

Trawler Talk

Cruising PDQ 41 Power Catamaran from Ontario to Wisconsin

As we mentioned last month in our article about "Trawlers on the Move", we would be taking delivery of our new 41 PDQ Power Catamaran at the factory in Whitby, Ontario and cruising her back to Wisconsin via the Welland Canal and four of the Great Lakes.



PDQ 41 Power Catamaran

Several things needed to be completed well in advance. About two months prior we went on-line to Customs and Border Protection to order the required decal to be displayed on the boat. The cost of the decal was \$25.00. A month before we booked plane tickets from Milwaukee to Toronto. This year the one-way price was better than a round trip, which in the past was the other way around. The Welland Canal has a requirement of three adults on board for all upbound pleasure craft. It's called "upbound" even though on a map we are going south, because it refers to the water levels and we will be entering all the locks when they are down and they will fill to raise us to the new level. They expect a lot of turbulence in the locks because they fill fast so they want one person on the bowline, one on the stern, and one to man the helm. About two weeks before, we contacted a man from Canada, Fred White, who we've worked with before. The Welland Canal employs him, but on his day off he hires himself out for this job at \$100.00. We scheduled him for May 16 when we plan to make the trip.

Packing for this trip has to be very well planned and organized. Our luggage probably created some very unusual pictures on the luggage video scanners at the airport. We try to take as many of the items we need for the cruise back to avoid having to buy things we already have, such as life vests, rain suits, extra lines, a tool kit, binoculars, hand-held VHF radio, Navionics charts, guide books and paper charts, laptop computer, a set of sheets and a blanket, small coffee pot to heat water, set of plastic dishes and utensils (trying to be environmentally friendly!), one 10" frying pan, our big digital lighted clock, and numerous smaller items. We need to pack "warm & cold" clothes as you know how unpredictable the weather is here in the Midwest in May. We managed to fit all this into four suitcases and two carry-ons with our largest bag weighing in at 42 pounds.

The weight limit is 50 lbs and you pay an extra \$40.00 if it's overweight, spoken from past experience.

The items we would have to buy in Canada that just can't be put in a suitcase included 2 pillows, a throwable, flares, a boat hook, and the large ball fenders we feel are a must. There is a convenient marina store next to the Whitby Marina and a couple blocks away a large Canadian Tire store (like our Fleet Farms) so we can easily find the needed items.

It's about 35 miles from the airport to Whitby, so we rented a car from Enterprise finding out ahead of time that they allow a drop-off in Whitby for an extra \$50.00. We had to go with convenience, not economy.

Spending two days at the PDQ University was very helpful as we learned the details of the electrical system and helpful hints and suggestions to get the most out of the electronics package installed on the boat. A presentation by representatives from Yanmar Diesel Engines and Northern Lights Generators was interesting and informative.



Boat handling course for women at PDQ U

The boat handling classes are always well received as the men and women are separated. A female captain who makes the experience less threatening instructs the women and each person is allowed a chance at the helm to dock and undock the boat. This is a big catamaran but it handles beautifully. The new electronic controls operate so smoothly you can actually control both engines with one hand. With one engine in forward and the other in reverse, it will turn a tight circle.



