

The Dreaded Baja Bash the First Time

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Summary of the trip from La Paz to Ensenada, April 2002.

It should be noted that those who dread the Baja Bash the most are those in sailboats. A power boat can at least make time going north, even if it is in uncomfortable conditions. Most sailboats cannot. It is not unusual for 40-50 foot sailboats to make only 1-2 knots against these conditions whereas we can make an average of 6. That means they take a grueling three to five days to make the trip from Cabo San Lucas to Bahia Santa Maria with no place to stop in between. We can make the sAMe trip, pretty much regardless of weather, in 24 to 30 hours.

La Paz, March, 2002: Donna had to make another trip to Sunnyvale, and when she returned on March 30, we had one and one-half days to provision the boat for our return to Ensenada – The dreaded Baja Bash. I spent the week during her absence doing the mechanical preparation, getting fuel, checking and rechecking all the systems, until I was confident the boat was ready. Our buddy boat, *Number One*, was ready also, and at 6 AM on Sunday, April 1, 2001, after two delightful months in the Sea of Cortez, we departed for Ensenada.

Don on *Vittoria III* said he'd help us untie, but he wanted to do it the night before so he wouldn't have to get up that early in the morning. We respectfully declined his offer.

A Word About La Paz: We found La Paz delightful. There are three major department stores, La Perla, Dak, and DAMians. There are two large hardware stores, Ace Hardware, and True Value. There's even a Radio Shack. There are lots of great restaurants. Among our favorites were: La Pazta, Hotel Los Rocas, Café California, Carlos and Charlies, The Dock Café (at the Marina), and of course, Senor Gonzales Fish Taco Stand. Prices are reasonable, for example, Chateaubriand for two at Hotel Los Rocas for \$11 U.S. Can't beat that.

What's Next? Altogether, we spent 28 days out of the 60 that we were in La Paz touring the islands. The other 32 were in the Marina. We still didn't get nearly enough. Next year, we plan to go earlier and spend more time in the Sea, going much further north, maybe up to San Filipe. We also would like to get across to the mainland to Guymas, Mazatlan, Puerto Vallarta, and possibly Z-town (Zihuatanejo). It is a great place. The scenery and sea life is beyond compare; I told Donna it was like Yellowstone Park on the ocean. We definitely will return and spend even less time in marinas, if possible.

Dogs on board: The dogs adapted pretty well, giving up their preferred place in the pilot house with us and finding places to hunker down in the salon where they wouldn't get bounced around so much. Cody even learned to crawl from one place to another instead of standing up. Every 3 or 4 hours we would turn down-swell and reduce speed to idle to let them go out on the bow for a potty break. This would lose us 10-15 minutes, but worked even in the worst seas we encountered.

La Paz to Los Frailes: The trip started from Marina de La Paz on Sunday, April 1, 2001, at 6:30 AM. We traveled with a companion boat, a Kady-Krogen 39 *Number One*, owned and skippered by Mike Ford. The weather was fairly good with winds from the southwest most of the way down to Los Frailes, where we pulled in for the night about 10 PM. By then the winds had built to 20-25 kts southwest, and we had 4-6 foot wind waves. We chose the northern bight of Los Frailes instead of the customary southern bight because of the winds. It proved to be a good choice and we spent a calm night there. This was a total distance of 99.7 miles in 15.5 hours for an average speed of 6.4 knots at 1800 rpm.

It was here that I discovered that I had been running the watermaker all day with the salt water seacock closed. I feared that this had damaged the watermaker, and indeed it had. So with about 200 gallons of water on board and no ability to make any more, we went on an extreme water saving regime. (Mike laughed at this: he can do just fine on that much water for a month!) We changed the dog box washdown to salt water, we turned off the fresh water head flush and used buckets of salt water to flush the head, and we stopped taking showers. With the watermaker, we had always had the luxury of Ample water, using it for boat washdowns at anchorage, and taking long showers every day.

Los Frailes to Cabo San Lucas: We left Los Frailes the next morning, April 2, at 0730 and pulled into Cabo San Lucas anchorage at about 2 PM. Total distance was 45.3 miles in 7 hours for an average speed of 6.5 knots. Winds were 35-40 kts and seas were 8-10 feet on the bow after rounding San Jose Del Cabo. (Note: this is what the log says. In retrospect, I think we were consistently underestimating the sea height, and these were probably 10-12 feet, based on more experience and the sea state vs. wind speed charts I have since consulted.)

