



*Charlie, Geni, Doug, Katy with Knee Deep on an earlier trip.*

# Crossing the Gulf Stream in 6 to 8

by Charlie Magee

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The plan was for me to meet up with Doug at Knee Deep, his Ian Farrier-designed Corsair F-24 Mk1 trimaran anchored somewhere off West End, Grand Bahama on Monday night, late in May of 2007. We would spend a few days fishing for wahoo, dolphin, snapper and bonefish, and then on Friday or Saturday we'd sail the boat to Stuart, Florida where a Corsair dealer, The Finish Line, was going to sell it for him. We both had planes to catch early Sunday morning.

I was looking forward to the fishing. Doug had been a fishing guide in Wyoming for 20 years and spent a month fishing in the Bahamas every winter for five years. I figured he'd take me from a beginner to intermediate salt water fisherman in no time. And I was seriously excited and nervous about my first sailing out of sight of land. But Doug had told me not to get too excited. He'd crossed the Gulf Stream about 8 times in that little 24 foot tri and it was almost always mirror pond calm. Once or twice the waves got up to 2 or 3 feet.

So much for plans.

Doug met me at the airport in Freeport: "The bad news," he said. "is that today was our best weather window. Tomorrow is iffy with 4 to 6 foot waves, winds of 15 to 20 knots out of the east. It gets worse every day after that with maybe a break on Sunday. Maybe."

--Well, at least the wind's not out of the north.

--Yeah, that's a plus.

(Wind from the north blows against the north-flowing Gulf Stream, creating nasty short, steep waves. That would have made it a suicide mission.)

It turned out that the first named storm of the season had broken up a few days before but a high pressure system over the Carolinas was pushing the remnants back down on the Bahamas.

It took me about a half second to figure out the probable consequences. Neither of us had ever sailed in waves bigger than 3 feet and a 24 foot boat is considered small for crossing the Gulf Stream, so instead of sailing we'd spend six days sitting on a tiny, anchored boat while it jumped and bounced and slapped and jerked in the chop of a slightly protected harbor. We'd dinghy in once or twice a day to drink beers and watch the wind blow sand down the beach. Then I would enjoy an arduous series of no-leg-room plane flights home while Doug would be left sitting in West End, waiting for a weather window, and trying to find someone else to make the crossing with him.

So, of course, we immediately began convincing ourselves that we could make it. It wouldn't be so bad. In fact, these Farrier-designed trimarans are so stable and safe and easy to sail that it would be fun! Even a bit exciting. Besides, the wind would be at our back the whole time. It would be a quick, easy downwind run

to Stuart. No bashing, no slamming, just soft and easy ups and downs with the occasional surfing of a wave. Fun stuff!

After the long cab ride up to West End (\$100 for the trip down and back!), we headed for the lobby of the Old Bahama Bay Hotel (Huh? The place couldn't have been more than 5 years old.) The beautiful young woman at the front desk had no problem letting us use a PC to go online to check weather forecasts, even though we weren't guests at the hotel. (\$300 a night!)

The forecast was exactly as Doug had said, with the additional info that the skies would be mostly sunny. If we didn't leave, at least we'd be able to sit in the cockpit and read books on that bouncing-in-the-harbor-chop tri.

We went to the hotel bar to discuss our options over conch sandwiches and beers. It was immediately clear that we intended to talk ourselves into going. We wanted to sail, the boat needed to get to Stuart, and we knew that boats just like this had sailed in much worse conditions than were forecast and had gotten their sailors home safe and sound. Yeah, they had probably been sailed by more experienced sailors than us, but how else do you get the experience?

Three twenty-something guys walked into the bar and they looked ragged. They had just spent the last 5 or 6 hours driving 50 foot fishing boats over from Florida. They had had to keep their speed down in the rough conditions to keep from bashing the boats too hard. They were glad to be there.

