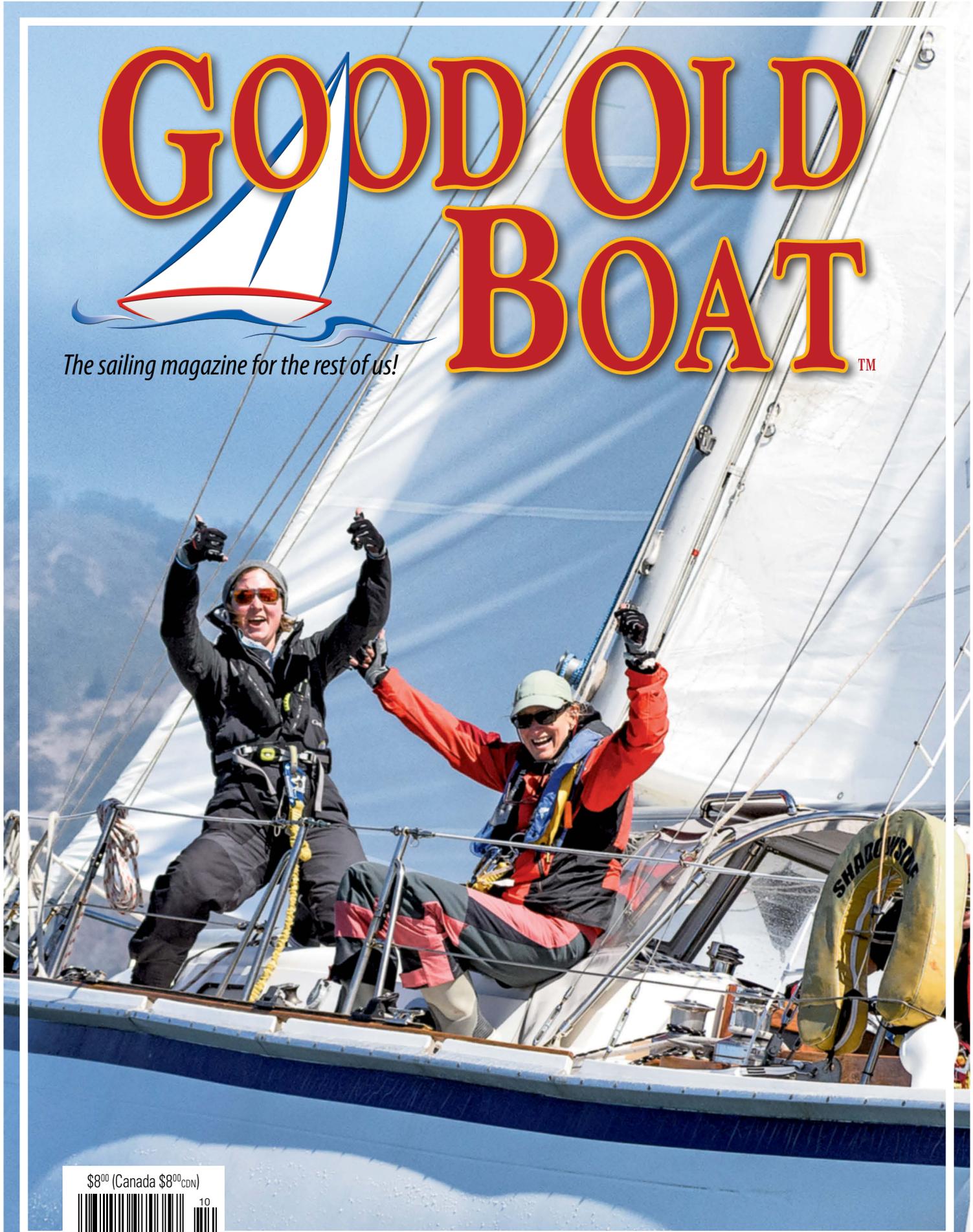


GOOD OLD BOAT™

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Contents

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018

ISSUE 122

Speaking Seriously

Review Boat

8 Cape Dory 30 Mk II

In the same tradition as its predecessor but roomier on deck and below

By Gregg Nestor

Design Comparison

14 The Cape Dory 30 Mk II ...

... and similar, but older, full-keelers

By Rob Mazza

Interior Improvements

16 An Icebox Becomes a Fridge

One boat's discard is another's chill deal

By Tom Alley

Nuts and Bolts

24 Forestalling Galling

Those nightmare threads that become unthreadable can be avoided

By Drew Frye

Creative Alternatives

35 Mounting the Outboard Inboard, Part 1

The case for a well that encloses the tilted-up motor

By James Baldwin

Refit Boat

42 A Tartan 34C with PTSD?

Solving a perplexing problem led to an explosive discovery

By Jon Keller

On the cover ...

