

# The Pacific Wild

CRUISING THE CHANNEL ISLANDS ABOARD A TRUSTY FLEMING 65 PROVED TO BE QUITE AN ADVENTURE; AND ONE WHERE MOTHER NATURE HAD HER SAY. BY PETER A. JANSSEN



LOA: 65'0"  
 BEAM: 18'8"  
 DRAFT: 5'0"  
 DISPL.: 133,500 lb.  
 FUEL: 1,700 gal.  
 WATER: 400 gal.  
 POWER: 2/800-hp MAN R6-800 diesels  
 TRANSMISSIONS: ZF/2.5:1 reduction  
 PROPELLERS: Faster Propeller (subsidiary of ZF),  
 31 x 31, nickel, aluminum, bronze  
 GENERATOR: 21-kW Onan

It was half an hour after midnight, zero dark thirty, when the rumblings of the big 800-horsepower MAN diesels woke me up. I threw on my clothes and ran into Tony Fleming, the owner of our Fleming 65 *Venture* and the founder Fleming Yachts, on the way up to the pilothouse, where Chris Conklin, the captain, had just fired up the engines. Christine Edwards, the mate, was just behind us.

Outside, the wind was howling—no, shrieking—as the Simrad wind gauge at the helm danced spastically between 50 and 60 knots, and it was pitch black outside except for the almost iridescent white foam that was blowing horizontally off the top of the waves. When we had anchored here in Forney's Cove late the previous afternoon, we'd thought we would be protected in the lee of Santa Cruz Island, one of the famed Channel Islands off the Southern California coast. Indeed, Forney's had seemed like a pocket of calm as we let out 300 feet of chain in only 17 feet of water. The weather forecast had warned of a dreaded Santa Ana wind blowing dry air in a fury off the mountains, but we thought it was headed farther south. Still, this was early December, and the wind was going to be cold; there was already snow on the hills behind Ventura, where we had started our cruise. After dinner, Conklin set the anchor alarm and then stretched out on the sofa in the saloon while the three of us went below to our respective cabins; if the anchor dragged, he would start the engines and we should come running.

In the dark pilothouse, Fleming took the helm while the three of us went out to pick up the anchor. On deck, a gust of wind knocked me against the railing; this was serious stuff. As the chain rattled in Conklin grabbed a machete-sized knife, bent far out over the pulpit and hacked away at clumps of kelp that came up with it. Kelp shrapnel kept flying back and hitting Edwards and me in the face at 60 knots. At last the big Ultra anchor came up, wrapped in a ball of kelp; Conklin hacked away until the anchor was back on board. Fleming turned on the FLIR thermal-imaging camera, which helped us find a kelp-free zone in the cove, and we dropped the hook again and hoped for the best.

After dawn, the thin, red track line on the Nobeltec cartography displayed a tangled zigzag where the Santa Ana had blown *Venture* back and forth, but the anchor had held. A few hours later however, with the wind still howling about 60 knots, it seemed that we were getting closer to the rocks off our port quarter. In the morning light, the beach in front of us had taken on an odd otherworldly golden



A California brown pelican searches for a meal (above, left). The 65's

classic lines serve her well (above). High winds stir the sea (below).

glow; the water was a cold steely gray with angry waves and flying foam. We were alone in the cove until a little fishing boat seeking protection came in, looking half submerged, spray flying. The chart-plotter registered 1.2 knots SOG as *Venture* swung back and forth, the big TRAC stabilizers working overtime.

But now picking up the hook seemed problematic. The chain tightened and became almost vertical—and stuck. Fleming tried to horse the bow around with the engines and thruster, but the wind was too strong. The stresses at work were enormous; the bridle line broke on the starboard side. Finally the big 132-pound Ultra came up and we could see the problem; the shank was bent about 90 degrees. It must have been stuck under a rock. (To its credit, Ultra sent Fleming a new anchor after our trip.) As *Venture* swung free, we took a big wave over the bow, and the three of us were soaked to the skin. Back in the pilothouse Fleming shook his head. "That was the worst night at anchor I've ever spent in my life," he said.

