

Shakedown breakdowns

RESTORING
A YACHT
Part 2

Looking good: a restored *Walden* at anchor

After months of restoration his lightning-struck yacht is ready to launch, but Drew Maglio isn't prepared for what happens next

The day we launched our 1987 Ericson 38-200 sloop was memorable for more reasons than one. The refit had finally come to an end (see PBO May 2020) and the former lightning-damaged *Kismet* had been rejuvenated into our beloved *Walden*... but the day was doomed from the beginning.

Growing restless and burnt out in the boatyard, my wife Avery and I had failed to meet our launch date numerous times – typical for sailors who do their own work. Because of this, we'd missed our window to explore the Dry Tortugas, as we were due to be in Maryland at the beginning of June for my post-graduate studies.

We'd worked tirelessly, cleaning, polishing and finishing the hull but, with hindsight, had we not pushed so hard to make an arbitrarily date our refit would have been more successful and gratifying.

I'd had no sleep the night before the launch as I had to work through the night to get *Walden* ready. She was towed down the road at 10mph on the yard's awkward trailer – a long awaited but unnerving but sight – and by 11am was tied up to the dock. However, once afloat *Walden* began to take on water from her shaft log and one Marelon seacock, which delayed us leaving the dock.

The previous owner, Noel, had kindly offered us the dock behind his house where we could finish a few projects before heading to the Florida Keys. He also offered to help us move *Walden* across Charlotte Harbour to his dock in the Punta Gorda Isles.

Noel arrived around noon, and after analysing the severity of the leaking shaft log and seacock, we decided that neither were serious enough to warrant hauling back out. The shaft log – which is a

traditional variety that relies on a flax packing gland to swell and thus reduce the incoming flow of water – began to slow the longer the boat sat in the water. Likewise, the seacock – which was only dripping slightly – stopped leaking altogether after a few hours. So we decided to head off towards Noel's house on the other side of Charlotte Harbour, 20 miles away.

Tumultuous maiden voyage
Walden's maiden voyage across Charlotte Harbour took place on one of the windiest and roughest days of the year.

Florida in the winter is a windy place for sailors and during cold fronts winds often sustain 30 knots, which is less than ideal for the relatively open waters of Charlotte Harbour. Due to the lack of a prolonged fetch as at sea, Charlotte Harbour allows for waves of 4-7ft to stack up in the shallow waters. The result is virtually no swell, but a washing machine effect with ceaseless and confused chop.

However, because the boatyard we'd been launched from had limited space, we were basically forced to leave the dock and head out of the canal system for the open waters of Charlotte Harbour.



LEFT and BELOW Idyllic sunset over Charlotte Harbour during our post restoration shakedown first sail with *Walden*



The trip through the canal system was relatively uneventful until we attempted to bend on the headsail. Even with the previous owner of 21 years leading the charge, we couldn't get the sail rigged properly, and faced tangled halyards, an uncontrollable sail, and sheets flapping violently in the near-gale conditions. We were reduced to motoring across Charlotte Harbour instead.

As we exited the final lock onto the harbour, the three of us were handling the boat with ease. We made our way towards Punta Gorda, and beat directly into the wind under motor for about two hours. At first, the wind was a modest 20 knots with 2-4ft waves, but as we neared Punta Gorda, we changed course and the waves were now on the beam.

Though the brand-new CPT autopilot maintained our course with ease, demonstrating its competence despite being only a wheel pilot, the boat began to roll violently back and forth with the waves: a miserable experience.

For the next hour or so we encountered 30-knot winds and steep 5-7ft waves before making it to our destination: Ponce Inlet, the mouth of the Punta Gorda Isles canal system.

As *Walden's* Yanmar diesel chugged along past a dangerous rocky breakwater to port however, its tune began change. The engine had served us well until this



Charlotte Harbour ended up being a motor passage rather than a sail

point, but now began to splutter. To our dismay it died and we couldn't get it restarted. Left to the whim of a fierce current in a narrow canal, we began to drift once our momentum slowed.

Fast-thinking, Noel threw out *Walden's* Bruce anchor, which held fast despite the tempestuous conditions. We troubleshooted the engine over the coming hours, concluding the rough seas must have shaken up debris or sludge in the fuel tank, causing a clog in the fuel system. We replaced the fuel filter with a

spare we had on board, but failed to properly bleed the fuel system so still couldn't get the engine restarted.

The tide, which was high when we had pulled into the channel, was now receding rapidly, pulling our stern towards the mangroves on the side of the channel.

With darkness quickly approaching, we called for a tow and waited two hours for help to arrive.

The tow-boat skipper, however, proved belligerent from the start and seemed to know little of sailing boats – even asking us if we could simply remove the rigging wires which held up our mast to clear ourselves of the mangroves!

Noel and Avery pleaded with him to gently pull us from the stern to free the backstay from the mangroves, since our bow was already anchored and holding. Delirious from a lack of sleep, I was admittedly good as useless on this forsaken day.

