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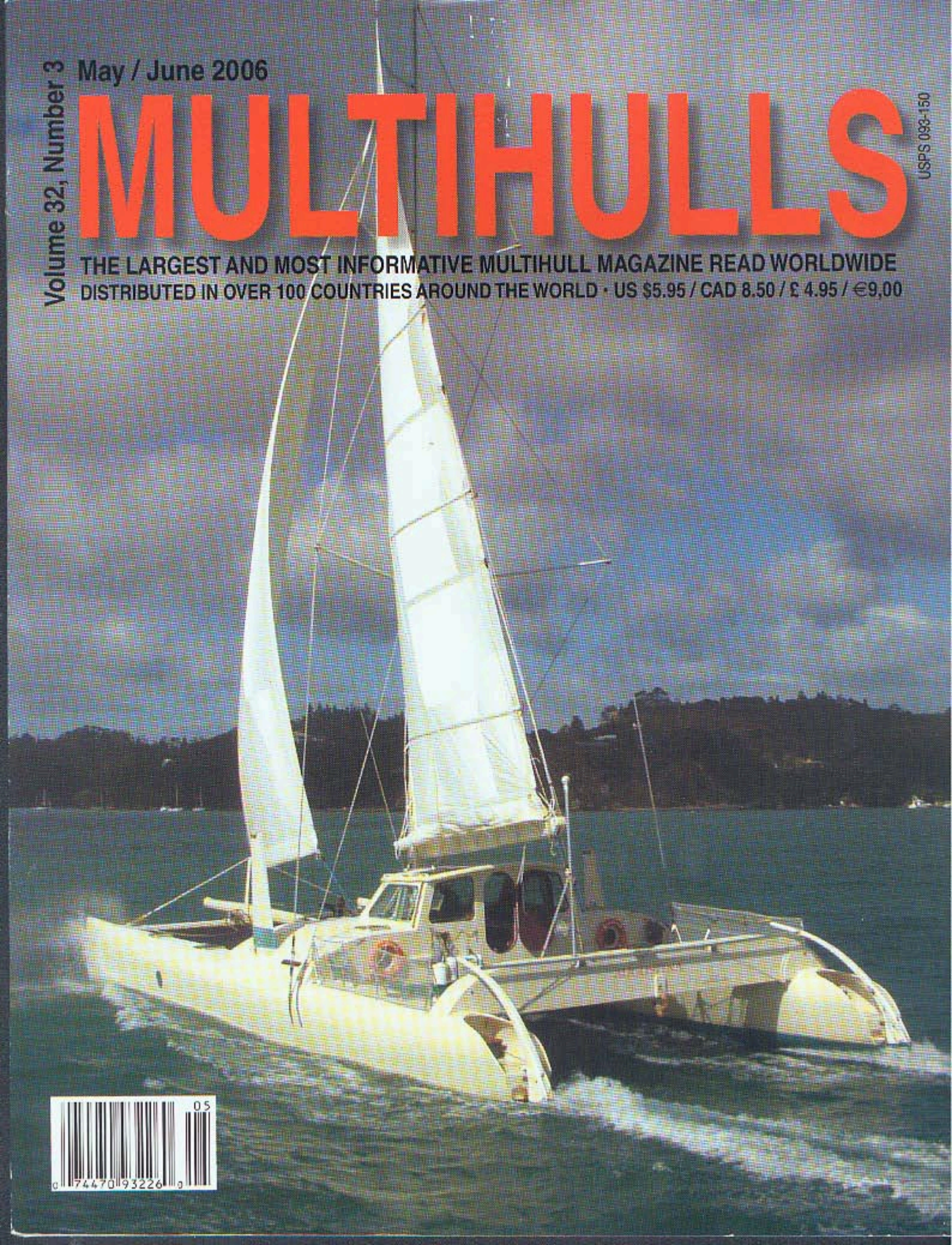

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Working In The Boatyard Blues