And that's saying a lot, because Fleming has cruised *Venture* about 25,000 nautical miles since she launched in 2005, plus several thousand more on *Venture II*, another Fleming 65 that he kept in England until recently, using both boats as test beds as well as for extended cruising (see "Better Boat: Equipment That Works," opposite). This particular trip was unusually close to home for Fleming, who lives only 100 miles or so down the coast in Newport Beach, though he had never been to the Channel Islands before, and neither had I, although we both had motored by.

Divided from the mainland by a bluewater trench that is deeper than the Grand Canyon, the four Channel Islands we were visiting—stretching from Anacapa, (only 16 miles off Ventura) to San Miguel (70 miles

## Better Boat: Equipment That Works

Over the past nine years, Tony Fleming has upgraded most of the major systems on *Venture*, including the engines, the genset, the propshaft, and the steering. The original engines, for example, were 640-horsepower Cummins diesels, but he thought the boat was underpowered. In 2007, he went to the MAN factory in Nuremberg, Germany, and installed 800-horsepower MANs upon his return. The MANs on *Venture* now have 3,163 hours, and they are standard on the 65 line.

Fleming put a 21-kW Onan genset on *Venture* a few years ago. "We started out with another brand," he says, "but it was problematic. I'm very happy with the Onan." *Venture* also has four inverters.

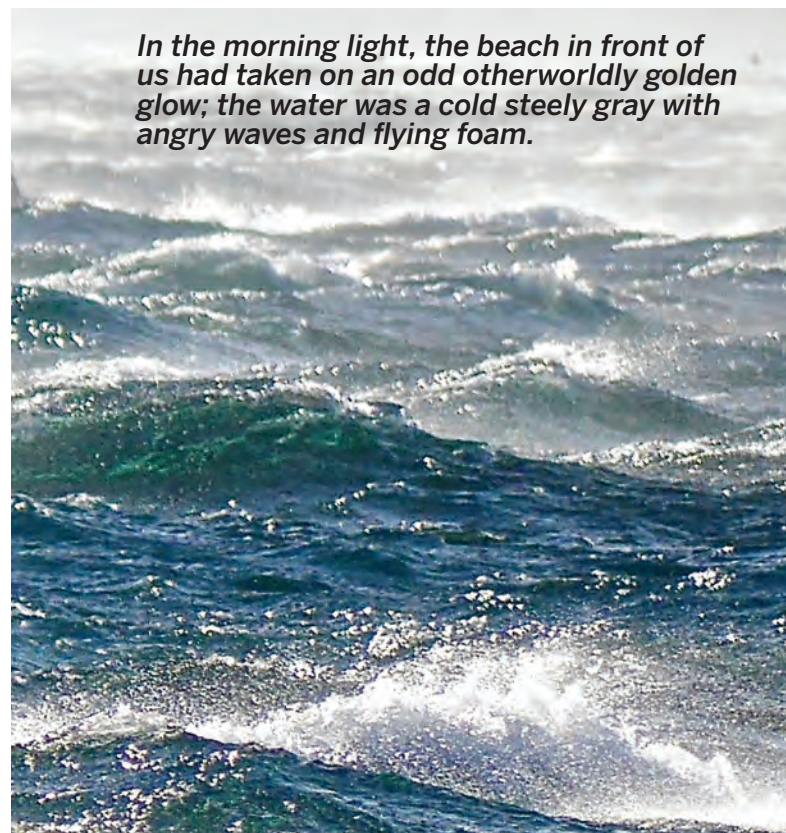
For the driveshaft, Fleming had been using the Aquadrive system, which employs soft engine mounts to reduce drive and vibration, until he tried another system when he built *Venture*. Then, while cruising in Florida, he stopped by the Seatorque factory in Stuart. Seatorque is a fully enclosed drive system where the prop shaft turns inside an oil-filled stainless steel tube; it's all one soft-mounted unit from the transmission to the prop, directing thrust to the boat's structure while reducing vibration, noise, and drag. He retrofitted it on *Venture* and it's now standard on all Fleming 55s, 58s, and 65s.