When they found out we planned to sail to Florida the next morning they shook their heads and told us it was a bad idea. They said to wait till Saturday or Sunday. It would be fine then.

We told them we had a nice, stable trimaran and thought we'd be okay.

--How big?

--24 feet.

They looked at us like we were crazy.

--You guys got balls. Even if you make it you still have to get in. What inlet? Stuart? Well, that's fine. That should be okay. Just don't try Jupiter. That sucks in weather like this.

Strangely, I felt more confident after that conversation. They didn't seem worried that we would die, just that the trip would be a bitch. And they didn't seem concerned at all about St. Lucie inlet, the entrance to Stuart. I knew they weren't sailors and had no idea what our boat was capable of. I was scared, but confident.

The wind was whipping at around 15 to 20 knots as we rowed the dinghy out to the boat. There weren't any waves, even though the fetch was hundreds of miles of open ocean, because we were in three feet of water that extended out several miles into the sea. Doug had two anchors out, a Delta and a Danforth, because the ground was hard sand that had been scoured by the current. He'd set them and then walked over and checked them by hand. They were holding fine.

The cabin on a Corsair 24 is just big enough for a happy couple or a big guy. Doug's a big guy and I didn't want to crowd him so I decided to sleep on the portside tramp with a tarp and a blanket. But the wind, and my nervousness about the coming day, kept me awake. I finally moved to a cockpit bench and got about 2 hours of rest and a half hour of real sleep. Not much to go on, but oh well.

Just before dawn, Doug dinghied in to double-check the forecast while I started getting the boat ready. Mostly I took heavy stuff out of the v-berth and put it on the cabin sole. The bow is very buoyant but I didn't want to give it any extra reason to dive into the back of a wave.

Just as Doug was rowing back I was working at the galley counter with my new sailing knife – you know, the kind you can use to cut yourself free if you get tangled with lines under water after the boat capsizes – and I sliced my thumb open. Great. There's an auspicious start, Magee. I managed to keep blood off the cushions, but couldn't find the bandaids before Doug got back aboard. I guess it was only fair that he knew ahead of time that he'd be sharing a potentially dangerous journey with a knucklehead.

Then, nothing left but to raise the main slightly above the first reef (these boats have rolling furling booms and you can reef the sail wherever you want—not quite as strong as using the two reefing points, but

it works), haul the anchors, unfurl most of the jib and set off. We were only a couple hundred feet from the breakwater, and it was too shallow to drop the centerboard more than a foot or two, but we had the outboard running and when we unrolled the jib the boat took off on a beam reach and never got closer to the rocks. We turned the corner and headed downwind, spending the first few minutes putting preventers on the main out to port and the jib out to starboard.



*Skipper Doug*

The waves were initially just a foot or two, but as we pulled away from land they picked up into the two and three foot range. Fun!

The morning was mostly cloudy with the rising sun peeking through here and there. The air was warm, water was warm, wind in the sails, boat shifting and swaying and bobbing on the waves, waves slapping and popping on the three hulls, bits of spray coming up through the nets between hulls, and we're moving at 8 to 9 knots with an occasional surf ride up to 12 knots. Palm trees and hotel behind us, open ocean ahead. Idyllic. Perfect. It's what inland lake sailors like me dream about.

begins . . . wind in your face, the boat comes alive, more control and attention needed. Just tiny movements on the tiller make a difference. Hold it steady. Find the long line. Ride the wave, stretch it out . . . then the wave passes by, the surf ride ends as the boat settles down the back of the wave. "Whoa! Yeah! Let's do that again!" But first, another three to five minutes of 8 to 9 knot sailing, boat shifting from port to starboard float and back because we're downwind and not on a reach. Then, another surf ride!

We're hand-steering and loving it. But we decide to check out the autohelm so we can relax and enjoy the ride. We hook it up, turn it on. Not too good. We're going straight downwind and the boat is swinging 30 or 40 degrees off course back and forth, side to side. We turned it off and stuck it below. It's more fun steering anyway, and we estimate just a 12 hour ride. No problem. Taking turns every half hour or so should make it easy.