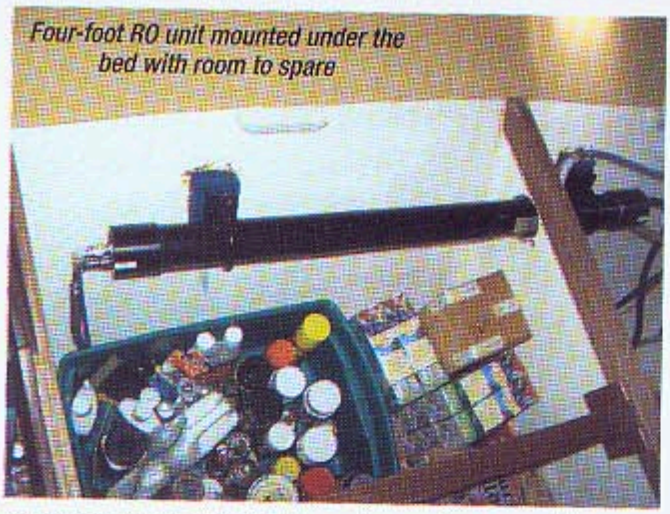
Laurie Corbett, ***Captain, s/v*** **Cat Tales**

"I Got Those Steadily Depressing, Low-down, Mind-messing, Working in the Boatyard Blues." My apologies to the late Jim Croce and his song about working in a car wash. Three weeks on the hard, doing your own work, in the Trinidad heat can get you down. Dawn and I had sailed our little Tobago 35, *Cat Tales*, from Canada to Trinidad, and had her hauled out in June, for storage during the hurricane season.

Before we flew home to New Brunswick for the summer, we had time to renew the ablative paint on her bottom and do the proper motor maintenance; and decided to do so while still somewhat acclimatized to the heat and humidity. We returned in late October, with quite a list of chores and needed to solve the problems of marine growth on our new folding propellers, and major leaks in our cabin escape hatches. We also had to replace a missing saildrive hull boot, install solar panels, a new forward trampoline, a watermaker, and a new ham antenna and tuner. Seeing the sites of Trinidad was also on the list, but sadly, near the bottom.

Arriving from the airport by taxi in the wee hours of the morning, and finding *Cat Tales* pretty much how we left her, but with a few extra layers of dirt, and also with the door unlocked. Didn't we lock the door? The tidiness of the inside, and all our expensive electronics still in their slots convinced us that there had been no break-in; but over the following weeks, we added up a significant little list of missing items. Working with Mr. Morrin of Peake's security forces, it was determined that the thieves entered through the cockpit window, simply by removing six screws and breaking the seal. They sorted through every nook and cranny, took only those things they understood and could find useful, tidied up, and left the door unlocked as they left. However, they got caught leaving another boat, and many of our items were found in their possession. We were shown the items at the police station: my best pliers and wire-cutters, my best screwdriver set with drill attachments, the best flashlights, numerous other small items and, most importantly, my Leatherman Wave. Those familiar with Leathermans know that these little multi-tools

Cat Tales *on the hard*


Four-foot RO unit mounted under the bed with room to spare

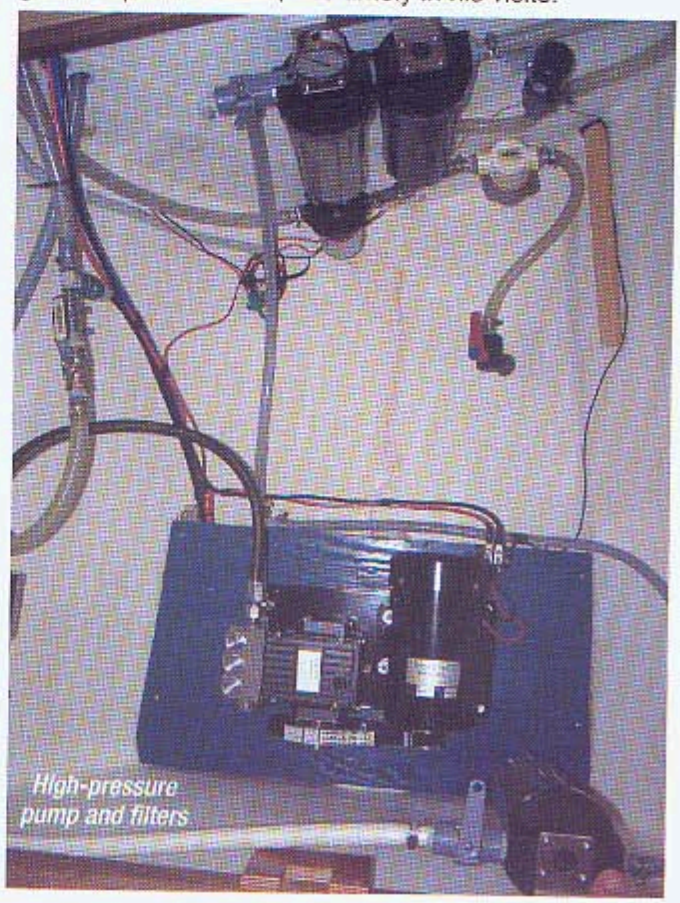
are addictive; and if you are used to wearing one while doing boat maintenance, you manage poorly without it. – Luckily, the police had most of what was missing. – Unluckily, in Trinidad, they prefer to keep all evidence until justice is totally done – and then, we're not sure. I finally picked up a new Leatherman on one of the many trips to the chandlery. The loss of the screwdriver set, with the flexible tubular universal, will haunt us surely.