This month's cover girl is *Shadowside*, a 1977 Allied Mistress Mk III, here passing under the Golden Gate just after the start of the 2016 Pacific Cup. About 14 days and 20 hours after Leslie Richter took this photo with a Nikon D810, *Shadowside* and her four crew, including owner Lad Burgin, crossed the finish line in Hawaii.



What's More

Websightings

3 **Good Old Boat's Digital Diversions, an Inspiring Sailor, and Old Boat Fixers**

The View from Here

5 **Sailing Is About Surprises**

We learn to expect the unexpected, then tell the story

By Michael Robertson

Mail Buoy

7 **Unlaying an Egg, Keeper Cover, and GOB's Digital Hit**

Simple Solutions

50 **Wrenches in Wraps Won't Wander**

Nor will SAEs mingle with metrics in the bottom of the toolbox

By David Lochner

Product Profiles

53 **Shoes for Wet Walks, Steering Wheel Stowage, and Fender Suspenders**

Good Old Classifieds 56

Reflections

61 **Could Water Really Be Blue?**

A coral atoll revealed the sea in its true colors

By John Simpson



The Rata of Seville

A ravenous rat unites a community while wreaking havoc on board

BY ED ZACKO

At our farewell party at the Club Náutico de Sevilla, Spain, I ate something I shouldn't have, and on returning to *Entr'acte*, I lay down on a main-cabin settee to await the inevitable consequences. When I awoke thirsty and rose from the settee to fetch a drink, I suddenly sensed I was not alone in the dark wee hours. I stood in the silence and waited. Nothing. When I reached for a cup in the galley, I heard a rustling in the trash bin, then I felt a warm furry body and damp little feet touching mine. I crashed into the head door as my visitor scurried out of sight up and under the galley stove. Through the darkness, I saw his broad backside and tail. A long, skinny tail. A rat's tail! There was no denying what I saw, and we could not go to sea with a rat on board. Our planned 0800 departure was the first casualty.

Entr'acte was still in her slip at 1000 when our neighbors Antonio and Tonia from *Habibi* walked by.

"*Que pase*, Eduardo, too much *fiesta* last night? Relax! Tomorrow is another day," Antonio said to me in Spanish, rolling every "r" as the Spanish do: rrrrrrr!

"No, Antonio, *tenemos una problema muy grande!* A rat came on board last night."

The couple looked quizzically at each other.

"*Una rrrrata?* You mean *un raton*, a mouse, no? Oh, they are harmless, such little things."

"No, Antonio, no *raton*, *una rata*, *una rata grande!* A rat!"

"*Rrrrata?*" Antonio paused, looking down. "*Rrrrrrrrata!*"

Mice seem innocent, they have some redeeming value, but rats . . . Just the word "rat," no

matter how it's said, sounds disgusting. The Spanish have a way of saying "rat" that manages to incorporate feelings of awe and disgust. They'll pause, think a moment, then bow their heads as if in shame or prayer. Taking a quick breath and while still looking down — seemingly into hell — they manage to simultaneously inhale and exhale using their diaphragms as if playing a very loud note on a wind instrument and, with a quick shake of the head, a gasping rush of air, out comes that single word: "*Rrrrata!*" Then silence. I have tried to duplicate it and cannot come close.

