

[By Kenneth Hoffman](#)

It's eight o'clock in the morning and a chill wind is coming off the water into my face. The water is cold as I run my hand through the choppy waves. Though the middle of July, two more hours of a North Dakota sun will be needed before the sweaters can come off.

My brother Allan stows the last of the supplies while I struggle with the canvas tarps. The boat starts to look less naked as the sails fluff out and the cushions are placed around. The far shore hides invisible in the morning fog, a mysterious feel to the water exaggerates the endless distance across deep water. Only the warm touch of the sun on my face saves the day from being unfriendly. I wonder at the seemingly too large cooler containing the only food available for miles around and anticipate the unknown goodies it must contain. The small engine responds instantly to the starter, the battery having been well taken care of by the silent photo cell charger. The faint odor of diesel fuel is quickly left behind as the boat stoutly points its snout toward the deep water. Curt commands guide my hands to the task of checking the cleats, sheets and sails for the coming challenge. A flimsy-looking jib states that a twelve knot wind is all it can handle. Will we see that much wind today? Al the captain says 'probably more' and doesn't seem concerned.

The diesel suddenly quiets and the slapping of the waves takes on a more strident note. We were heading almost straight into the wind and are not making much headway when we entered a patch of darkened water and successfully jibed to the port side. Now we were traveling at right angles to the wind, a pronounced lean along with a noticeable wake quickened our pace. My face only inches from the rushing water, we seemed to be racing recklessly ahead of the waves, the bow crashing through the green water.

A quick glance at the speedometer showed a creeping needle relentlessly climbing toward the ten knot mark. Can this be? It felt like sixty miles an hour in a car. Some larger waves pound the hull with a hidden strength, keeping time with an unseen maniacal director, each fist felt through my feet like a giant drum. By now the hiss of the waves forms a comfortable background to the squealing of the gulls and the flapping of loose canvas. Sharp orders from the captain cause a flurry of sail corrections, anxious looks trying to keep up with the flirtations of the wind. Slowly the needle creeps up past the 12 knot mark, matching worried eyes measuring the height of the new waves. An increasing tilt of the deck strains the turnbuckles as we race toward the unknown.

Two hours later, tightened skin across my forehead proves the power of the sun, in spite of the cooling effect of the breeze. Our destination is an island boasting a quiet cove where we can safely drop anchor for a peaceful lunch.

Suddenly the sky darkens, threatening rain, and a powerful wind rattles the sheets angrily, whipping the waves to new heights. My brother, the captain takes advantage of the gift of wind horsepower, searching for that perfect heading that will produce the most speed. The deck tilts at a fearsome angle, loose objects sliding in sympathy. My heart keeps time with the racing waves as we quickly close the gap to the approaching horizon.

Just as quickly as the wind appeared, it dies to a steady six knots. Thank God, I think, that the sails held through what seemed like certain disaster as we glide into the protected calm of a sunny harbor.

Power boating can't compare to the thrill and peace of sailing.

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