Getting things done in Chaguaramas, especially during their busiest season, can be trying: with many promises made and broken. It appears the workers and contractors try to please everyone, and frustrate many. The problem stems from the continued growth of popularity of the place, and the lagging supply of people and equipment. A veteran of the place suggested that there was an increase of near 500 new yachts using the area over the summer.

The "critical path" items for us were the solar power and the watermaker, so our first efforts were towards getting these started. Knowing that face-to-face communication is best, we walked to the Echo Marine factory to make inquiries about our previously ordered gear. This and other trips are easy in Chaguaramas, as those few places that are farther away than a 25-minute walk can be reached by using the YSATT water taxi (5-10 $TT, or 1-2$US). It took a few trips to get enough equipment from them to start the job, but at least it was started. We had decided to do the work ourselves; to save money and to better understand it for future trouble-shooting. It helped that the boat was just beside Peake's chandlery so that the many trips for little electrical and plumbing parts could be done. There were times that I made 3 trips per hour.

As the pictures indicate, we opted for the 12-volt model, which promises 8 USG per hour at 20 amps. The engine-run model just could not fit alongside the Yanmar 2GM20 engines in our little Tobago. An advantage with the Tobago, and with most cats in general, is that there are great spaces for these installations; even if the electrical wires must often be upsized to travel much greater distances. The Echo system brings the seawater through a wire screen, a small booster pump, a 20-micron filter, a 5-micron filter, through the high-pressure pump, and then through the RO unit. A 10-micron filter, with activated carbon is also required to allow for backwashing the unit and the prefilters. The charcoal de-activates any chlorine that may be in your system water – a damaging material as far as RO filters are concerned.

We placed our complete setup under the starboard middle bunk by using plywood found in a waste-bin. We connected the inlet to an existing through-hull used by our cold-plate refrigerator, and the outlet to the existing refrigerator cooling water outlet. Special care was taken to ensure the heavy electric motor and pump were properly secured, as they could trash a through-hull easily if they came loose during a crossing. The most difficult item to place is the 4-foot RO unit, but as you can see, a hole through a bulkhead allowed it to be placed without loss of storage. It took me, an amateur, over 20 hours to install the equipment, but the time was spread over 10 days, with much other work done during delays caused by missing fittings, runs to the chandlery for other work, and head-scratching. Thomas, Echo Marine's technician, was a great help with advice, and timely in his visits.


