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Bucket list item checked off on boating trip of a lifetime

By Diane Claytor



Dave Munson at the helm of Boomerang I Photos provided

the South of France, it took Munson approximately

Twenty days. More than 1,800 miles (almost 1,600 nautical miles). Fourteen ports. Four waterways and four countries. This may sound like a marketing brochure for a luxury cruise line, but that couldn't be further from the truth. This trip, recently experienced by Moraga's Dave Munson, did not include chefs producing gourmet meals, stewards providing fresh towels daily or servers bringing fancy drinks poolside. It was, instead, a "real shakedown cruise," Munson says.

The affable Munson, who laughs readily and jokes frequently, is certainly no stranger to travel. A retired international banker, the New Jersey native has lived and traveled all over the world with his family. In fact, he explained, he purchased his Moraga home in 1984 but until his retirement 20 years later, had actually only lived in it for five of those years. Istanbul, London, Tokyo and Hawaii were his homes instead, as were hotel rooms around the globe.

When Warren Sandral, Munson's longtime Australian friend, asked Munson if he'd be interested in helping sail Sandral's newly built 61-foot motor yacht from the construction site in Yalova, Turkey to its home port in the South of France, it took Munson approximately 10 seconds to say "you bet."

Munson arrived in Yalova on May 18 where he met up with Sandral and his Australian friend, Stuart Parke. The construction crew was toiling away, "working hard to get everything finished and going over every problem we found, no matter how minor," Munson says. Five days later, Captain Sandral and his two first mates boarded Boomerang I and set off sailing. "Forty-five minutes into the trip and suddenly there's a boom and a warning light comes on, indicating the port engine has a pressure problem," Munson reports. "Back to the marina where diagnostics are done and a few hours later we're given the OK to head out again."

For the next 20 days, the three sailors traveled through Turkey, Greece, Italy and France, stopping in 14 ports along the way. Their typical day began around 6 a.m. and ended 8-10 hours later. They'd wash down the boat to eliminate all the salt buildup, go into town for dinner, get back on the boat around 11 p.m. where they'd retire to their cabins and get ready to do it all again the next day.

The days could sometimes get boring, Munson admits. With the sophisticated navigation system, there really isn't much steering to do. "We'd go to the chart, pick the way point, hit 'go to,' choose the speed (typically 17 knots) and that's pretty much it," he says. They took turns manning the helm, watching for other ships and lobster and squid traps. Other than that, Munson reports, they read, took naps, did stretching exercises. There were a few days of R&R when the sailors were able to enjoy some sightseeing on dry land. There were also incredible sunrises and sunsets and lots of laughs, Munson says.

Most days there was something on the boat that required their attention. After all, this was a "shakedown cruise. We heard more beeps than you can imagine," Munson laughingly recalls. "At the end of the trip, we all said we felt like the Pavlovian dog - automatically reacting every time we heard a beep." There were a few significant issues; perhaps the biggest was when the water pump quit and it took several attempts before it was fixed - meaning several days of no running water.

Munson kept notes throughout the journey and sent regular emails to friends and family, regaling them with stories of this amazing trip. On May 29, for example, he described the experience of being the lead in a flotilla of five boats to sail into the Corinth Canal. "Being the first into this very narrow waterway with its high shear walls, over 200 feet at certain points, and the clear blue green water is almost magical," he wrote. "However, the magical experience went up in smoke as we entered the Gulf of Corinth and encountered 30 knot winds along with 2-3 foot wind driven swells for the next four or five hours." Both the boat and the sailing crew survived with flying colors.

As Boomerang I pulled into its home port in Villeneuve-Loubet, France, Munson wrote his final email: "We did it! . we have seen some of the most fascinating sites, met interesting, helpful and wonderful people along the way. Amazing how we have so much in common despite distances, culture and language

differences." Everyone got along well, the weather cooperated and all three sailors agreed that they've checked a big item off their bucket list.

Sandral is already talking about another cruise next year and this time it didn't take Munson even 10 seconds to say he's definitely in again. "Not only that, but my wife Rena said she's not missing the next one!"



Getting the Boomerang I ready to sail; Capt. Warren Sandral surrounded by his first mates: Stuart Parke (left) and Moraga's Dave Munson (right)

*A 20 day ... 1545 nautical miles / 1897 miles / 2855 kilometers ... 19 ports ...
A Waterways traverse: Dardanelles, Corinth Canal, Straits of Messina, LeVieux Canal*



Map with the route from #1, Istanbul to #14, Villeneuve-Loubet, France

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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