



# NORTHERN LAUNCH

BY LAURIE AND DAWN CORBETT

Launch-day in the north is a big thing. Like everywhere, there is the stress of having your boat travel overland and being handled by heavy equipment. However, in the north it represents the culmination of significant preparation and de-winterizing. On top of that, Dawn and I were hoping to have *Cat Tales* ready for extended cruising. We intend to head to the Caribbean from Canada, via Bermuda, after the hurricane season.

We had put *Cat Tales*, a 1996 Tobago 35, on the hard prior to the formation of ice on the local lakes and rivers, and prior to the first snowfall. We hauled her out on a trailer customized out of a mobile home chassis, and left her on the trailer in the yard on the bank of the St. John River in New Brunswick, Canada. After removing the sails and all fabrics, a big tent went up over her, to get the snow to

slide to each side, and all materials and fluids that could freeze were dealt with. Over the winter, our plans began to congeal for the launch. Our new intentions would be to quit our jobs, repair and upgrade the equipment, and sail the boat to the Caribbean where it would stay for at least two years.

The boat needed all the tender loving care that had been withheld while it had spent six years in the charter trade in Martinique. We had owned and worked on her for two years, but were still far behind. Finding time to do the work while we were winding up our careers was going to be difficult. We scheduled the launch for the last week of June, same time as the end of our careers and the abandonment of our apartment. If ready, we would move the boat to our cottage on Grand Lake, 45 nautical miles away by water.



Just dismantling the tent was no small thing. We had used \$300 worth of new lumber and tarpaulins to ward off the snow. The year before had been our "winter of discount-tent" with two ice storms forcing us to almost reconstruct the shelter in terrible conditions after two icestorms tore most of it down. Removing the new and improved assembly after the last snowstorm took a full weekend. It was the same weekend as my ham radio exam cramming session, so tension was high.

Removing the anti-freeze glycol took an evening. It was in the bottom of both water tanks, all the water hoses and pumps, in the toilet system, in the freshwater cooling system of both engines, and in the bilge pump system. Even though it is supposedly "food grade," getting rid of that stuff on land was more environmentally friendly. It was also the right time to clean up the engine bilge areas, and track down mold and debris. A strange reddish fluid and related mold under the floorboards of the starboard hull caused us some concern, until we tracked it to a forgotten bottle of red wine quite far forward, which had frozen and expelled its own cork.

Repairs to the mast and boom could be done while the weather was still cold. A new stainless steel plate covered an aluminum tear near an eyelet for a mainsheet pulley, and the boom end cap was taken to a shop for welding. Z-Spar uses big rivets, so a special rivet gun had to be borrowed for reassembly.

Replacing the motor mounts under the Yanmars had been completed in the fall, under the new tent. However, the job uncovered some deception. The port engine mounts were epoxied on. A drill hole at the bottom of the plinth or box upon which the engines sit demonstrated why. The box was filled with water. The first spring job was to move the engine forward, and remove the sail drive to inspect the installation. I couldn't find a sure entry-point for water, but re-glassed, re-gelcoated, and epoxied the plinth. Finding warm, dry weather for glasswork was a chore in New Brunswick's usually wet springs. A secondary seal had become loose on the sail drive, and had to be reinstalled

as well. New fuel valves were also installed; a problem, as the existing equipment had different threads than anyone in Canada could match. The solution was to reconnect both sides of the valves with hose and clamps.

As the spring weather finally warmed enough to allow working without gloves, we began to prepare the undersides and hull areas. We had been told that the two extra bulkheads, just behind the bows, had been installed by the charter company, because the hulls had "pumped" in the Caribbean swells. It was time to check their work. As expected, the six-foot cracks in the bows had just been filled with bondo and re-gelcoated. We ground the bows down and relaid the glass as best we could. I designed a method to allow multi layers to be held in place, for 14-inch sections, even upside down. We would lay the glass on plastic sheets, then stretch and tape the sheets on the bow. It not only ensured a good bond, but the elasticity of the plastic tended to wring out the excess resin. We gave up trying to keep the swarms of mosquitoes out of the white gelcoat. Oh well, it didn't match the original white anyway. Sometimes perfection is a waste of time and mental health. We focused on keeping the ones full of our blood out of the coating. Springtime in Atlantic Canada!

