



Donna refinishes her hull. *Inspired Insanity* (inset)

Sailing Minstrel

Donna Lange sings her way around the world

» AT 45, DONNA LANGE IS NOT YOUR average grandmother. She just finished the first leg of a solo circumnavigation—covering 17,000 miles from New England to New Zealand—and after repairs and re-provisioning of her Southern Cross 28, *Inspired Insanity*, in Auckland is heading out for more. A musician and songwriter, Lange is funding her trip in part by playing at venues along the way and has released an album of songs written during her passage, *Alone at Sea, from Bristol to Auckland*. **Rebecca Waters** caught up with Lange before she headed back out to sea.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO ATTEMPT A SINGLEHANDED CIRCUMNAVIGATION?

I was looking for a *Walden*-type spiritual quest alone with God, Mother Nature, and the natural world. I had spent 20 years caring for my family and others and was seeking self-discovery. I wanted to stay at sea for a long period of time. It is a challenging environment in which I could discover my potential. I was not disappointed.

I was a fitness instructor and a profes-

sional nurse; I worked on my own cars; I never hired a repairman, but fixed things when they broke. My family built canoes, so I had experience with woodworking. All this made me confident that I could sail a boat alone. I am a tough lady. I found that out while rebuilding the boat.

HOW DID YOU START SAILING? HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE DID YOU HAVE BEFORE YOUR FIRST SOLO SAIL?

I began sailing as crew and cook on a traditional tall ship in Baltimore, Maryland, and fell in love with the environment. I decided to accept an offer to go to the Caribbean to work in the charter business. When the season finished, I chartered a 30-foot boat and sailed for 10 days around the British Virgin Islands with my sons.

I wasn't a natural, but by the end of the trip I wanted to learn more. I spent the next months playing in an island band and living on sailboats. The dream of buying my own boat and traveling around the world with my music came into focus while I was sailing in the islands.

I really didn't have much sailing experience. My experience came from rebuilding my boat. I knew her systems. I took her apart and put her back together again. That gave me a lot of confidence. The sailing was learned along the way. Mother Nature was pretty easy on me. The conditions became progressively more challenging with each passage, but I figured it out.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE TO DATE?

I guess the most dynamic moment on this first leg was when I sang to the sea and winds for hour after hour while rounding the Cape of Good Hope and the seas seemed to respond and began to calm. It was a moment of overcoming fear of the unknown future. It was a turning point for me. Having experienced a massive storm so early in the Southern Ocean, I had no idea what to expect of the passage to Australia. The idea that I would have to endure more storms like this was overwhelming. But in the deepest fear came a calm and peace, and I sang "Peace Still the Raging Storm" through the sunset that would mark the last of the 60-plus-foot seas.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED SO FAR ON YOUR JOURNEY?

I have come to have a tremendous respect for the potential within each of us. I have met the challenges of both preparing for and executing this wild dream and can only consider the potential in humanity unrealized. This is certainly only a beginning for me, and I am excited about having another half of the world to cross.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHERS LOOKING TO SET SAIL?

Go! Do what you can to cover your bases, ensure your vessel is solid, but go. Your boat doesn't need to be perfect. I have met so many people who admire what I am doing, but my greatest accomplishment was leaving the dock. ▲

Follow Donna Lange's adventures on www.donnalange.com.