



**VENTURE AMONG
THE ICE FLOES
CALVED FROM THE
SOUTH SAWYER
GLACIER AT THE
HEAD OF TRACY
ARM JUST SOUTH
OF JUNEAU**



THE INLAND PASSAGE

FLEMING 65

VENTURE

WHEN THE FLEMING 65 WAS FIRST INTRODUCED TO THE MARKET JUST OVER ONE YEAR AGO, TONY FLEMING DECIDED TO KEEP HULL #1 AS A TEST VESSEL TO TRY OUT NEW IDEAS AND EQUIPMENT AND TO EXPERIENCE FOR HIMSELF AS MUCH EXTENDED CRUISING AS POSSIBLE IN THE NEW DESIGN. PHOTOS TONY FLEMING





In the 14 months since commissioning, the new boat, named *Venture*, has logged more than 6000 miles along the Pacific coasts of Mexico, the USA and Canada; and has cruised the entire coastline from Juneau to La Paz—some of it more than once. She started this season by making the open ocean passage from Southern California south to the azure waters of the Sea of Cortez where the temperatures reached a blistering 104 degrees. Just a few weeks later, her bow was nudging aside ice floes in Alaska, at the foot of the South Sawyer glacier south of Juneau. Glaciers from the last ice-age created an intricate maze of channels, which

constitute a protected waterway that stretches for 1000 miles from Seattle's Puget Sound in the south to Alaska's historic, gold-rush town of Skagway in the north. This vital and scenic route is known as the Inside Passage for the very good reason that it is shielded for almost its entire length from the wrath of the North Pacific Ocean by a complex network of islands.

The two months spent exploring the section of the Inside Passage from Vancouver to Juneau were the highlights of the summer. *Venture's* owners met many people with thousands of cruising miles beneath their keels who were firmly convinced that this area, with its scenic beauty and

the opportunity to experience "nature on steroids," as one Fleming owner recently put it, provides the finest cruising grounds in the world. Part of the appeal lies in its remoteness and the long distances between pockets of civilization, but those very factors require that the crew have a good knowledge of seamanship and pay attention to what they are doing.

For most of its length the Inside Passage is bordered by steeply forested slopes, which extend right to the water's edge where, at high tide, the trees tickle the surface with their feathery fronds. Perched precariously at the edge of the land, many of these forest giants eventually topple and



float away complete with roots and branches. Logging is a major industry in the Pacific Northwest and huge log tows and barges, piled high with logs, are a common sight. Inevitably some of their booty breaks loose and errant logs and trees are the biggest hazard for a cruising yacht, and one which virtually precludes cruising at night. Fortunately summer nights are long, so this restriction is not too onerous. Logs are not always easy to spot but a line of seagulls, apparently standing on the water, often betray their lurking presence.

Tides are another consideration requiring careful planning. Seymour Narrows, at the northern end of

Vancouver Island, is a major thoroughfare used by all vessels traveling north and south—including cruise ships—and has currents exceeding 15 knots at springs. Many smaller passes are the same. Tidal ranges, which frequently exceed 19', give rise to these tidal streams and it can be dangerous to navigate narrow passes at other than slack tide. Even a three knot current can make a significant difference on a long passage depending on whether it is with or against you.

Especially later in the summer months, fog can appear with little warning and, as the air and dew point temperatures are often only a couple of degrees apart, everything can be instantly enfold-

**CRUISE SHIPS
DWARF SMALLER
VESSELS AT THE
WHARF IN DOWNTOWN
KETCHIKAN**

**WATERFALL AT
THE ENTRANCE TO
FORD'S TERROR,
ENDICOTT ARM**



ed in a soft opaque blanket when they come together. Under these conditions it is useful to have two radars set to, say, three miles and 1/4 mile. AIS is a new and useful tool allowing captains to differentiate between a cruise ship with a schedule to maintain and a much smaller fishing vessel with a ton of gear acting as a good radar reflector.

