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# A CURRENT AFFAIR

*A Gulf Stream crossing from Miami to the Bahamas on a Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 469 is an interesting exercise in patience and perseverance.*

**Story by Herb McCormick**  
**Photos by Billy Black**

**H**ave you ever tried paddling a narrow canoe directly across a wide, rushing river? If so, and perhaps without even realizing it, you learned a useful lesson in three-dimensional vector analysis. We could ramble on here about stroke rates (how fast can you paddle?) and stream flow (how quick is that river?), but let's get to the point. Literally. Peering over the bow, you may have noticed—if not immediately, then soon enough—that it was aimed not at your destination on the far bank but a few degrees askance of a heading directly upriver. “Crabbing” your way from one side to the other is an excellent tactic to compensate for rapidly moving water.

If you didn't catch that, of course, you may still be paddling.

Last February, somewhere in the Straits of Florida about midway between Miami and the Bahamian isle of Cat Cay aboard a sweet new Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 469—and smack-dab in



*Midway across the Gulf Stream between Florida and Cat Cay, the waters may look placid, but don't be fooled by appearances: The northerly current is actually ripping at a brisk four knots, and woe be to the crew that doesn't take it into consideration.*



**OUR DESTINATION IN THE ISLANDS** *may have been due east, BUT IN ORDER TO GET THERE, we steered a compass course of 120 degrees TO COMPENSATE FOR THE NORTHERLY SET* of the powerful, ever-present Gulf Stream.

the middle of a honking Gulf Stream current charging northward at a very steady four knots—all this dawned on me with piercing clarity. And I did have time to ponder this conundrum from multiple perspectives: navigational, mathematical, and even philosophical. That's because even though we were coursing through the water at a pleasant 8.5 knots, our meager VMG, or velocity made good, to our

destination was only half that speed.

This could be viewed from one of two perspectives: We were either going nowhere very quickly or somewhere really slowly. Either way, the opportunity for rumination was practically endless. Which is how my mind found its way down a faraway river. And to the imaginary mountain trails and campsites that lined its hypothetical edges. So, yes, my focus was wavering. The Gulf Stream was trying my patience.

Then again, the problem

was of our own making.

Most cruisers sailing to the Bahamas choose a course that takes advantage of the Stream's northerly set. If heading for, say, the Berry Islands, they begin their journey from someplace in the Florida Keys, like Rodriguez Key, near Key Largo. Or if bound for the Abacos, wise sailors set forth from Fort Lauderdale aiming for West End, on Grand Bahama Island.

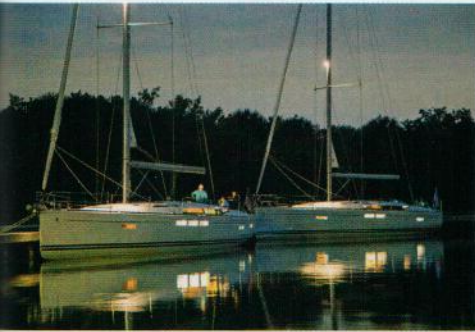
But no, our stated goal was Bimini and/or North Cat Cay, approximately 50

miles due east from Miami. I'd often wondered why the vessels of choice for a Miami-to-Bimini run, a route that more or less negotiates the Stream perpendicularly, were always packed with hefty horsepower capable of double-digit boat speeds and came from companies like Donzi, Cigarette, and Hatteras.

Now I knew.

Which brings me to the purpose of the expedition. Which is where, when telling this tale, I invariably lose the sympathy of my





friends and family.

For the goal, right after last winter's edition of the Miami Strictly Sail Show, was to sail not one but two new Jeanneaus—the 469 and its big sister, the Sun Odyssey 509—across the Stream for a real-world boat test and a full-on tropical photo shoot. To that end, we had some heavy-hitting, very talented sailors from

Jeanneau among our crew: Jeanneau America's majordomo, Paul Fenn; Jeff Jorgenson, a rugged former Finn sailor who'd learned his ropes racing on windy San Francisco Bay; and Erik Stromberg, a technical wizard who'd grown up in a full-time liveaboard cruising family and was now based at the company's headquarters in France.

