

WHEN I was first contacted by Bluewater Marine and asked to deliver their 35ft Luhrs convertible sportfisher from Durban to the Maldives, I said, "No problem, I'll work out a price."

The boat had a 380 mile range carrying 1 500 litres. I knew the Moçambique legs and across to the top of Madagascar would be no problem. Madagascar to the Seychelles was 600nm, so with a few extra drums of diesel, that was also within range. The only grey area was the Seychelles to Maldives leg which I had never looked at before, but I figured it couldn't be further than 600nm across.

Later that evening I went onto Google Earth to confirm some distances and work out a price for delivery. It was all as I'd expected until I got to the Seychelles-Maldives leg: that was when I realised it was 1 200 miles!

What now? There's no way a 35ft sportfisher could carry enough diesel

to make it across that expanse of sea, and if anything went wrong there would be absolutely nothing but ocean, ocean and more ocean.

I called my mate and fellow skipper, Michael Smith, to see what he thought. After some discussion we decided that if the boat could carry the five tons of diesel needed to make the crossing, then we could get her there. We talked to Bluewater Marine and agreed that a trial would need to be done before we went any further.

We called Luhrs in the US to ask about carrying the extra weight, and they just laughed.

A few days later Michael and I flew up from Cape Town to do the trial. Using tanks and drums we put 2 000 litres of water on the aft deck and another 2 000 litres spread through the engine room, front cabin and foredeck. We also had a ton in the boat tanks. To our amazement she carried the weight without a problem.

The important thing was that we were able to put over a ton of the weight in the forward cabin area, which offset the two tons on the aft deck and at the same time kept the weight at waterline level to give greater stability. That afternoon we did a sea trial to check speed, stability and consumption. It all seemed fine, the only downside was that we would be doing seven knots for most of the trip. The next day I called Duncan at BM and told him we could do it.

The new owners accepted our price and we flew back to Cape Town. A couple of weeks later, after updating our wills and surviving the "I'll divorce you if you go" threats, we were back in Durban and spent three days getting everything ready to go. On Saturday 16th August at 6.30am we set off from Wilson's Wharf in Durban ...

