

2020 NADA HA-HA —

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the annual 750-mile Baja Ha-Ha cruising rally from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas was canceled. Many cruisers still planned to go south — some having worked on that plan for many years. The Nada Ha-Ha



ATALAYA

This photo of cover girl Remy Lang of 'Atalaya' says it all: a racer-turned-cruiser doing a non-rally rally in an upside-down year — and loving it.

down the coast.

The goals of the Nada Ha-Ha were few: group camaraderie and safety while avoiding contact with the locals. We provisioned with enough food and fuel for the entire trip. Plus, we sorted, rinsed and carried all of our trash to Cabo. Beyond that, skippers and crews were responsible for sailing their own boats. This was the first substantial offshore cruise for many entrants and their introduction to offshore cruising.

More than 70 boats registered their interest in going to Mexico with the fleet, but as the date neared, more and more made the decision to leave a month or two later, not go at all, or depart earlier than our starting date of November 2. At the official start that Monday morning, we had 31 boats checking in from San Diego and Ensenada. They ranged in size from Ralphie West's *Islander 30*, *Ceci Rose*, to Terry Moore's *Deerfoot 62*, *Moonshadow*. As in earlier Baja Ha-Ha's, there was even a motorboat contingent — Oleg Haren-car's 46' *Ed Monk 50*, *Perla Negra*, out of Sausalito.

Sadly, Mike Haden had to drop out because one of his crew tested positive for COVID. Mike is the new owner of the Catalina 445 *Tranquilo*, a boat that the late Lloyd Clauss had taken on over 10 Ha-Ha's. Mike has promised to have *Tranquilo* at the start of the 2021 Baja Ha-Ha.

Many crews began preparing for this adventure years — even decades — be-

fore the starting date. Others, however, decided to join the southbound exodus on short notice. In fact, one of the last sign-ups, Cary Gunn's San Diego-based Catalina 42 *Liberta*, decided to sail south just three weeks before the start. Some boats had firsts. For Lynn Scharf and Charlotte Formichella on the Garcia 46, *La Danseuse*, it was the first time the two women had ever sailed with crew.

At 360 rhumblines miles from San Diego to Turtle Bay, Leg One is the longest and can be the coldest, windiest, and roughest of the three legs. Ullman Sails' Chuck Skewes gave us an extensive weather briefing. The prediction was for very light air at the start and 10-18 knots of downwind sailing expected the rest of the way to Turtle Bay. The morning of the start was hindered by a drizzly, thick fog and absolutely no wind. The fleet motored or sailed at their own discretion with sails going up as the wind speed rose throughout the leg. Every boat got a chance for some good downwind sailing before the finish.

In Turtle Bay, we chose an anchorage far from the town on the southeast side of the bay. A few of the Turtle Bay locals came by, wanting to sell fuel and to collect cash for taking trash. In the spirit of the Nada Ha-Ha, we declined. It was difficult because the Baja Ha-Ha brings a

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substantial amount of income to the area with restaurant visits and fuel, grocery, and beer sales. We assured the locals that the Baja Ha-Ha would be back in 2021.

The morning VHF net had the fleet checking in from different points up and down the coast. Jeff Clark's 50-ft Xquisite



NOVA



NOVA

X5 *Sea Larks* in the "lead," checking in from Bahia Asunción, and Andrew Abdo's 34-ft custom steel cutter *Red Star* bringing up the rear after a quick stop in Ensenada to do some surfing. Many tales of fun sailing, and even a green flash — but happily, an unusually minor amount of repairs. A dorado wrapped a fishing line around the rudder of Eric and Kim Rimkus's Beneteau 46, *Gladiator*, which thankfully took less than an hour to undo. *Talion* lost a spinnaker halyard shackle at midnight, sending the huge symmetrical $\frac{3}{4}$ oz kite floating forward and into the water. Luckily, it didn't go under the boat. Chriss Uptegrove's Cal 34, *White Pearl*, broke a whisker pole.

Autopilot problems were the most prevalent issue. Cameron Peebles's Pearson Countess 44, *Ella*, along with *Ceci Rose*, *Liberta*, *Moonshadow*, and *Angela*

Southbound and down, loaded up and cruisin' (l to r): 'Amazing Grace III', 'Calista', 'Talion', 'Flite Deck' and 'Nivasi'.