The original steering on *Venture* was hydraulic, but Fleming replaced that with fly-by-wire Hypro Electronic Command Steering, with an electronic unit at the helm connected to an electronic power unit near the rudders via a single wiring harness. The new system made steering easier, while eliminating the chance of hydraulic leaks. It was retrofitted on *Venture* and is now standard on all Fleming 65s.

Not all upgrades are high-tech. Indeed, Fleming created a jump seat for the pilothouse of *Venture II* that folds away flush against the starboard bulkhead when not in use. This means five people can sit comfortably in the pilothouse facing forward underway; one in the custom helm chair, two on the L-shaped settee, one on the steps leading to the bridge, and one in the jump seat.

Other upgrades include an Ultrasonic antifouling system, with three internally-mounted transducers sending pulses through the hull "to keep creatures and slime away," Fleming says, plus PropSpeed on the propellers, which has kept them clean for a few years. (For more ways to keep your prop protected, see Boatyard on page 85.)

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## Best Thing

Watching seal pups playing in the surf at San Miguel Island.

## Worst Thing

No question: 60-knot Santa Ana wind!



The arch at Anacapa is a popular site (left). Fleming mans the wheel as he's done so many times before (top). Just in case you didn't believe us, the author documented those powerful winds (above).

from Ventura), with Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa in between—have been part of a national park since 1980. Isolated, windswept, and dotted by sea caves, cliffs, a few beaches, and more than a few shipwrecks, the Channel Islands understandably don't have many inhabitants.

What the Channel Islands do have is one of the world's richest collections of sea life, brought together where the cold currents heading south from the upper Pacific meet warmer waters from Mexico. Attracted by the currents and nutrients in the sea (not to mention kelp forests), the islands at various times of the year are home to gray whales, seals, and California sea lions. On the farthest side of San Miguel, more than 100,000 seals and sea lions (including 6,000-pound elephant seals) haul out each year, resting on rocky cliffs and wide beaches; it's the largest elephant-seal rookery in the

world. All that's on the water, of course, but if you look up you'll see brown pelicans and peregrine falcons flying overhead. To the four of us, all this was inviting; to Fleming, a dedicated photographer and videographer in addition to his boatbuilder activities, it offered a wealth of new material.

With our bent anchor back on board, we headed west, toward Santa Rosa and quickly put the Santa Ana behind us. Over the next few days, we enjoyed exploring the islands, finally heading out to Point Bennett, the rocky western tip of San Miguel. There seals were often perched way up on the cliffs. How in the world did they get there? Then, around the south side, hundreds and hundreds of them filled the beaches in three distinct groups, with the big elephant seals in back, looking like black boulders, while small seals

played in the surf, all honking away in a never-ending din.

When it was finally time to head home, we turned south toward Avalon on Santa Catalina, about 90 miles away. The ocean was calm, the sky blue, and we cruised along happily in our own, self-contained universe, entranced when a school of dolphin played along in our bow wave.

After a delightful night moored bow and stern in the Avalon fashion, we turned west to Newport Harbor, as civilization and responsibility beckoned our return from the Pacific wild. On the way in, we all agreed that we'd love to go back to the Channel Islands—but next time we probably could do without the Santa Ana. □

**Fleming Yachts, 949-645-1024; [www.flemingyachts.com](http://www.flemingyachts.com)**

## Channel Islands Resources

When cruising the Channel Islands you'll probably spend most of your time on your boat, but there are a few must stops.

The 580-slip Ventura Isle Marina is protected by Ventura Harbor's breakwater and chock-full of modern amenities. There are shops and restaurants, but most importantly, the Channel Islands National Park Visitor Center is near the harbor's entrance. It's an extremely helpful resource for cruisers. [www.venturaisle.com/marina](http://www.venturaisle.com/marina)

Eighty miles south of Ventura is Santa Catalina Island and its main city of Avalon. There are no slips there, but there are 700 moorings in the area. A tender will ferry you to land for \$8 a head, round trip.

While in Avalon hit up Steve's Steakhouse for dinner where entrees are in the \$30 range. And in the morning, you need to check out Original Jack's Country Kitchen for breakfast. Grab a cup of Kona coffee and tell 'em Power & Motoryacht sent ya.