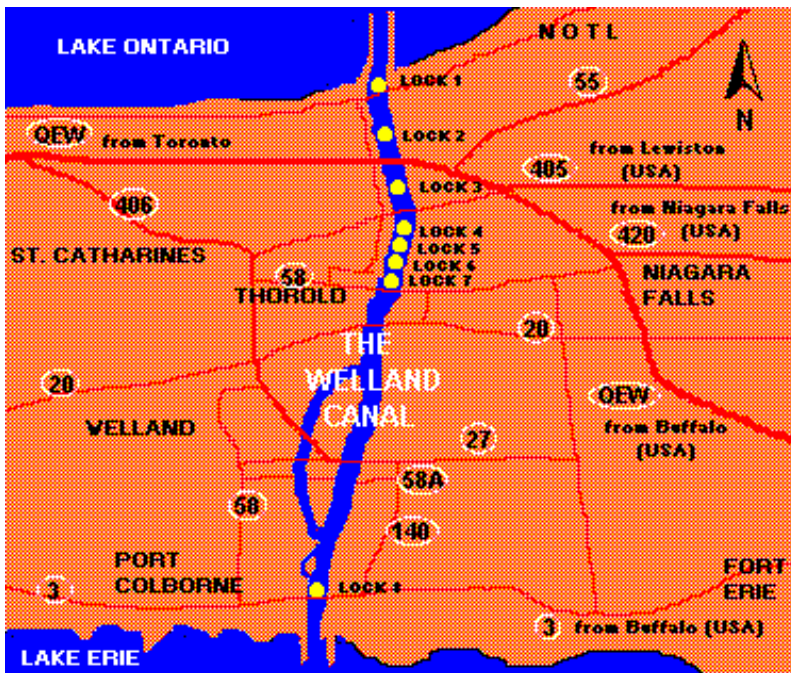
PDQ 41's and 34's at Whitby Marina

The camaraderie is always great too as we socialize with the other catamaran owners and the staff of PDQ Yachts. Saying our thank you's and good-byes, we cruised out of Whitby midmorning on Wednesday, May 16th, and headed south on Lake Ontario for Port Weller and the start of the Welland Canal. About halfway across the lake we encountered really thick fog. Setting the range on the radar at ½ mile we felt we could keep a safe distance from any obstacles.



Encountering a large freighter in fog

A blip on the radar at the one o'clock position showed something moving toward us. Karen went right up to the front windows to watch closer and soon saw an object, which was coming closer and turned out to be a large freighter. Had we not seen it and continued on our course we may have experienced a very close encounter. Never hurts to be too diligent in fog.



Welland Canal

The Welland Canal is located in the Niagara region of Ontario, Canada between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. It is a vital link in the St. Lawrence Seaway passage from the Atlantic Ocean to midwestern Canada and the United States. The canal is about 27 miles in length and includes

seven lift locks and one guard lock that is used annually by over 3000 ocean and lake vessels plus numerous large pleasure craft boats. It allows vessels to be lifted the 326 feet from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. This is a man-made canal that was first built in 1824 and has been re-built three times. There is a lot of information on the canal at www.wellandcanal.com.

We arrived in Port Weller at noon and Fred was there to meet us. He informed us that we would be waiting about 4 hours because of the tows and freighters going through. Commercial traffic has precedence over pleasure boats. We had to check in with customs on the phone located there and report the size of our boat, where we started from and where we were traveling to, and how many people were on board. Then the next booth had a machine that allowed you to enter your info and pay for a one-way pass at \$160.00 using a charge card.



Toll booth and Customs booth

Having that taken care of, we decided to have a sandwich and do some reading as we passed the time. We entered Lock 1 at 4 pm at Mile 0.



Entering Lock 1 – PDQ 34 ahead of us

There are 8 locks on the canal and the first port you can tie up at is at mile 27 at Port Colborne so once you start the process, you must continue through the entire canal. The first time we made this passage two years ago, we locked through in 4 hours. That was not the case this time. We had about an hour wait at Lock 2 and proceeded right on through Lock 3. As we approached the next three locks we were told to tie up on the wall. That turned out to be a 3-hour wait as several freighters were locking through ahead of us.



Our entertainment whiling waiting for the Lock

Locks 4, 5 and 6 are flight locks, meaning they are just separated by the gates and you go directly from one to the other.



Lines are attached to cleats on the boat on the side furthest from wall



Lines are attached as shown (one on bow and one on stern) to allow you to continue to pull them in as the water in the Lock fills and the boat goes up. This needs to be done to hold the boat close to the wall because the turbulence of the water as it fills would really push the boats around.

We finally reached Lock 7 at 9 pm, which is when Fred left us. Two freighters, each locked through separately, came through before we were allowed to go in.



Large freighter coming out of Lock as we enter

Lock 8 is only a 5-foot rise in elevation so we didn't even have to tie up...just hovered in the middle until the gate opened. It was now after 11 and we had a 15-mile run in the dark so we kept our cruise at about 9 knots. It was lighted pretty well along the sides so we could always see that we were in the channel. We still kept a vigilant watch on the depth sounder.



Running the canal after dark

By now, it had really cooled down and we needed to steer from the upper helm for best visibility. We actually used our bath towels as neck scarves to try to keep warm.....it may have looked weird but on a boat you sometimes have to improvise! We grabbed a dock at Port Colborne at 1:20 am. Sure glad we didn't know at 4 pm when we started out just how long this was really going to take!