Another wave picks us up. 11 knots. 12 knots. 12 point 5. 13! But hey! What the hell?! The rudder is chattering. Loss of steering, the boat is sliding in the direction of last tweak on the tiller. Hold the tiller as still as possible. The boat is turning more than I want. No control! What the . . .?! Then the chattering stops, control is instantly back, the wave slides under and away.

---Whoa! Did you feel that?

--Hell yeah! Rudder ventilation.

---Maybe we should think about slowing things down.

--Yeah, might be time to reef.

---Let's see if it happens again. Waves are 4-foot average now, but we're still mostly under 10 knots. The island is right there.

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(Ian Farrier says this: "Many F-boats are now capable of speeds in excess of 20 knots, and rudder ventilation problems can arise at these speeds. Rudder ventilation is caused by waterflow being unable to stay attached to the blade when it is turned at high speed, with air then being sucked down the rudder blade. This will result in a loss of steerage control, and the usual obvious symptom is a 'whoop' noise from the rudder area, a large rooster tail, and the rudder immediately feeling mushy. Control can usually be restored by centering the rudder blade and wiggling slightly to reattach water flow. However, at sustained high speeds, ventilation can become a major nuisance.")



*Jib furling, preveter on*

(The first time it happened, I would not have chosen the word “nuisance.” I would have chosen “holy-shit-what-the-hell!” At least previous reading had alerted me to the possibility and I wasn’t completely surprised. Just freaked out going down the face of a wave with no control. And it didn’t “whoop.” It chattered. Loudly. You could feel it in your hand.)

(It turns out that this ventilation problem we had was an anomaly at the speeds we were going. I’ve just found out that the rudder had had some less-than-professional repair work done in the recent past. It worked fine for the way the owners were using the boat — fishing and dinking around the shallow waters of the Abacos — until our trip. The boat has now been

sold and a condition of the sale required repairs to the rudder and tiller.)

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Trees and roof tops are still visible. The sun is over the tree tops and we’re seeing white caps in every direction, but they’re still a hundred feet apart and just appearing and disappearing at the tops of little waves.

I’ve been feeling queasy for a while now. I expected to get seasick, but have a hunch I’ll still be useful. I’m fighting it off. No meds or ginger or copper bracelets or New Age crystals. Just will power. I have to know what this part of going to sea is like before I’ll ever convince my wife to set sail across an ocean with me.

Doug puts on some sunscreen and offers it to me. I know I should put it on. I’m a redhead and I burn quickly and painfully. But I’m pretty sure the smell of it will make my puke, so I turn it down.

--It would take a couple of hours to beat back to West End, but we could do it. The wind is picking up.

--Nah, we’re okay. Let’s keep going.

Sliding along. 9 knots, 10 knots, surfing, yeah!! No! Damn! Rudder gone again. That dreaded chattering. Boat sliding. Then control is back.

--Okay, time to reef. What’s the plan?

---The wind and waves might push us around while we’re trying to bring down the main, so let’s fire up the motor. You take the tiller and motor at the same time. I’ll roll up some jib first, then go forward and roll down some main.

The outboard on an F-24 is to port of the tiller and it’s pretty handy for maneuvering. You can steer the outboard and tiller at the same time, to amplify a turn or suddenly check a turn if you need to.

So Doug steps up to the winches and rope clutches. We turn and watch the waves coming up behind, wait for a series of 5 footers to pass by. Doug looks at me and nods, and I push the tiller hard to port. We swing around. Damn, those waves look a lot bigger facing into them. Blue. They’re so blue at the bottom, then light blue, pale blue, almost white where the sunrise beams directly through. Then the boat is rising up, BAM! Spray everywhere. We peak, drop off the top and down. Up and over. Bam! More spray.