High-pressure pump and filters

Solar wing panel

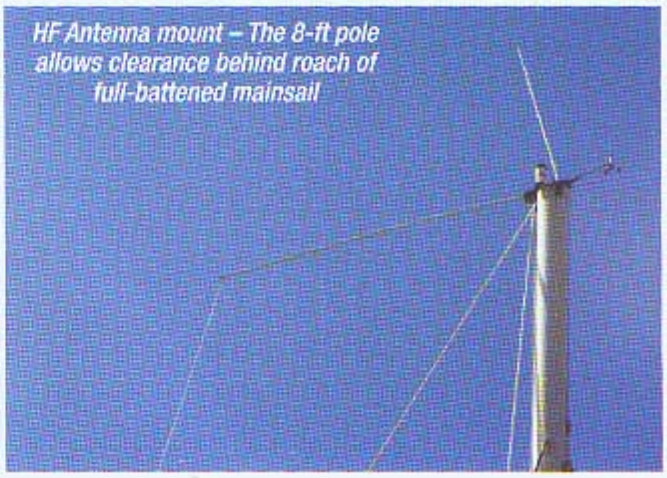
Two Sharp 124-Watt solar panels were imported and waiting for me at Marine Warehouse in the Tardieu Marine yard. They also brought in many replacement parts from West Marine and other North American suppliers, all at reasonable prices. The panels were 59" by 26", much larger than expected. A search for a competent welder led me to Dexter, in the Dynamite Marine Services complex. He had been the only one to actually show up at a friend's boat after their long searches, so he was Number One in mine. What a find he was. He talked me out of an arch; and after a long discussion of options, focused on the Tobago's quite robust dinghy davits. These 2" ss pipes go through the stern of the cockpit to bolt into mini-bulkheads behind the cockpit seats. They also have flush-mount plates that are bolted into the stern skin of the cockpit, and are screwed into the same bulkhead. Finally, 1" struts support the assembly from a lower fiberglass flange that wraps around the back of the cockpit between the sterns. Dexter brought two pipes up to the level of our bimini, and created a simple wing of the two panels with a 2" pipe and appropriate flanges. The installation is simple and elegant, as the picture attests. Welds are factory-perfect.

I opted to install the wiring to the exterior of the piping, although I may change this in the future. The hollow areas behind the cockpit and the openings for the tiller-connector bar made access to the batteries quite easy. With the panels supplementing the Airex wind generator installed last year, there are often days when I can run both refrigeration and make 8 gallons of water without running the engine.

Another unique addition to the boat is a tuner and antenna, imported by Navtech Electronics, in the Coral Cove yard. They provided a SG237 Smartuner, and some special wire suitable for use as a backstay-type antenna. The wire is a thin, tight coil of stainless steel inside a thin plastic sheath. To get around the problem of the outrageous roach and long boom on the Tobago, I installed an eight-foot fiberglass stick to the top of the mast, trailing horizontally back. It was an unused 8' tiller for a Hobie beach cat, with a stainless steel sleeve at the hinge end that I had thrown aboard before leaving Canada. Frankly, I think an offshore or salmon fishing rod would have been even better. I installed it at the top of the mast with two screws through the sleeve, and a 5/8" eyelet as a "u" clamp. A 1/8" line comes down to the wire so that the wire is 34' long (some old ham operators say this is optimum, while others would run the antenna wire completely to the top). I used some plumbing pieces to insulate the wire at one end of the new solar wing, installed the bottom 8' of the wire inside a 1/4" tube to protect the innocent from radiation burns, and then took the wire inside to the tuner through a tiny hole in the hull. I much prefer the 10' wing to a truss-like arch, and am happy we had the option.

This setup replaces a 20-meter inverted "v" antenna and some "hustler-style" coil/stinger antennas we were using for 20 and 40 meters. What a great improvement. The Smartuner needs only 12 volts, a ground plane, and a strong HF signal from my Kenwood TS-50 transceiver to do the job of tuning. I am now annoying net controls at many frequencies, and sending e-mail at 3 times the efficiency. The few who notice the installation accept the strange aesthetics quite well, while my ham friends in Canada say I have the best signal in the Caribbean.

Many other jobs filled our time. The growth of salt behind the gaskets of our escape hatch created a constant flow from the sea to the bilge during crossings. We opted to do our own cleaning and polishing, as well as the usual motor and battery maintenance. Although not a mechanic nor electrician, I am guided by the writings of Nigel Calder. The typical delays in each job resulted in a lot of jumping around the checklists. In one day I have had, under my


HF Antenna mount – The 8-ft pole allows clearance behind roach of full-battened mainsail

nails: diesel, gas, phosphoric acid, muriatic acid, battery acid, polyester and epoxy resins, soaps, WD40 and other solvents, three different 3M wax products, and lanolin. The lanolin is a new treatment we tried, to keep barnacles off the big brass propellers. It didn't work, and a month later I am back to sanding and scraping the propellers at the end of each snorkeling adventure.

