

BEN RUSI SEAMANSHIP AWARD NOMINATION - 2020

As per its description on the BCA website and in the BCA Member Directory, the **Ben Rusi Seamanship Award** “recognises outstanding acts of seamanship by individuals or groups, for single, multiple, or extended feats demonstrating a level of courage, determination, citizenship, and discipline to which all Bluewater cruisers should aspire.”

This year, I nominate BILL NORRIE, BCA member as the 2020 recipient.

His epic, east-about, single-handed circumnavigation via the five Great Capes of the Southern Ocean aboard his beloved 28' Bristol Channel Cutter, **Pixie**, will go down in the annals of Bluewater Cruising as he put his skills, resourcefulness, adaptability and fears to the ultimate test and lived to tell the tale. Herewith a few details of his journey and the fastidious preparations that preceded his departure from Victoria on August 31, 2019 and led to his safe return one year later:

Dates - August 31, 2019 to September 2, 2020

Total length of passage - 29,000nm

Total length of passage at sea in days - 314 days

Total length of passage at sea + in port - 366 days

Stops Enroute - Gambier (French Polynesia), Tiera Del Fuego Isla Hershel, Port Stanley (Falklands Islands), Cape Town SA , and Lyttleton NZ

Preparation

Bill's preparation for the circumnavigation was thorough and substantial; his over-riding goal being the safe completion of his long-held dream to circumnavigate via the southern capes. In the words of his wife, Cathy, who stood alongside him the entire way (and is equally deserving of BCA recognition):

“We took a defensive posture from the beginning in buying **Pixie**, a Bristol Channel Cutter 28 which is an ultimate heavy weather boat. We bought **Pixie** in 2014 and began work on her in 2016 once we arrived home from our first circumnavigation:

- totally new standing and running rigging including a second spinnaker pole secured on deck;
- a complete new suite of Hasse sails (who builds sails for boats planning to go around the Horn), working sails plus trisail, plus 2.2 oz. drifter;
- all new canvas including a new dodger and sail covers;
- all new B&G electronics powered by a Watt and Sea hydrogenerator and 300 watts of solar panel;
- a trim tab vertical windvane and a backup servo pendulum windvane;
- an inflatable dinghy stowed below decks;
- a new claw anchor stowed below decks;
- permanently sealed all large hatches and temporarily sealed all portholes.

We studied and practised storm weather tactics particularly heaving-to (thanks to the reference books, videos and professional and personal chats with Lin and Larry Pardey). Lin sent us the charts that she and Larry used going around the Horn which included handwritten details of safe anchorages for Bill to use... which came in handy when he was searching for shelter in Tierra del Fuego.”

Challenges

Fire

- Two electrical fires, a week apart, in the South Atlantic - completely separate. The first was in the engine compartment with a shorted kill solenoid and the second was in the battery compartment from a shorted out battery monitor with raw flames in both. Both heralded by smoke below decks when Bill was returning from sail changes in the middle of the night.

Gear failure

- Knocked down in the South Atlantic, water damaged his electronics and Bill had to stop in Cape Town for repairs.
- During a second knockdown in the Tasman sea, **Pixie's** cabin was inundated with water, destroying her electrical equipment, batteries and navigation charts. His back-up system was a hand-held GPS and an inflatable globe (perhaps this is why BCA leaver packages always contain a blow-up globe!) which got him safely around the fifth cape and north to Lyttleton.
- All the electronics were eventually lost as they slowly shut down with advancing corrosion as Bill and **Pixie** sailed the last leg up the Pacific - the after-effect of the knockdown and flooding in the Tasman Sea.

Weather

- "There be dragons"... An increasingly frequent heads-up from Bill that the weather was conspiring against him as he made his way towards Cape Horn and beyond into the Southern Oceans.
- Timing was difficult as Bill wanted to get to the Horn at the best time of the year for weather. He delayed arriving at the Horn until peak summer (stopping for four weeks in Gambier Islands due to his swift passage south from Victoria) but then it caught him at the end when approaching and leaving New Zealand.
- The weather in the Southern Ocean deteriorated as the summer season came to a close particularly in the Tasman Sea. The frequency and severity of the gales increased with the approach of the Southern winter.
- The most dangerous moment was underneath Tasmania when the boarding sea created a moment of dynamic instability and Pixie broached, filling her cabin with boarding seas.

Citizenship

Bill completed seven interviews with CBC Calgary while he was away, giving ordinary Canadians a sense of what it was like to be alone at the mercy of the Southern Oceans:

[https://www.cbc.ca/search?](https://www.cbc.ca/search?q=Bill%20Norrie%20sailing§ion=all&sortOrder=relevance&media=all)

[q=Bill%20Norrie%20sailing§ion=all&sortOrder=relevance&media=all](https://www.cbc.ca/search?q=Bill%20Norrie%20sailing§ion=all&sortOrder=relevance&media=all)

His story became the topic of many television interviews, articles and media coverage, especially upon his unexpected arrival in New Zealand in the middle of a global pandemic.

He also gave BCA members a taste of his experiences via an organization-wide club night and is scheduled to speak again in Spring 2021.

An active BCA member since 2009, a **Currents** contributor and club night speaker, Bill served as the Reception Watchkeeper for the Calgary Chapter for a number of years, giving up that position in summer 2019. Bill and Cathy completed their first circumnavigation in 2016. They now live in Victoria and are members of the VI Chapter. Future cruising plans? Sailing the Salish Sea and beyond...

- - - Submitted by Jennifer Handley, with details provided by Cathy Norrie. 2020.11.13