Docked at Port Colborne

Waking to overcast skies and a light breeze, we thought it best to get underway. We would be crossing Lake Erie with a destination of Erie, Pennsylvania. This is where we need to go through customs. Lynne Sheahan at PDQ Yachts notifies a customs broker ahead of time approximately when we will be arriving.

Cruising at 17 knots (20.4 miles per hour) in 2-3 foot seas is a very comfortable ride in the PDQ 41 Power Catamaran. You hardly notice the waves or the speed; it just lopes along so easily. And the real beauty of this is you're only burning 10 gallons/hour at that speed.

We arrived in Erie at noon spotting the lighthouse at the end of the Dobbin's Landing pier. An easy tie up on the wall of the large stationary pier made it easy to go ashore to the US Customs phone located on the pier.



Tied up on pier at Dobbin's landing – Customs phone on right



Customs taking picture of passport

It has been updated since we were here last and now has a camera that takes your picture as well as a picture of your passport. All persons on board are photographed. It really feels weird because you are told to stand in front of the phone and look straight ahead. They have a camera in there somewhere. This is also where we need the number from our Decal that I mentioned earlier that we purchased before hand. That process all went very smooth and we were soon underway again. Lake conditions remained the same so we were really making good time. We passed Cleveland, Ohio, noting all the skyscrapers from a distance.



Cleveland, Ohio from a distance

We like to go to ports we haven't been to before whenever we get a chance so on this trip we know we will make Lorain, Ohio, before dark. Our Lake Erie Guide Book directed us to Spitzer Lakeside Marina just inside the harbor. This marina was once the home of American Shipbuilding where many of the giant ore ships on the Great Lakes were built. The ship yard closed in recent years and has been replaced by marinas for pleasure boaters.



Tied up at Spitzer Lakeside Marina in Lorain, Ohio

A very nice restaurant within walking distance was recommended by the locals so we took their sound advice and enjoyed a pleasant dinner and evening.

Friday dawns with another beautiful day and calm seas with waves 1-2 feet. We soon spot the large ferris wheel at Cedar Point amusement park near Sandusky and cruise past Kelleys Island, well noted for its restaurants and night-life. Before long we are entering the Detroit River, meeting and passing a lot of big freighters. Their immense size at such a close distance is really impressive.



Passing freighters on the Detroit River

The cluster of six GM (General Motors) buildings at the waters edge make a bold statement reminding us of the huge auto industry that dominates Michigan's economy.



GM Headquarters in Detroit, Michigan

Across the river from Detroit is the city of Windsor, Canada. For a good trivia question, it is the only Canadian city south of the United States. It is well known for its 900 parks within the city boundaries.



Windsor, Canada across the river from Detroit

We cross the 24-mile wide St. Clair Lake in equally calm seas and we know this lake is not always such a lamb. It is a shallow lake averaging only 12 foot of depth and can really kick up a fuss in certain wind conditions. Soon we are tooling up the St. Clair River, which some say is not a river but a 39-mile strait connecting St. Clair and Lake Huron. We again realize how many folks do live "on the waterfront". This river is lined with homes of all shapes and sizes, covering the whole gamut of the economy. It's the same all over when small homes on big lots are torn down and replaced with big homes now on small lots.



Homes along the St. Clair River

Arriving in Port Huron around 4 pm gave us plenty of daylight before we needed to find a dock so we cruised up the Pine River to River's Bend Marina where a 40' Vinette steel hull boat that we are brokering is located. We've not seen the boat other than pictures and it's always a good idea for us to be able to board the boats we are selling for the owner. A gal at the marina was very helpful in directing us to their location. The river is very narrow and we're mostly showing 3-4 feet on our depth sounder. Bringing a brand new boat into an unknown area like this is pretty intimidating. Julie continues to reassure us that we'll be OK.



40' Vinette Steel Hull Trawler

We actually rafted up to the Vinette and got onboard. This is really a classic, still in the refurbishing stage, but already has new engines, running gear, bow thruster, electrical system, and more. We're glad we took the time to check her out.

