

A Day in the trades.

By Marty Still

After many years and very wet miles thumping around Bass Strait, "Shanty", our S&S 34, has moved North in a quest for warmer waters. As yet another Melbourne winter approached, a move North became desirable. A month long wander up the East coast brought Shanty to the Gold Coast and sunshine.

After 18 months on "The Coast" with itchy feet, Shanty was on the ocean road again. Off to Lord Howe Island then on to New Zealand. Tripping around the Queen Charlotte sounds in South Island was nice but still a bit cool for us. The receding summer saw us on the hard stand at Whangarei. Mid May saw our bow heading Northwards and, once again, the weather showed a marked improvement as each day passed by. Ten of these casual days later brought us to where we wanted to be, coral reefs, palm trees, dusky maidens and a whole swag of international yachties. Nukualofa. Tonga. Heaven.

Shanty arriving in Opuia – Bay of Islands.



Hanging out at the Mapua Boat Club NZ.



Three months cruising these most beautiful of islands saw us once again heading North to Pago Pago then on to Apia, Western Samoa.

Fun in the Sun outside Apia – Western Samoa – with Sarah, an Aussie peace worker getting a dunking in the warm tropical waters. We dived with sharks later, wild girl, that one.



This is true trade wind territory. Each day sees the breeze come in at between 15 and 20 knots, temperature never below 26 and never above 30° Celsius. But alas, the time had to come to think about a return to Australia. A prolonged stop in this latitude during cyclone season is not a good idea.

No time to dally with nearly 3000 miles to go.

Out into the deep blue Pacific Ocean, under a blanket of clear blue skies. Headsail poled out on one side, main with preventer on the other, permanent 75 kilo break strain fishing line towing astern. This is the life. Shanty has a slow rolling action in the following breeze and seas, speed sitting around 6 to 7 knots and very little in the way of waves. After finishing our night watches, 3 hours on 3 off, our day begins.

First task of the day, make coffee and sit on deck to watch the sunrise. The deck is slightly damp but we know that it will dry out in no time. Dressed in only a Lava Lava (sarong) and T-shirt we greet a new day. Second cup of coffee. Time to stream the fishing line, we don't leave it out at night because the sharks tend to chomp the lure during the hours of darkness. Tilt the solar panels back to take maximum advantage of the free power we extract from the sun, our wind generator needs no attention, working constantly day and night. Time now for breakfast. Something nice and simple to complement our life and current mental capacity in this tranquil aquatic wilderness, oats or muesli does just fine.

Now our hectic routine begins. Check course and position, even in these days of GPS it pays to put the occasional scribble on the chart just for old times sake. The cabin starts to warm up by 08⁰⁰ so we have to find a shady spot on deck, up forward works well, in the shade of the sails. A good book, a couple of pillows and a jug of cordial and I'm set for the morning. Every now and then I find myself staring vaguely out to sea, hypnotised by the constant rolling motion and feeling so untouchable in this vast ocean.

A dozen or more flying fish break surface to glide great distances only inches above the wave tops. I wonder what predator may have induced this urge to fly, or maybe they just enjoy the experience. Are they fish who will eventually take to the air or are they birds that have adapted to the sea, who cares, but it is nice to have the time to cater for such idle and useless thoughts.



The periodic whoosh of the bow wave next takes my attention, we rise slowly as each wave that has passed beneath our stern reaches the bow, the boat slows marginally then gathers speed again as another wave lifts the stern, breaking white water rises up the bow, whoosh. How many waves pass under us during the course of a day, I start to do a mental calculation but give up, who cares.

It's a hard life on the ocean.



10⁰⁰, time to adjust the solar panels, check the amp meter, 6 amps, that's ok, now I can go back to my dream world 'til lunch time.

12⁰⁰, adjust the solar panels again. Cheese and biscuits for lunch followed by a couple of bananas. We have a hand of these hanging from the solar panel frame, slowly ripening as each day goes by. A cup of lemon tea washes it all down. The wind has shifted a little to the south and increased by a couple of knots. A minor adjustment of the sails and self steering gear and we are creaming along. Maximum wave height, about 2 feet, over a swell of about the same height. Small fluffy white clouds drift slowly overhead, a perfect trade wind day.

By 13⁰⁰ the solar panels are shaded by the sails but the wind generator keeps ticking away quietly. Our shady spot moves aft of the mast so we move with it. "Strike". The bicycle inner tube stretches out, tugged by the fishing line. What is it? It's big, we can tell by the shadow under the water, it breaks the surface with a flash of blue, Mahi Mahi. Yes, what a fish. I slowly pull him in, being careful to maintain tension on the line, Carol gets the gaff and rope loop ready. He is alongside now, Carol loops his tail, I use the gaff, he is landed easily. Over 1 metre long. The meat on this fish is so tender it can be eaten raw. Carol prepares a mix of coconut cream, lime juice, teriyaki and chilli sauce to marinate some of our catch. This little beauty will be our fresh meat supply for four days or more. After doing a flavour test we return to our lounging and reading.

16⁰⁰, all is quiet again, the sun is receding in the Western sky, it's still hot. A cup of tea goes down well as we sit in the cockpit having a championship game of backgammon.

It gets dark early and quickly in the tropics so we prepare dinner early, I won't say what juicy delight was on the menu but it was served with rice. We sit on the foredeck eating as the sun goes down. There is a touch of coolness in the air, as the breeze caresses our skin a great yellow ball slips behind the horizon leaving a blazing red sky as its final farewell. Sitting in awed silence on deck for over an hour until the sky is black, the stars have taken control of the situation. The wind has eased a little now and our speed has dropped a little but an average of 6.75 knots for the day isn't all bad. But what is this now? A light is appearing on the Eastern horizon.

We always try to plan our passages to coincide with the moon and here she comes now. A giant ball, looking huge and warm, pity the solar panels don't work on moonlight. The ocean is bathed in a soft light, a line is drawn across the wave tops directly to the stern of our little boat. I feel so insignificant in the whole scheme of things when out here.

Carol is taking the first watch and will call me at 21⁰⁰ so I go below for a bit of shut eye.

21⁰⁰ "Marty, wake up".

"Hi babe, how 's everything"?

"Great, nice night, kettle's on, what do you want, Tea coffee or chocolate"?

"Chocolate, I'll be up in a minute".

Wow, what a night, I shiver, don't know why, it's not cold. Sitting in the cockpit in the quiet of the night your senses come alive. A different noise in the water alerts me to the presence of dolphin, they dart and weave around the boat, I sit contentedly on the bow. At midnight I call Carol for her watch. We sit for a while talking about nothing in particular. A new day has begun, a new day in the trades.