

Jeanne Socrates on NEREIDA



My first solo circumnavigation was west-about from Mexico and started in March 2007 from Zihuatanejo, as soon as their annual GuitarFest had finished - far too good an event to miss!

I had only begun single-handing two years earlier, following my husband's death from cancer in 2003 after three years of cruising the Caribbean and the east coast of Canada and the U.S.A. together. My boat was *Nereida*, a Swedish-built Najad 361.

My plan was to circumnavigate in about one year, avoiding the usual six months of a southern hurricane (or typhoon) season 'holed up' somewhere. I worked out that, with careful planning, I could see most of the Tropical islands that sounded so attractive. Leaving from Mexico, I sailed to the Marquesas and on to the Tuamotus and Societies, then on to Niue, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu before reaching Cairns, Australia, in July=

In order to avoid any early typhoons in the Indian Ocean, I needed to arrive in Richards Bay, S. Africa, by mid-November, so I cleared out from Darwin on 1st September, having made day-hops up the inside of the Great Barrier Reef. Piracy south of the Red Sea was avoided by making for S. Africa, passing south of Madagascar. Bali was temptingly close - I had a wonderful time there before hopping across the S. Indian Ocean to Christmas Island (famous for its large crabs) and Cocos Keeling with its lovely palm-fringed white beaches, coral and abundant fish-life. Several cruising boats were there, so daily get-togethers and frequent barbecues were had on the beach. On to tiny Rodrigues (poor but proudly honest) - in time to join in lively celebrations of its first year of part-independence from its beautiful larger partner Mauritius - a total contrast by way of both scenery and culture. Finally, the French island of Reunion and a testing 3-day walk across its three steep-sided extinct volcano craters among wonderfully varied vegetation and scenery

Sailing south of Madagascar, I learned to look out for sea-mounts in time to avoid rough seas in strong winds there and then had a nasty experience crossing the Agulhas Current nearing the African coast - a 15kt SW wind against the strong SW-flowing current was enough to cause typically short, steep seas. The full genoa had parted company from the forestay just beforehand, adding spice to the mix... S. Africa was very enjoyable, but worrying at times - such a beautiful country, but with such big problems... but there were good flights back to England for Christmas.

A speedy sail with the current took us straight down to historic Mossel Bay. Cape Agulhas was rounded to reach the Atlantic and lovely Simon's Town – home to the former British Navy base and an excellent adjacent marina. After a good, long stop for repairs, Good Hope was passed to reach Cape Town. What fabulous walks (and wines) are to be had in the Cape region!

A good sail followed, up the coast with its shifting sand banks to the old German town of Luderitz, Namibia, avoiding diamond-drilling rigs in thick fog, and on to friendly St Helena (reminded me of Somerset in places) - "An emerald set in a bronze mount," the Governor's wife told me, as she gave me a lift, seeing me exploring in light rain. My voyage continued on across the S. Atlantic to Brazil - but then, no working autopilot or wind-steering resulted in 7-hour sessions of hand-steering followed by 5 hours hove-to for rest and food etc. until I reached Trinidad after ten slow days. Repairs were needed before continuing on to Bonaire and Colon - where the wind steering needed yet another replacement rudder due to big seas and a hefty tree trunk conspiring to demolish the newly-repaired one from Trinidad....

On through the Canal (always an interesting, mainly enjoyable, experience) and then the 'Clipper route' towards San Francisco to start the SHTP08 Race to Kauai but with no wind, I was forced to motor-sail NW to Guatemala for fuel and on to Mexico and a very welcoming Acapulco Y.C. for more fuel. Just one more day and just over 100 miles to my finish.... I left just before sunset to be sure of making landfall in daylight. A beautiful, tropical, moonlit night - but no wind, so we were motoring well off the coast. "Better get a nap," I thought... 45 minutes

Before my alarm went off, I was doused with water. We were in big surf and headed into the beach – I jumped to the wheel - it felt loose and had no effect - we were aground already. It was remote, deserted and dark... In brief, I survived being almost washed out to sea but Nereida ended up a 'constructive loss' - now buried beneath the wet sand of Playa Michigan.

