



Photograph by Hans Marx, the Sun Papers

*Despite her age, Larikin was a fine looking ship and could step along with the best of them*

## **CRUISING FOREIGN**

### **— CLOSE TO HOME**

*The Bahamas and the West Indian Islands within easy reach of the capable cruising yachts from the States. English territory was entered at Cat Cay and officials were found to be courteous and helpful*

By **AL HOOVER**

#### PART ONE

**T**HE ad intrigued me. It described a 47-foot, Herreshoff-built, auxiliary yawl for sale at Newport News, Va. Built in 1902, the boat was 50 years old, but was sound and could be bought at a reasonable figure.

I had owned many kinds of small sailboats and had cruised extensively on Chesapeake Bay. Now, in my mid-thirties, I wanted a fast and comfortable boat for blue water cruising, one that would go well to windward, and that could be handled easily by two persons. There was a wedding looming on the horizon.

Betty, my bride-to-be, had, for two seasons, been crewing for me on my thirty-foot Quaker Maid, which we raced on Chesapeake Bay. For a long time we had been considering a Bahama-West Indies cruise to start immediately following the wedding.

This important ceremony was scheduled for the following autumn, so the procuring of a suitable boat was important, and it seemed to me that a Herreshoff 47-footer might just fill the bill.

I reread the ad for the 'steenth time, then picked up the phone in my

home at York, Pa., and put through a call to the owner.

Alas, the boat had been sold!

No, the deal had not yet been consummated—but it was ALMOST a certainty.

"Anyway, I'd like to look her over," I told the owner. "I'll be there in two hours."

"But you're in York, Pa.," came the bewildered reply. "This is Newport News, Virginia."

"Put a pillow case on the smoothest cow pasture near your home," I instructed the puzzled gentleman. "I'm flying down."

Just two hours later my Aeronca made a safe but bumpy landing, to the consternation of several startled Virginia cows.

Larikin (that means beachcomber) was moored in the James River, and some way her appearance seemed in keeping with her name. Beachcombers are usually tattered and ragged—and she was just that.

Her upkeep had been sadly neglected. Her outside cried for paint, and any evidence of varnish had long since vanished. The hollow masts were a grimy black, and her running rigging had that bleached, gray color that denotes age in rope.

But neglect could not hide the beauty of Larikin's lines. Every inch of her long, lean hull, with its ten-foot beam, seemed to flaunt the genius of her famed designer. She was a beauty in tattered garments, a queen in a ragged dress.

Below decks things were in fairly good order. There was a nice galley with a Shipmate stove, a Primus burner converting it for kerosene. High in the bow were berths for a crew of two. The spacious main cabin would sleep four. Space beneath the cockpit housed a 30 h.p. Gray motor. I examined the sails carefully. Their condition was good.

Despite her seedy outward appearance I really wanted that boat. As yet no money had changed hands and her owner cheerfully accepted a retaining fee from me. This was to give me first chance in case the pending deal should backfire.

A few days later I received the welcome news that Larikin was mine, and that she would be delivered to me at Solomon's Island. That would bring her approximately a hundred miles nearer Baltimore, which would be her new home port.

It wasn't long before the hoped-for



telegram arrived. Larikin had reached Solomons. In an hour I had recruited Horace Burgard, a friend who operates a marine supply store in York, and we were winging our way southward in the Aeronca, for another cow pasture landing.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at the harbor and there was my beautiful yawl, looking stately and graceful as she rode quietly at anchor. Our plans were to get an early morning start, but when one has a "new" boat, one's hands itch to feel the kick of the wheel.

We had a hearty supper aboard, then the evening hours passed slowly. A fresh northwester souged through the rigging and the sky flamed with stars. The elements seemed conspiring to tempt us seaward.

The hands of the clock were creeping toward midnight. "I don't feel a bit sleepy," said Horace. "Let's start!"

He was voicing my sentiments to the letter.

The three sails thrashed in the wind as we both heaved on the heavy anchor. When the hook broke free I rushed aft and spun the wheel. Larikin leaped ahead as the canvas was sheeted in. The lee rail dipped and the slim craft raced through the star-lighted night.



Photograph by Hans Marx, the Sun Papers

*Betty looks a bit worried as she stands her trick at the wheel*

Sails were our only motive power, and would be for the balance of this trip. A defective gasoline tank forestalled use of the motor.

As we moved out from the protection of the land we got the full sweep of the northwester. The wind was much stronger than we had anticipated, and with her lee rail buried in brine, Larikin zoomed over the big, black billows, taking them with the ease of a hurdling greyhound. Suddenly there was a shrill

ripping sound and a thrashing of canvas aloft. The mainsail had torn, and rounding to we got it down in a hurry.

There was not much point in driving through the long, cold September night under jib and mizzen, so we scurried back to calm water and turned in.

Examining the ripped sail in the daylight, it was obvious that repairs would require the skilled hands of an expert, so we again hoisted the jib and mizzen and headed out. The northwester had increased during the night, the bay was polka-dotted with whitecaps, while fast flying, fair weather clouds streaked across the blue sky. It was glorious sailing weather, and even under shortened canvas Larikin worked steadily northward.

