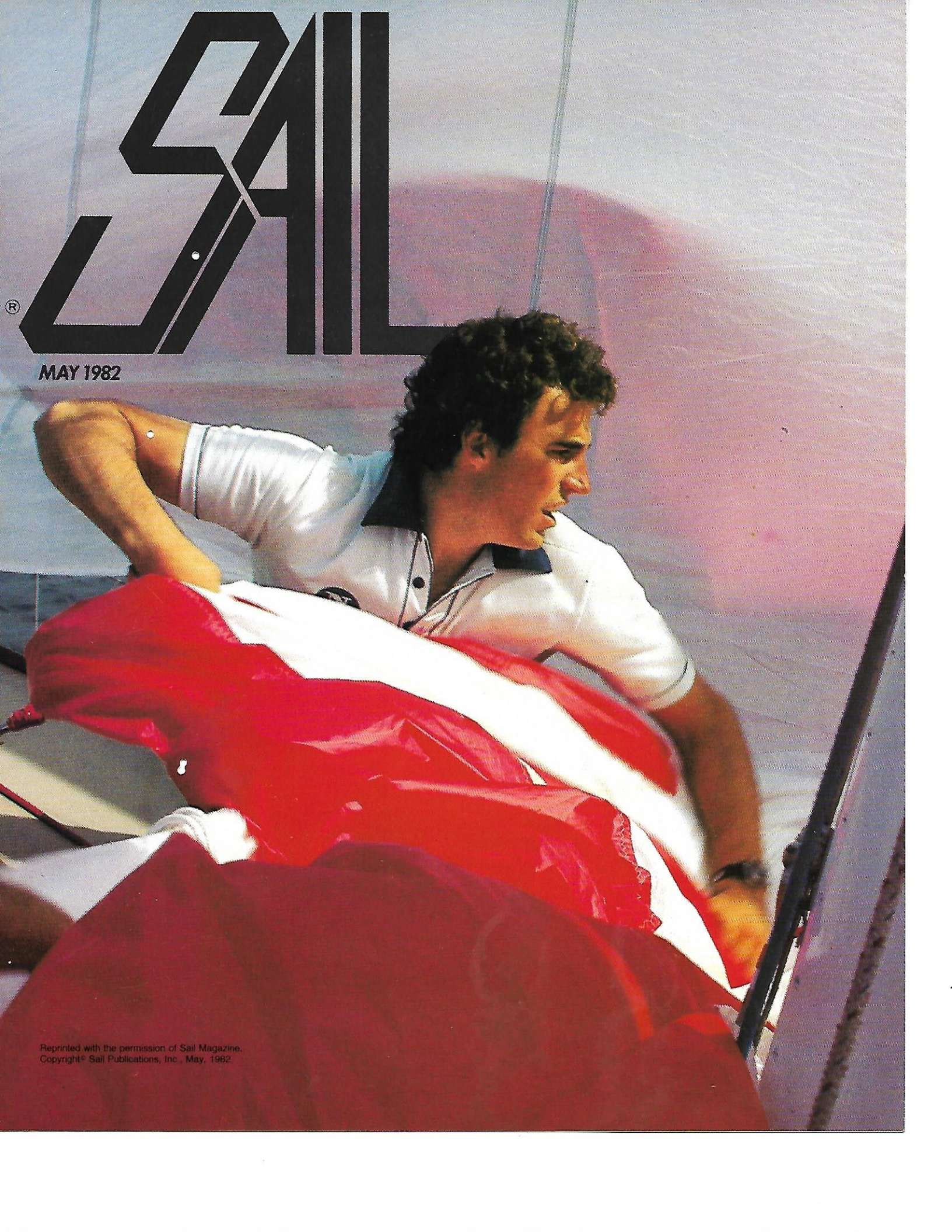


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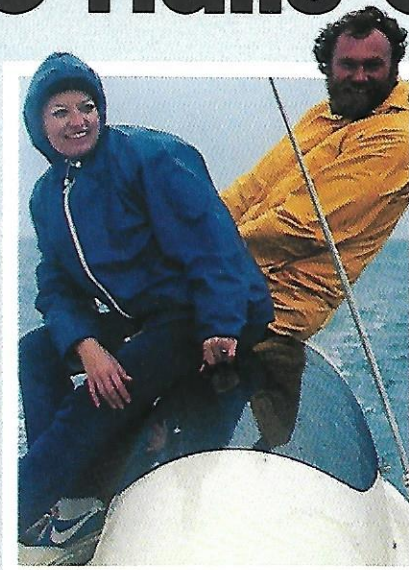
Two hulls east