(I sailed the new 'Nereida' down to Acapulco to complete that last short leg up to Zihuatanejo a few years later...)

Second circumnavigation in a new boat, also named *Nereida*

The new 'Nereida' is a Najad 380 – very slightly larger and with a bigger rig than the N361 – she feels like a big sister to my first boat. While she was being fitted out, in early 2009, I was deciding where to sail. I'd followed in awe as Ellen MacArthur made her record sail around, then watched Sam Davies and Dee Caffari doing well in the Vendee Globe. I wondered what it would be like to sail a nonstop circumnavigation – so I began planning a route from England sailing east-about via Cape Horn,



I eventually started my first nonstop attempt from Lanzarote in October 2009 but, as I headed down to S. Africa, several rigging problems caused me to pull into Cape Town for repairs. Being too late in the season to head back north to England and wanting to gain experience of the Southern Ocean, I eventually continued on east past Australia to New Zealand and then made for Vancouver from where I intended to start my next nonstop attempt.

I prepared the boat in Port Townsend, WA, USA, but left, in October 2010, from Victoria, B.C. since that city's harbour is closer to the Pacific Ocean. My passage plan was simple – head SW from Cape Flattery for 2-3 days, and then head S on 127-130W. As the land falls away to the E, the distance off gradually increases so small fishing boats are no longer a problem and only shipping has to be checked on

As we head S, we reach the good NE Trades, with occasional squalls to beware of, then the calms of the unstable Doldrums with the threat of areas of nasty storm clouds... Next, the (often unreliable) SE Trades ... patchy calms around the southern High-pressure area ...and finally the Westerlies (and frequent storms) of the Southern Ocean. The more

threatening the weather, the more often I download information to help me decide where best to head or to prepare for imminent strong conditions.

As well as trying to keep the boat sailing at a good speed in a reasonable direction, there's always a list of repairs to be done. Equipment on board regularly fails or needs some kind of repair – running rigging wears, electrical items corrode. Anything that can come to grief will. Communication becomes a morale-booster – I'm on the SSB/HF radio several times a day, emailing and/or downloading weather information or chatting to ham radio operators or cruisers, many of whom I

still have not met but who have now become good radio friends.

Drawing close to Cape Horn, near to New Year 2011, I planned to heave to, should a storm threaten, before reaching the continental shelf, to avoid bad seas. Well, an untimely storm did arrive and Nereida was knocked down, despite being hove-to as planned. I was devastated, having been so sure I would succeed in my nonstop attempt this time around. Fortunately, I was uninjured and was eventually able to continue unaided, although major damage forced me to make for Ushuaia for repairs. Two days later, despite all the damage, I was on a high as I rounded Cape Horn in daylight, under genoa alone, in company with just several black-browed albatrosses and a playful school of dolphins.



Approaching Cape Horn

While in Ushuaia, waiting for a replacement boom and other much-needed items, I decided to make a positive out of my otherwise depressing situation by continuing on around the remaining four Great Capes – if I could complete a solo circumnavigation via all five Great Capes, I would achieve something not many people have done, albeit with occasional stops for repairs (and a fascinating stop in the Falklands, in lieu of Antarctica). The SE Cape of Tasmania and the S Cape of New Zealand (on Stewart Island) are well south and so suffer from frequent Southern Ocean stormy conditions, making them often difficult to round (Stewart Island's S Cape especially), so I felt it would be useful experience for my next nonstop attempt which I was already planning. I was thrilled to sail into Victoria on 1st August 2012, having successfully rounded all five Great Capes on the way.

Circumnavigation No 3

Two months later, having prepared Nereida yet again, I set off for that elusive 'nonstop, unassisted circumnavigation'. This time, despite a knockdown S of Australia and the usual catalogue of challenges to overcome in order to keep going, I succeeded, arriving back triumphantly on 8th July 2013 – becoming the oldest woman to do so and, to my surprise, finding myself the first woman to

do so from any point in N. America. I finally gained a few 'brownie points' in my grandchildren's eyes when they saw my name in the Guinness Book of Records!

