, I knew absolutely nothing about sailing. After doing a singlehanded Baja Bash back to Southern California, I bought a Hunter 466 in Miami. Although I intended to have crew, I ended up single-handing *Wanderlust II* across the Atlantic. I then cruised the Med, and that winter I came back across the Atlantic — with crew — and ultimately to French Polynesia via the Galapagos. Then, while on the way to Hawaii, the rudder broke.

After getting a replacement rudder from Hunter, my plan was to sail back to San Francisco, do the Ha-Ha again, do the Puddle Jump to the South Pacific, then continue on to Australia and around the world. But the folks at Hunter liked what I was doing. They brought me to their booth at the show in Miami and suggested that I trade my 466 in for one of their new Mariner 49s — which wasn't even completely designed at that point — and do my circumnavigation with one of those. They made me a hard-to-refuse offer, and then even had me come to the factory to get my 'non-sailor' input on the boat. Having accepted their offer, I had to postpone my circumnavigation for a year in order to sell my 466 and in order for them to finish designing and building the 49.

*"I'm a guy who likes to move around, and I discovered it was possible to circumnavigate in 11 months."*

**38:** We've gotten to know you over the years, so we expect that you put that year of waiting to good use.

**Harker:** I went to Sea School in Fort Lauderdale to get my Captain's license, then I went to school in Pensacola to get a

Masters upgrade, and finally I went to Orange Coast College's School of Sailing and Seamanship for my offshore and sailing endorsements. I now have all the certificates.

**38:** Were the classes helpful or did they basically teach you what you already knew?

**Harker:** There was a lot of stuff that I did know, but the classes were helpful. Among the most useful stuff I learned is a lot of sailing and nautical terminology that I wasn't familiar with. You have to remember that I learned almost all my sailing in the Ha-Ha with German friends, and we only spoke German. And since I've singlehanded more than 90% ever since, I haven't learned the English terms from subsequent crew.

**38:** So you mostly sail alone?

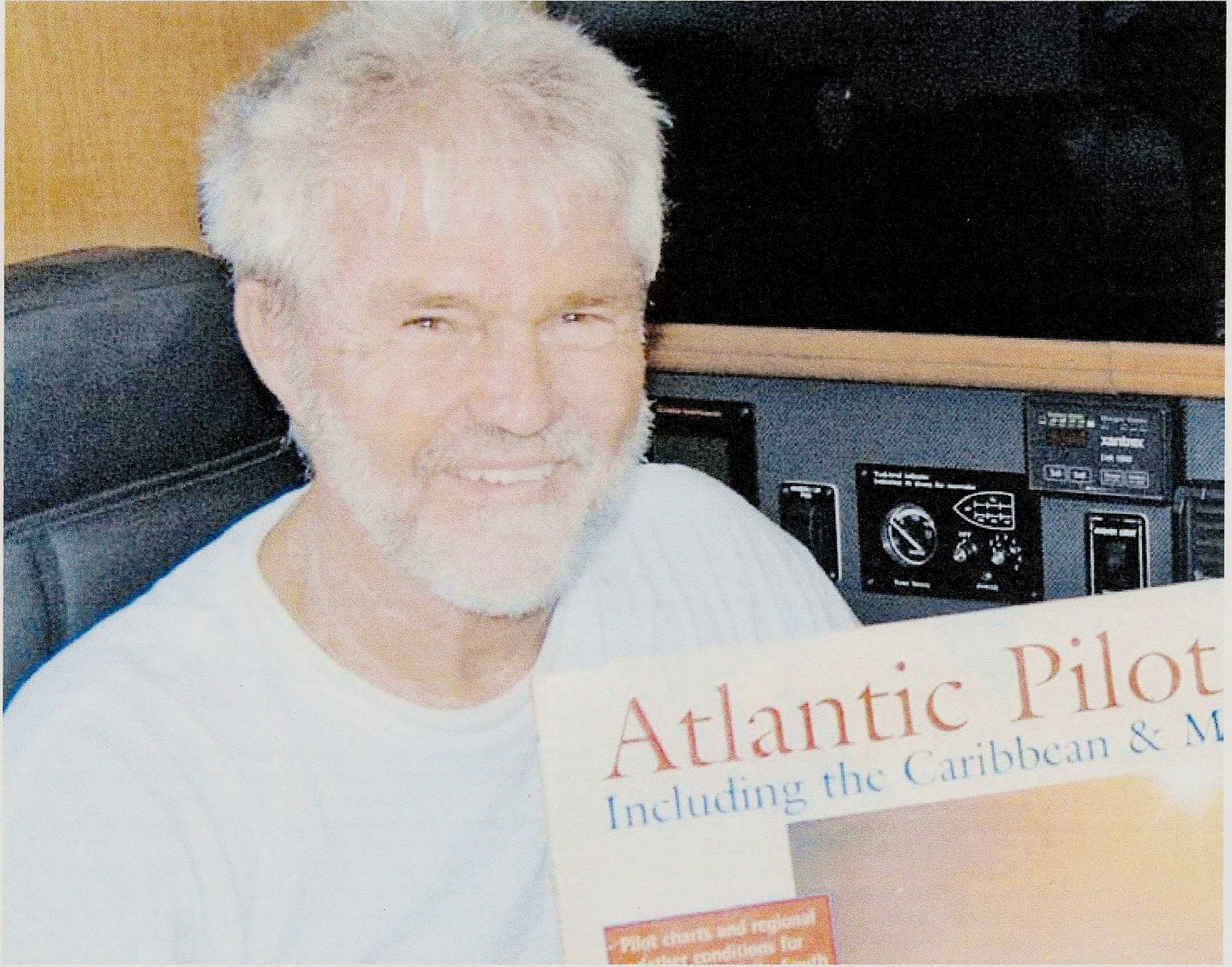
**Harker:** The only crew I've had for a long distance passage was from the Canaries to the Caribbean with my 466. I don't think anyone has sailed more than a couple of hundred miles with me on my current boat. I only need crew for coastal waters where there is a lot of traffic because, without someone else watching, I can't safely go to sleep.