The choice to do our own cleaning and waxing was a bad one, however. Admiral Dawn, taking advantage of our little cat's nearness to ground-level, and attempting to make up for her 5' height, decided to put a 5-gallon bucket on top of a Rubbermaid stool to reach a little more area with the polish. When the inevitable happened, she broke at least one rib, and shattered the stool. She spent the next two weeks in bed, thankful that we were maintaining an air-conditioner over the little galley hatch. Not only was I without a helper, but my work increased substantially, as she could not even get into or out of bed without assistance, for the first week. She could not cough, and remained fearful of a sneeze for 4 weeks. (Holistic treatments failed to bring about a recovery for the Rubbermaid stool, and it was chucked.)

The accident quashed all hopes of enjoying Trinidad's sights. As a result of being befriended by one of the yard workers, we had an opportunity to join a local family for the Hindu holiday of Duvali; but even that had to be turned

Cat Tales *back in her element*

Cheyenne

down. Instead, when Dawn could walk a little, and the daylight was gone, we would take a libation and walk the boatyard. The many catamarans were a delight for me, who had spent so much time in similar surroundings, looking for our own cruising cat. We also met many other hard-working owners trying to get their boat ready for splashing.

The hardest-working people were forever buzzing around a 41' Kennex named *Splendid Adventurer*. Captain Phil and his wife Nikola were on a schedule, as they had charter customers waiting on the Grenadine island of Canouan. Helpful and entertaining, we look forward to meeting them in less stressful situations. Many other friendships were created among the hard-working, small-boat crews. As well, there were many cruisers and "cattle"-marans to see, during the hour-per-day we would unwind.

One amazing sighting, was the mastless *Cheyenne*: Steve Fossett's 125' record-breaking machine. On its way to California, it came in and parked beside the launching slip, about the only place in Chaguaramas where it could fit. With only the well-strapped boom left of its rigging, and with numerous similarly strapped fuel barrels, it was a curious sight. Apparently, after losing its mast off the coast of Argentina, it was offered for sale. A low level of interest may have led Fossett to change his mind, and he directed a crew to motor it to California for a refit and new rigging. Although lucky to see one of the world's marvels, I would have rather seen it complete and underway.

A final item of interest, we sat through an earthquake while on the hard. We were hoisting a "sundowner" in the cockpit, still filthy from the day's efforts, when the Richter Scale hit 5.5. The boat was sandwiched between the concrete toilets and a towering 108' steel monohull, and we were able to see the big boat straining on the stands as it rocked towards and away from us. Very scary – and I was forced to down my drink rather than spill it. However, no damage was reported in the yards as a result of the rattling.

We got a lot done: new solar panels, watermaker, new anodes, windlass control, bottom paint, hull cleaning, dozens of little repairs, and special safety checks. As with most boats leaving a yard, however, there was lots left; a new trampoline to install, interior cleaning, exterior waxing, etc. We have three leaks to manage; the worst being a seawater pump that requires the removal of a heavy hot-water tank to gain access. All can be done at anchor and many can be done "up island."

Cat Tales looks and feels like a true cruiser now. The extra complexity and energy requirements of a watermaker is traded for the weight of one of the two water tanks – meaning a decrease of 500 lb – and eliminates the trips through expensive yachts to tie up to a water dock. The solar panels provide extra energy and decrease the need for fuel. The antenna and tuner provide reliable communication, without returning to shore.