By Robby Robinson

We were doing fine until the chart blew overboard. In three decades of cruising I'd never lost a chart that way, but then I'd never cruised a catamaran before. Carol stood and pointed at the paper as it receded toward the edge of our narrow circle of fog-rimmed visibility. I put our *Stiletto* about and Larry, her builder, draped himself over the middle of the forward crossbeam.

I wondered how long a chart would float as we peeled back toward the blot on the water. Carol and Cathy gave me good directions, and we came luffing over it, one hull on either side. Larry grabbed as we slid by. Up he came with the paper, or at least part of it. We watched the remainder of the chart slither forever beneath the surface and then unrolled the fragment he had salvaged. It contained Nantucket Island and not much more.

Earlier we'd left Edgartown and rounded Cape Pogue at the north-eastern tip of Martha's Vineyard, and



Cathy and I enjoy the ride

we were reaching at an easy 10 knots through the fog when our navigational library abandoned ship. We had been headed for Nantucket, and we didn't want to turn back, so, armed with the chart fragment, we decided to take advantage of the 15-knot southerly and stumble our way there.

Dotted with two-foot shoals and swept by 2-knot currents, Nantucket Sound is not an ideal spot for fumbling in the fog. Still, *Stiletto's* draft of less than a foot with board and rudders up made the thin water manageable. Our double-digit boat speed also meant that we could cover lots of ocean looking for our landfall. Fearing we might miss the island altogether, I hedged on our original dog-leg course. We'd planned to follow deep water out to the east and then turn south to the island, but with every quarter-hour of hull-slapping through the fog I pinched up more toward the south. With no chart aboard, the few buoys we found meant little. I was looking for something solid.

We'd been chartless almost two hours when Cathy spotted something solid through the haze on our starboard bow. As we feathered toward it I could hear breaking waves. We edged closer still until we could make out the wreck of a medium-sized fishing trawler aground in six to ten feet of water. First off our