(L-R) SONRISA, CALISTA, FLITE DECK

A RALLY TO REMEMBER



The get-together at Mag Bay was the only official shoreside gathering of participants in the Nada Ha-Ha. **Inset above: Jim Levitt of 'Nova' shows** off this year's colors.

and Gary Livers' Catalina 380, *Nivasi*, all reported autopilot problems. Only the doublehanders on *Ceci Rose* were unable to make repairs and were relegated to hand-steering the rest of the Ha-Ha.

Sea life sightings were plentiful. "We saw a humpback whale breaching again and again for 20 minutes outside Turtle Bay," reported the crew of the Leopard 46 *Calista*. Kristin Torek on the Baba 40 *Sonrisa* summed it up perfectly, remembering a "magical sail under moonlight surrounded by a million dolphins."

It didn't take long for shenanigans to brew and a social distancing dinghy raft-up party was soon in the works. Seeing the participants at the raft-up brought the question, "What's the average age of your captain and crew?" Amazingly, the median age for the entire group was about 40, with *Talion's* Glenn Belshaw

topping it at 77, and 19-year-old Abbey Mauro on Eitan Zur's 36' S2, *Sierra Wind*, the youngest participant in the fleet. It seems many of the group were inexperienced but adventurous young sailors who reasoned that they could quarantine and work remotely from anywhere — and life in Mexico is warm and cheap.

Leg Two took the fleet 240 miles to pristine Bahia Santa Maria. The prediction was for NW wind in the low teens with gusts in the high teens. This is a cruiser rally, not a buoy race, so we decided to do away with start and finish lines. Everyone took off on their own schedule, and spinnakers were popping everywhere.

The pair of Seawind 38s, Paul Benson and Erica Johnson's *Atalaya* and Bill Edwards and Katie Smith's *Flite Deck*, took off like rockets as all cruisers headed out on typically the best sailing leg of the Ha-Ha. The weather started to warm up, and shirtsleeve sailing was the order of the day. It's also where the fish started biting. Dorado, yellowfin, wahoo, and other game fish were hitting trolling lines throughout the fleet. The warm air and water brought

lots more sightings of sea life — including turtles, whales, marlin, jumping rays and even flying fish that needed to be cleaned off many decks in the morning.

Boats trickled into Bahia Santa Maria at a steady rate all through the night of November 7 and into the next morning. The bay is well protected from the north and west, so although it was

quite windy, the water was flat and the anchorage comfortable. The morning net heard of a fabulous sailing leg summed up by Remy Lang on *Atalaya*: "Sailing barefoot in November in breezes you wish



LEFT: MAÑANA; RIGHT: SONRISA

Left: The biggest one that didn't get away in 2020 was this 100-pound black marlin caught aboard 'Mañana' at the start of Leg Two. After the 45-minute fight, "we released her in good condition back into the big blue," reports crewman Jeff Greenlee. Right: If it's your first fish, size doesn't matter — Kristin of 'Sonrisa' with the catch of the day. you could order up on demand for racing." Cameron Peebles had a late start due to that autopilot issue on *Ella*, so he decided to skip Turtle Bay and blast through to Bahia Santa Maria — his cutlass bearing "spraying like a squirt gun" the whole way. Cameron didn't have the right tool for the job, but as soon as he anchored, Greg on *Sonrisa* came to the rescue.

In a normal year, when the Baja Ha-Ha visits Turtle Bay and Bahia Santa Maria, the *panga* fishermen turn into taxi drivers, shuttling ashore those less experi-



LEFT: ERICA JOHNSON; RIGHT: FLITE DECK

2020 NADA HA-HA —



The only dinghy raft-up was behind 'Amazing Grace III' at Turtle Bay. Only a few people ventured ashore for surfing or short hikes.

enced with landing a dinghy in surf. With our COVID mandate in place, even this tradition was put on hold, and almost no one went ashore. Instead, most participants chose to catch up on both sleep and repairs. The crews from *Atalaya* and Louis Solorzano's 43' Hans Christian, *Solamer*, risked the beach landing and hiked over the massive hill to the ocean side. They were rewarded with incomparable views of Mag Bay and the Pacific. After shredding sails and losing charging capabilities on Leg Two, Ralphie on *Ceci*

a nasty beat to weather up into the bay to anchor off the beautiful white sand beach. After many days of quarantine at sea, we proclaimed ourselves free of COVID and had a no-mask beach party complete with music and a tequila bar. Lots of folks brought food to share as cruisers finally met each other and exchanged tales of the trip so far. That included John Hutchins of the Vector 39 *Alexis* from Juneau, Alaska. John had left late and sailed doublehanded and non-stop from Ensenada to Mag Bay to make the beach party.