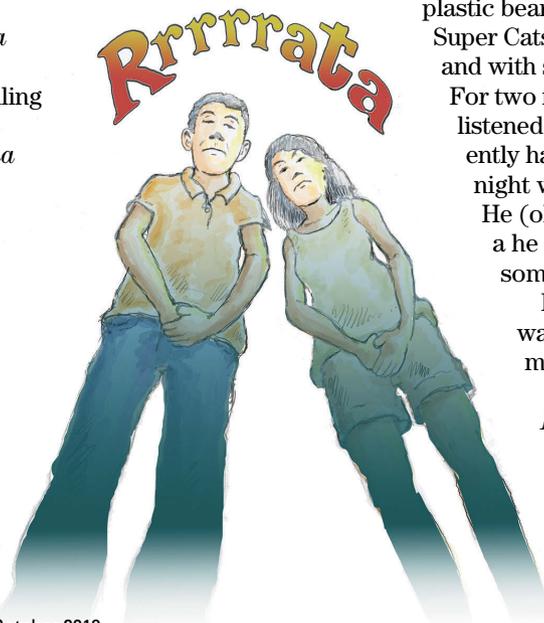
And so, the battle was joined. For the next three months we engaged in an all-out war.

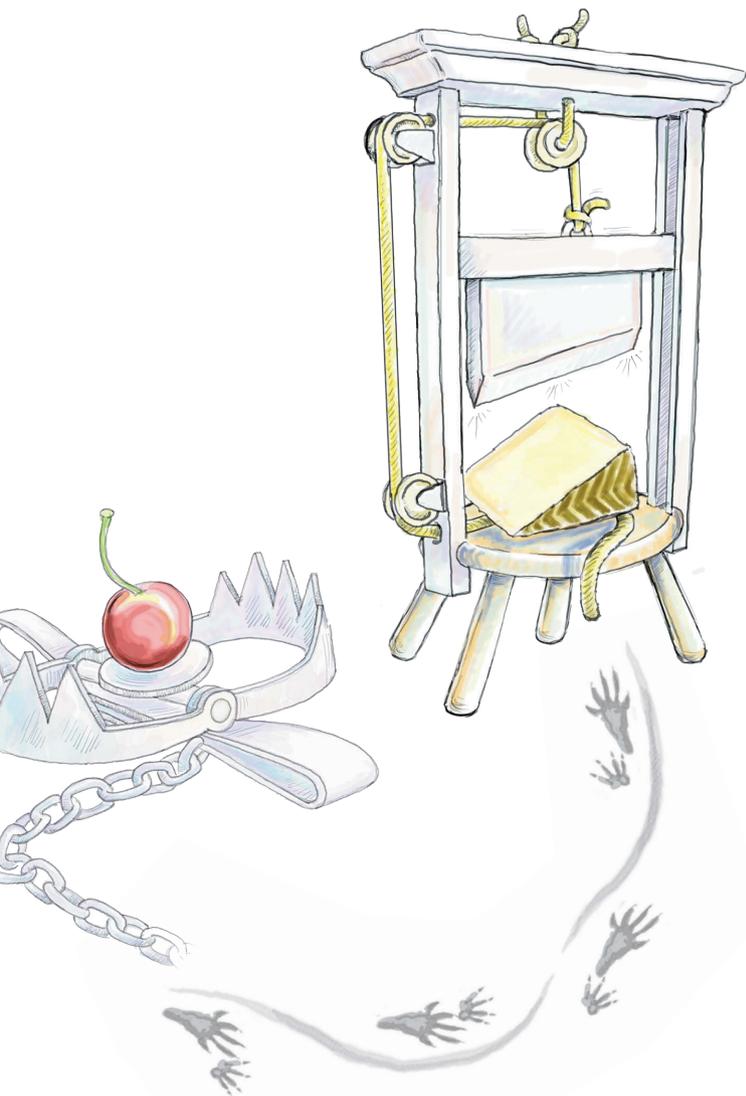
First came the traps, big traps and small traps. We found one called Super Cat, which looked like a large plastic bear trap with teeth. We baited several Super Cats with cherries, with peanut butter, and with salmon skin. It was all for naught. For two nights, we lay awake at 0200 and listened as our friend leaped about, apparently having a wonderful time. On the third night we heard scratching and gnawing. He (oh merciful King Neptune, let it be a he and not a she) was feasting on something.

By day four, the entire yacht club was involved. Escobar, the restaurant manager, pulled me aside.

"Don Eduardo, *es una rrrrata Espanol*," he said. "And a Spanish rat must have Spanish bait. Wait here!"