Carol Robinson

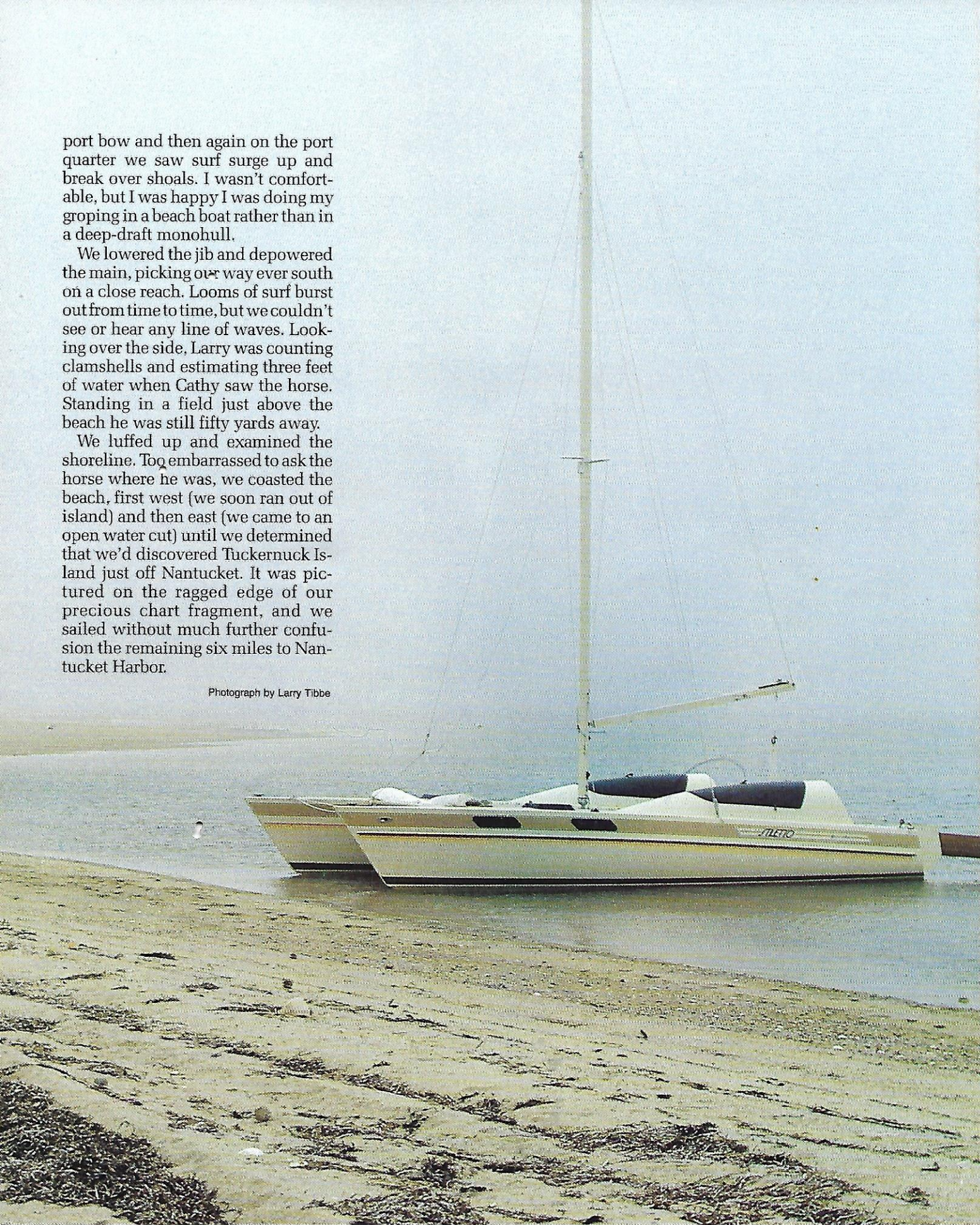


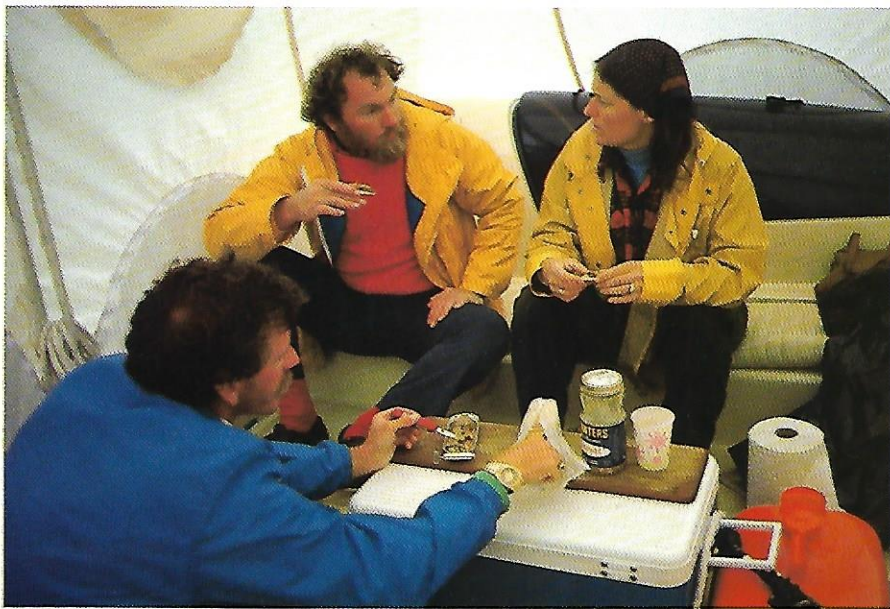
port bow and then again on the port quarter we saw surf surge up and break over shoals. I wasn't comfortable, but I was happy I was doing my groping in a beach boat rather than in a deep-draft monohull.