'The engine had served us well but now began to splutter. To our dismay it died and we couldn't get it restarted'

Nonetheless, the tow-boat captain stubbornly insisted he would only pull us from the bow, and we reluctantly obliged.

This proved catastrophic as all he did was pull *Walden* deeper into the mangroves. I heard the rigging beginning to stretch, and ran to the bow to demand he stop at once.

Now *Walden*'s spade rudder was stuck into the soft bottom, and with the receding tide we were forced to leave our boat and home in the mangroves overnight.

The one good thing the tow company did do was take the three of us to Noel's home where his wife, Linda, had prepared us dinner.

After a night's sleep, we reassessed the situation the following morning when Noel – who felt terrible about our predicament – took us in his dinghy back to the boat.

To remedy the fuel problem we installed an in-line primer bulb, which quickly brought *Walden*'s Yanmar diesel engine to life. With the engine working, we finally made it to Noel's dock, battleworn, weary, and with a lot of projects still to complete.

A month's reprieve

Avery and I rested at Noel and Linda's house for a few days before doing any boat projects. Once recuperated, we successfully bent on the head and main sails under Noel's tutelage.

Afterwards, we tried to fit the vertical anchor windlass into the new and improved anchor pan.

We then bought a new nylon anchor rode and spliced it to $\frac{5}{16}$ in galvanized anchor chain to work with the new windlass. Despite our best efforts, the windlass install did not go to plan – the chain angles were all wrong – and pulling up the anchor by hand has proven to be easier so far.

While *Walden* was moored at Noel and Linda's dock, we also went home to visit family – first for Easter, then for a wedding.

We removed the last vestiges of *Walden*'s former name and gave the transom a fresh polyurethane paint job. We ordered a new vinyl name from the local sign shop, had a brass nameplate fabricated for the cabin, and then our

LEFT Does this water make it worth it. Only you can answer that!



trusted rigger come out to tension the standing rigging and replace our tattered main halyard and first reefing line.

Everything we did at Noel's and during our time on the hard was done in order to have a safe passage south to the Florida Keys and ultimately Maryland. We'd replaced a lot of hardware on our 32-year-old yacht but were still unaware of what *Walden* had in store for us!

Our first passage

The blithe and carefree Captain Ron, in the 1992 film of the same name, famously quipped that 'if anything is going to happen, it is going to happen out there'. This axiom has become something of a sailor's proverb since then. While it might seem obvious to the casual observer, this rings true even to the most seasoned and prudent sailor: if anything bad is going to happen, the ocean is the only true litmus test for sailors.

You should prep your boat extensively to go to sea, but at some point – if you're to be a sailor – you must cast off the dock lines and head out of safe harbour.

And so we left Noel's house one



Sunrise at sea en route to Marathon

afternoon in early May for the marina, where we waited for a weather window to travel south.

The first time we raised sail on our new and improved *Walden* was an enchanting experience. The wind was 10 knots on the beam and we made an easy 6 knots on a perfectly still harbour, all alone on that tranquil perfect evening.

We arrived at Burnt Store Marina at night and had no trouble tying to our dock, despite the shallow channel. After a few days of eating delicious peanut-butter and chocolate ice cream from the general store, provisioning, and awaiting the arrival of Avery's brother John Mark, we were ready to set sail. We left Burnt Store at 0300, heading due south along Florida's south-west coast. Where we'd end up depended entirely upon the fickle wind, which we hoped would prove fortuitous.

With three crew we tried to set a watch

'Lowering sail proved to be nearly impossible as we soon realised we'd inadvertently tangled the halyard'

schedule but this proved difficult because of the nervous excitement we were all experiencing on our first passage. We motor-sailed in the calm conditions 10 miles out of the harbour exit at Boca Grande pass.

Once out of the harbour, we navigated to deeper waters and hoisted the sails, which proved to be anything but easy as the boat violently rolled back and forth in the moderate Gulf swell.

As day broke, the wind began to pick up just forward of the beam and *Walden* ripped along at an easy 7.5 knots, heeling about 30° to starboard. The seas were a

choppy 2-4ft, but manageable. Avery went below to get some sleep as John Mark and I kept watch. Over the next few hours, we cruised out to sea on a port tack as the wind increased to an exhilarating 20 knots. The sea similarly increased to 4-6ft and we continued to veer west to avoid beating into the sea. The crew put one reef in the main and furled in the roller-furling genoa to reduce sail area, but *Walden* still ripped along at 7 knots.

Around 0900 I went below for a few hours to sleep while Avery kept a solo watch. In the early afternoon the wind died down, forcing us to turn on the engine. The temperature down below quickly soared and I headed above deck.