Cabo San Lucas to Bahia Santa Maria: The wind persisted throughout the night and had not diminished appreciably when we left at 0435 the next morning to round the cape. Seas were not bad, about 4-6 feet with 27 kts of wind until about 1100 when the seas became noticeably calmer even though the wind did not change much. About 5 PM the seas got a little rougher and built to about 6-8 feet until after midnight, when they laid down to 2-3 feet. Accompanying the seas was a long swell of about 10 feet which was not particularly noticeable.

We arrived at Bahia Santa Maria at about 10 AM on April 4 in fairly calm seas but still 25-30 knot winds. This was a total distance of 175 miles which we completed in 29 hours for an average speed of 6.0 knots at mostly 1800 rpm.

Bahia Santa Maria to Bahia Tortuga: We left at 10 PM with the intention of anchoring before nightfall at San Juanico. When we left, the anchorage was calm, light winds, but upon rounding Cabo San Lazaro we got hammered. By midnight we had 30 knot winds and 6-8 foot seas, according to the log. In retrospect, I believe the seas were more on the order of 8-10 feet. It was pretty rough, but the boat handled it fine. By 0630 the winds had built to nearly 40 knots, and, though I recorded 8-10 foot seas, I believe they were more on the order of 12-15 feet. At one point, the large radar monitor jumped out of the console and we duct-taped it back in. I still have to make a bracket to hold it in. These conditions persisted until about 5 PM, then things settled down and the ride smoothed out. We talked to Mike aboard *Number One* and decided we would not anchor at San Juanico after all, but would continue on, our next possible anchorage being Punta Abrejos.

We had elected to follow the shoreline around instead of cutting directly across the bight to Bahia Tortuga because I didn't want to get that far off shore. Cutting across saves about 6 hours, but sea conditions may be worse or better, and if worse, there's no place to hide. Following the shoreline gives you fairly good northwest refuge anchorages at San Juanico and Punta Abrejos, and a few other less palatable ones. Mike was not happy with this decision as this put us abeam the seas much of the way. He would have just cut directly across, which is what we did all the rest of the times we did the Bash.

Calm conditions prevailed until just after midnight, April 6, when seas began building again. By 5 AM we were back to 30 knot winds from the northwest, and 10-12 foot seas, which persisted until we arrived at Bahia Tortuga at noon. During the night of the 5th, just after passing Punta Abrejos, we encountered several rain squalls which we could see on radar. Only a couple actually produced any noticeable rain, most of them being heavy moisture laden air which we later learned is called virga. At one point, the log shows we were down to 4.2 knots, and we were frequently below 6 knots, but we managed to make the 248 nautical miles from Bahia Santa Maria to Bahia Tortuga in 38 hours, for an average of about 6.5 knots at mostly 1800 rpm. There were some periods where we backed off to 1700 rpm, then for the last 3 hours, we ran at 2000 rpm. It didn't seem to matter much what rpm we ran; it was just as rough slower as it was faster.

We spent three days in Bahia Tortuga waiting for the winds and seas to subside. It's a very pleasant anchorage and there's a large fuel dock that dispenses diesel fuel. We visited the small town, visited the Catholic church and made a small donation to the Padre there for the children that he teaches and supports. There's not much to do in this town except fish, and not much income.

Bahia Tortuga to Bahia San Carlos: On Monday, April 9, at 0400, we left Bahia Tortuga, intending to anchor at the north end of Isla Cedros to rest before going across Bahia Sebastian Vizcaino. Bahia Tortuga was dead calm, no wind at all. As we entered Canal de Dewey, we were hammered with 40-45 knot winds! These persisted to the south end of Isla Cedros, with one gust about 8 AM registering 50 knots on the anemometer. This was the highest wind speed we measured on the trip. Seas were correspondingly high, 10-12 feet at least. This area is known as

the “washing machine”. We had a fairly calm period along the east side of Isla Cedros, but the anchorage at the north end turned out to be unusable because of the direction of the winds which were kicking up 4-6 foot seas. In order to anchor, we would have had to go back to Cedros Village, which was reasonably calm. Rather than lose the distance we had gained, we decided to continue on to Bahia San Carlos, knowing we would arrive there at around midnight. Coming into an anchorage for the first time at night is not our favorite thing to do.

Immediately upon leaving the north end of Isla Cedros, we got back into 10-15 foot seas and up to 35 knot winds which persisted almost all the way to Bahia San Carlos. This was the roughest part of the entire trip, but we averaged about 6.4 knots at 1800 rpm. Again, we did not have any extreme discomfort, though it does get old after a while. We were fairly comfortable, just constant pitching. Mike on *Number One* had worse conditions because he doesn't have any roll stabilization and he was single-handing.