Doug’s cranking the handle with one hand, easing the halyard with the other. The main is coming down. He’s got it where he wants it, but cranked the handle a bit past the hole where the handle inserts. He needs a third hand.

---Close the halyard clutch for me!

I let go the handle of the outboard. Take a step forward, hanging onto the tiller, reaching for the clutch. The boat swings hard to starboard. I fight it with the tiller. I push harder, the boat is still swinging, almost beam on to the wave. Doug yells:

---The outboard swung out! Forget the halyard!

I turn to look and the outboard handle is pointing off to port and the prop is driving us around. A quick glance at Doug, he's got the halyard. I lunge for the outboard handle while still hanging onto the tiller. Got it. Pull it back hard, swing the boat into the six foot wave. BAM!! Beautiful sun through the top of the wave. I can't help but admire it. Up and over and down. What a beautiful boat. So well-designed and built. I get to think about the beauty of a wave while my blood is pounding after the moment of quick action.

Doug manages to get the reefing crank back into its slot one-handed. Pops the clutch down, nods at me. I turn us back downwind. Commotion over. Life is easy again.

The main is halfway down and the jib is rolled halfway in. We're back down to a steady 7 knots with occasional surfs up to 10 and 11 knots. And no loss of rudder control. But now we are definitely in waves past the forecast of 4 to 6. We're in steady 6 to 8 foot waves with an occasional series of 10 footers.

How do we know they were that big? A couple of novices at medium sized waves? Well, we both have a lot of experience with 8 foot sheets of plywood. We know where eight feet is in relation to our head. We know that our feet are only about 6 inches above water level. We know that we're completely losing sight of the horizon. We know that the wind has been steadily picking up and is probably blowing at 25 knots. The waves have gotten bigger every twenty minutes.

The scene is absolutely beautiful and only partly as I'd imagined it. Very rarely are the waves running in sets like you see at the beach. The swells are definitely pushing us west, but the waves are quickly popping out in every direction and disappearing just as quickly. Sometimes we seem to be riding a four foot wave that is riding the face of a separate six foot wave.

There are white caps in every direction, every 50 feet. Every few minutes the top of a wave sweeps over the transom and washes over our feet. It feels good. So warm, so soft. Then it washes back out.

Doug says:

---The color of the water is so beautiful. Such a deep azure. It's incredible.

I nod my head in agreement, looking around at the surface of the ocean. But I think to myself: "Azure? Not even close." I'm a graphic designer and I know colors. But I don't say anything. Why spoil a great moment? Who cares about a word when surrounded by the inexplicable beauty of the open ocean?

I'm definitely past the queasy stage now. Fighting off the vomiting is dominating my mind. I hate it. That feeling sucks. I just want to have fun steering the boat and enjoying the day.

Shit! Surfing again! Loss of rudder! That was scary that time. No sign of the island anymore. We're alone out here.

--What speed did we hit?

---Over 14 knots!

--Reef again?

---Probably should. I don't want to tumble this boat out here.

--Yeah, nobody around.

---I know. We've only seen two boats. Every other time I've made this crossing there was a powerboat going by every five or ten minutes and a sailboat every half hour. The traffic was crazy. No waves. Motoring along, sometimes sailing slow.

--We must be the only stupid ones today.

---Well, if we do tumble it, we'll just sit on it upside down. The wind will push us onto Florida in less than a week.

--With the Stream pushing, it'd probably be South Carolina.

---Yeah, we should probably reef.

I'm steering and then a seven or eight footer picks us up. The acceleration is instant. Surfing fast! Oh



*Yes, sailboats have wakes.*

man! This is a long ride! What a rush. Flying, carving the face of the wave. Then chattering! No control! The boat is sliding sideways. It's taking forever. This is the longest one yet. Damn, we're going fast! C'mon! Come back to me. C'mon. C'mon.

Faster. Sliding, sliding.

There! The chattering stops. I steer slightly back to port to stop the slide. The wave passes underneath. We didn't even wonder how fast we had gone. The answer was obvious: too fast.