Fast-forward to 2015 – Nereida now had a lovely hard top and a Coppercoated bottom, both enhancements carried out in Mexico. I enjoyed cruising Mexico over the winter but was missing the ocean passages and the wilderness of the Southern Ocean with its impressive seas. I was beginning to think about another circumnavigation when a friend commented that if I succeeded nonstop unassisted, I'd become the oldest person (not just woman) to do so. That gave me a great excuse to take off again – it wasn't really for the record ... but that would make a nice bonus.

Circumnavigation No 4

I'd planned to set off in October 2017 but a nasty fall from a ladder at deck-level onto the hard just a week before my planned departure caused serious neck, rib-cage and internal injuries, which resulted in postponing the attempt to October 2018.

I expected to be at sea for 7-8 months (hopefully, faster than previously) but a surprising number of weather- and gear-related problems, many of them major, caused my journey to take just over 11 months to complete, not helped by damage caused by a knockdown off Stewart Island. Instead of arriving back by early June, I eventually made landfall on 7th September 2019, despite a long catalogue of challenges which had needed to be overcome along the way in order to return to Victoria. This was my fourth solo circumnavigation and my second successful nonstop one. I had become the oldest person to have sailed alone, nonstop, and unassisted around the world via the Five Great Capes of the Southern Ocean.

So what were the problems that resulted in such a long time being taken to complete that nonstop voyage?

I met with far more stormy weather in the Southern Ocean than previously, interspersed with many days of little useful wind. Many more deep Lows headed SE into the Atlantic from South America and the Doldrums doggedly lived up to their frustrating reputation. Three Tropical cyclones had to be avoided.

I suffered a lot of unexpected gear failures – despite having re-rigged in 2016 in readiness for this attempt and all sails being either new or nearly so.

Electrics and electronics at sea are always a source of problems and on this voyage I had more than my fair share.

Spares for running rigging were needed after the first reef line failed and other breakages occurred in the topping lift, the mainsheet traveller line, the genoa car lines and the two lazyjacks. There were problems with both headsail foot shackles, staysail furling gear, reef strops, etc)

For the first time in my voyages, I had major sail problems with either the genoa or the mainsail being unusable for several weeks – that clearly added noticeably to the time taken.

Even worse was the mainsail problem – it tore along the leach while hove-to in January and it was not until 18 weeks later that I was finally able to raise it and use it near Dunedin, N.Z.

On Day 50 (22 November), the rod-kicker holding the boom in place detached itself from the mast at

its base. All the rivets tore out and I had to lash it onto the mast using a thick Spectra line. I also lashed the goose-neck fitting to the mast with some more thick Spectra line, as a precaution.

In the fortnight approaching Cape Horn, there were typically rough seas and strong winds, with some rain. We frequently surfed at 9-10kt over big seas in winds often 30-35kt, gusting 40kt or more. "I'm on the edge of my comfort zone," I reported!

But there were some high spots among the string of challenges.

On Wed 19 Dec 2018 at 0243Z, in lovely twilight, we passed Cape Horn after an enjoyable day's sail. Being close to midsummer, and with a bright moon, there was enough light around to see it clearly and the scattered cloud above allowed plenty of stars to be seen as well. The wind was cold but the occasional albatross was flying around - it was a definite high point for me – I felt very happy to be rounding safely!

I was lucky to witness both a full lunar eclipse on 21st January and a near-full solar eclipse on 2nd July and saw two kinds of dolphins new to me - some Dusky dolphins were spotted near Gough Island (S. Atlantic) and several Peale's dolphins appeared near the Falklands and leaped and twisted around Nereida on Christmas Day

Another highlight was rounding NZ's South Cape soon after a colourful dawn approach, despite damage from the earlier knockdown, and then having a relaxed sail in the lee of Stewart Island. I was so very happy to be finally headed north up the Pacific - and received an amazing welcome back in Victoria after an unbelievable 11months and 4 days at sea!



