

SEAMANSHIP



PS contributor Skip Allan perches on a bean-bag chair covered with waterproof Sunbrella during a long watch at the helm. He also uses it for padding below in rough weather.

Boomer-itis and the Solo Sailor

Thirty years ago in my first TransPac, I was agile enough to walk to the bow for a jib change or spinnaker jibe. Now, at age 63, with two knee operations in the recent past, I will be on hands and knees when forward of the mast. And I will purposely minimize night-time sail changes.

After many ocean passages, I find I can function well on five hours total sleep every 24. Offshore, by drinking a quantity of water before laying down, the call of nature arouses me an hour later. I answer this call by using a plastic urinal, obviating the need to go on deck, but still taking a look around. And, as a light sleeper, I'm automatically alerted to changes in the wind and motion of the boat.

While resting below, I have on the VHF, the Automated Identification System on 16-mile alert range, and if squalls are lurking, the radar on 4-mile guard zone. (Radar detects rain in potentially menacing squalls.) I also have on the masthead tricolor and an amber strobe lights up the sails at night.

But it is impossible to not get tired while racing a small boat offshore. Frustrations and mistakes can result. To this end, I remind myself that if I'm struggling, I need to slow down, rest, and re-group.

Exhaustion, combined with heat and the direct sun, nearly overhead at noon at the latitude of Hawaii, can cause serious dehydration issues. Drinking enough water is a priority, and staying in the shade is also important. *Wildflower* carries a small (6'x8') cockpit awning that can be rigged on all points of sail during the day. In addition, two-speed Hella Turbo cabin fans help keep me cool while resting below.