---That wasn't good.

--Not at all. Let's do it. I'll go forward this time.

We're worried now. The waves have gotten steadily larger. We're definitely seeing occasional 10 foot waves and we're each pretty sure there was at least one or two 12 footers. We're in a 24 foot boat and we're beginning to think that the waves will soon be averaging 10 feet instead of 7, and then up to 14 and then who knows?!

Doug takes the tiller and turns us back into the wind and waves. I roll up the jib the rest of the way, then climb onto the port side of the cabin roof. I reach down and take the halyard in hand, release the clutch, then stand up and grab the furling handle. I roll the main down until there is about seven feet of luff showing. I pop the handle back in, turn and squat to close the halyard clutch. And then, wham!, that was that.

You're pukin' dude. Better jump for the side.

I have just enough time to close the clutch and jump onto the port tramp. There is a head-sized gap between the tramp and the rear beam, right next to the main hull. I grab the tramp attachment lines with both hands and push my face into the hole, thereby becoming SpewMan.

All Doug says is:

---Don't fall off the boat!

A couple of waves blast up through the tramp while I'm hanging there. At least the water is warm. If I hadn't been puking so hard I might have enjoyed it.

Then, between spew moments, as I'm staring down, straight down into the water, I realize: Azure! The water is absolutely incredibly nothing but AZURE! But only when you look straight down. I forget about my lurching stomach for a moment. I think I even smiled.

Finally, I drag my ass back into the cockpit. I stand there, holding onto the frame of the dodger, and stare at the horizon. I feel better, but worse at the same time. I stand there for about 15 minutes and then take another turn at the tiller. I have to show Doug that I've not suddenly become a liability.

But we're still going too fast. Average speed of 9 knots and the boat still occasionally surfs. We've haven't lost steering again, but we don't feel in control. We're taking the bigger waves at an angle to help avoid surfing and to prevent running down into the back of the wave. The bows are buoyant but we have no interest in finding the limits of what it takes to pitchpole. We've got to slow the boat down.

Doug says:

---Maybe we should put our harnesses on. (We had two manual inflation PFDs with harnesses on-board. But they were still below.)

--Yeah, we should probably do that. By the way, when you went to check the forecast this morning, did you call anyone and let them know we were heading out today?

---Uh. No.

--I didn't call either.

---Oh.

--Not smart, huh? We could flip the boat and no one would no to look for us for about 5 days?

---No, I've been talking to Katy every day and yesterday I mentioned that we might try for it today. Besides, we've got an EPIRB.

We shook our heads and rolled our eyes at each other like a pair of total dumbshits. A couple of guys with a lot of outdoor experience. Exactly the ones who should know better. Years of wilderness travel built

knucklehead overconfidence into our lame brains. Meanwhile, we're speeding up again. We could hear it in the rush of water on the hulls.

We struggle into our harnesses. Actually, Doug slips his right on. I struggle because I wasn't used to it and I was trying to keep my eyes on the horizon. I wanted that thing on before I took another trip to my spew position on the tramp and I didn't want the action of putting it on to force that trip.

Doug suggests bringing the anchor back and dragging it behind us. I agree that that would definitely help, but as the smaller and more agile of the two, I know that means me crawling up to the bow and somehow getting the anchor and two hundred feet of rode back to the cockpit. I'm sure I can do it, but I'll probably be sick somewhere between here and there, and I'm worried that I'll lose balance at some point and ding the deck with the anchor. Doug is taking the boat to Florida to sell it and I don't want to damage it.

So we're talking it over and suddenly Doug thinks that maybe if we swing the outboard motor back down that it will cause enough drag to make a difference.

Hmmm. What the hell. That's easy enough to try. It took some strength to push it down against the speed we were making through the water, but I finally got it down and locked.