**38:** What was the concept behind such a rapid circumnavigation?

**Harker:** While waiting for my boat to be done, I spent a lot of time planning a circumnavigation. I studied *Jimmy Cornell's World Cruising Routes* for the best times to be in the places I wanted to pass through. The primary determinants of the best times are avoiding hurricane and tropical cyclone seasons. For example, you don't want to leave Mexico for the South Pacific in the summer or fall, nor do you want to be crossing the Indian Ocean after October of any given year. I know that most cruisers typically take three to five years, but I'm a guy who likes to move along, so I found that the hurricane seasons would also allow me to do a circumnavigation in either 18 months or two years. But after doing some more studying, I realized that I could actually do it in just 11 months.

Cornell's book was my bible. Not only did I spend a year planning my route with it, but I visited with him at the Annapolis Boat Show. In fact, I had two \$100/hour consultations with him about my route. When I showed my plan to him, he said, "I've never seen anyone with a plan like this, but it looks





perfect!" Jimmy has been around the world something like 11 times and really knows his stuff. But don't get him started talking, because he can go on and on. (Laughter.)

**38:** What were you figuring for an average speed or distance covered in a week?

**Harker:** The distance of the circumnavigation was about 26,000 miles, and since there are 26 weeks in a year, I would have to average 1,000 miles a week. So if I sailed at an average of 6.5 knots, I could be sailing half the time and resting or exploring ashore the other half of the time, and still make it around in 11 months. But as it turns out, I did nearly 2,000 more miles on the east coast of Australia for the fun of it.

**38:** But we all know about the inevitable breakdowns, new boat teething problems, and schedules going all to hell.

**Harker:** I don't know what to tell you except that, as I'm here now talking to you, I've completed 26,900 miles of what will actually be a 28,000-mile circumnavigation, and that I'm currently just one week behind schedule. Had I wanted to, I could easily have been right on schedule.

**38:** That's pretty remarkable.

**Harker:** It's not to say that I didn't have delays or spend more time than I planned in some places. For example, I ended up spending three weeks in the Galapagos waiting for the people at customs in Quito, Ecuador, to release an alternator that I needed. I'm normally a very patient person, especially on boats, but that was the first time I got really frustrated. As a result, I had to make up three weeks crossing the Pacific. So while I did have delays, there was enough leeway in my schedule that I could make up for it.