He returned with a trap that looked like a guillotine and large enough for three rats. Wearing latex gloves to eliminate any





ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRITZ SEEGBERS

human smell, Escobar inserted *jamon serrano*, *queso viejo*, and *camarones* — the three most expensive items on the restaurant menu.

“This never fails! *Venga!*”

Not only did this trap fail, la Rrrrata wouldn't touch the bait. In fact, he was aboard a boat newly stuffed with provisions for a transatlantic passage to Trinidad and he wouldn't touch any of it! Oh, he nibbled on a single cracker just enough to ruin the package, and on a single strand of pasta to ruin *that* box. And he did make a tiny hole in the plastic jar of honey so the contents ran through the locker, across the galley sole, and into the bilge. But no, la Rrrrata's food of choice was *Entr'acte*, or to be precise, her electrical system. He absolutely *loved* electrical cable!

At this point, Club Náutico hired an exterminator at their expense. The professional appeared and, rat-like, crawled about the boat, peering with beady eyes into hidden spaces and squeaking merrily as he scattered hundreds of poison pellets throughout our home.

“To kill a rat, one must think like a rat. *No problema, en dos o tres dias, muerto! Garantizado!*”

For the next week, la Rrrrata chewed on one wire after another. Each morning, one more electronic device fell victim. First was the GPS, then the VHF, then the SSB. At 0500 one day, the bilge pump activated. I opened the engine-room door and wanted to cry. A smorgasbord of wire,

insulation, and wire bits floated in water that had gushed from a hole in the sink-drain hose. What stopped my heart was the frayed hose from the engine intake. I closed all the seacocks and returned to bed.

Next came the Rat Glue. “This glue is so sticky nothing gets away from it.”

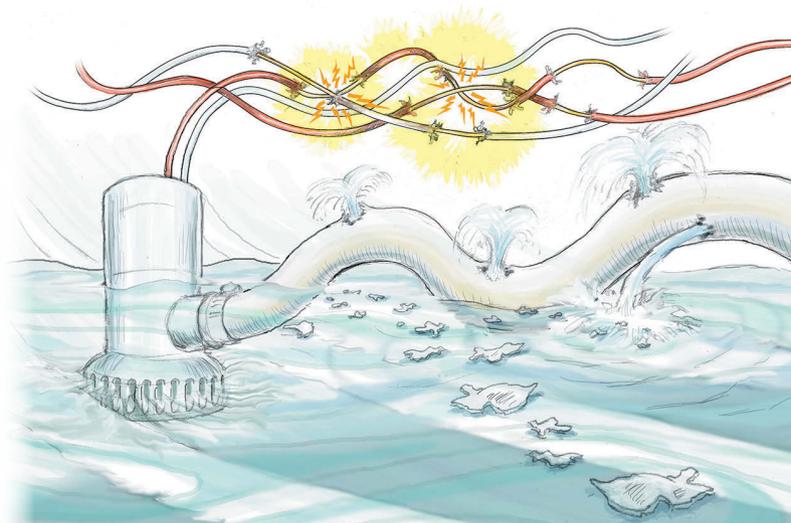
We placed two traps baited with greasy salmon skin on top of pieces of cardboard smeared with Rat Glue, and placed more Rat-Glue-smeared cardboard pieces on the stovetop, on the sink, on the head, in the trash bin, on the settees, and all along the sole. Our cabin was a minefield of Rat Glue.

At 0200, a loud *bang!* One of the Super Cats! I carefully approached the overturned trap . . . empty! La Rrrrata had escaped with the bait.

I stepped backward . . . onto Rat Glue. #%&*@!!!! I reached down, carefully trying to find, in the dark, a glue-free spot on the cardboard that I could grab to pull my bare foot free. Then my hand stuck fast and I couldn't move. I pulled hard, and stringy tendrils of glue followed. A small wave caused *Entr'acte* to roll just enough for me to lose my balance and I flopped down onto the settee. My foot was stuck, my hand and legs were covered in glue, and now my butt was stuck to another piece of cardboard . . . my butt, because I was stark naked.

“Did we get him?” Ellen called from her bunk. I was too angry to scream.