The Inside Passage is open to the ocean in Queen Charlotte Sound, just north of Vancouver Island, and at Dixon Entrance on the Canadian/USA border just south of Ketchikan. Smaller boats can be held up here, sometimes for days, waiting for calm conditions, but *Venture* was lucky and had favourable weather for each crossing

both north and south bound. In any event the exposure to the open ocean is only for a few hours, and there are bolt holes that offer some protection, although these may call for steady nerves to enter in bad weather. However, prudence is called for and the Alaska handbook for boaters wisely counsels that it is better to be sitting on land wishing you were on the water than being on a boat and wishing you were on the land!

More conservative boaters have allowed themselves to be put off by the perceived hazards, but in reality they are nothing that any prudent mariner cannot handle with ease and they merely add a touch of spice to an adventure that is

almost without price.

Venture spent most nights at anchor in secluded bays, commonly in depths exceeding 80', most of them the only boat in sight. Large batteries, kept charged by an almost silent Whispergen—powered by an external combustion Stirling engine, kept up with overnight loads and avoided disturbing the solitude. In fact the main generator was seldom run and usually reserved for watermaking and laundry. In most of the few cities, including Juneau, the capital of Alaska, the roads come to an end a few miles out of town and are not linked with the outside world. Access is only by plane or boat and all the necessities of life arrive in barge



VENTURE APPEARS TO FLOAT ON THE MIST AT DAWN IN THOMAS BAY JUST NORTH OF PETERSBURG

WORKING AND PLEASURE BOATS SHARE BAR HARBOR MARINA IN KETCHIKAN, WHICH GETS MORE THAN 5,000 MM OF RAINFALL PER YEAR

RUGGED PEAKS STRETCH AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE BETWEEN JUNEAU AND THE GOLD RUSH TOWN OF SKAGWAY



**MANY GLACIERS SNAKE
DOWN TO THE LYNN CANAL
AT THE NORTHERN END OF
THE INLAND PASSAGE**

**PEACEFUL AND DESERTED
ANCHORAGE IN FITZGIBBON
COVE, MISTY FJORDS**

**VENTURE AT ANCHOR
IN RUDYERD BAY IN THE
FJORDS EAST OF KETCHIKAN**

loads of containers. Float planes are practically a way of life and, although *Venture's* crew did not avail themselves of the service, you can arrange to be delivered to your boat in a remote anchorage by giving the pilot the GPS coordinates. Guests did fly from Juneau to Skagway on a rare sunny day and were rewarded by magnificent vistas of snow-capped peaks and serpentine glaciers. Berthing for transient boats is usually available in the marinas but neighbours are more likely to be tough working boats than fancy yachts. In fact the berth allocated to a 65' boat most likely belongs to a commercial boat which is away fishing!

The highlight of the trip was creeping through pack ice towards the glacier at the head of Tracy Arm. Proceeding at almost zero speed, *Venture* nudged the ice floes aside and guests took photos of *Venture* from the Zodiac. Just around the corner, in an inlet with the colourful name of Ford's Terror, they were awed by a magnificent multi-streamed waterfall cascading down the precipitous rocks into the sea while tendrils of mist hung from the evergreens and floes of blue ice drifted nearby. At Anan Creek *Venture* anchored in 50 feet of water where guests went ashore to visit the wildlife observatory

and to view the bears and Bald Eagles fishing for salmon negotiating the falls on their way upstream to spawn. The observatory allows you to get within a few feet of the bears, which is a great thrill. It is necessary to make reservations ahead of time because the daily number of visitors is limited. Advance reservations are also necessary to visit Glacier Bay. Although one can see both Humpback and Orcas from afar, we were not lucky enough to witness them bubble-net feeding although everyone else we spoke to had that good fortune. However, we plan to return to this wonderful place next year, when *Venture* will continue to accumulate more memories to leave tumbling in her wake and the design will continue to be refined from what is learned along the way. Inevitably Tony Fleming made changes as a result of his experiences but these have been of a minor nature and he is very satisfied with the way in which his latest boat has performed. She has proved to be easy for two people to handle as well as being capable and comfortable under a wide variety of climatic and sea conditions—including the 1200 mile open ocean passage much farther south from Seattle to Southern California which she accomplished in 4 days.