

Delivery of North Star 92' on December 16, 2001

By Jerry Clark, Chief of Operations, NorthStar Yachts

We recently delivered a new NorthStar 92' motoryacht to the owner who was anxious to take it to San Diego to enjoy the holidays with his family. The owner, captain and cook were scheduled to make the trip alone when the owner invited two others from NorthStar and me along for the maiden voyage.

After checking the weather and with conformation from the captain, we began our trip in calm waters heading down the Columbia River to Astoria. There we would spend the evening before crossing the Columbia River bar the next morning. It was a beautiful morning, one of those days you always hope for, and we enjoyed the scenery while making our way down river.

Three hours later we approached Astoria, which is located immediately inside the Columbia River bar. We began to encounter some winds blowing about 25 knots coming in off the Pacific with a small four-foot chop giving us a chance to experience a little rough water, but we were quite comfortable. We punched through the chop and experienced a smooth, dry ride. It was beginning to get dark when the winds picked up to 40 knots and we realized that we were not going to be able to enter the small Astoria marina for fuel so we decided it would be best to anchor in a nearby cove for the evening and top off fuel in the morning. This gave us a good opportunity to test out the dual anchors as later that night the winds kicked up to 60 knots. In fact, the Columbia bar was closed that night for all boating including large commercial vessels. By morning there were six commercial freighters anchored just across the channel from us waiting to cross the bar.

Early that next morning we pulled up anchors and moved into the local marina and took on fuel before heading out to sea. I was looking forward to the opportunity of seeing how well the boat would perform in rougher waters as the Columbia bar is known to be the most dangerous inlet in the Northern Hemisphere with more than 2,000 vessels on the bottom. I was somewhat disappointed as we only experienced 20-foot swells with 14-second intervals and 20-knot winds—no big deal. The sun was out and the weather seemed perfect as we began our trip. But the seas were building as we crossed the bar and it gave us a chance to appreciate the performance of the Jack Sarin design and an opportunity to start testing some of the systems such as stabilizers and autopilot that you hear about failing when conditions get bad. Although it was far from being a fair weather day, the conditions weren't as rough for late December as I had anticipated to see how the boat would handle in heavy sea conditions.

Once we crossed the Columbia bar we headed 25nm offshore to begin our trip south at 14 knots. We had intended to run 24 hours a day so we could make San Diego for the holidays. The weather was holding reasonably well for the Oregon coast in winter but suddenly things turned for the worse, and very quickly, which is not uncommon this time of year.

By sunset the swells were beginning to get steep with white caps blowing off the top. Some of this is what I wanted as a test, but not was to follow. I could not have been happier as the vessel would punch through the large waves with the bow's entry providing a good ride while we sat in the comfort of the pilothouse.

Meanwhile, we lost GPS reception on the on board systems due to a technical problem and thereby lost our ability to get a fix on our exact location other than by a GPS hand held unit. After several attempts to repair it we realized that the computer system was down and beyond our abilities to repair, so we continued on course using only our charts and compass.

By 10:00 pm that evening we realized that we were into a very serious storm and by midnight it was apparent that it was going to be a long night ahead. Soon, the winds were 50 knots plus and the seas were now running 30 feet and very steep with white caps blowing off the top. The intervals were so close that it seemed like we'd never make it over the top of one when suddenly we were heading straight down the backside, never hitting the trough and penetrating the next wave only to land in the second trough. Three of the six crew were now sick and we knew it was going to be an even longer night for those at the helm. We reduced our speed to six knots, just enough to keep steerageway. The good part is that the boat was doing well, the performance of the hull showed excellent stability, and it continued to rise and punch into the seas ahead with a very sea kindly motion. I was happy to be aboard the boat to see first hand that the boat was performing like a champion and that it was stable and capable of handling the heavy sea conditions we were experiencing.

Now the rest of the story. By 1:00 a.m. the anemometer was reading 50 to 58 knots and the seas were becoming steeper with white caps of about four feet and the intervals reduced to 8 seconds. This was certainly becoming an opportunity to experience the really rough stuff...an opportunity I would forgo again. As the boat continued to punch into the waves head on, we kept on course and navigated just by using our charts and compass. As we maintained our course the waves continued to build. When sitting at the helm, you felt like you were in a rocket ship as the bow pitched up the wave, then the boat would teeter over and the bow would drop down the backside of the wave and break through the next...like a roller coaster. Generally speaking, this is not what you want to experience if you can avoid it.

Remember it was dark, in fact it was pitch black, and you could not see the waves coming but could feel them rising up below you and the bow would pitch high as the vessel would slowly climb over the top. The seas continued to increase and we experienced larger waves breaking over the bow, and there was water rushing across the front of the boat which is 12 feet off the water, flooding the huge foredeck and then washing over the windshield like being in a submarine. I have been in heavy seas off the Washington and Oregon coast many times but never had I experienced something like this and was pleased to see how well the boat could handle it. I have to give credit to **Garibaldi Glass Industries** and Sika Industry; they are the two vendors that provided the windshields and the window adhesive that provided us the safety we needed from the breaking waves. I have heard stories of windshields breaking or separating in such sea conditions.

About 2:00 a.m. we had another wave break over the bow and again the boat performed like a champ by maintaining her course in these heavy sea conditions with good rudder control. By 2:30 a.m. it was becoming a situation where every fifth wave we would feel the boat launch off the wave and then drop over the top and you would feel like you were falling into a deep hole. It seemed like this would never end when another enormous wave broke about ten feet over the bow and then again a big flood of water that covered the fore deck and windshield for several seconds just like being underwater. When you looked aft you could see a wall of water pouring off the back of the bridge deck like a waterfall.

This went on for 4 ½ hours and when you're in a situation like this it seems like time slows down and that the storm would never come to an end. As each wave would break over the bow and water would flood the windshields you wonder just how much of a beating a boat can take. You sit in the helm chair in the pitch black not being able to see the waves coming other than you could see the white water breaking over the bow at the last minute. You would hang on tight as you sat at the helm because you knew that you were going to be pounded hard when the bow dropped down the backside of the wave with another wave breaking over the bow.

As daybreak finally arrived it was our intention, since we had lost our GPS, to get a bearing from a landmark and head toward the nearest port along the Oregon coast. But unfortunately the storm and fog was so thick we could not see 200 yards. We decided to call the coastguard to see if they could get a radar fix on where we were so they could help guide us to the nearest port. After the Coast Guard tried to get a fix on us it was determined that the storm was so thick they couldn't get a radar fix so they tried to get a VHF radio fix by triangulating on our VHF radio. They tried to locate us for over an hour but when it was determined that they were unable to they decided to send out one of their boats to get closer to our estimated position and try again for a radio fix. Finally, they were able to establish a fix on our location and we proceeded toward each other. The seas were still tall but we were finally able to spot them for a brief moment when we were both at the tops of the waves.

By then we were 10nm offshore and visibility improved as we followed them into Coos Bay, Oregon. I was glad to see an end to what will be a memorable experience. I have to commend all of those that were involved in the designing and engineering of this vessel and certainly the individual workers that were involved in the construction of the boat along with all of those vendors that provided their products. This proved to me that the boat could perform and prove itself to be a seaworthy boat that you could rely on to get you back in safely as this was truly a life threatening storm.

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