At 0330, she and I were both in the cockpit, naked and covered with Rat Glue. It spread faster than we could clean it up. The slightest touch left behind a stringy trail that had no end. We quickly learned that neither water, soap, alcohol, nor acetone will remove it. We had no gasoline and the toluene was buried under our clean bunk, which we were smart enough not to touch. Dry rubbing with a towel eventually and painfully brought things under control and Ellen returned to her bunk. I was right behind her, but stopped for a quick visit to the head.



feet, and Little Rochefort chewing on everything — everything except that peach.

Another morning dawned after another sleepless night.

“You must gas him! Run a tube from a car’s exhaust pipe to the boat.”

“No way, that will stink up the whole boat!”

One evening, the club threw a party (in Spain there is always a party). A live band played, accompanied by the obligatory smoke machine. I had an inspiration, and set out the next morning to rent a smoke machine. It was a holiday (in Spain there is always a holiday) and everything was closed.

That afternoon, the *comodoro* told us that the club was going to pay for a second exterminator. This became an argument of honor on both sides.

“Don Eduardo, we cannot have *rrratas* at Club Náutico! It is our *rrrata* and our responsibility.”

“Don Paco, no! I will pay. I am the captain. It is my yacht and therefore my rat and my responsibility.”

“No! The club will pay, and that is final!”

Back on *Entr’acte*, Ellen asked me for the ditty bag so she could finish a minor canvas repair. I opened the bookcase and, in broad daylight, there he was! As his rump descended along the engine exhaust hose into the bilge, I noticed two very important things. First, his color. He was brown, not gray. Second, the length of his tail. If it’s true that the length of a rat’s tail is equal to its body length, he was one big rat. To this day I regret that my reflexes were not fast enough to grab the tail and flip him out through the hatch.

“Oh, so he is brown, not like those gray river rats. My daughter, she has a pet like this. You call it a gobel, no?”

“No, Antonio, Gobel was an American TV star.

You mean gerbil, and this one is not harmless!”

The exterminator arrived carrying only a very small paper bag. As he climbed on board, I took the bag and started to reach inside. He slapped my hand, hard.

“No! Poison, *muy toxico*. *Mira!*”

He put on a pair of rubber gloves and removed from the bag a small plastic packet on which was printed the silhouette of an anatomically correct black bull (in Spain everything eventually arrives at the bull). The bag bore a warning in large letters: *CONTENES SUFFICIENTE POR UNA TORO 850KG*.

“*No toca! Muy, muy peligroso!*”

He next produced two large tomatoes, cut them into very

small pieces, and mixed them with the *entire contents* of the packet.

“Smear this over everything he eats or touches and everywhere he steps. When he licks his feet to clean himself, he will die!”

I diligently coated every wire and hose in the engine room, the engine, fuel tank, lockers, cans . . . everywhere with the Salad of Death.

“*Dos o tres dias, morto! Me garantia!*”

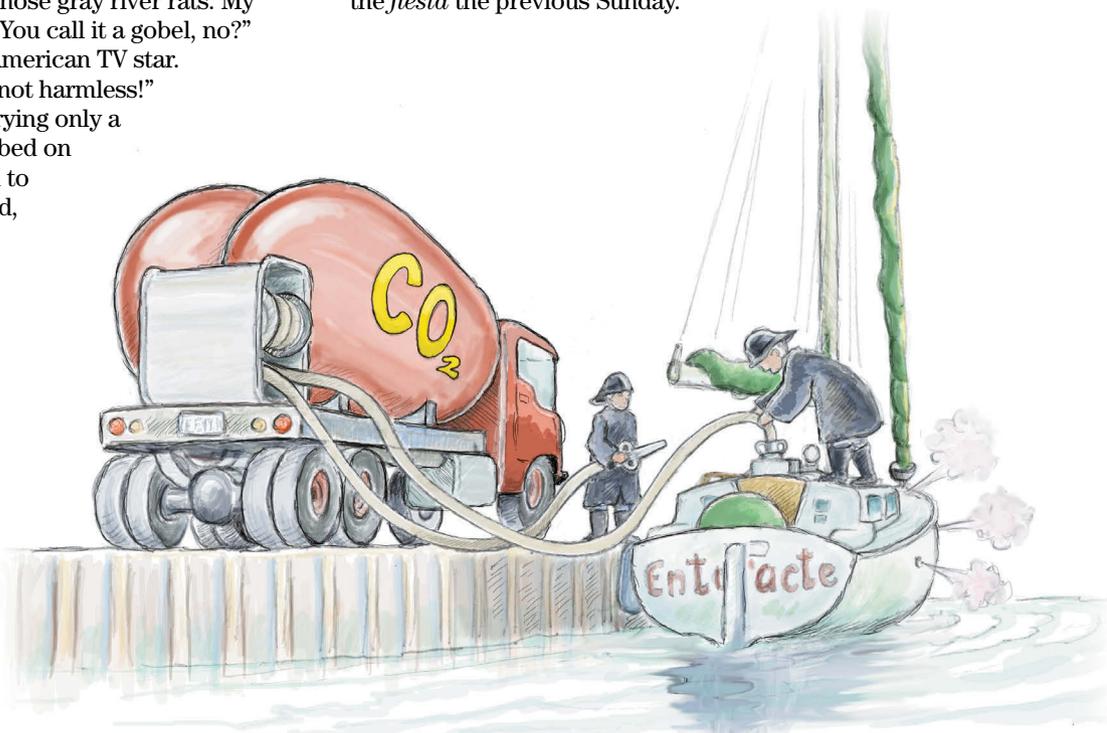
Oh please, let it be so!

