



Full circle

Jeanne Socrates has completed a fourth circumnavigation and etched her name even more firmly in the record books. She reflects on the ups and down of a job well done with **Sam Jefferson** and **Birgit Hackl**

“Some people talk about having a guardian angel on their shoulder but I have to say that, on this trip, it felt more like there was a demon looking on! Everything that could go wrong did go wrong.” So says 77-year-old Jeanne Socrates, reflecting on a 340-day epic record trip around the world aboard her trusty Najad

380 *Nereida*. It's a trip that has put her in the record books as the oldest person to single-handedly sail non-stop around the world, beating the previous record holder, 71-year-old Minoru Saito, by a substantial margin.

The trip started and, naturally, concluded in Victoria BC and took in Cape Horn, the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Leeuwin, the SE Cape of Tasmania and the S Cape of New

ABOVE
Jeanne Socrates
aboard her trusty
Najad 380 *Nereida*

Zealand. It was not without incident, however, and took far longer than Socrates, a veteran of three previous circumnavigations, had envisioned. “I just could not believe how long it took,” Socrates reflects. “My previous circumnavigation took seven-and-a-half months and I used to chuckle when I thought about Sir Robin Knox-Johnston taking over 10 months in *Suhaili*, which, by his



Infobox

The present *Nereida* is a modified Najad N380, built by Najadvarvet in Sweden. She is named after the 'Nereids', who were the 'handmaidens of Poseidon', according to ancient Greek mythology.

LOA: 38ft (11.55m)

Beam: 12ft (3.65m)

Draught: 6ft 10in (2.10m)

Displacement: 20,060lb (9,100kg)

Sail plan: Cutter rig with furling genoa and staysail

own admission, was a bit of a pig of a boat to get round – but there I was beating a very unwanted record!

“The weather was far worse than anything I had experienced on my previous trips – stormier and then, between the storms, long periods of calm when I couldn’t make any progress. It was frequently frustrating.”

All the while things fell apart. “I think I suffered 15 to 20 gear failures through the trip. Early on the vang went when all the rivets holding it to the mast failed. Supporting the boom when reefed was hard after that.

“The biggest one was probably the mainsail, which tore badly along the leech while hove - to in a storm. I had to repair it as I went and that was a big job. I ran from 32° W, 1300nm NNE of the Falklands to 171° E after rounding the South

ABOVE RIGHT
Jeanne steps ashore
after 340 days afloat

Cape of New Zealand 126 days later with no mainsail, which has to be another sort of unwanted record!”

Perhaps the climax of these difficulties came off New Zealand, where *Nereida* suffered a knockdown that forced Socrates to head for the sleepy South Island port of Timaru, where she picked up a mooring buoy and got to work fixing her battered boat. Unfortunately she lost her radar and both solar panels in that knockdown, but at least she managed to repair the wind generator to keep running electronics, a sat phone and an SSB radio – important pieces of equipment as they allowed Jeanne access to weather forecasts and to post daily blogs to her website.

The culmination came as she trekked slowly back up the Pacific. Jeanne was forced to sit tight and wait for a weather window off Honolulu as two cyclones, Erick and Flossie, whistled past. Even after that, it was not plain sailing. “I was hoping to pick up the tail end of a low to push me

toward Victoria, so I heaved to until I thought the low had passed through and, as the wind dropped off, I set the genoa in order to make good progress.

“Unfortunately, I had miscalculated. I now think I was in the eye of the low – the wind started to build again and my genoa went to pieces and I had no choice but to furl it. In the end, I set the storm jib in addition to the staysail and that was how I arrived in Victoria.”

This last leg was made all the more fraught because *Nereida*’s steering cables were badly frayed so Jeanne kept a constant weather eye on them, afraid they might part.

So, aside from the weather, why did so many things break? “I guess *Nereida* is just that bit older than she was last time I circumnavigated. I have renewed and repaired things, but I guess time has taken its toll. It’s worrying really.

What about high points? “Rounding Cape Horn this time was special – just because it was so stormy this time →

Interview ~ Jeanne Socrates

around and I was ducking between storms to get past. The night I rounded was unexpectedly beautiful.”