Against the advice of many boaters, we used a power-washer to try to remove the bottom paint. In fact, we sprayed, scraped, sanded, and repeated the cycle. At least, power washing can be done in the rain. We were getting lots of that. There was some combination of ablative paints, and some type of grey barrier-coat, possibly Interprotect on the bottoms, which had obviously failed to bond in many areas. Fountaine Pajot suggests that no such coating is necessary, as the boats are built out of isophthalic polyester resins that successfully protect against osmosis and blistering. We touched up the repaired areas with a Pettit barrier coat, as we didn't have isophthalic resins, and applied three layers of Pettit ACP50 ablative. We made the first layer black and the following layers blue, so that we might see when erosion had reached in two layers and reapplication might be necessary. Hopefully this would do for two years.



The week before launch, a new bimini, new sails and the repaired trampoline arrived. The tramp had tested at over 500 pounds strength for each string of the net, so we declined to completely renew it. Bad news for the sails, however... both the main and the jib required modifications, so it was back to the bus station for them. It was also time to install our new Flex-o-fold propellers. The owner of the yard, Lee Colter, suggested they should be installed as late as possible. Displaying that much shiny material unnecessarily is just asking for trouble.

Finally, launch day! As we were still working, we arranged for Lee and his driver, Arlee, to back our boat in at 4:30 in the afternoon of the last Friday of the month. Dawn had finished her teaching job a few days earlier, and I snuck away from my job early. What were they going to do? Fire me? Lee had access to the ramp for himself and his clients, but the marina was a private affair, and there was no place to go if technical problems developed. Once more, it was pouring rain; and strong winds would cause real problems if the engines would not start. The narrow ramp area was ringed with heavy riprap boulders to control shore erosion.

With Arlee's expertise, and some luck, the launch went off quite successfully. We backed out of the narrow, dangerous marina, and into the River's current without a problem. A few quick good-byes, and we were on our way downriver. Against good judgment, we confess we celebrated the event with rum and cola. Our new bimini was equipped with a vinyl windshield, and we remarked about how much more comfortable the cockpit was with it. Although vision through it was a little blurry, it kept the sheets of hard rain out of the steering area, and maintained reasonable comfort in the cockpit.

Midway through the celebratory drink, the starboard engine sputtered to a stop. As Dawn took over the steering, I carried my drink, headlamp, tools and Nigel Calder's book: "Boatowner's Mechanical and Electrical Manual" down to the engine. With the bed out of the way, one can set up a fairly convenient mechanic's working area in a

Tobago. I read, bled, and read some more, following the fuel as Nigel directed. Dawn pressed the starter and it came back to life. However, it soon failed again. After a few iterations, it was time to think of where the air might be coming from. After standing on my head to retighten the hose clamps around the new fuel valves, my troubleshooting bore fruit and my evening was freed up.

Even in the rain, the St. John River Valley is beautiful. Well marked boating channels take you through lush greenery, stately elms, bald eagles, osprey, and picturesque islands. There are a few salmon left, and catching one jumping is pretty neat. Many of the islands are inhabited by cattle, that are left by farmers to fatten up on their own. If you are so immature as to "moo" at them, they'll often talk back.

With the wind and the rain on our nose, we didn't miss the sails. Indeed, it was a proper time to assess the new folding propellers. I remain convinced that we get an extra knot out of them under power. We stopped behind Ox Island for the night, at 8:00; as the wet, overcast night had turned prematurely dark. In spite of the weather, we agreed over supper that it was darned good to be afloat again. We slept well, as the wind fought for supremacy over the strong spring current to determine which way *Cat Tales* should lay at anchor.

The rain continued the next day, and we motored for five more dismal hours, before reaching the cottage. It was only after unloading the boat and getting to the deck of the cottage that the rain stopped. There was more work ahead for us before the boat could be seaworthy. We planned new shrouds, new ground tackle, a sea anchor, storm jib, wind generator, electrical upgrades, and storage systems; but that could wait. We opened the cottage and unloaded the bags. The cottage, stuffed with furniture, book cases, and clothing quickly reminded us that we had left our urban home and our jobs. Moments later, as we turned around to face our boat and our future, a double rainbow touched down on *Cat Tales'* bows.

We'll take it as a good omen. ☐