



Saving Grace

A Southern California sportfisher is outfitted for Oregon rescues

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PHOTOS BY DAVID J. SHULER, YACHTPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

MANY OREGONIANS TEND TO TAKE BOATING SAFETY a little more seriously than their Southern California counterparts. Even on a calm summer day, fast-moving storms, shifting sandbars and frigid waters can make the simple act of getting out of an Oregon harbor a gut-wrenching operation.

Oregonians also know that help is not always close at hand. In certain isolated areas along the coastline, Coast Guard stations are few and far between and private towing companies are spread

thin. When Oregon boaters find themselves in trouble, they realize that survivability in frigid waters is often a matter of minutes, not hours. Help may arrive too late.

VOLUNTARY HEROES

Tim and Nancy Porter, homeported in Salmon Harbor, Oregon, at the mouth of the Umpqua River, have seen their fair share of boating disasters. As Coast Guard Auxiliarists,

they have assisted in numerous searches, rescues and vessel tows.

Last year, the couple decided to make a major commitment to helping fellow boaters. They ordered a new 50-foot luxury sportfisher from San Diego-based Mikelson Yachts and outfitted her with high-performance diesels, searchlights and beefed-up tow hitches.

The couple recently put their Mikelson 50, *Permanent Vacation*, into service as a designated Coast Guard Auxiliary Operational Facility. That is, the boat and crew are qualified to operate under direct Coast Guard orders.

"Nancy and I have been around boats our whole life," Tim said. "Nancy grew up fishing on boats in Long Beach (California), and I spent the last 20 years run-

NEW AND IMPROVED — With features like 1,000-watt searchlights, a reinforced transom, 400 feet of towline and the latest electronics, *Permanent Vacation* is ready for rescues.

ning jet boats up and down the Snake and Columbia rivers for hunting and fishing trips. We decided it was time to give something back to the sport."

Especially during large tidal swings, the Umpqua River Channel entrance can be dangerous. In fact, Charles Woods, author of "Charlie's Charts," advises transiting boaters to skirt Salmon Harbor altogether in favor of Coos Bay, some 20 miles to the south.

"This is not a highly recommended stopping point for cruising vessels because its entrance can be very dangerous," Woods said. "Dangerous breaking seas occur seaward of the north jetty even when a low swell is running."

Breakers may cover more than half the channel entrance. They may crest in the middle of the harbor and pop up nearly a mile upriver.

LENDING A HAND

While most of those who keep slips in Salmon Harbor are well aware of the river mouth's hidden dangers (local boaters drive out to "Chicken Point" on the north jetty to check conditions before putting out to sea), many trailerboaters are not.

Every summer, salmon anglers in boats as small as 16 feet wind up in trouble: Motors conk out, vessels succumb to steep chop, boats broach trying to outrun incoming waves and successions of breakers push boats into jetties and beaches. The cold water always seems ready to begin sucking the life out of anyone who falls overboard.

When that happens, Tim and Nancy Porter hope to lend a hand.

After spending the past few years patrolling the Umpqua River area in their Tiara 42, the couple knew exactly what it would take to create a first-class auxiliary rescue boat. They started by outfitting their Mikelson 50 with a pair of 540 hp Cummins diesels.

"Most of the problems boaters encounter when running the bars

(crossing sandbars that inevitably build up at river mouths) are due to being underpowered," Tim said. "This boat has true 30-knot capabilities. It has the power to keep up with waves."

A specially reinforced transom with oversized cleats helps *Permanent Vacation* tow large boats. In fact, the 50-footer can safely tow a Coast Guard 47-foot cutter if need be.

WELL EQUIPPED

The couple relied upon prior experiences to equip the Mikelson with 400 feet of 1.25-inch braided towline, for maximum pulling power. For assisting in search-and-rescue operations, they outfitted the boat with an enormous pair of forward-facing 1,000-watt metal-halide searchlights. Combined with three rear-facing 1,000-watt halogen lamps, these lights can illuminate an ultrawide swath for search and rescue.

"It's all about covering as much area inside the search parameter as possible," Nancy said. "When you turn these all on, it's daylight regardless of what your watch says."

Along with a full array of modern electronics, the Porters installed a surprisingly low-tech device. Basic as it may seem, *Permanent Vacation's* radio direction finder (RDF) is often the most useful piece of equipment on the bridge when it comes to locating distressed mariners.

"You'd never believe how many boaters we help out that don't even have a simple GPS," Tim said. "They get in trouble and simply don't know where they are."

Even though an RDF can only give direction, when used in conjunction with a Coast Guard cutter's RDF, precise locations can be determined.

COMMITTED TO SAFETY

The Porters are eager to see how their new Coast Guard Auxiliary Operational Facility works out during the summer fishing season. But summer also reminds them of a small sacrifice they unknowingly made.

Under Oregon fish and game laws, it is permissible for private boaters to obtain a commercial fishing permit that enables them to sell jig-caught tuna. After ordering their Taiwan-built Mikelson 50, the two dedicated anglers discovered that such commercial permits might only be issued to boats built in the United States. They are currently investigating whether they qualify for an Excess Tuna Permit under Oregon law.

Still, the Porters are glad they made the decision to put *Permanent Vacation* into Coast Guard Auxiliary service. For as much as they love fishing, they are much more serious about safe boating.

For more information on Mikelson Yachts, call (619) 222-5007 or visit www.mikelsonyachts.com. ♡