

Catalina proves to be ideal testing grounds for new Nordhavns

by Jeff Merrill

Santa Catalina Island beckons 30 miles away from Dana Point. The deep ocean swells combined with wind and chop between waypoints is as good a place as any to test a new passagemaker. And besides that, there is usually some excellent sea life viewing to be had. Trips to Catalina are actually standard shakedown practice for new Nordhavn owners whose boats get commissioned in Dana Point, so Peter and Su Faklis followed suit with a weekend getaway on board their brand new 43, Posada.

If you are a frequent Nordhavn.com reader, you may recall a feature I wrote a couple of months ago about picking up a Nordhavn 43 in [San Diego](#) (along with a 40, 47 and 57) and bringing her up to Dana Point. That delivery took place in December and three months later 4306 was almost finished. I had suggested to Peter and Su that an escape from the hustle and bustle of the commissioning process would give us some time on the water to [learn the boat](#). We treated it as kind of a working vacation.

I've known Peter and Su for over 10 years, having previously sold them a 40-foot Pacific Seacraft sailboat, and then brokering the same boat a couple years later when they signed up for their Nordhavn 43. Peter and Su were very astute when it came to building and outfitting their new boat, to the point that Posada turned out to be one of our [nicest](#) Nordhavn 43s replete with several outstanding innovations and improvements.

One Friday afternoon, the PAE commissioning crew turned the boat over to us so we could complete the necessary pre-departure tasks such as fueling up (with a little docking practice thrown in), some light provisioning and an engine room indoctrination.

I had also put together a couple of first draft Nordhavn 43 checklists for Peter and Su to use for starters and then personalize over time. We reviewed the "start up and shut down procedures" and "leaving the dock checklist". They kept everyone busy for an hour or so, and also made sure we were ready to go.

By the next afternoon, we were on our way and quickly dialed in the course heading to the east end of Catalina, home of the beautiful resort town, Avalon. Almost immediately, a squadron of eight Pelicans soared by to send us off in style. It was a sparkling clear day and we could see the island...which is both good and bad. Sometimes when you can see Catalina from the beginning it feels like it's taking forever to make the crossing, but on this particular Saturday we were in no hurry and it was fun to see the island slowly grow bigger as we drew near.

It's always fun to watch a pair of new owners break away from shore for the first time on their new yacht. You get to share in the relief and excitement, and understand their

underlying thrill of knowing that soon just the two of them will be taking off to destinations unknown. But there is a lot to review before you gain that confidence in a new yacht and this trip was one big step in that process. We played around with the electronics to check out how everything was integrated then tested the TRAC stabilizers going from centered to active. Changing our course across the swell was a great chance to see how well they worked.

This overnighter was the first opportunity for any of us to spend time aboard the boat in a clean, organized state. First we took turns standing watch – which really amounted to scanning our beautiful surrounding waters looking for sea life since we seemed to be the only boat out on the water. “Standing” watch isn’t really a fair description when you actually are sitting in an amazingly comfortable Stidd helm chair. No kidding, it would be easy to continue on station right through your crewmate’s watch just to remain in command.

Everything is in reach, gauges are easily sighted and the wheelhouse visibility to the outside world is exceptional.

There is always something to see if you keep a good look out and the VHF was peppered with boaters (none of whom we could see) asking to confirm the location of whale sightings (it’s migration season again) and about an hour out of Avalon, Peter and I witnessed a big gray whale break the surface to glide up for a big gulp of air and then send us a wet whistle as she sounded. We also slipped through a pod of at least two dozen Pilot whales about a mile from the shore, which we interpreted as the reciprocal greeting to our pelican send off!



[Peter Faklis checks out gauges in the pilothouse](#)



[Grey Whale sighting!](#)

Posada has the optional flybridge and it is a wonderful place to appreciate the great expanse of the ocean. You are up so high you feel like you can sneak a peek over the horizon. The company built a little “rumble seat” aft to starboard in the stainless work for an extra perch and before everything is done Peter is going to add a fixed stainless steel framed Bimini top cover. The vastness of the flybridge deck is substantial and once the helm chairs are installed and the Bimini completed, I think

this is going to be the place to run this boat.

I marveled at how quietly we were running. Posada is the first 43 to get the Luger electronic main engine and she purrs along silently. Magazine articles in Power and Motoryacht and Latitudes and Attitudes have been published recently and I’m sure there will be a lot more coverage once word starts getting out.