We lowered the jib and depowered the main, picking our way ever south on a close reach. Looms of surf burst out from time to time, but we couldn't see or hear any line of waves. Looking over the side, Larry was counting clamshells and estimating three feet of water when Cathy saw the horse. Standing in a field just above the beach he was still fifty yards away.

We luffed up and examined the shoreline. Too embarrassed to ask the horse where he was, we coasted the beach, first west (we soon ran out of island) and then east (we came to an open water cut) until we determined that we'd discovered Tuckernuck Island just off Nantucket. It was pictured on the ragged edge of our precious chart fragment, and we sailed without much further confusion the remaining six miles to Nantucket Harbor.

Photograph by Larry Tibbe





Cathy Sturgeon

Her boom tent made *Stiletto's* cockpit into a comfortable home

Carol and I had come on this three-day cruise with a weighty agenda. Not only were we hoping to explore the mysteries of cruising a multihull, we also had fond ideas of guiding Larry Tibbe (of Force Engineering) and his friend Cathy Sturgeon to an enjoyable first taste of New England cruising. Our itinerary was stacked with sure-fire winners: Marion, Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket. To complete it we picked a long weekend late in May.

May in New England can be gorgeous. That weekend in Massachusetts, however, it wasn't. Fog, spotty sun, hefty breezes, and temperatures in the fifties were the weather word. Although our lingering by the crowded dooryards of Edgartown was more an act of will than a supreme pleasure, although we dressed for the slopes when we headed for the beach, and although Larry and Cathy never broke out the bathing suits they'd brought from Florida, the cruise was a success, nonetheless.

The original catamarans were descendants of the Polynesian outrigger canoe. Light, stable, powerful, and fast, they were perfectly suited to the friendly climes and vast distances of the mid-ocean "paradise" where they were born. We, however, were cruising New England, land of the Puritans, home of the whalers, a choppy, changeable area that has also produced its own distinctive sailboat types—none of which has two hulls.

From the moment that we dou-

bled our speed on the strength of the first puff as we were making our way clear of the dock in Marion, I began to suspect that I would like sailing *Stiletto*. That afternoon the sou'wester was fitfully pulsing from 0 knots to 8, and I wouldn't have put up with the drifting and slatting long in my own monohull before capitulating to

In our almost chartless state we were way inshore, trying to figure out just where we were, when Cathy saw a horse

the engine to complete our passage across Buzzard's Bay to Woods Hole. *Stiletto* was stable enough to prevent the slight cross-chop from spilling our wind in the lulls and light enough to get up and go in the puffs. The thought of the engine barely crossed our minds.

We did use the engine to punch out of Woods Hole against a gray, sleety, southeaster the next day. The considerable (3-plus-knot) westerly current flow against the wind bequeathed us a chop that was shorter and steeper than the most lurid Polynesian sailors' nightmare. *Stiletto* was definitely at her worst in the stuff. The bracket-mounted outboard would lift high enough to cavitate wildly when she buried her bow, and then bury itself up to the housing and beyond on the downstroke.

There wasn't room to sail, and we babied the throttle to keep the outboard from self-destructing and "tacked" between the few patches of flat water we could find until we finally made the mouth of the channel and the end of our agony. (Force Engineering now offers a motor-mount that is virtually amidships as an option on its new *Stiletto's*.)

Under sail *Stiletto* handled the chop much more gracefully. Her high freeboard made her very dry to sail—drier, I felt, than a monohull of comparable size. The weather hull caught waves from time to time as we beat toward Edgartown, and our foul-weather gear was definitely not irrelevant. However, going to weather in a wind-versus-tide chop induced by a 15- to 20-knot breeze, we still tended to skip over most of the waves.