**38:** But be honest, is an 11-month circumnavigation a realistic goal for most sailors?

**Harker:** Yes, it is, and even for singlehanders. With crew, it would have been an easy jaunt. The biggest factor is how much time people want to spend in places. It might sound as though I rushed around the world, and I certainly did move much faster than most cruisers, but it's not like I didn't stop places. For instance, I spent nine weeks in Australia — even though I'd only planned on spending three. Of course, that meant I had to race across the Indian Ocean. It turned out there was nothing wrong with that, as I didn't find anywhere desirable to stop in the Indian Ocean on the way to South Africa. I spent two days at Christmas Island, two days at Cocos Island, and two days on Mauritius — which was about one day too long. There's nothing in the Indian Ocean on the way to South Africa except a few islands with water and sand, and there's much more beautiful water and sand in the Bahamas.

I also spent quite a bit of time in South Africa, which I loved. Here's why: I just happened to arrive at Durban at the same time as the Clipper Around The World fleet. And it just so happened there were 14 front row slips, but just 13 Clipper entries. So an ambitious Hunter dealer arranged for my boat to be put in the 14th slip at the same time as the Clipper people. This apparently confused some of the thousands of people who showed up for the celebrations, because I was treated like a superstar! People thought that I was famous. (Laughter.) They had bands, big crowds, and it was a really big deal.

Since my boat was in the front row, I was visited by many people, among them two families, each of which had 15-year-



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old sons. One was named Marx, and he was the South African Laser champion. The other was Pietier, and he's about to do the Santa Cruz to Panama leg of the Clipper race with his mother. Anyway, about an hour after leaving my boat, both the young-

*"I don't think I ever sailed upwind — except for three days off Cape Town."*

sters returned and sheepishly asked if they might sail with me. I told them I would take them if they could get approval from each of their mothers. When the mothers assented, the boys jumped up and down like crazy. The two youngsters sailed all the way to Cape Town, a distance of about 800 miles, with me. We were together for four weeks, as we had to stop all the time to avoid the famous storms that blow along the southeast coast of Africa. Most *Latitude* readers are probably aware that, in that part of the Indian Ocean, you get a storm every three days, then two days of lull. It happens like clockwork. You have two days of calm, then three days of gale-force winds — and I mean a real 50 knots of wind, not just 30 knots. Plus, the Agulhas Current flows in the opposite direction of the wind, so the seas become big, square, and horrendous. I don't know what it's like to be caught in those conditions because we managed to avoid them, but it wouldn't be fun.

But having to stop all the time meant getting to visit all these great places like Port Elizabeth. My favorite was False Bay, the last one before rounding the Cape of Good Hope. I did a presentation at the local yacht club, then let the two boys sail my boat around the Cape. They were great kids.

**38:** Did their parents pay for them to sail with you?

**Harker:** No. My rule with crew is that they pay the expenses necessary to get to my boat and to return home but, once on the boat, I pay for all the food. I would never pay anyone to crew for me.

**38:** How much of your circumnavigation was upwind?

wind to change direction, then continued on with a fair wind.

I don't sail with the wind on the nose because I don't like it. As I think back, the wind was always on my stern quarter, except for the Windward Passage between Cuba and Hispanola, when it was on my port beam. It usually blew on my port quarter, except in the South Atlantic, when it blew on the starboard quarter. My boat was heeling to port for six months, then to starboard for two months. (Laughter.)

**38:** What was your worst weather?

**Harker:** I never had any really bad weather. The only rough stuff that I didn't wait out was 30 to 38 knots of wind between Samoa and Vanuatu, but it was coming from my stern quarter, so it wasn't bad. The seas were big, however, maybe 18 to 20 feet. They'd been generated by 70-knot winds in the Southern Ocean. Some boats further south got dismasted, and some mariners were drowned down there. But *Wanderlust 3* handled the conditions well with four reefs in the main and a staysail. We were doing about 9 knots, and the boat was loving it. *Wanderlust 3* doesn't heel as much as my 466 did, so it was quite comfortable. She's also a dry boat because she has a bit of a hollow or concave in the bow that causes the water to shoot out to the side instead of up and over the deck. I had some waves crash onto the dodger of my 466, but that never happened with my Mariner 49.

**38:** What other differences have you noticed between the two boats?

**Harker:** The Mariner 49 tracks better downwind and doesn't yaw as much. She behaves like she has a long keel, yet she turns on a dime. She also feels like a much bigger boat.

**38:** Was her larger size a problem?

**Harker:** Not at all. My 466 was actually only 44'6", while my 49 is 49'11". Plus, the new boat has a plumb bow and carries the waterline almost all the way aft, so she's truly a much bigger and faster boat.