Amazing. The boat instantly slowed to about 5 knots and pretty much stayed between 4 and 6 knots for the rest of the trip. The waves stopped building and maintained the 6 to 8 foot range that we soon became accustomed to. It was a completely different sailing trip. We stopped even thinking about the waves for a while.

Our setup is: centerboard down, main smaller than double-reefed, traveler all the way to leeward, mainsheet bar tight, completely rolled jib. We stayed that way until we reached the coast.

(A couple of experienced monohull sailors have since told me that we should have had the main completely down and had the jib partway out. They say we would have been able to control our speed more easily, with the added benefit of reducing the risk of pitchpoling.)

(The F-boaters on the Yahoo group tend to agree. Ian Farrier's comment sums it up well: "Mainsail is probably the first thing that should be reefed or go when running downwind in strong winds. It is the only sail on the boat that cannot be released if overpressed downwind, whereas headsail or spinnaker can.

Jib or genoa is far better and safer, and a kite could be best of all downwind in strong winds when offshore.

I once got caught out in the middle of Cook Strait (New Zealand) with a southerly buster coming through. First and only time I ever managed to bury bows while going to windward, and even filled up the cockpit.

Dropped the main, turned around, and ran for Wellington harbour with only a small jib up. Was doing a constant 14 knots and it felt completely safe.")

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The conditions are: sunny, 6 to 8 foot waves, 25 knots easterly wind, and we're not sure what the speed of the Gulf Stream is, but the forecast of 4 to 6 knots is probably right.

Now we were in a timing game. Would we make it to St. Lucie inlet before dark? The GPS estimated our arrival at 6:45 pm, 7:05, 6:53, 7:30, depending on what our course was at the moment. That zone of time slots was fine. That gets us in well before sunset. But Doug was worrying that the Gulf Stream was going to push us too far north and that we'd end up having to go on a beam reach to get back south and we'd get there after dark after all.

So we set our course more south of east. The GPS laughs at us with a matter-of-fact digital time of arrival estimate of 11:32 pm. Queasy old me was thinking "Oh shit, we've only been out here about 4 hours. That would mean sitting off the coast till morning. And the wind and waves are forecast to continue to build through the night. We're maintaining now, but fighting shit in the dark? With a stomach like this?"

We stayed on that course for about 10 minutes, then decided: screw that. We found a course that estimated arrival closer to 8 pm and went with that.

The next few hours were spent taking turns at the tiller, with my occasional quick jump to the trampo-

line for another spew routine. All it took to trigger the trampoline visit was for me to take my eyes off the horizon. Once I tried to read the GPS screen. Another time I just looked at Doug while we talked. Another time I looked below for my jacket. The dry heaves were no fun, but that azure was something else.

We talked about our kids, my wife, his girlfriend, where we grew up and how we ended up on this little trimaran sailing across the Gulf Stream. I became more and more impressed and comfortable with this little boat. What a great sailboat Ian Farrier had designed. What a stout sailboat Corsair had built. We were getting wave action from three sides at once and the boat just bobbed and surged and lifted, over and over and over. I simply relaxed and steered the boat in the direction we wanted to go.

The only thing that changed was the face of the ocean. There was a two or three hour period of time in which the water became somewhat regular and predictable. The waves were mostly moving in the same direction and they were all within the 5 to 8 foot range with a rare set of 10s. But then we entered a weird zone of action.

Looking out, away from the boat, it seemed that we were in 6 foot seas. But 2 foot, 3 foot, 4 foot waves were popping out of that 6 foot scene in all directions. A 2 footer came out of the back of a 4 footer that was coming out of the top of a 6 footer. A 3 footer appeared on the face of a 5 footer that was riding the edge of a 7 footer. They were shooting right, left, up, out, and sideways. It was all popping and disappearing from one moment to the next, and in every direction. Imagine riding on top of a pot of boiling water. That's what it looked like. My hunch is that we had reached the heart of the Gulf Stream, but Doug thinks we had passed the core of the Stream and were in the eddies off the coast.