Stiletto's speed took some getting used to. On the fog-shrouded reach across to Nantucket the breeze was a solid 15 at the outset. As it began to build I could feel us start to go faster than I really wanted. It wasn't just a question of freight-training through the fog and not knowing where we were. As speeds shoot up, strains do, too. While much of my uneasiness undoubtedly is lack of familiarity with multihulls, I asked Larry if he thought we ought to be going this fast.

"We're light enough now with just four of us aboard to be in good shape," he said. "Load her up with six or eight people, though, and that's when you've got to be careful."

In Edgartown we did some close-quarters sailing in the harbor so that Cathy could take pictures from the dock. I was pleasantly surprised at *Stiletto's* maneuverability. She is heavy enough (1,100 pounds) to have some carry, and the centerline daggerboard helps her spin quite nimbly from one tack to the other. Her high-aspect rudders stall somewhat, especially if you're attempting to bear off without much way on. Still, she responds to sheet adjustment and rudder wriggling better than most boats, and her rapid acceleration is a real plus in tight quarters.

At Woods Hole, Edgartown, and Nantucket, dockwalkers had remarkably similar approaches to our somewhat unconventional craft. While they might break the ice with, "What do you call them?" or ask,

"How many engines does it take to push it?" they would inevitably get around to the self-same, "Do you sleep on it?"

In truth we slept in it. Larry and Cathy had the starboard hull. Carol and I had the port. Although on the one hand, the romance involved in head-to-toe berthing might best be described as minimal, on the other, the berths are wide enough so that romance is, at least, not out of the question. Also tucked below were a galley module and a portable head.

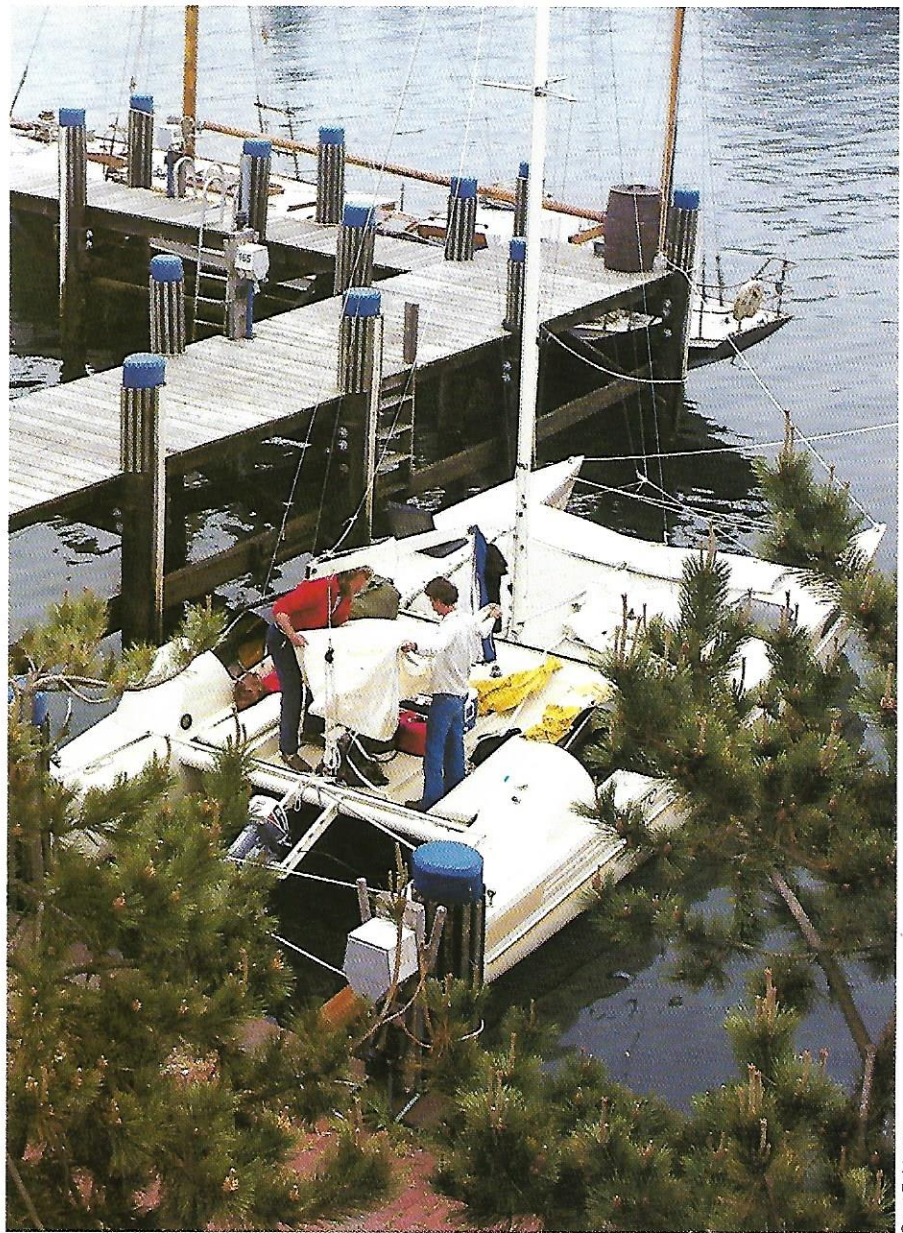
Still, the real secret in making *Stiletto* a home was her boom tent. The zippered canvas covered her entire cockpit area (and on a *Stiletto* that's a lot of room). Beneath it we ate, drank, and socialized, protected from the elements in privacy with elbow room.