**38:** What did you consider to be a good day's run?

**Harker:** *Wanderlust 3* had no problem sailing at 8.5 knots for hours on end, so I had many 24-hour runs in excess of 200 miles. My best week was from Christmas Island to Cocos

Island, during which time I covered 1,396 miles in seven days, or an average of just a hair under 200 miles per day. For a luxurious and relatively heavy boat being singlehanded by a guy who wasn't racing, I thought that was pretty good.

**38:** How did you get your weather info?

**Harker:** I got GRIB files via SailMail when at sea and, while on land, I used the U.S. Navy forecasts from *fnmoc.navy.mil*. The SailMail files comes in black and white and are based on the color charts from the U.S. Navy. But the Navy has the best ocean weather info around. They are really good. Plus, they can provide you with a lot more information than just the surface winds and sea conditions.

**38:** Did you see many other singlehanders?

**Harker:** It seemed that no matter where I went, I was introduced to "that other singlehander." There was never more than one, but there was always one, and they were usually French. Three of them were women. One of them, Jeanne Socrates, had done the last Singlehanded TransPac in her 37-ft Najad *Nereida*. She was going around the world on a 'fast' circumnavigation too and having a great time. Interestingly, I've never met another singlehander on a boat larger than 40 feet. Most of them have older style boats, with long keels and lots

COURTESY WANDERLUST 3



*While not as nimble afoot as some, Harker proved he could make it around — in more ways than one.*

**Harker:** (Long pause.) I'm thinking about it really hard, but I don't think I ever sailed upwind — other than three days near Cape Town. It would also have been upwind from Vanuatu to Sydney but, when I got to Brisbane, I waited three days for the



of overhang. I don't know, maybe it just means they couldn't afford newer and more expensive boats.

**38:** Did you have any problems with any port officials?

**Harker:** No. But I always make an effort to present myself well, and I'm very courteous. I smile, I'm patient, and I'm never demanding. But above all, I put myself beneath the officials, letting them know that they are in charge. They love that! (Laughter.)

**38:** Was any stop particularly expensive?

**Harker:** Tahiti would have been, but I bypassed it because I'd been there before and knew it would be expensive. But, no, I don't consider any of the places I stopped to have been expensive.

**38:** Speaking of money, how much did this circumnavigation cost you?

**Harker:** Almost nothing because I'm a cheapo! (Laughter.) Plus, if you're out at sea, where are you going to spend money? And I'm not a big spender in ports. If I've been out at sea for awhile, the first thing I'll do is order a big salad, because you can't keep the makings for salads fresh for very long on the ocean. So I'll get a salad at a restaurant for my first couple of meals ashore, and then maybe a breakfast omelette. But after that, I'll eat all my meals aboard my boat. If I'm in port for a spell and want to socialize, I may go to a restaurant, but I'll just order a cappuccino or something like that rather than a full meal.

**38:** What do you eat when you're at sea?

**Harker:** Everything I eat comes from Costco because, like I said, I'm a cheapo. (Laughter.) But Costco — which has a store in Panama, by the way — actually has the best canned chicken breasts, and you get eight cans of them for just \$7. I'm also big on Kirkland and Starkist brands of tuna. I make lots of noodle dishes at sea. For example, I'll do a chicken or tuna with noodles, or maybe a spaghetti carbonara, but I'll always add a second portion of unflavored noodles. I do this to 'stretch' whatever I'm making from just a lunch or dinner to a lunch or dinner plus leftovers for a next meal. I probably eat chicken or tuna with noodles four times a week.

And every morning I have Quaker Steel Cut Oats — from Costco, of course. But I mix in some dry museli, plus dried cranberries or blueberries. When you add hot water, the berries, which come in three-pound cans from Costco, open right up and taste great. I also throw in a few almonds and walnuts I've bought in bulk containers at you-know-where. (Laughter.)

Diet is very important for good health. Even though I'm legally a paraplegic as a result of my hang gliding accident — after which I was bedridden for six years — before I started this trip my doctor told me that I had the constitution of a 40-year-old — 20 years younger than my chronological age. My blood pressure is perfect, and my cholesterol is 150. Those are the kinds of numbers I had when I was on the rowing team in college.