We pulled into Bahia San Carlos at just about midnight and were anchored by 1 AM, April 10. This is a large, open anchorage, easy to approach at night, and we had no problems. We also had a nearly full moon. We saw no lobster pots and no kelp here, but at night, even with a moon, you can't see much anyway. It was a little rolly, but not bad for us, as we left the paravanes down. This was a distance of 125 nautical miles in 20 hours, for an average of 6.3 knots. Not bad, considering the awful sea conditions.

Bahia San Carlos to Bahia San Quintin: We left Bahia San Carlos at 0630, Tuesday, April 10, headed for San Quintin. This was to be a short day, not a kamikaze run like the previous ones. We had a fairly comfortable ride, in 8-12 foot seas, but much gentler and more “swelly” than the previous day. Winds were light, seldom getting over 20 knots. This was a total distance of 60 nautical miles in 9.5 hours, for an average of 6.3 knots. We had a lot of opposing current much of the way, which slowed us down to 5.6 knots or less at 1800 rpm. We finally raised the rPM to 2000 and achieved over 6 knots, and as high as 7.7 knots briefly, for the remainder of the trip. San Quintin is a good anchorage, easy to approach from the South, and we had a good rest.

Bahia San Quintin to Bahia Santo Tomas: We left San Quintin on Wednesday, April 11, with the intention of anchoring at Bahia Santo Tomas that afternoon. *Number One* reported difficulty starting his engine, very unusual and troubling for a diesel, but finally got it started and we set out at 0630. Seas were 8-10 feet in the morning, building to 10-12 feet in the afternoon with 25-30 knot winds. Gentle swells and overall, not too bad. This was a distance of 75 nautical miles in about 12 hours for an average speed of 6.3 knots. We ran at 2000 and 2100 rpm for the entire trip, however, bucking a strong current. There is a lot of kelp around here. We snagged some on the way in to the anchorage and had to pull in the paravanes to clear it. We saw no lobster pots, though. We dropped anchor at about 6 PM, as near to the moored fishing boats as we could get.

Number One elected to go on to Ensenada because of potential engine problems, so we were alone for the first night since we left La Paz. It's a good thing he did: Near the entrance to Marina Coral, the engine nearly died. He nursed it into the harbor and got tied up, then it would not restart. The problem was eventually traced to the fuel injector pump whose built-in stop

solenoid had stuck. Fortunately, the John Deere rep was available for Saturday work, but it turned out to be a \$1500+ problem.

Bahia Santo Tomas is a terrible anchorage! Full of kelp and very roly. You have to anchor in 30 to 40 feet of water in between patches of kelp. We had a lot of trouble finding a clear spot to drop the hook, and we dragged the first time. The wind alternately shifted from north to west all night. When north, it oriented the boat crosswise to the swell, and even with paravanes out we rolled 30-degrees each way. It was a choice of spending a miserable night at anchor or coming into Marina Coral at night, which probably would have been a better choice.

Bahia Santo Tomas to Marina Coral, Ensenada: The next morning, we left Bahia Santo Tomas at 0600 and arrived at Marina Coral at about 0930 on April 12, 2001. Sea conditions were moderate at 8-10 foot swell, winds were around 20. Total distance, 24 miles in 3.5 hours at 2000 rpm for an average of 6.8 knots. On the way through the pass between Isla Todos Santos Sur and Punta Banda we had to slow, then stop dead for two large humpback whales that crossed in front of us.

Time in Ensenada: We spent almost a month in Ensenada at Marina Coral. We got a major chore done there, painting the teak cap rails. We have done varnish on the previous boat – no thanks! We have seen two other N46s with painted wood, and they look great. So we contracted through the Marina for Antonio Garcia Garcia's services. He put on three coats of epoxy, one filler, three primers, and three forest green topcoats. We are delighted with the results, and think it really finishes out the look of the boat. We departed the Marina May 5, 2002 the very next morning after Antonio finished the painting.

Summary of Statistics: The total trip from La Paz to Ensenada was 852 miles and we accomplished it in 134.5 hours of sea time in 12 days, for an overall average speed of 6.3 knots. Main engine running hours were 143. Generator running time was 68 hours. Total fuel on board at La Paz was about 800 gallons, and remaining at Marina Coral was about 300 gallons, for a total of about 500 gallons burned. If we assume that the generator burn rate is about 0.8 gph, then the generator used 54 gallons of that, and the main engine used 446 gallons for a burn rate of approximately 3.1 gallons per hour at a nominal 1800 rpm. We changed main engine oil in Bahia Tortuga, but otherwise, the engine did not burn any oil. We started and ran the wing engine periodically and let it drive the boat on several occasions to make sure it was operational.

Because of our extreme water conservation measures, we arrived in Ensenada with about 150 gallons of water left. There was about 75 gallons in the main tank and we had not touched the auxiliary 75 gallon aft tank.

The End