To be a cruiser the pile of aluminum and fiberglass on the trailer behind Larry's car first had to become a boat. We arrived an hour late for our set-up rendezvous in Marion and found the boat already afloat. We drowned our shame at missing the work with cones filled with Peterson's old-fashioned ice cream and a walking browse by the weathered saltboxes along Marion's Front Street past the docks, dormitories, and playing fields of Tabor Academy to Barden's boatyard where we picked up not only an *Eldridge* (Bible of New England current information), but a top-of-the-harbor view of one of New England's busiest cruising ports in pre-Memorial Day slumber.

At Woods Hole, too, we were ahead of the season. We negotiated the drawbridge (Larry's finesse with the throttle kept me from having to research *Stiletto's* turning circle under trying circumstances) and found a place to tie up inside, in the heart of town, without so much as a second look. In two weeks such places would be rare, indeed. In July they'd be gone for good.

Marion has an ambience of understated affluence, of wealth that's had time to settle in. Woods Hole, on the other hand, grabs for the jingle of right now. It's not only a bustling yacht harbor, it's the terminus for the island ferries and the home of a world-renowned oceanographic institute. It's a town that hasn't the time to be quaint.

Hadley Harbor, Tarpaulin Cove,



Stiletto stood out in salty traditional Nantucket

Robinson's Hole, Cuttyhunk—those gems and others beckoned us toward the Elizabeth Islands. *Stiletto* would have been great there, but instead we heeded the call of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket to seaward and left the other islands for another time.

After slipping past the gate-keeping Chappaquiddick ferry we relaxed and explored Edgartown at a leisurely pace. We weren't slothful enough, however, to let the lobsters at the Kafe outdistance us. Nantucket, too, was a preseason feast that we savored deliberately. We prospected (successfully we agreed) for a candlelit venue suitable for celebrating the cruise's end, had the downtown shopping area virtually to ourselves the next morning, ran across the har-

bor for lunch and a walk on the beach to collect some souvenir shells, and made our connection with the ferry that took Carol and me back to civilization by mid-afternoon.

We envied Cathy and Larry their further explorations. For a three-day cruise we'd covered a lot of this great cruising ground, but it's never easy to go home. The ferry cast off, and the fog socked in as we left the harbor. We wondered about Cathy and Larry and their eventual trip back from Nantucket. They'd be headed west, though, with lots and lots of beaches to hit. They should be okay. They were cruising in a very fine beach boat.