The broken chainplate

About 30 miles offshore of Fort Myers Beach, Florida, we dropped the sails to take a dip in the aquamarine waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Lowering sail proved to be nearly impossible as we soon realised we'd inadvertently tangled the main

LEFT Motoring a sailboat on a miserably hot summer day is not enjoyable

BELOW *Walden* at the dock at Burnt Store Marina in Charlotte Harbour



Kismet at Noel's Dock before Drew and Avery bought and renamed her *Walden*

halyard while raising the mainsail in the dark. After much straining we got it down and afterwards I did a deck check to make sure everything else was in order.

At the bow, I noticed the torque tube clamp for the Harken roller-furler had inexplicably fallen off and was nowhere to be found! When installing the new forestay, our rigger had great difficulty breaking the torque tube clamp off of the furler and had to drill it out, possibly damaging the threads.

I assume that – while beating to weather – the damaged threads let go, allowing the furler foil to walk free, hindering our ability to control the headsail.

That sinking feeling

Distraught, I continued my deck check and what I found sank my heart to the bottom of the ocean: our port U-bolt style chainplate for the cap shroud had broken at the deck junction!

This revelation was the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back – and our burgeoning adventure was over before it truly began. After such a long and



Avery and the ship's cat in the middle of Florida Bay

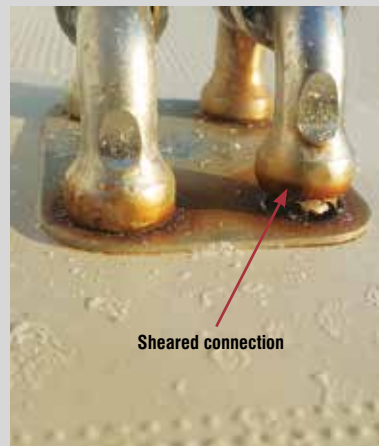
arduous refit, we broke a chainplate on our first passage! Perhaps *Walden* did not love us as much as we loved her! 'Tis the life of a sailor!

We spent the rest of the afternoon seething and contemplating what had just happened. We were 30 miles offshore and had a decision to make: press on or return to port? We decided in favour of the

former, continuing to our destination off the Florida Keys. Over the next few hours we motored to make safe harbour in Naples, Florida, before sundown.

Fortunately the Yanmar diesel proved reliable this time and we motored on the calm Gulf waters through Gordon Pass and took a mooring at Naples City Marina in order to consider our predicament.

Sheared chainplate U-bolt



The broken chainplate on deck



The chainplate below deck consists of a pair of U-bolts, aluminium backing plate, and stainless steel tie rod



Close up view of the chainplate's aluminium backing plate



The chainplate tie rod holds the deck down, while the rigging pulls it up. The tie rod is screwed into the hull grid



The chainplates, backing plate, and tie rods are accessible under a vinyl headlining



LEFT Gently heeled and heading upwind on the sail to Naples

BELOW LEFT Does this water make it worth it? Only you can answer that!

BELOW RIGHT Drew at *Walden's* helm... albeit in the boat yard

After mooring alongside, I phoned the rigger to tell him of our troubles and he advised that we shouldn't sail until we'd replaced the broken chainplate, which I already knew. After noting that the ritzy Naples was 'an expensive place to be stuck', he recommended motoring on a still night from Naples to Marathon in the Florida Keys.

The following day we went into town and recuperated in the air-conditioned local Starbucks before returning to *Walden*.

The next afternoon we headed for Marathon. As we motored out of Gordon Pass, we noted several ominous thunderstorms on the horizon – and one storm was over Marco Island: a place we had to travel through en route to Marathon. To avoid the storms, we carefully watched the radar and slowed down and changed course as needed.

Fortunately we avoided all of the storm systems and, a few hours after sunset, the storms receded and we were left with a flat calm sea, clear sky, and full moon.

We motored down the coast of Florida, successfully navigated the shallow waters off the Everglades, and by morning, were crossing Florida Bay.

The night off the Everglades, even under



Walden on the Dock at Marathon Marina in the Florida Keys



the obnoxious iron sail, was magical as it was completely still and brightly lit. Out of sight of land and all telecommunications, we were completely on our own island in the sea as it were.

The Florida Bay crossing went according to plan and despite one small stop for a swim was swift and uneventful.

As we neared Marathon the temperature increased dramatically and the wind died. We noted on the horizon that a morning tempest had spawned a waterspout, though it soon dissipated. Around 1400 on a late May afternoon we pulled into Marathon Marina in the Florida Keys, and at the time of writing *Walden* is still there!

We've made a number of repairs, including the broken chainplate, which proved immensely difficult.

We've also since ordered a proper horizontal windlass which will be fitted in the coming months, and we've meanwhile yet to remedy the missing furler torque tube clamp.

So do I regret the decision, all those months ago, to buy a boat struck by lightning and in dire need of a refit?

The answer is no, but the lesson I've learned is that boats require constant diligence and vigilance to stay afloat, and if left to their own devices they'll soon see us shipwrecked and abandoned!"