**38:** Do you do exercises on the boat?

**Harker:** Exercise, of course, is just as much a key component to good health as is diet. So besides all the exercise I get singlehandedly the boat, I have a StairMaster onboard that I use regularly while at sea, hanging onto the dodger for balance. In addition, I do push-ups and arched back pull-ups on the dodger. Push-ups and pull-ups are opposing exercises that are very good for you.

My exercise goal is not to be muscular, but to be fit. It's important for me to keep working the joints in my arms, legs, shoulders — everywhere. So I usually do about half an hour of exercise each morning, then shower up. Many times I'll get my exercise in while boiling the water and otherwise preparing my oatmeal. Through diet and exercise, my goal has been to

maintain the health of a person 20 years younger.

**38:** We're surprised to see how luxurious your Mariner 49 is. Granite-like countertops, nice woodwork everywhere, shades for all the hatches and ports, and even mosquito screens



**Mike's infamous waterpump:** He fixed the leak in the housing with a self-tapping stainless screw dipped in 5200.

for all the hatches. And that's just scratching the surface.

**Harker:** Hunter offers three versions of the 49. The normal Sail Away package comes in at under \$300,000, and includes sails, instruments, and a long list of standard luxury items — plus a five-year warranty that can be extended. Then there's the Mariner package, which includes \$80,000 worth of gear for just \$40,000. That gear includes a Bose surround sound system, a 20-inch flat screen for the double berth forward, and a 28-inch flat screen in the salon — although I bought a 32-inch flat screen with built-in DVD to replace the 20-incher in the bow, and a 40-incher for the salon. I have to admit that I love movies. In fact, I have 2,000 movies aboard — none of them pirated. I can have the same movie playing at three places on my boat at the same time — the third being on my chartplotter in the cockpit. I can't get sound on the chartplotter, though.

**38:** (Laughter.) You must be the only cruiser who doesn't have a pirated movie.

**Harker:** The third version of the Mariner 49 is the Bluewater version, which is what I have. It has a deeper keel, a taller mast, and includes a bow thruster, watermaker, gen set, and a second layer of kevlar cloth in the hull. There's lots of other stuff too, and it goes for just under \$400,000.

**38:** How are they selling?

**Harker:** Hunter tells me that they sold almost 50 of them in one year.

**38:** Your boat is loaded with extras. Any favorites?

*"The circumnavigation cost me almost nothing because I'm a cheapo!"*

**Harker:** My favorite thing on the boat, my buddy, is my Lewmar Mambo autopilot. This is a beefed-up version of the Raymarine autopilot motor, and mine was the first on any boat. I haven't had a hiccup or squawk, and I do 90% of my sailing



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on autopilot. You might remember that I burned up three autopilot motors on my 466. Actually, the whole steering system is a Lewmar Mambo, which consists of gear boxes and rods. It works really well, and is all but maintenance free.

**38:** We actually have the same Mambo system on our catamaran and have been very pleased, too.

**Harker:** With the Bluewater package, the heavy-duty autopilot motor and stronger U-joints in the steering system come standard.

**38:** Be straight with us, Mike, are you still claiming that you don't really know how to sail?

**Harker:** Well, all I know about sailtrim is what I learned from my hang gliding days. And all I know about navigation is that I point the arrow on my GPS to my destination and push GO/TO. Then I just sit back and drink tea. I'm sorry, but that's how I sailed around the world. I'm not proud of it, but that's how I did it.

**38:** We think there's a little more to it than that. For example, you flew a gennaker, didn't you?

**Harker:** I flew the gennaker from my old 466, but it blew out in strong winds near Vanuatu. But I also flew my Parasailor2, which is a rather unique spinnaker from Germany that has a full-width opening about two-thirds of the way up, and an 'air batten' that helps keep it from collapsing. It's a beautiful concept, and it means you don't have to sail as precise a course or, thanks to the inflatable wing or worry about the chute collapsing as much. Plus the vented elastic bands spill the wind when it starts blowing hard, so you have more or less the same pressure on the sail in 30 knots as you do in 12 knots. While crossing the Indian Ocean, I had my Parasailor2 up for more than a week without taking it down, and I flew it in the South Atlantic all the way from the Equator to the doldrums. It costs about 25% more than standard spinnakers, but I love mine and think it's worth it. Oddly enough, you never see them in the States, but more than 40 boats carried them in the last Atlantic Rally for Cruisers.