In the late afternoon, far out from the east shore, we sighted a small, open motor boat tossing wildly, her lone occupant frantically waving. In pantomime he signaled that his motor had conked out.

With our power plant out of commission, it was ticklish work coming alongside the bouncing disabled craft. We finally made it, but ripped a chunk out of Larikin's rub rail when the two boats came together. With the disabled boat in tow we headed for the Little Choptank, *(Continued on page 107)*



Photograph by Freddie Maura, Development Board, Nassau, Bahamas

*The yacht haven in Nassau, Bahamas, with its fine marina. It is the center of a great multi-island cruising area*



## CRUISING FOREIGN—CLOSE TO HOME

(Continued from page 33)

where we tied up for the night. The rescued fisherman was profuse with his thanks.

The following afternoon Larikin glided up to a mooring off the Baltimore Yacht Club in Middle River.

Despite the fifty mile drive from York to Baltimore, I spent many winter days working on the boat. When spring came she was aglitter with fresh paint and shiny varnish.

During the summer Larikin's speed was demonstrated in numerous races, for she frequently showed her transom to many fast, new boats of the Bay fleet.

She handled beautifully, and Betty was just as adept—if not more so—than I was in putting her through her paces.

The wedding was in September, and a few days after the ceremony Betty and I climbed aboard Larikin, ready for the long jaunt to the Carribean, via Florida. From now on the yawl would be our home. We had burned all bridges ashore, and did not plan to settle until we found a place exactly to our liking.

With such a vagabond itinerary time was no factor and we planned to drift along from port to port as the spirit moved us. But at the start a rollicking northwester had no love for laggards, and seemed determined to blow us off Chesapeake Bay in the shortest time possible.

Two days after leaving Middle River we were zooming down on Newport News at a good eight-and-a-half knots. It was blowing so hard we were unable to get the mainsail down and had to compromise by dousing the jib and mizzen. Larikin reeled along like a clipper until we rounded to in the shelter of Old Point Comfort.

With Chesapeake Bay behind us we spent a few leisurely days at Hampton Roads, and then moved on to Elizabeth City, N. C. Albemarle Sound gave us a dusting, but Larikin behaved like an aristocrat, cutting disdainfully through the high, steep waves.

### A Month to Reach Miami

It took us just a month to reach Miami, and somewhat pridefully we figured the winds had pushed us 75 per cent of the way. Except for an "occasional" grounding, there were no discomforts or worries. Larikin is of the keel-centerboard type and draws six feet with the board up, eleven feet with it lowered. Naturally we never lowered the board in the waterway, but the 6-foot draft obliged us to keep to the center of the channel in order to avoid humps along the edges.

Arriving in Miami we were atingle with excitement. From here on we would be "cruising foreign."

Our Miami stay was both a gay and a busy one. Provisions had to be purchased and stored, the vessel cleared, etc.

And in Miami Larikin's crew was augmented by three persons. Joy Stahl was a pretty, blonde sailing enthusiast, who had made quite a name for herself racing Comets on Chesapeake Bay. She would help Betty in the galley and also stand tricks at the wheel. Bob Jeffries and Roy Fox, two friends from the North, were also going along.

The two young men occupied the crew's quarters forward. Joy bunked amidships, and Betty and I had the after cabin. It all worked out very nicely, and the three extras lightened our work and added greatly to the trip's enjoyment.

It was still early December when the last gallon of water, the last can of food was stored—and we were ready to sail, the circumnavigation of Cuba being our aim. English-owned Cat Cay, only 60 miles to the eastward, would be our first port of call.

We got underway right after supper, a light breeze from the north sending Larikin merrily along. Darkness fell and the stars came out. It was a mild night, perfect for sailing, and everyone stayed on deck to enjoy the world's dusky beauty. The lights of Miami glittered and danced like some fabulous bracelet. The bracelet became smaller and smaller, finally vanishing entirely—but the glow lingered on.

The yellow reflection of Miami lights astern was still



visible, when, just before dawn, I caught the flicker of Gun Cay Light right over our bow. It was mid-morning when we reached Cat Cay and entered its sheltered basin. The influx of winter visitors had not yet commenced and the quiet of a ghost town prevailed. That was to our liking for it gave us opportunity to rest up after our night-long sail.

Cat Cay being English-owned, we had to go through the formalities of entry. The officials were courteous and helpful, and the same treatment was accorded us at all ports under the British flag. The clearance given us at Cat Cay allowed us unrestricted access to all English-owned islands.

In going from Cat Cay to Nassau, deep draft vessels must work to the northeast and round Great Isaac Light, but with Larikin's 6-foot draft it was safe to continue due east across the banks, a distance of about 145 miles.

We had made a late start from Cat Cay, and that night we anchored on the banks, dropping the jib and mainsail, and close hauling the mizzen to keep Larikin bow on to the wind. Still tired from the night-long run from Miami, we slept soundly.

