

**George Tinley was sailing home from the Azores when a huge, breaking sea suddenly came from dead astern**



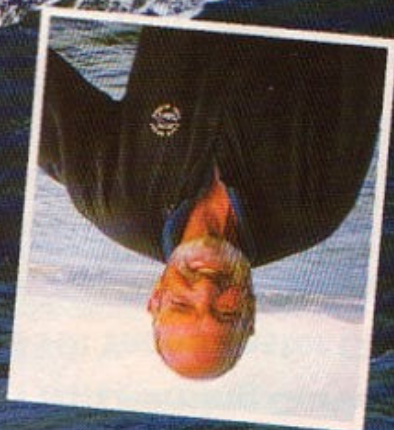
astaway is a Freedom 35 centreboard cat ketch, built for us in 1987. We have enjoyed sailing her over 80,000 miles, taking in six Atlantic crossings and several trips to the Azores and Canaries, as well as some racing in her earlier days. In 1999 her summer cruise was via the Spanish rias, Portugal, Gibraltar and the Canaries, to overwinter in Puerto Mogán on Gran Canaria. Now it was May 2000 and, with our usual complement of three persons, two of whom had never sailed in Castaway before, we were on our way home to Lythamton. First we crossed via Tenerife, Madeira and Santa Maria

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My crew were Ken Eakins and Tristan Jones. Ken, who has just retired, but is not yet as old as my 67 years, was doing his first long passage to qualify for Ocean Cruising Club membership. Tristan (no relation to the famous Tristan) was a dinghy sailor in his early twenties having a university gap year. We were pleased when he brought with him a catering degree.

Castaway (above), a Freedom 35, was sailing home from the Azores when huge seas and winds gusting to 45 knots made life difficult for George Tinley (inset)

# Castaway's knockdown!



**Learning Curve**





## Lessons Learnt

- We left the centreboard down this time, and it would have been better to have raised it to allow the hull to slide more easily through the water, as we have done previously. This may have stopped the boat pivoting around
- I should have streamed warps earlier, but in my defence it was only 35 knots steady, and we seemed comfortable
- I should have made more effort to distribute the weight of extra stores. Too much was sited forward and having only one man in the cockpit made it worse
- I should have taken the pramhood down before the sea removed it, although on a previous occasion we found that streaming warps slowed her too much and that the pramhood windage helped by providing a small amount of steerage way
- Following the knockdown, the two of us with the most experience took turns the third crew produced hot drinks and sandwiches. This worked well until we could get going again after eight hours
- I cut off the remains of the pramhood to tidy my little vessel. I should not have been so proud and at least made an attempt to cobble it up as some sort of shelter. Once it had gone, the wetness and exposure was awful. The hatch was shut tight to keep out rain and spray, but on entering or leaving lots of water poured down below. Even a hood with splits and rough repairs would have been better than nothing, in terms of protection for the watchkeeper
- We were 10 days out of Horta and, hearing another gale brewing up and right on track for us, we decided to put in to Falmouth to dry out, eat steaks and have hot showers. This was a good decision, and after a 24-hour respite we set off for the last, short leg to Lymington, well rested and content.

George Tinley has retired from running a wholesale flower nursery. A dinghy sailor, he chose to live in Lymington in 1957, but cruising always beckoned. Between racing commitments he bought an old 30-footer, devoid of engine and nav aids. Before *Castaway* was built in 1987, George had owned over 40 boats. He won the original Crystal Trophy Offshore Multihull race three years running. He raced an XOD, *Anitra*, winning the Captain's Cup at Cowes three times in the 1970s. *Windswept*, his OOD34, completed the 1979 Fastnet and, having suffered a knockdown followed by a 360° roll, made Cork under her own sail with George suffering a broken wrist and nose! He has sold *Castaway* and with his wife, Carol, is going to buy a comfy motor cruiser.

Left: Ken Eakins joined *Castaway* for the voyage to the Ocean Cruising Club. Inset: Tristan Jones, a qualified caterer, was a welcome addition to the crew



such seas by presenting our quarter but with my hood up, and not much peripheral vision, I hadn't seen it. There was a colossal impact and the stern lifted under me until I was looking vertically down to the bow.

Pitchpoling flashed through my mind, but *Castaway* slewed sideways and the breaking sea passed over her and, continuing on its way, removed the pramhood in the process, leaving us with a few bits of tattered fabric. Following this we immediately streamed warps – 140m of 20mm multipial to form one loop from quarter to quarter, and another loop about the same length made up of mooring warps, kedge lines etc. We have done this before, and *Castaway* immediately became docile. While a few more seas did invade us, as we steered to take the seas on our quarter. The most unpleasant part was being without our large and protective pramhood.

With this gone, the companionway and all the usually protected opening portholes had to be tightly closed. Even coming out or returning below let in a lot of water and the boat soon became very bedagbled and messy below decks. In retrospect, I had carried on too long in a very steep and breaking sea. I thought *Castaway* would cope and would warn me by starting to surf at dangerous speeds. I did not take account of her overloaded state, which was preventing her doing just that. This could be a major problem for some small cruisers. *Castaway* has a 33ft hull and is said by the brochure to displace 12,000lbs. When she was hoisted in the Canaries before a race to Barbados in 1994 the driver of the crane, having been told that she was six tons, wagged his finger at me and told me she was nine tons. Since then a lot more cruising gear has found its way aboard. Charts, books, booze, tinned food, spare parts, extra gas, extra fuel on deck in cans and extra water. You name it, we have it, and a lot of it is stowed well above the waterline. Poor *Castaway*. Not her fault, of course. But if that silly old owner will overload you, then what the hell are you meant to do about it! The blow lasted around eight hours and we were then able to retrieve our warps and get slowly underway again for Lymington.

## There was a colossal impact and the stern lifted under me until I was looking, vertically, down to the bow

So the next decision was to hand the main and get it neatly tied down for an impending blow. Having done that we were still making six to eight knots under bare poles, but at least on the right course for Lymington.

By dawn it was blowing a steady 35 knots and gusting up to 45, but the sea appeared to be building out of all proportion to the wind. It was very steep and confused, with heavy breaking crests. I also have to admit that *Castaway* was grossly overloaded with gear after her overwintering in the Canaries. She had been away from her home port for nearly a year and the gear had simply accumulated. She felt sluggish and was slow to respond as the seas came up steeply from astern, so I prepared warps to stream in case the wind and sea increased to what I considered were dangerous levels. However, before I finally made that decision, a huge breaking sea came from dead astern and broke clean and square against *Castaway's* large, fat transom. We normally prefer to take

we were looking. Tristan and Ken to tell me how the barometer was looking. We have a splendid Prosser electronic instrument and the news I was given, as I lay in my warm sleeping bag, was that there was a red light showing and the reading had fallen three points in the last hour! That was the end of my peaceful night. Arousing myself to assess the situation, I decided to hand the mizzen. *Castaway* was running fast on what was now a fairly wild, moonlit night. She was under goosewinged main and mizzen, both single-reefed, and dropping the mizzen was the first move. Checking the barometer, we found it in freefall and the wind was now gusting to 35 knots. Our mainsail can also be a handful to double reef, particularly when the halyard and wishbone hoists are not properly marked to enable accurate and easy reefing first time. I had replaced them both in Mogan before leaving and have to admit that I had not got around to the markings.

Following some pleasant downwind sailing for five days out of Horta, the first of a series of depressions rolled in. It was then that from my cosy bunk, I heard the watch changing at 0200. I was conscious of the changing motion as we started surfing down the seas, and I called out to Tristan and Ken to tell me how the barometer