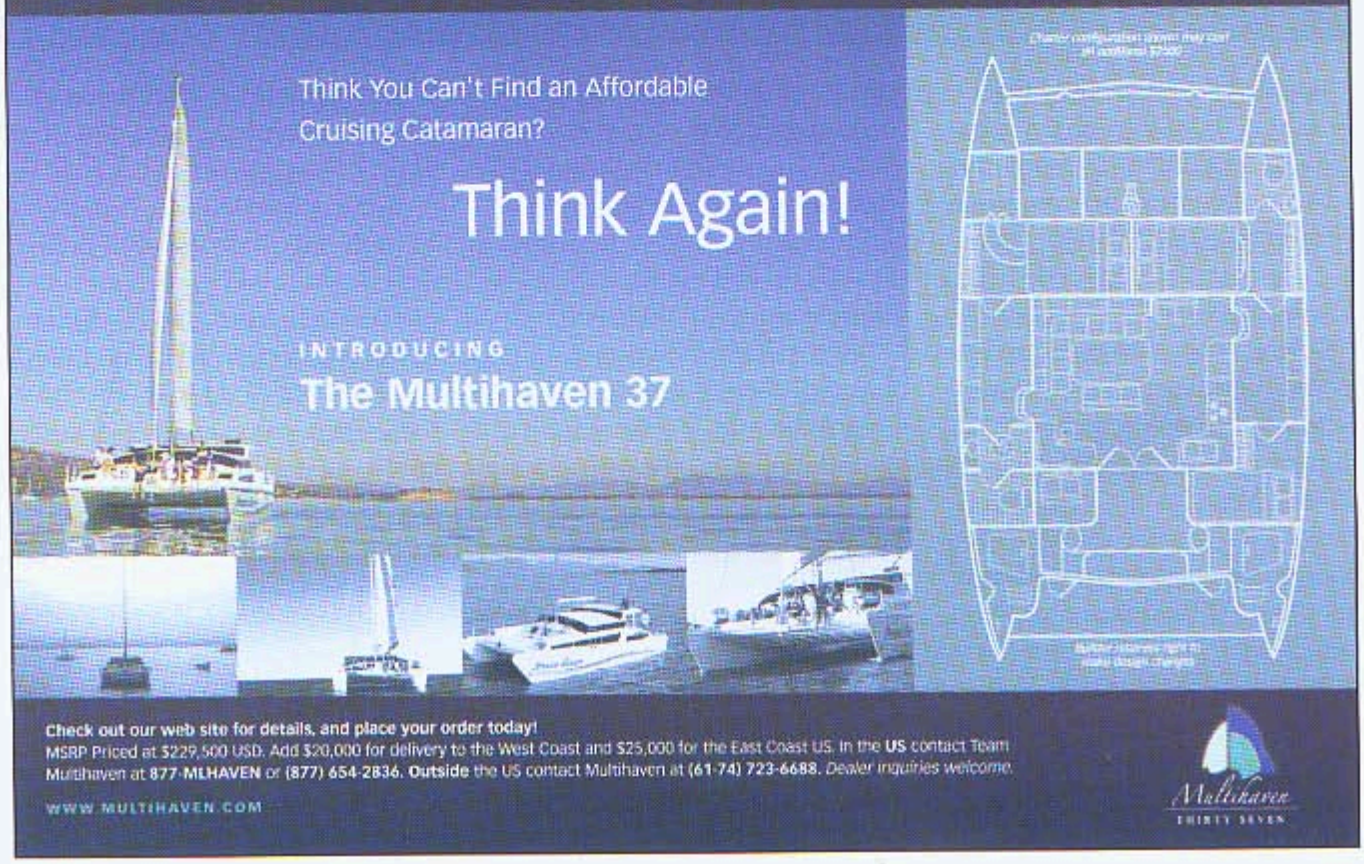
Chaguaramas, Trinidad has a lot going for it from a cruiser's point of view. Considered south of the hurricane belt, it and its vast boatyards are also rather protected behind towering Trinidad mountains. There are about 10 major establishments on this property, which not long ago was an American naval base. These offer a great variety of services, and are supported by literally dozens of contractors, suppliers, and manufacturers. This large group has also created an association for coordination, customer services, and quality management. Anybody not yet sold on Chaguaramas should contact Yacht Services Association of Trinidad & Tobago (**www.ysatt.org**) or peruse a Trinidad & Tobago boaters' directory.

(**www.BoatersEnterprise.com**)

I do recommend Chaguaramas as a place to get things done, and offer these recommendations for haulout, storage, and work in Chaguaramas:

1. Do pay the extra for the higher security if leaving the boat;
2. Don't expect to recover what is stolen, even if the thief is caught;
3. Don't leave dinghy-davit blocks, bridles, or other hardware hanging down from the deck for someone to take;
4. Do opt for air conditioning to both control mold growth and to make it reasonable to do inside upgrades and maintenance;
5. Double the expected time to get it all done;
6. Other recommendations may be found in Chris Doyle's "Guide to Trinidad and Tobago."

At Multihaven, we think buyers looking for cruising catamarans are not finding their dreams very affordable. We are offering them a better choice: a fully-loaded* cruising cat delivered to the US for less than $250K USD! How are we able to do this? Our cat is Australia designed and proven, and has many unique and useful features, including a composite dinghy, a unique dinghy elevator, and more. And because we're producing our boats in China, we're able to offer the best boat at an unheard-of, low price!



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