By morning the wind had worked around to the southeast, but, close hauled, we could still follow our course. It was just another glorious sailing day and it seemed that in a jiffy mid-afternoon had arrived and Larikin was gliding into Nassau's glamorous harbor.

The city was quaint and delightful, everyone hospitable, and day after day we kept postponing our departure. Finally—after a one-week sojourn—to move became a "must", for both Joy and Bob were on limited vacations.

We were now about to start the uphill climb to Haiti—uphill because the prevailing southeast trade is a headwind. I had viewed reluctantly this stage of our voyage, thinking it would mean days and nights far from land, with Larikin fighting her way through heavy seas.

As it turned out, however, islands and harbors were so plentiful that instead of a grind, the long 500-mile haul was just a series of short pleasure jaunts.

#### Outward Bound From Nassau

It was another blue sky day that found Larikin outward bound from Nassau, our destination a day's run to Hatchet Bay, on long, slender Eleuthera. The Atlantic was aglitter with silvery sunshine. The breeze blew warm and fresh, and our ship foamed through the sea.

The white buildings of Nassau were soon lost in view, and, except for some scattered estates, the island seemed sparsely inhabited. From time to time during the day small islets would appear ahead and disappear astern.

Hatchet Bay rates as the best harbor of the several on Eleuthera, but the entrance is narrow and blasted out of solid rock. Consequently we felt apprehensive when darkness overtook us before we reached the haven. But the chart gave explicit instructions, and we soon sighted the light marking the entrance.

With the light located it was a simple matter to sail into the large, deep and landlocked bay. We anchored close to the settlement, and in the morning moved up to a fine, stout dock.

The slender island of Eleuthera is more than a hundred miles long, and, leaving Hatchet Bay, we skirted its palm-lined shore for thirty miles and anchored in Governors Harbor. The harbor is just a coastal indentation exposed to west and southwest winds. The town, a negro settlement, is small and unattractive.

Before setting sail the next morning I studied the chart long and earnestly, for off the tip of Eleuthera it showed a large area dotted with innumerable shoals. There were no markers and the route seemed brim-full of hazard. I was keenly worried, but when once underway my fears vanished. In the transparent water every reef flaunted its presence, the color of the sea broadcasting its depth at that particular spot.

Deep blue water tapering to light blue means a minimum depth of 30 feet; yellow blue, 8 to 10 feet, and yellow or



white water, very shallow. We just scudded along in a brisk southerly breeze, always following the channels of dark blue water. It was an easy form of daylight navigation. On any bright, clear day buoys would be superfluous.

Clarence, on Long Island, was our goal for the day, a run of more than a hundred miles, and the sun had set before we arrived off the harbor entrance. Two churches on a hill make an excellent range for entering, but we could not locate them in the dusky twilight.

Clarence is a typical Bahamian settlement, populated by easy-going, indolent negroes. There was nothing attractive about these small ports between Nassau and Haiti, but even so the places were interesting, and we were enjoying our cruise to the fullest. Weather conditions were ideal. It was warm and clear and never a hint of storm. Some days the trades blew boisterously and the sea was rough, but under the blue tropical sky, each day's sail was a glorious experience.

Long Island, on which Clarence is located, much resembles Eleuthera as to length, width and topographical features.

#### Anchor at North Riding Rock

Leaving Clarence we anchored that afternoon in the lee of North Riding Rock. This is a huge mass of stone, about 200 feet long and 20 feet high, that protrudes from the sea to stand a lone ocean sentinel. The water was deep right up to the rock and we took turns making excursions ashore in the dinghy.

Big, bright-colored land crabs, surprisingly tame, examined us inquisitively. They were absolutely fearless—and had a right to be—for their scrawny frames carry practically no meat. Also on the rock were countless lizards and chameleons, darting hither and yon.

In a small basin an octopus, with tentacles three feet long, had been imprisoned by low water. We watched fascinated as it changed color to blend with the surroundings. It tried several shades, but, becoming alarmed by our presence, it completely concealed itself by ejecting its inky brown fluid into the water.

From North Riding Rock we had a glorious six-hour run in a full-sail breeze to Hogsty Reef. Here there is a splendid lagoon, with protection provided by a long and circular coral reef, enfolding the lagoon like a bended arm.

No natives live on this island but it is inhabited by thousands of birds. There were cormorants, boobies, etc., in profusion. Though the birds strenuously objected, we gathered a few dozen eggs. But it was wasted energy for only five of them were good.

While fishing in the lagoon I hooked a big jack. Before I could boat it a shark had taken half. But the half remaining provided two hearty meals for five hungry sailors.

Churning through blue waters the next day, Betty suddenly pointed ahead and cried, "Iceland Ahoy!"

We all gazed in amazement. On an island far in the distance the sun's rays glistened on great mounds of "snow".

I knew the answer. The island, our next port of call, was Great Inagua, and it produces salt in large quantities.

*(To be Continued)*