One other time we stayed at a nice marina on the Black River, just ahead of us still in Port Huron, but when we radioed them we found out they aren't officially open for the season. We did need to fuel up for the first time since we left Canada. It sure is nice to have a fuel-efficient boat. There's a marina with fuel before the bridge so we docked there for fuel. Across the river from us was the Port Huron Yacht Club and we saw a 42 Nordic Tug tied up on the wall there. As we looked closer we realized that it's the one we sold to George Mosher from Port Huron back in 1998. Another man on the boat beckoned us to tie up there for the night. He said it's the first Friday night the Yacht Club is open for the season and everyone is welcome to the party and we can dock on the wall just a few boats away from George's. We went up to the club and George and his daughter joined us for a cocktail and dinner. What a pleasant surprise to meet up with him

and catch up on what's been going on in our lives. He was the first commodore of the yacht club and raced sailboats for many years until his knees gave out and he had to switch to a trawler.



Port Huron Yacht Club near old bridge

We can hardly believe this, but the next day we are again experiencing 1 to 3 footers all day on Lake Huron. This trip is really setting some records for our time on the water and experiencing these conditions 5 days in a row. Definitely not typical for the Great Lakes although we do know that spring and summer are the best times to be on the lakes. As we pondered our destination for the night we realized we could easily go as far as Mackinac. We have cruised under the Mackinac Bridge so many times but it never worked out for us to take the extra time to go to the Island. Since we have been making such good time in the relatively calm seas and with a boat that can really move along, we decided we could take that extra day. Hey, it's a Sunday and God said we should rest on the 7th day.

Entering Mackinac Island in a drizzling rain doesn't really take away from its charm and uniqueness. We picked a slip and backed in since all the pier heads were pretty short. There aren't many boats in the water because it's so early in the season, but the ferryboats are buzzing back & forth getting folks from the island to the mainland, some visitors and some workers that don't live on the island. Since the rain is continuing, we ate on board and just relaxed taking in the scenery around us.



St Ann Church, Mackinac Island

Knowing the next day is Sunday, we could see a steeple of a church just a few blocks away and so when the rain stopped we went for a walk to check it out. The church was St. Ann's Catholic

Church and we attended the 8:30 service in the morning. Then a block from the church was a bike rental shop (only one of dozens in the area).



Bicycle rental shop on Mackinac Island

In case you don't know, there are no cars allowed on Mackinac Island, only horses and bicycles. It was a sunny, but chilly morning so we were glad to have access to our leather jackets and gloves.



Ken and Karen biking on Mackinac Island

Never having ridden a “bicycle-built-for-two” we decided to give it a try. With a map in hand, we started our 8-mile journey around the island and took one side tour up a very long hill to the airport. We are both private pilots so we always have to check out the airports wherever we go. Actually saw one plane land and another take off in the short time we were there.



They are in the process of putting a nice addition on their office building so it must get plenty of use to warrant that. Returning back to the village, we decided to take the bike up to the Grand Hotel. It's up a pretty steep hill but we made it. Two different guys yelled at Ken, “she's not pedaling”! Course, I was on the back and that seems to be the thing to say to a couple on a tandem bike. How come my heart was pounding and my thighs were burning if I wasn't pedaling? The flowers are spectacular as it is tulip season and they are in full bloom. We've never seen so many tulips in one place. We tried to capture some of the beauty on pictures.



Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island

After turning in the bike we walked the main street and, yes, we did have to partake in that famous Mackinac Island Fudge. Ken is a dark chocolate fan so he's in his glory. We planned to take a horse and buggy ride but by the time we got serious about that we found out they stop the rides at 5 pm this time of the year. Oh, well, it's good to save something for our next visit.



Mackinac Bridge at sunrise

What a spectacular view as we left Mackinac Island at sunrise. Day 6 turned out to be another day like the others with 1-2 foot seas and very light winds as we cruised southwest on Lake Michigan past Beaver Island and through the Manitou Passage and across the lake to Manitowoc. Temperatures during this whole trip hovered in the 40's at night and never much over 55 during the day. We ended up running from the lower helm most of the time, but that's just not a problem in this boat. The visibility is almost 360 degrees and with all the big windows, you always feel very much a part of your surroundings. Ken and I generally do a lot of reading on a trip like this as we take turns at the helm.



Lighthouse welcoming us home at Manitowoc, Wisconsin

Again, it's good to be home, but it was another great experience on the water with your best friend and a well-designed and well-built boat.

Please direct any questions or comments you may have to:

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