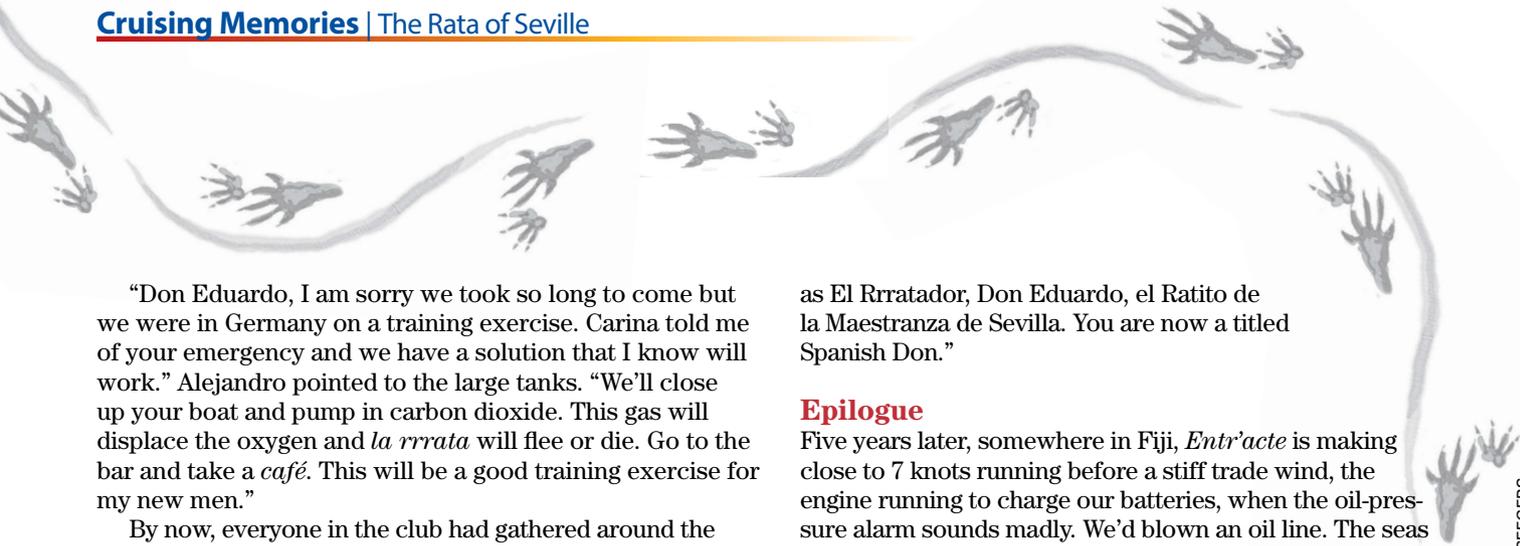
All night long, Ellen and I waited. As the scratching and chewing began anew, it was like being inside a submarine during a depth-charge attack. All we could think was, “Die! Die!” He could be fried, crushed, decapitated, and stuck by that damn glue (and I knew firsthand how that one goes). But alas, the lights of the club remained lit as Little Rochefort partied on.