SATURDAY, 16TH AUGUST

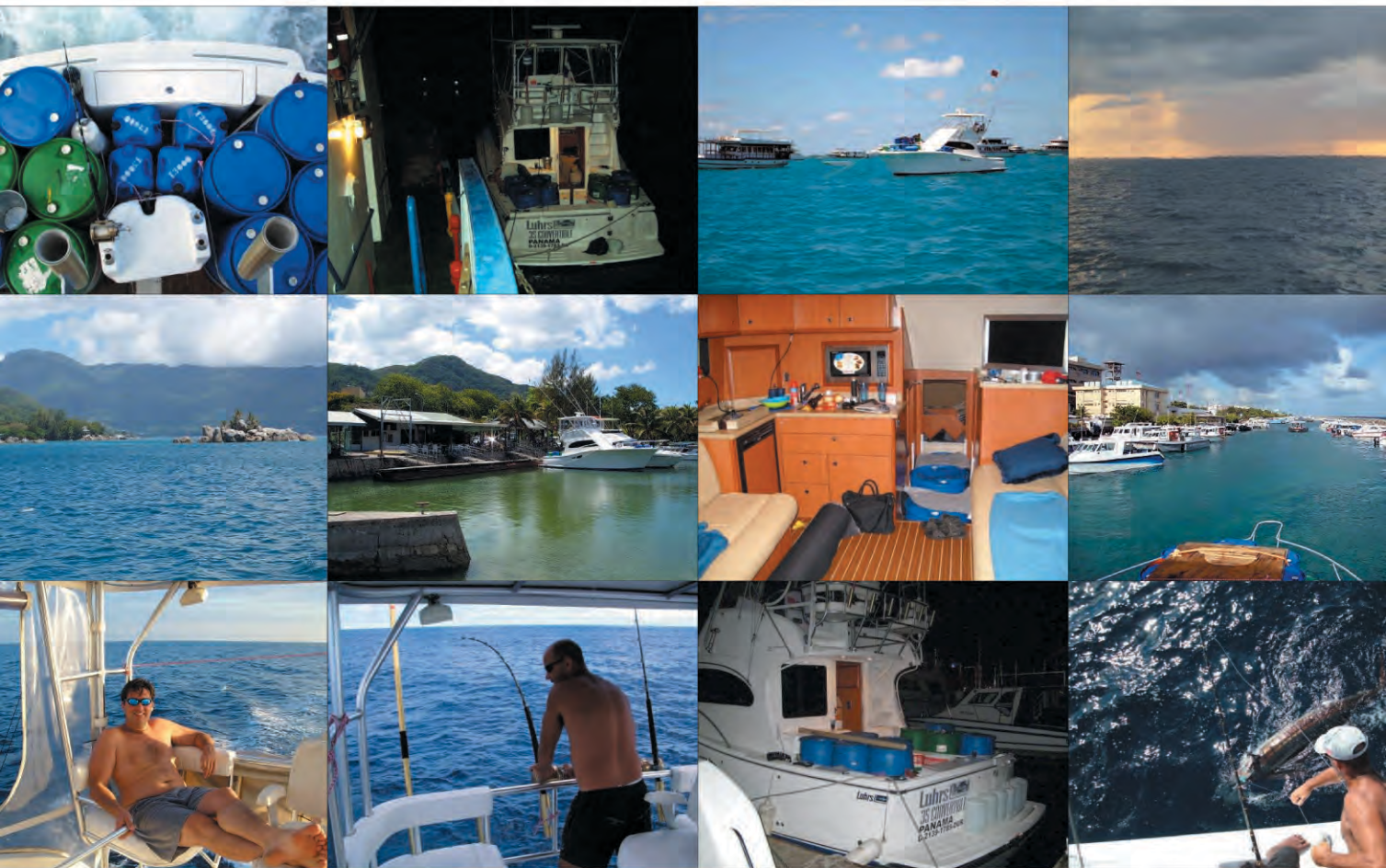
There was a 25 knot southwesterly

EPIC JOURNEY

Durban to Maldives in a sportfisher



The red dotted line indicates the route taken from Durban to the Maldives. A journey of 3 500 nautical miles.



blowing up the coast which got us nicely on our way. The boat was handling well and doing just under eight knots at 1 500 revs with all our extra diesel onboard. Our plan was to go up the coast to Inhambane, refuel, then cross to Madagascar.

During the first day we changed that plan and decided to head straight to Majunga in Madagascar which is 1 200 miles from Durban — a good test for our crossing between Seychelles and Maldives. That night, just north of Richards Bay, the south-moving Moçambique current got really strong and, ploughing into 25 knots of southwesterly wind, we were forced inshore to escape it.

SUNDAY, 17TH AUGUST

The wind picked up to over 30 knots in the early hours and, with driving rain-squalls, our first 24 hours at sea were rather unpleasant. At dawn we were off Sodwana, the wind still above 18 knots with rain.

The day was much the same, the highlight being that we caught a nice 20kg wahoo which we filleted and froze. Everything onboard seemed to be working well, but we were going to have to watch our fuel consumption because we were using a lot more than expected.

That evening off Ponta de Ouro we turned northeast, aiming to pass 50 miles south of Inhambane and across to Bassas.

MONDAY, 18TH AUGUST

In the night the wind and current again forced us to turn north and into the shallow water on the coast. We continued inshore until just south of Ponta de Barra, then had to head east and across the Moçambique current.

We transferred diesel again and set a course for Cap St André in Madagascar via Bassas da India. In the afternoon the wind dropped to around 15 knots where it remained through the night. At last we managed to have a decent cooked meal.

TUESDAY, 19TH AUGUST

A pretty boring day — still in the Moçambique current and only making six knots, but we hoped this would change as we neared Bassas. Still getting plenty of squalls from the south-east, but the sea state was a bit more bearable.

FRIDAY, 22ND AUGUST

Wind was still light, around 12 knots, and current one knot from the north. At 2pm we reached Cap St André — an amazing place. We were in 18-20m of water and 56 miles offshore. I caught my first marlin that evening — a small stripy.

The current changed as we rounded the Cap and our speed was up to 8.5 knots. After checking our fuel we decided to miss Majunga and head to Nosy Be or maybe even Diego Suarez which is 20 miles down the east coast.

SATURDAY, 23RD AUGUST

The night was calm until 4am when a nasty east-southeasterly wind picked up, gusting 28 knots. With the current pushing into this, the sea was a complete mess. By now we were 60 miles offshore, and with no options for shelter we were just going to have to ride it out. We were talking about how this was supposed to be the calm part of our trip when Michael recalled someone saying that the wind blows here till 11am and then drops.

We were still laughing about how unlikely that would be when it stopped — like a switch had been flicked. Unbelievable — what a pleasure! It was a perfect day after that. We transferred the last of our fuel and continued in a northeasterly direction, hopefully all the way to Diego Suarez.

SUNDAY, 24TH AUGUST

It was a beautiful night up past Nosy Be and into the day. Everything was great until we rounded the top of Madagascar late that afternoon. We had been warned about this place and it was every bit as bad as they said it would be. The wind, current and swell all seemed to oppose each other. We were just in gear, no throttle and still falling off the back waves. To make things worse, it was dark. This is not a piece of coast you want to be off at night.

We eventually arrived at the harbour entrance sometime near midnight with only the echo-sounder still working, and



even that was intermittent. As a result of all the pounding, the radar had packed up and the heading marked on the plotter had gone. After a tense navigation through an unfamiliar mouth, we anchored and fell asleep, both of us physically drained.

It had been a long leg — nine days at seven knots, 24 hours a day, living from one four-hour watch to the next. The one good thing was that we had done 1 600 miles in one go and were now a lot more confident about the stretch from Seychelles to Maldives.

