

Saint Martin to Portland Maine,
a 1,700 mile delivery on a Pat Benz customized Gunboat 66.



GAIA with captain Andrew Reiley, and delivery crew Toby Reiley and Seamus Hourihan on the bow in Portland, ME. The boat is about the size of a tennis court. The mast is over 100' tall and the dagger boards draw 16' when down.

Eastern sailors including captain Andrew Reiley, Seamus Hourihan and I recently delivered the 66' Gunboat GAIA (ex-Extreme H₂O) 1,720 nm from Saint Martin to Portland, Maine as three of the five person delivery crew. The trip took 177 hours at an average speed of 9.7 knots with a max speed of 22.8 knots. Sailing speeds averaged much higher as CAIA powered in the 6 to 7 knot range.

I'd been eager to sail this boat since I first read about her as the very Extreme H₂O eight years ago so when Andrew asked for help with the delivery from Saint Martin to Portland, ME, I did not hesitate to respond, "I'm in". Reportedly the fastest of the Gunboats ever built, specifically optimized for racing from the raw hulls up and finished in California, her racing record speaks for itself. J.B. Braun designed her sail inventory. The boat did not disappoint, truly a beast in the most complimentary way.

Keep in mind that this boat is intentionally extremely overpowered; I could happily sail this boat for years without ever shaking out the first reef. Most of the delivery was done with the first and second reefs tucked in, and often with a third. We sailed with the storm jib in breezes over 20 knots while maintaining 10 knots of boat speed. The steering was always very responsive. To give you an idea of performance, see the pictures of the instruments when we have 10.0 knots of boat speed in 10.1 knots of wind at a True Wind Angle of 117 degrees, 1 Reef in the main and an A3 Roller Furling headsail.



The A3 roller furling headsail. From the deck and as seen through a hatch from below.



10 Knt in 10 knts of True Wind Speed from a True Wind Angle of 117 ° (behind the beam)

And even with all this power and focus on racing, the boat's finish is very comfortable. It is not often you can sail 1,700 miles with absolutely no bruises. The galley is "up" to Port in the salon with truckloads of cold storage and giant counters. To starboard is a countertop large enough for "old-school" paper charting from the Caribbean to Nova Scotia on one sheet. With just five crew on board, we each had our own cabin, and four heads.



*Sunrise in the trades at 12 knots of boat speed.
Note the height of the raised daggerboard above the deck.*

Give the boat's pedigree, I wanted to experience the big speeds she is famous for, but as delivery crew our job was to comfortably get the boat, now renamed GAIA, to Portland Yacht Services in Maine without breaking anything big. We carried just 4 headsails, and captain Andrew's game plan was to rein in the boat speed to under 15 knots off the breeze and about 10 knots upwind to keep the hulls quiet (no pounding). For me as a 60+ year-old "bag of bones", being well rested is critical to be ready to handle adverse conditions, and there is no sleeping when the boat is pounding with the wind forward of the beam.

As our weather router Bill Biewenga says, “Any fool can make a Gunboat go fast, but it takes some imagination slow them down”. Experienced high performance cat sailors know that streaming warps can be appropriate when caught over canvased in a storm to keep from plowing into the next wave and burying a bow or two (never pretty and can be hazardous for the crew). Look up warps if you don’t know how to use them. Also, we hanked on the Storm Jib at the dock and tested it before we left Saint Martin, which proved to be a very good call.

Bill’s weather routing and suggestions were absolutely spot on. Communications and weather were received by Garmin In-Reach texts with no internet or GRIB files availability. The original target for the Gulf Stream Entry Point was 200+ miles west of Bermuda. Our winds ranged from flat calm to 40 knots and were mostly 15 to 25 in the Easterly trades which then clocked to a welcome Southwesterly breeze pumped up complements of the Bermuda High. The forecast for the overnight Gulf Stream crossing was for 30 to 40 knots in squalls. We opted for a triple reefed Main and Storm Jib combo.



*Approaching the gulf stream from 30 miles out at sunset.
You know it is not going to be a quiet night!*

These big cats are loaded with mechanical and software systems. As with many older boats, while most systems worked, a few failed during the trip. While reaching into the new Gulf Stream Entry Point, we were also passing through a cold front which produced:

- 2) a freak wave deposited green water on the coach roof (which is 10 feet above the water line)
- 3) hours of nearly continuous lightning,
- 4) downpours fitting of Noah Ark with zero visibility, and
- 5) the many wind holes and downdrafts which squalls in the Gulf Stream are famous for.

Just as we entered the Stream, we lost the hydraulics for the mainsheet and mast rotation after a Gulfstream wave covered the boat, filling our forward cockpit with water and pouring inside through a partially open window at helm station. The culprit was an electrical repair done long before this crew was aboard using household connectors meant for dry indoor use but were left exposed in what became an underwater environment. And so, we went through the Stream without a mainsheet. Very exiting!



*The block and tackle Seamus and Andrew constructed to control the for the rest of the trip.
The 16 foot "dinghy" is hanging on the davits behind the traveler.*

The reduced sail combo was perfect for maintaining 8 to 10 knots when we had gusts in the 30s and were dumping excess power. Seamus did a fabulous job threading the needle between squalls using the radar to "see" the rain, but we were still hit by cells bringing no wind and heavy rain plus a couple with 30 knots gusts. The diesel-hybrid propulsion kept us moving in the calms. And even with the loss of the hydraulics, with one exception, GAIA handled them all with ease. Due to the interior helm station, no foul weather gear was needed.

Our final 40 miles to Portland was frigging cold with 40°F air and water temperatures plus a rapid transition from downwind motoring in a Southwesterly at 10 to slamming headwinds of 25 knots with gusts to 40 at a True Wind Angle of 75° from the Northeast. A bit bumpy and uncomfortable to say the least, but we were prepared with the 3rd reef tucked before dusk (6 hours earlier when under power) and the storm jib (we only expected up to 25 knots of breeze, not gust to 40). When the True wind speeds hit 30 to 35, we dropped the storm jib to slow down from 13-14 knots and sailed bare headed at 9+ knots. With Andrew managing the systems and Seamus both navigating and coaching me on the helm, the slamming to windward with waves washing over the roof was not very pleasant for few hours but we were comfortable and safety in the enclosed salon and helm station. It is amazing how beautiful a sunrise can be when making landfall in a big blow at dawn.

The boat is actively for sale, and it is perfect for a family or syndicate of *avid sailors* who can appreciate and participate in what this boat has to offer. A cruising and/or racing program might involve summers in the New England or Europe, winters in Caribbean, and you might consider adding "up-to-6-person charters" or even an offshore weather and passage making school for three or four weeks during the Spring and Fall shoulder & delivery seasons. Now 10 years after the boat's design, it is possible to swap out many of what were state-of-the-art race systems to gain simplicity, redundancy, and reduced crew requirements without compromising performance.

This boat is an absolute hoot to sail!