**38:** What was typical weather for your trip?

**Harker:** Most of the time the wind was under 18 knots, and about 50% of the time it was 12 to 15 knots. It rarely blew under 12 knots, but when it did, it seemed to be very light for days on end. That happened three times, and was the least fun of all, as the boat rolled like crazy. Three days south of Indonesia in the Timor Sea was the worst of all. The water was like glass — in fact, it would have been perfect for the barefoot waterskiing that I did in my younger days.

**38:** How many hours did you put on the engine?

**Harker:** I've got 1,200 hours on the main engine, but some of those are only because my Fisher-Panda genset got water into it and stopped running. That meant I had to charge my batteries using the alternator on the engine instead.

**38:** What is *Wanderlust 3's* fuel consumption like?

**Harker:** My boat has the first Yanmar 4JH four-cylinder with the new turbo and intercooler. I can go at normal cruising

Package — is the Fuel Filter Boss. This device allows you to switch between two fuel filters while the engine is running, plus it has a fuel pump which eliminates manual bleeding, and even features a light in the cockpit that warns if the filters are getting dirty. Thanks to the Fuel Filter Boss, I didn't get a drop of fuel in the bilge. When the unit indicates a filter is getting dirty, you temporarily switch to the other fuel routing, remove the old filter and drop a new one in — while the engine is running. That's it. Changing filters was a real pain with my old boat, and I always spilled about a pint of diesel in the bilge. I hated that. The Fuel Filter Boss is great insurance for your engine because all you need to keep a diesel going is clean fuel.

I also have a third filter for fuel that goes from my spare tank to my main tank. Incidentally, Hunter's normal fuel filters are 10-microns. I gave them away and bought a 24-pack of 2-microns. They stop everything. I never had a fuel problem on my trip and, believe me, I got some dirty fuel in a couple of places.

**38:** Did you have a watermaker, and how did that work?

**Harker:** I have a 9-gallon per hour HRO, and it was perfect. I changed the filters five times during my trip, and changed the carbon filter once six months into it. But there wasn't a hiccup.

**38:** You hardly had anything go wrong?

**Harker:** There were really just two significant things, and both involved a chain of events. My boat has four 8D AGM 230-amp batteries, which is double the number of batteries and amps that Hunter puts in. So I had twice the battery capacity that the alternator was designed for. Normally, it wouldn't make a difference, but I had two Danish models who sailed with me from Panama's Perlas Islands to the Galapagos, so they needed a lot of power for their hair dryers and such. Plus, they used the microwave and other stuff doing lots of great cooking.

Normally, this wouldn't have been a problem, but my Fisher-Panda 12Kw genset arrived with a faulty fuel pump. Believe it or not, it was me, not all the engineers at Fisher-Panda, who discovered that the fuel pump was bad. They later found that the pumps in the first 16 gensets were bad. Anyway, with the girls using the hair dryers all the time, and my genset out, I was having to use the engine alternator a lot to keep the batteries charged. Before we got to the Galapagos, the engine alternator was fried trying to keep the batteries charged.

**38:** Didn't you have a spare alternator?

**Harker:** No. But I do now. It's a bigger 110-amp Balmar which, by the way, is now standard on all Mariner Bluewater 49s. The regulators have been upgraded, too.

**38:** What was the other major problem?

**Harker:** Having left Cape Town, I was 1,000 miles from Africa and 1,000 miles from South America, when my high water alarm went off. There was a very unusual leak in the water pump housing of my Yanmar diesel that peed water all over the alternator. There was so much that my lower bilge pump couldn't keep up, and the water got to the higher bilge pump, which automatically turns on an alarm. But because we were heeled over, the water had gotten into the Fisher-Panda genset's motorboard before the alarm went off, so it was toast. As for the main engine's alternator, it was caked with salt from having water sprayed all over it. Thanks again to a chain reaction, I had no way to charge my batteries for the second time! Well, I had a Honda generator that I used to keep the charge on my engine battery up.

**38:** We made a big deal asking folks how they would have stopped the leak in your pump. How did you actually do it?

*"Now that I carry a spare, I'm confident I'll never need a replacement rudder again."*

speed for two hours on a gallon of fuel. It's a very fuel-efficient engine at 1,800 rpms, which is what I ran it at.