All three were handsome gents, as was the photographer, Billy Black, with whom I'd shared countless previous adventures. But when it came to pictures and video, for some reason Billy seemed focused on the other members of our team: Jeanneau's Valerie Toomey, surfer and sailor Stefanie Gallo, and Billy's assistant,

**Pictures from an expedition:** In No Name Harbor in Key Biscayne's Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park (left), the Jeanneau sisterships were bright and shining. The next morning's sunrise (center) was equally illuminating, and there was plenty of time for cat naps (above) on the way to Cat Cay. Crossing the Gulf Stream may have been a chore, but once in the Bahamas (below), the turquoise water and fresh breeze proved worth the effort.





**Once in the islands**, former Finn sailor Jeff Jorgenson went to work hoisting the Bahamian courtesy flag (inset, above). The drop-down swim platform on the Sun Odyssey 469 makes a morning dunk an inviting proposition (above). From his vantage point high in the rigging, photographer Billy Black had a bird's-eye view of a breakfast toast in the 469's ample cockpit (right).

Meagan Beauchemin. But Billy is a pro, and I trusted his unbiased judgment.

To sum up, we're talking cool boats, great sailors, good-looking people, and the Bahamas. So I do understand the lack of compassion for my plight.

As far as the 469 is concerned, in build, layout, and details the Philippe Briand-design is very much the younger sibling to the 509. (See "Here Comes the Sun" in *CW*'s February 2013 issue.) In other words, it's a cracking good sailboat. We had a delightful trip from Bayside Marina, in

downtown Miami, to No Name Harbor, in Biscayne Bay. In a northeast breeze of about 12 knots, it was a tight reach out of Government Cut before we eased sheets a tad for the hop down the coast. Once into Biscayne Channel (after weaving through the mesmerizing waterborne shacks known as "Stiltsville"), with the sails just cracked off in flat water, the boat really came alive, topping off at 9.5 knots. Sweet.

In the enclosed, natural, protected harbor called No Name—located within the boundaries of lovely Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park—we rendezvoused with the gang on the 509, had a nice meal at the park's small restaurant, the Boater's Grill, and retired early in anticipation of the next day's crossing of the Stream.

The sunrise was spectacular. Not five miles outside of Biscayne Bay, the northerly current kicked in.

On the 469, we motorsailed upwind for the next few hours, doing our best to hold our own and maintain easterly progress. Once past the halfway mark to Cat Cay, we threw in a tack, switched off the engine, and unfurled the headsail. The motion improved dramatically and immediately, as did the collective onboard vibe. We felt the effects of the Stream almost the entire way and, despite our best intentions, were actually swept a few miles north of Cat Cay. With one more southerly tack, we laid the island, and Billy got everyone together for sunset photos. When we tied up at the yacht club at North Cat Cay, a friendly fellow off a powerboat took our lines. "How was the trip?" he asked.

"Longer than expected," said Paul.

"It always is," was the reply.

We were up again early the next morning and on station, awaiting Billy's

instructions, at dawn. For the next few hours we were at his disposal, swimming and sailing, which made the slog worth it. All of a sudden it was lunchtime. Where had the time gone?

It was early afternoon before we hoisted the sails for the return trip to Miami, and well after dark before we once again slipped into No Name Harbor. It had been a short but eventful journey.

So what did we learn on our travels?

When you buy a Jeanneau, you're purchasing a vessel from guys who know sailing and sailboats. The waters off Cat Cay are picturesque and inviting. And, for Bahamian-bound cruisers, the Gulf Stream is best tackled from an embarkation point north or south of Miami. Otherwise, you may find yourself up the proverbial creek, without a paddle.

Herb McCormick is *CW*'s senior editor.

*To sum up, we're talking COOL BOATS, GREAT SAILORS, and BEAUTIFUL BAHAMIAN ISLANDS. So I do understand my family and friends' total LACK OF COMPASSION for my PLIGHT.*

