



# Follow the dolphins

Paul Robert Clark sails his Swan 43 *Humblebee* out of San Diego. A keen cruising sailor for many years, Clark recalls some cherished times aboard and explains why he will be eternally thankful to a school of dolphins ...



I spend at least half the year on board my Swan 43 in San Diego – mostly on weekends and vacations. Nowadays the best voyage out here in Southern California is from San Diego to Catalina Island. That is really the only good trip to make if you just have a few days. In years past I used to go down to Mexico but I haven't done that recently, especially because of the complication of customs and so on.

The longest voyage I have taken was from San Diego to La Paz, then to Honolulu, and up through the Molakai Channel out into the North Pacific over to Seattle. Then we came back down the West Coast of America to San Diego. That wasn't in the Swan but in a 38ft Zeeland Yawl built in the Netherlands. I think we could have completed the voyage much faster in the Swan as she is two or three knots quicker.

My favourite moment on board is early morning



But this particular story is definitely one for the 'Believe it or not...' category

watching the sunrise and drinking my coffee, when there is nobody around except the seabirds. Mostly I spend time with friends and enjoy sitting outside because of the good year-round weather in San Diego. I prefer cruising and there have been no Swan Regattas here in Southern California since George Steineman retired from the Swan brokerage in Newport Beach.

The best event I enjoyed was a recent Tall Ships Regatta in San Diego Bay. I was heading out of Mission Bay on deck all by myself. I was steering with my foot and drinking a cocktail. I was passed by a 42ft sedan cruiser with his engines synched up to show off proudly. However, this skipper was used to leaving sailboats on the horizon after a short time. About an hour later I had closed to within just 50 yards of his stern. When he saw me back there he did a big double take like a parrot and then you could see two big black clouds of exhaust coming out of his pipes. He was so embarrassed, he pegged both engines. It just goes to show some of those power boaters don't know how fast a Swan can be!

One of the most wonderful moments aboard *Humblebee* was on the way back from Mazatlan in Mexico. We had spent over 17 days coming back up the coast

bucking currents off Cabo Colnett and Cedros Island. Back in those days there was no GPS and aids to navigation in Mexico were non-existent. Since we had been at sea for so long we were anxious to make port. The passage into Ensenada Harbor from the south is treacherous. The channel is strewn with rocks between Todo Santos Island and Punta Bunda. It is not a passage to run at night, especially if you have never done it before. I checked my position on the chart every ten minutes and had two crew on the bow as lookouts.

I could see dark shapes on the horizon. These shapes of course were the rocks on either side of the channel. Needless to say, I had a fair amount of anxiety. I was pretty sure I was on course and then all of a sudden two lines of light about three miles in length and about 50ft wide lit up the channel on either side. It looked just like runway lights at an airport landing strip.

At first I couldn't figure out what it was and then I realised it was the dolphins lighting the way through the channel. When they swim at night they light up the plankton known as phosphenes. You have seen the fluorescence in the ocean at night, well that's what it is.

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