

# Cruising

Recent cases reveal impe



## Epic voyage

When most of us think of races such as the Fastnet or the Sydney-Hobart we think of them as serious challenges in themselves. For Australians Alex Whitworth and Peter Crozier, retired sailor and builder respectively, these have been cruising destinations.

We've scratched at the surface of their unbelievable voyaging before when Whitworth and Crozier, fresh from finishing the Sydney-Hobart Race 2004, decided to get to the start of the Fastnet by sailing their 33-footer *Berrimilla* halfway round the world and back.

## The pair have added another Fastnet along with a circumnavigation

The Aussie pair didn't do it just the once, mind you, but twice, sailing round the world for two successive Fastnet Races, most recently last summer.

In adding another circumnavigation to their roll of honour they also managed a feat that stands out all on its own: a crossing of the North West Passage. This they believe to be the first under sail alone.

No short report can possibly do justice to such an epic feat in a small, 30-year-old production yacht, so I won't try. I simply point you in the direction of the bare facts on page 75 and urge you to keep an eye out for forthcoming issues of *Yachting World*, in which the lavishly talented raconteur Alex Whitworth will be recounting part of his remarkable tale.

Elaine Bunting

## Stealing away... in your yacht

*Two audacious incidents remind us that, although rare, the theft of a yacht can be hard to prevent and old boats are just as vulnerable as new ones*

Yacht theft remains comparatively rare, but there are signs that the motivation for it is changing. Many would-be thieves calculate, correctly, that the risks of being caught, the potential for gain from the average production yacht and the skills required to sail away from the place of theft make stealing a yacht much less attractive than taking, say, a luxury car.

Many yachts are stolen not for financial gain, but as a means to some other criminal endeavour – drug smuggling, for example. Ordinary production cruising yachts, which by their nature do not stand out, are good targets for this growing transatlantic trade.

Over a dozen yachts intercepted in drug busts in the UK and Ireland in the past two years may well be the tip of the iceberg.

Yachts can also be seen as a good bet for people-trafficking or criminals on the run, and recent audacious thefts from either side of the Atlantic illustrate this.

In Cape Verde, a Swiss family who were living aboard their 38-footer flew home for a visit, leaving their boat unattended. When they returned to Cape Verde the boat had disappeared.

Eventually the yacht turned up in Brazil, where the authorities arrested the crew. The yacht, *Enea*, had been taken by a group from Cape Verde and Guinea expressly to emigrate illegally.

After the crew were taken off,

locals gutted the boat and the authorities demanded a huge sum for her release to the owner.

According to our source, the insurance company agreed to pay out, but declined to pay the 'salvage' fee and the family has bought a new boat in Italy.

A correspondent in Cape Verde comments that this case is of concern because of the fear of copycat thefts: 'There are always young African men in Mindelo trying to hitch a ride to Brazil.'

In the Caribbean, another source says he was asked to track down a yacht stolen in Martinique. It had been taken from charter company VPM and the culprit turned out to be US criminal Milos Gaspar.

Lucie Barone of VPM Yacht Charters says his had seemed like a normal booking: "The boat was handed over with a charter contract and we had made copies of the passports of all the crewmembers."

It appears Gaspar was not an experienced sailor. He had booked a skipper for the yacht, who sailed with the charterers to Isla Margarita, where they kidnapped him and, Barone says, "told him: 'Either sail us to Mexico or we throw you into the water.'"

The boat, a Bénéteau Cyclades 43, bore hull markings that clearly identified the yacht as property of VPM Yacht Charters, but Gaspar