MONDAY, 25th AUGUST

We upped anchor at 6am and sailed into the port. Once alongside, Michael got started with servicing the engines and getting the electronics working again. I went into town to arrange diesel and sort out customs and immigration.

That evening, once all our work was done, we enjoyed a few local rums, then fell asleep early.

TUESDAY, 26TH AUGUST

We cast off at 4am and set a course for Farquar, the southernmost island in the Seychelles group. The wind was still over 20 knots and the sea not pleasant at all.

Michael was spending a lot of time in the engine room, trying to figure out where we were getting air into the fuel line which was causing the starboard engine to shut down every 30 minutes or so. Only after changing the pickup point on the tank did we manage to solve the problem. We got hammered by the wind and sea again that night.

WEDNESDAY, 27TH AUGUST

Early in the morning we passed west of Farquar and up in the lee of the large reefs around these islands. What a pleasure to be in flat water again. We had a huge breakfast, caught a few yellowfin and just enjoyed the day.

THURSDAY, 28TH AUGUST

Once north of Providence Island we

headed east again, out of the lee and back into the weather.

The current was starting to push northward now, so the extra speed made up for the bad weather. Whoever said this part of the world was paradise lied. We figured that if we could keep up this speed we should be in Mahé by the following afternoon.

FRIDAY, 29TH AUGUST

The current continued pushing and about 30 miles from Malé the wind finally dropped and the sea calmed. Approaching Mahé you could see why people flock to this group of islands — it's beautiful.

At 2.30pm we anchored outside the port where customs, immigration, health and coastguard officials boarded and did our paperwork. They were so slick that within 20 minutes we were all done and headed in. Once alongside we got refuelled and enjoyed a few beers with the locals — very friendly, helpful people.



Nascer do Sol



Guinjata Bay



Casa Lisa



Casa Rei - Pomene



Paraiso de Chidenguela



Blue Anchor Inn



Jeffs at Jangamo



Jangamo Beach Resort



Montego - Xai Xai

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SATURDAY, 30TH AUGUST

Clearing out wasn't so easy. We should have paid our port fees on Friday when we arrived, but couldn't because all the offices were closed on Saturday. After many calls to the port captain somebody eventually came and took our money so we were free to go.

We stopped in at a supermarket to get a few things, but on seeing the prices we decided we had enough on board. Our original plan was to leave on Sunday afternoon so that we could see some of the island, but when we got a favorable weather report we decided to leave immediately — we'd had enough of bad weather. We left port at 3pm and set course for Malé in the Maldives, 1 200 miles east. That night we enjoyed our first calm night since leaving 15 days before.

SUNDAY, 31ST AUGUST

All was going well, there was a south-westerly wind of five knots, the current was flowing eastwards and our speed was up to nine knots. Michael hooked and released a rather lively 150 lb black marlin that afternoon which we had to fight from the flybridge because there was no cockpit space.

MONDAY, 1ST SEPTEMBER

Another beautiful day. We lost a marlin but caught two nice wahoo which would keep us fed for the week.

TUESDAY, 2ND SEPTEMBER

We were being roasted by now — no wind at all, just heat. We crossed the equator that evening and celebrated with some Seychelles vodka.

WEDNESDAY, 3RD SEPTEMBER

Again a lovely day — no wind. I caught a 200 lb black marlin in the morning which gave me quite a workout. The fish never jumped, staying deep, and with no harness or decent bucket and seriously out of practice I was exhausted when we finally released it an hour later. In the afternoon we transferred most of the fuel off the aft deck, lashing the drums on the foredeck to begin cleaning up and getting the craft back to looking like a new sportfisher again.

THURSDAY, 4TH SEPTEMBER

Unbelievable, still no wind. Transferred the last of our fuel into the main tanks, and with just 250 miles to go we opened the throttle for the first time. What a pleasure — we were doing 20-22 knots and getting there fast. We slowed again after dark just 40 miles from the outer atolls.

FRIDAY, 5TH SEPTEMBER

After a slow course up the middle of the atolls, we anchored off Malé at 7am only to discover it was a public holiday and all the government offices were closed. Our contact there eventually

persuaded someone to help us, and late in the afternoon we were cleared in. We spent the day cleaning up, removing all drums and putting cabin doors, etc., back on their hinges.

After 21 days we had used 1 200 litres of diesel and traveled 3 500 nautical miles. At around 7pm, once all the paperwork was done, the boat was anchored on a safe mooring and we were on a ferry to our hotel.

We asked our contact where we might get a drink. He just laughed and said alcohol was banned in the Maldives!

SATURDAY, 6TH SEPTEMBER

We slept in a bit and then took a stroll through Malé. It's a very interesting place with an amazing amount of marine activity.

We bought some new fuel fittings and went over to the boat to fix out temporary repairs. That night we tracked down a pub at the airport, which is about a 15-minute ferry ride from Malé town.

SUNDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER

We did a bit of fishing with the new captain and crew and showed them around the boat. The fishing was great. There are so many sailfish here, everywhere you look you see them jumping — sometimes three together. What a way to end the trip.



BRADLEY KIDD

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