I didn’t remember falling asleep, but we woke suddenly to a hellacious racket on the dock. I poked my head out to see, running in our direction at full tilt, four firefighters in full combat gear, including air tanks on their backs, towing a wagon filled with large tanks.

My God! Fire! That damn electric trap must have started a fire! “ABANDON SHIP! Ellen, get up, hurry!”

We both catapulted ourselves out of the aft cabin to land on the dock just as the firefighters came to a stop at . . . *Entr’acte!* The leader removed his oxygen mask and we recognized Alejandro, the husband of a friend we sat with at the *fiesta* the previous Sunday.





“Don Eduardo, I am sorry we took so long to come but we were in Germany on a training exercise. Carina told me of your emergency and we have a solution that I know will work.” Alejandro pointed to the large tanks. “We’ll close up your boat and pump in carbon dioxide. This gas will displace the oxygen and *la rrrrata* will flee or die. Go to the bar and take a *café*. This will be a good training exercise for my new men.”

By now, everyone in the club had gathered around the *bombieros*. “*Ya-tay Entrrrrrract-ay, ole!*” Our hearts still pounding from the fire scare, we just stood there laughing.

I wish that I could report that our little friend came staggering into the open, coughing and gagging as he jumped ship, but it didn’t happen that way. Instead, we worked throughout the summer heat to get *Entr’acte* back in order. We repaired the entire electrical system, systematically unloaded and reloaded all our stores, and thoroughly cleaned and disinfected every nook and cranny, all the while searching for the body. But we never heard or saw the rat, nor did we find or smell the body.

Entr’acte was once again poised to depart for the South Pacific, but at dinner on the eve of departure, Ellen was quiet.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know how to say this, but I’m just not ready to leave here. These past weeks have been so much fun. We’ve met so many new friends, and after everything that’s happened, it seems so wrong to go running off.”

“You call what just happened *fun*? What was fun? The sleepless nights, the mess, the 0200 Rat Glue haircut under the spotlight?”

The sudden silence crumbled into laughter so uncontrollable that we were crying.

Then Antonio and Tonia from *Habibi* appeared with a bottle of champagne and a card containing a crude photo of me dressed as a matador.

“Don Eduardo, we salute you. You fought your bull valiantly. Forevermore, Club Náutico will remember you

as El Rrrrator, Don Eduardo, el Ratito de la Maestranza de Sevilla. You are now a titled Spanish Don.”

Epilogue

Five years later, somewhere in Fiji, *Entr’acte* is making close to 7 knots running before a stiff trade wind, the engine running to charge our batteries, when the oil-pressure alarm sounds madly. We’d blown an oil line. The seas are smooth behind the barrier reef, but we have only about an hour before we hit open water and the ocean swells. We have a spare oil line. If I work fast, I should be able to install it within our window, allowing us the security of the engine when we run the pass into the next atoll.

The engine room is covered with hot black oil. I squeeze, stretch, rotate, and manage to get a wrench on the line. *Entr’acte* rolls to a gust. The wrench slips and clatters into the bilge as something hits me on the face and ends up in my mouth. It’s soft. And chewy.

“Hmmm.”

It’s a piece of dried tomato, a vestige of the *ensalada de muerte*. A drop of hot engine oil hits my glasses. I stop and lie there, remembering, and laughing.

“Oh Little Rochefort, whatever became of you? You changed our lives for the better in ways that can never be explained. I sincerely hope that you are living a long and happy life ... somewhere else!”

Ed Zacko is a Good Old Boat contributing editor. Ed, the drummer, and Ellen, the violinist, met in the orchestra pit of a Broadway musical. They built their Nor’Sea 27, Entr’acte, from a bare hull, and since 1980 have made four transatlantic and one transpacific crossing. After spending a couple of summers in southern Spain, Ed and Ellen shipped themselves and Entr’acte to Phoenix, where they have refitted Entr’acte while keeping up a busy concert schedule in the Southwest US. They recently completed their latest project, a children’s book, The Adventures of Mike the Moose: The Boys Find the World.

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