



SKIP NOVAK

EXPEDITION YACHT DESIGNS HAVE PROLIFERATED, BUT ARE THEY REALLY FIT FOR TRUE EXPEDITION SAILING, WONDERS SKIP?

Adventure travel today makes it appear that everyone is on an 'expedition' of one kind or another. Expedition is, to a great extent, an overused word – and it's usually used out of context. But it is sexy sounding, unlike simply being 'on a tour'.

I use the word expedition liberally in my charter business and I hope we can claim some semblance of verity, although I am obliged to admit that those of us who sail to the high Arctic or deep south or anywhere else in between are all tourists in the end. The days of exploring blanks on the map really are over, unless you leave behind your laptop that has Google Earth.

The accepted definition of expedition, gleaned and distilled from various sources on the web, goes something like this: 'An organised journey or voyage for a specific purpose, especially for exploration or for a scientific or

military purpose.' To be honest, the purpose can simply be a pleasure cruise.

My own caveats to the above are: 'A journey that is

extended, one that goes into a relatively remote area and where one is self-sufficient.'

These are the parameters that dictated the build of my two expedition sailing vessels *Pelagic* and *Pelagic Australis*. Both were overbuilt for all the knocks, groundings and general wear and tear that expedition sailing implies, and both can be autonomous for two months with respect to fuel and provisions.

More to the point, they are relatively simple in their systems so our crews can keep them going in the field and make any running repairs needed, the purpose being to finish the voyage without the need to bail out because of mechanical failures.

I can say with hand on my wooden heart that things work all of the time. The secret is simply to have fewer things to go wrong.

I am continually amused and bemused by the proliferation of production 'expedition yachts'. They are marketing success stories in most cases so you can't gainsay the business model. But, without exception, when

you look beyond the bare aluminium hulls that are *de rigueur* there is not much difference from production bluewater cruisers, which by and large share the same problems for extending sailing in at any latitude.

Take the interior layouts. I have yet to see any of these designs with adequate stowage for provisions to last for several months in the field. Open any locker and, rather than finding a storage space, it is an inspection port for runs of pipes and wires and/or a transformer or two.

It is noteworthy that many expedition yachts have more conveniences and gadgetry than the average well appointed home. None, it appears, has any way to store fresh provisions of fruit and vegetables. Eating out of tins for months was something Robin Knox-Johnston did in the Golden Globe Race because he was obliged to, or maybe he just loved his tins. To drive the point home, if you can't store at the very least potatoes, carrots, apples and oranges for six weeks in a cool climate you have not thought about the requirement.

I have yet to see any of these designs with forepeaks big enough with convenient access for stowage of equipment and necessary spares (anchors, dinghies, outboards, cordage and toys to name a few). Rather there are berths and heads compartments that are useless at sea. Like all cruising boats, they are marketed for the number of berths they have – like pricing homes by the number of bedrooms, however small.

Engines are generally light on power and fuel capacities are insufficient by what I estimate to be, on average, 60 to 70 per cent. Two good examples of expedition cruises that need extended autonomy are the North West Passage and the coast of the Chilean fjords. Figure on 2,000 miles on the former and 1,200 miles on the latter between fuel stops that don't need pre-arranging – if arranging is possible at all. And much of both of those are motoring passages.

To market a design with less gadgetry and conveniences in lieu of more space for storage and capacity for fuel is akin to justifying a cost for what are void spaces. No designer or yacht builder in their right mind wearing their commercial hats would ever risk attempting to pull off what could be a clever conjuring trick of designing a true fit-for-purpose expedition yacht that would be to the benefit of a buyer in the long run.

That would be a tough call. ■

'AN EXPEDITION SOUNDS SEXY, UNLIKE A TOUR'