Per Ha-Ha tradition, the start of the 180-mile Leg Three began at the early

hour of 7 a.m. so that the smaller and slower boats would only have to spend one night at sea. But there isn't always much breeze at that hour, and this year the wind gods were definitely taking the day off. In fact, most boats never saw breeze above 8 knots the whole way to Cabo. A few boats had the foresight to start the night before, right after the beach party, and had enough wind to sail the entire third leg, including the Seawind *Atalaya*, who only motored into and out of anchorages, using nine gallons of gasoline the entire trip!

The air temps were in the 80s, with water temps in the high 70s, and continually inching higher as the water became unbelievably blue. "I never tired of the stunning sunset, moonrise, and sunrise cycle," observed Jamie Sandberg of the Island Packet 46 *Amazing Grace III*.

Boats arriving at Cabo had the choice of anchoring out in the sometimes-rolly anchorage just off the beach, or opting for a slip in Marina Cabo San Lucas. With the state of the economy and the pandemic this year, there were slips in the marina

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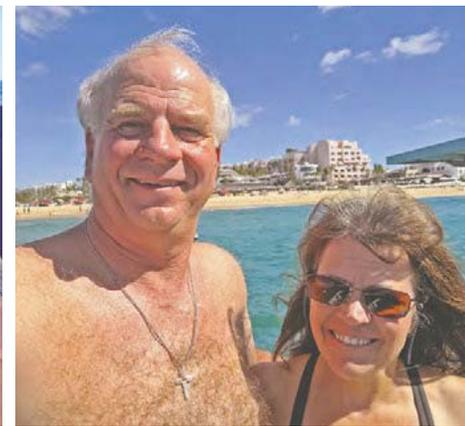
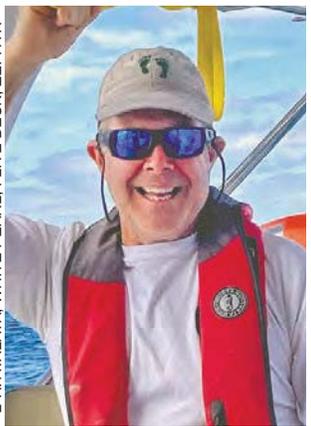
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A RALLY TO REMEMBER

L-R: ATALAYA, WHITE PEARL, FLITE DECK, ZEPHYR



for every boat that wanted one. The marina itself was relatively quiet, with only a few tour boats, fishing boats, and cruise ships in attendance. Most restaurants in town were either closed or only offering takeout. Still present were a few throbbing nightclubs, and the persistent street hawkers attempting to sell you anything from dive trips to camel rides.

And so the first and (I hope) only Nada Ha-Ha came to a close. Completion of this 750-mile rally is a cause for celebration. In fact, according to some in the fleet, it was one of the greatest adventures of

Young or not-so-young; first timers or old Mexico veterans, the Nada Ha-Ha was awash with smiles (l to r): Paul of 'Atalaya', Chriss of 'White Pearl', Bill and Katie of 'Flite Deck', and Cece and Nixie of 'Zephyr', thrilled to be in a strangely quiet Cabo.

their lives. New friendships were made, lessons learned, and experiences had that will never be forgotten. I, for one, cannot wait until the 2021 Baja Ha-Ha and the return of the pied piper of fun, the Grand Poobah, Richard Spindler, once again leading the fun-filled adventure.

— Patsy Verhoeven

Readers — Patsy "La Reina del Mar" Verhoeven has done 13 consecutive Ha-Ha's on her Gulfstar 50 Talion, and has been 'Assistant Poobah' for the past five years. We cannot adequately express our gratitude to her for making the Nada Ha-Ha happen in this strange and difficult year.

The Baja Ha-Ha Rally Committee is confident that, with upcoming COVID-19 vaccines and other health measures worldwide, the 'official' Baja Ha-Ha Rally will return next year. See www.baja-haha.com for event details.



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