Speaking of fuel, one of the great items on my boat — and I'm going to recommend that Hunter make it part of their Bluewater



**Harker:** I coated a self-threading stainless steel screw with 5200 to make it waterproof, and screwed it in the hole. It lasted just fine until I got back and the Yanmar folks had a chance to look at it.

**38:** What spares did you carry?

**Harker:** I had a spare and/or spare parts kits for almost everything. I had them for my Yanmar and Fisher-Panda genset, a spare freshwater pump, a spare micro bilge pump, a spare high water bilge pump and alarm — and, eventually, a spare alternator. I even had a plumbing spares kit because Hunter includes one in the Bluewater package for the 49s. Other stuff they include as standard in the Bluewater version are a spare link arm and U-joint for the steering, a spare Selden gooseneck fitting for the mast . . .

**38:** Wait! They include a spare gooseneck fitting?

**Harker:** Yes. I also got a spare roller fitting for the headboard of the mainsail — I'm terrible at the specific names of things — that I actually needed to put on yesterday. It pulled away from the mast while I was in the doldrums, but I was still able to make it here to St. Barth.

**38:** It's a good thing that you didn't have to go up the mast.

**Harker:** That's not an issue, because I can't go up the mast.

By the way, I had to change the masthead tricolor on my last boat twice, so for this one I bought a \$700 LED tricolor. It wasn't cheap, but I think it's worth it. It's called a Lopolight, and it includes the navigation lights and a five-mile anchor light. It uses less than one watt of power, but is twice as brilliant as the old-style lights, and you never have to change them. All the Volvo Race boats used them.

Readers might be interested to learn that I don't have a single incandescent lightbulb on my boat. Everything is either low-power fluorescent or even lower-power LED.

**38:** You have solar panels. How much did they help?

**Harker:** I have three 28-amp solar panels, and during the day they normally provide all the power I need to run everything and to top off the 900-amp bank of batteries. I have two freezers and two fridges, but I only use one of each. I typically used 20 amps an hour, depending somewhat on how much effort my autopilot was having to make. All my instruments and lights used very little power. The Mariner 49 is very well thought out in terms of energy use.

**38:** There must have been some things that you didn't like or that broke on the boat.

**Harker:** There were three little things. First, Hunter needs a better drain system for the shower. For an expensive boat, you shouldn't have to get down on your hands and knees after every shower to make sure the pan drains completely. Second, they put two big drawers under the port settee that rob you of about 20 cubic feet of storage space, fall out when the boat heels and, to my mind, are a waste of wood and woodworking skills. Finally, in the forward head they have these cutesy little spotlights over the mirror for women to use when applying makeup. But they're just below a hatch that you leave open from time to time, allowing a few drops of saltwater in. Anyway, the light fixtures aren't stainless, and mine have already rusted and broken apart.

**38:** That's it after sailing around the world?

**Harker:** Yes. And for all I know, Hunter has already corrected these problems in the newer boats. But I have to admit, the shower drain thing really drove me nuts!

**38:** What about the construction of the hull and such.

**Harker:** Structurally, I found the boat to be excellent. In rough weather you don't hear any creaks or moans. Not a

squeak. I was amazed. It wasn't even a problem in Las Perlas, when a 20-ft drop in the tides grounded my boat.

**38:** Didn't you carry a spare rudder?

**Harker:** (Laughter.) Yes, after the one broke on my last boat.

*"All I know about navigation is that I point the arrow on my GPS to my destination and push GO/TO."*

I wasn't going to be unprepared again. Not only do I have a spare rudder, but the stainless steel shaft and cage, too. The new rudders are flexible, but bulletproof. Although pretty much identical to the rudder that broke on my last boat, the new ones are so much more robust that it takes two people to carry one. And now that I carry a spare, I'm confident I'll never need a replacement rudder again. (Laughter.)

**38:** Are you careful about locking up your boat everywhere you go, and have you had any stuff stolen over the years?

**Harker:** I've never locked my boat, and in all this time I've only had one thing stolen — and that was just the other day in Antigua. While I was at Nelson's Dockyard to get fuel, somebody stole the gas tank from my dinghy! Oh wait, there was another thing I had stolen right after doing a Baja Bash in '01. I finally had my boat back in Marina del Rey, and somebody clipped the cable to my collapsible bike and rode off.