Socrates has noticed a big difference compared with last time she went round and set a record. “It feels different this time. Press attention has been much more intense and it feels like this time I got far greater recognition, which is strange.”

Despite this, she has wasted no time in getting back to life ashore and has suffered little in the way of anticlimax: “It was strange, I just went straight back into ‘land

mode.’ When I was on the boat, I was sad the voyage was going to end – partly because being aboard is actually very sociable with all the friends you make over the HF/SSB chats. But once I was back, I just got on with things.”

And what about the future? “Well, the main thing is getting *Nereida* repaired. It will take time but people have been very generous here in Victoria so that helps.

“Once the boat is fixed, I’ll get back to cruising in a relaxed, laid back sort of way around the Pacific. – enjoying the stop-offs this time around!”

RIGHT
A jubilant Jeanne
back in Victoria



Quick Q&A.

Long-time blue water cruiser Birgit Hackl chatted with Jeanne on the SSB as she sailed up through Polynesia and sent us this quick Q&A

1) What's the most annoying/stupid question you've ever had to answer in an interview?

Jeanne: Was I just sailing around the world for the thrill of it?!

2) Did you meet any resistance from family and/or friends who tried to talk you out of this voyage?

I know friends in Victoria did not think it a good idea, but I suppose they knew I wouldn't listen if they'd tried to talk me out of it.

3) Do you have a special strategy/ritual to deal with repairs/disasters that seem overwhelming in the beginning?

Most things are fixable – you just have to figure out how best to go about it and prioritise quickly if more than one challenge occurs at the same time.

4) If you had to choose between two evils, would you prefer too strong wind, or too light wind? Why?

Strong wind you can either sail in or heave to in, but in light wind you can't do anything – so I prefer to be faced with strong wind rather than light wind.

5) What's the most important piece of equipment/gadget on your boat?

It used to be my wind steering (Hydrovane), now broken. So useful and so quiet, and follows the wind in wind shifts – no need for batteries or electronics – it's just great!

6) Is there some piece of equipment/gadget you wished you had brought?

Suitable strong adhesive and more sail repair material. Set of taps and dies for new screw holes.

7) When you check in on our SSB net, you always talk in the plural – who does “we” refer to?

“We” means me and *Nereida* – we're a team!

8) Do you always enjoy being linked to the world via sat-phone or does it sometimes feel like a burden that people expect you to write/phone regularly?

I've not usually had a satphone, only radio. I'm an amateur operator and enjoy the many 'ham' contacts I've made around the world as I've sailed. This time, I was loaned a wi-fi terminal by Redport/GMN and given free unlimited use



of the Iridium satellite connection. It's enabled big weather files to be downloaded (but no Internet) and unlimited phone calls via VOIP. I've enjoyed being able to call friends and family whenever I want—it's up to me to do it at my convenience so it has not been a burden.

9) What's the first thing you'll do when you've reached port again?

I'm looking forward to soaking in a bath and having some fresh fruit, green salad (a crispy Caesar salad), fresh vegetables and fresh bread and butter, and cheese, with wine, of course!

10) When do you miss company most, in challenging moments when you could do with some help, or in beautiful moments when you'd love to share the experience?

The beautiful ones would be nice to share with someone close.

11) How do you keep your diet varied on such a long trip? Do you rely on pills for vitamins or do you try to grow sprouts etc to have something green on your plate?

I have a big variety of tinned food – meat and fish and veg, plus bouillon, as well as starting out with fresh-laid eggs. They lasted for four months, just turning them every day, plus fresh potatoes and onions (I just finished my last onion today), and lots of dried beans etc. Jars of curry paste, soy sauce, mayonnaise, pesto sauce. I can ring the changes and have made a lot of thick soups to last several days – especially good when stormy weather is expected. I take vitamin C and D daily and can sprout beans if I wish –sprouted mung beans are lovely and crunchy added to a quesadilla.

12) What rhythm have you found to get enough rest after such a long time on passage? Do you set your alarm at regular intervals day and night?

I sleep whenever I'm tired, if nothing else needs doing – daytime as well as night-time. I set alarms for important times in case I sleep overlong.

13) What's your favourite time of the day?

I enjoy sunsets and sunrises.