Five hours after departing Dana Point we pulled into Avalon and were assigned our mooring ball by the harbor patrol. We now have 50 hours on the engine and kept varying the rpms on the crossing to help break it in – no sense rushing, particularly in a Nordhavn! I practically grew up on Catalina in the summers of my youth and am very familiar with the Catalina anchoring scenario which starts with a floating bow whip which pulls up the forward hawser and then uses a weighted sand line which connects to the stern anchor and its attendant hawser. Peter did a masterful job guiding Posada down the narrow fairways to our assigned mooring. On final approach I grabbed the whip, but we slightly over shot the can and before I was smart enough to drop the whip and start over again the tension on the bow whip snagged the sand line on our starboard stabilizer fin end plate – great, now what? We weren't in any danger, and we certainly weren't going anywhere. Luckily there was only a soft wind with no current, but this was not the entrance to the harbor that I had planned. I quickly evaluated my options: flailing away with boat hooks or launching the dinghy to get a better angle both might work, but who knew how much time either would take? I decided on a swift remedy.

I'm not a boy scout, but people who know me laugh at how heavy I travel and unlike MacGyver who can improvise a pair of vice grips with a paper clip I usually travel with vice grips (and paper clips). So, bringing a mask and snorkel on this trip was kind of my anti-Murphy's Law logical way of hoping I wouldn't need to use them, but Murphy won this time. In fewer minutes than it took to type this paragraph, I stripped to my shorts, put on my mask and snorkel and in one deep breath jumped in the water (not even wanting to know the water temperature in March). I un-snagged the sand line and flopped back on to the swim platform. Then it was up on the starboard side deck to coordinate pulling in the lines and in moments we were secure on our mooring. (The starboard side deck of the 43 is perfect for this type of mooring – you can easily travel from bow to stern protected by railings with good footing and handholds).

The sun was still up, our crossing complete and I'd had little exercise. After further review (adrenaline rush and heart rate up), I realized it wasn't really that cold so being wet already, I dove under the boat to look at zincs, stabilizer fins, rudder, keel cooler and running gear for the main and wing, then got a chance to test the cockpit shower – ah, warm water – works great!

It was about this time, as I was toweling off and chuckling to myself, that I noticed we had company. Nordhavn 6201, Saumlaki, owned by David Higgins was in a perfect position to watch our entire rookie escapade. Oh man, this is a guy who single-hands his 62 with ease. I haven't talked with David yet, and maybe he didn't see, but if he did he certainly was a gentleman, and I'm sure we provided entertainment for some of the other boats in Avalon.

We hailed the shore boat for a ride into town and had a wonderful Italian dinner where we toasted our day's adventure. We talked about systems and procedures and how we could have done the mooring pick up a little bit better next time. Peter and Su raved enthusiastically that Posada was going to be everything they had hoped for.



[Peter and Su pose with a replica buffalo. Hundreds of live ones left over from western movies shot in Avalon during the '30s, still roam the island today.](#)

After a restful night for all we soon launched back into the new boat owner checklist for a couple of hours before heading home. Going through the list we ended up exploring under floorboards and drawers, peering behind bulkheads and really getting a good feel for the boat – discovering many subtle nuances and locating equipment and components that until now had been out of sight, out of mind. Crawling around the boat while peacefully at anchor is a great way to discover how much space and access there is on the 43. It's truly a well put together machine.



[Avalon's famed Casino provides a nice backdrop.](#)

Before long it was time to depart and Peter took responsibility for a thorough engine room check (we knew the coolant and oil were fine since we just checked them yesterday morning, but with a new boat you get a fresh start and with this the opportunity to develop new habits). Since Peter is so methodical in his routines, it was no surprise to see him dig right in. Both Peter and Su shared the captain's duties and I tried to keep out of the way so they could get some hands-on experience, acting kind of like a sideline referee. I didn't have to offer much advice. Having owned a long-range sailboat and sustaining a marriage of many years has made them an incredible team that's able to anticipate each other's moves.

As we left Avalon we sliced through another pod of pilot whales while a large fleet of acrobatic porpoise congratulated us on such a beautiful trawler. I was reminded once again how great it is to be out on the water, breathing the salt air, enjoying the sea life and humming along at 7.5 knots with all of the comforts of home. A full displacement long range trawler like a Nordhavn allows you to travel in comfort at a leisurely pace and you become part of your surroundings – you really are immersed in the moment –time nearly stops and you can soak it all in. I know a lot of people prefer fast boats and just want to blast from one place to another, but to me they are missing the point. The journey (no matter how long or short) should be savored, not endured, and the destination is just the icing on the cake.

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