**38:** Did you get another bike?

**Harker:** I sure did. For this trip I bought a West Marine Port Runner and, thanks to a coupon, got \$100 off. I love that little bike — which comes in a protective bag — and have ridden it all over South Africa, Antigua and Australia.

**38:** Were there any issues about being alone?

**Harker:** Not really. I would listen on the weather nets — although I would rarely talk on them. For example, when I was in the Galapagos, about 22 boats left just before me and talked on the Southern Cross Net. I didn't talk much, but I must have sailed a lot faster, because I got to the Marquesas well before they did. I also stayed in touch with people via email.

**38:** What about a sat phone?

**Harker:** I had an Iridium satphone and bought 500 minutes for \$500. In some places, such as South Africa, Australia, and Antigua, the \$1/minute Iridium was the least expensive way to call home to the States. They kill you with roaming charges on other phones. My Iridium always worked and, in fact, played a critical role in my most crucial repairs. For example, I talked for over 100 minutes to Balmar to get my backup alternator to work. The problem is that the back-up had a built-in regulator while the Yanmar has its own. The two regulators had to be sorted out, and we were eventually able to do that over the phone.

**38:** When is the circumnavigation finished?

**Harker:** I finished mine in Antigua about a week ago but, depending, on how I make my way back to Miami, the boat will finish her circumnavigation at either Matthewtown, Inagua, or Nassau in the Bahamas.

**38:** It's a long sail around the world. Did you enjoy all of it?

**Harker:** There were a few times I didn't. I got extremely frustrated in the Galapagos. The three times that I was totally becalmed and getting my brains rolled out by the swell were torture. And just outside of Antigua, about to finish my personal circumnavigation, I got hit with 40 knots of wind and a tremendous lightning storm. That was pretty scary.

**38:** But what about day to day?

**Harker:** Day to day, I really enjoyed it. When I woke up, I'd



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## the latitude interview:

go, "Ah, here I am again. It sure beats being at home watching the Travel Channel." I looked forward to each day as an opportunity to see and enjoy something new. And if I had a down day, I'd remember the six years that I was in bed, unable to

*"Not only do I carry a spare rudder, but the stainless steel shaft and cage, too! The new rudders are flexible, but bulletproof."*

move. But I didn't have to kick myself like that often.

**38:** So after this fast circumnavigation can we assume you'll have had your fill of sailing for awhile?

**Harker:** Not at all. After my boat is displayed by Hunter at the Miami Boat Show in February, the month of March is just for me, and I'll be spending it cruising in the Bahamas. In April, my boat will be hauled to get checked over and I'll be speaking at Strictly Sail Pacific [check [www.strictlysail.com](http://www.strictlysail.com) for times]. From May to October, I'll be doing presentations at yacht clubs or Hunter dealerships every two weeks all the way up the East Coast to Maine. My last one will be the Annapolis Boat Show in October. This November I'll enter the Caribbean 1500 Rally from Virginia to Tortola in the British Virgins, and spend the winter in the Caribbean. That should be wonderful. In fact, I

won't have anything scheduled until Antigua Sailing Week at the end of April, and I can't wait to get back to St. Barth.

**38:** That's quite a schedule for a 60-year-old after a fast and mostly singlehanded circumnavigation. What then — lots of rest?

**Harker:** Oh no. After Antigua Sailing Week, a year from May, I'll head to the Azores and across the Atlantic. My main destination goal is Thailand but, along the way, I very much want to visit Croatia and perhaps spend the winter in Turkey or Israel. But after going down the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean to Thailand, I'll continue on to Japan, where I'm sort of famous because I flew a hang-glider off Mt. Fuji many years ago. In Japan, they revere people even if they accomplished things many years before. Then I'll sail across the North Pacific to California, and hang out in San Diego until the start of the Ha-Ha. That will be three years from now.

**38:** Do you think most people could do what you did?

**Harker:** Oh sure. You have all kinds of couples who are retiring in their 50s, and who have put the kids through college. They can not only sail around the world, but they can do it cheaply. Of course, they may not want to do it as fast as I did it.

**38:** How much sailing experience do you think they need?

**Harker:** I didn't know how to sail at all when I started with my boat in the Ha-Ha, but I've sailed 55,000 ocean miles now, almost all of them singlehanded, and I learned by doing. I think anybody who knows the basics of sailing, is in good health, and has common sense, could do the same thing that I did. And by the way, legally, I'm a paraplegic.

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