Land ho! Er, skyscraper ho! Er, long row of ugly Florida condominium buildings ho!

Yep, a line of condos popped above the horizon. And there they stayed for four hours, gradually revealing one floor after another. Then more condos. And more condos. Probably 90% empty except for two weeks of the year.

We watched more and more of condo nation show up until, suddenly, we're getting close to shore. We can see trees and then sand. We're too far south and we need to turn onto a beam reach to get to St. Lucie. We're out of the boiling pot of water scene and the waves are more regular but closer to 8 feet than 6 feet, and now they're slamming the side of the starboard float. Spray flies up and the wind throws it at us. For the first time we're beginning to get a bit wet. Not real wet though. Just enough to notice.

We pull the jib out to crank up the speed and control just a bit. This sailing is more fun: a beam reach, bouncing across the waves, spray flying, and we can swim to the beach if we totally screw up.



*Doug calls home*

I'm excited about getting close to our destination, but as the minutes go by Doug is getting more nervous. He's been more worried about crossing the bar at St. Lucie than about anything else we'd been through that day.

I'm not worried a bit, probably because of the attitude of those fisherman we saw in the hotel lounge the night before. It had been obvious to me that the crossing at that inlet hadn't concerned them in the conditions they knew we'd be in. But Doug had crossed that bar many times and had seen how closely packed the waves could get. And these bar waves would be bigger than any he'd ever steered through before.

A couple of miles later I turned the tiller over to him and stepped forward to look for buoys. We got to the outside of the inlet and looked it over. There appeared to be about seven waves at any given moment and they were 12 and 14 footers with 30 feet between them. That's not much room for a 24 foot boat. To complicate matters, the top third of the waves were breaking and slamming down into the troughs, making the

space even smaller.

We headed in. Doug had the motor on and was steering that and the tiller at the same time. He was looking back at the waves trying to judge the timing. I just looked forward and kept my eye on the sea walls and the buoys. I pointed my arms a bunch but I doubt if Doug was paying any attention to the animated knucklehead in front of him.

A wave picked us up, slammed us forward, swept by and then we wallowed down the backside. Repeat. Then a wave rushed us faster than the others. I heard it break on the back of the boat and water rushed over my feet. We slid into the calm area past the buoys. Safe!

We did it! Big grins and a high five. Yeah! It was exciting. It was a thrill. It was a relief.

And that's when I first felt the impact of an earlier decision. Now that the boat speed was down to almost nothing, and the noise of waves on the hulls was gone, and everything in general was settled down, the skin on my face spoke to me with a blast of steady pain: you burnt yourself bad you dumbshit!

So I did my best to ignore the pain and stood there with Doug and watched the sun go down behind some clouds and trees. It took a half hour of motor-sailing to reach our anchorage. We dropped anchor in 3 feet of water next to a county park. Time for phone calls to family and friends.

Now, I know all you sailors with thousands of miles of blue water experience are rolling your eyes and saying "Big deal." That's okay. I don't blame you. But for me it felt like a big deal and a big accomplishment. I think it felt almost that big to Doug. We're both ready for more.

The queasiness slipped out of my body and an hour later I was ready for a burger and beer. The sunburn pain was really making itself felt. My face was burned worse than at any time since high school. What a stupid idiot. Lobster boy had arrived, pre-cooked. The bartender didn't have any aloe-vera handy, but an oldtimer at the bar took pity on me and drove us to Walgreen's.



*Lobsterboy*

Doug and I spent the next day cleaning up Knee Deep and we turned it over to the owner of The Finish Line in Stuart. That night we found a nice hotel, watched the tube and drank rum drinks. We checked in with U.S. Customs in West Palm Beach and headed for Key West. Doug had fishing guide buddies there and we hung out with them for a few days. We went out in conditions much like we had seen in our crossing. I didn't get seasick and we caught four dolphin and a wahoo. But that's another story.