

Jessie Goes to Sea



When we made the final decision to cast off the lines and go cruising in the fall of 2007 we had an additional decision to make, what should we do with our dog Jessie? She has been our furry family member since 2001 and in the spring of 2007 she turned seven years old. Our first decision was no decision, she would come with us. After all hadn't she lived in a tent camp in the arctic during the winter, chased lizards and rabbits in the deserts of Nevada, gone with us on all of our summer (and winter) sailing vacations, flew in helicopters and bush planes to summer field camps and been on numerous car trips? Both of us were sure she

would do just fine on a longer sailing adventure.

As the preparation phase continued throughout the spring of 2007 our decision about Jessie wavered. Was sailing really the best life for Jessie? She had never been on an overnight passage, had never "done her business" on the boat (Curare), hated being in the cockpit well (she preferred the bench seats), liked doing laps around the deck while we were sailing, and had never been in a storm. Did dogs get seasick? I had no clue. I wish I could say that we spent long hours in discussion regarding Jessie's future life but we didn't, and all too soon it was mid-July and we were moving onto the Curare. Thus by default Jessie became the third crew member.



It was at this late date that I started researching dog related items on the internet. The first thing I discovered was the fact that pets are not allowed into French Polynesia. This was our intended first year destination so already plans would have to be changed. Well, Mexico for



a year or two did not sound so bad and at least it would be warm. We knew that bringing a dog to Mexico was possible



because Geoff had already taken his previous dog with him without any problems. All that is required are up to date vaccination certificates for rabies and the other yearly doggie shots you usually give your pet. In actual fact when we arrived in Mexico in late September 2007 the customs/immigration officials did not even ask to look at Jessie's certificates, but that may have been an oversight

and I would not want to have cleared in without them.

Since I was already putting together a complete offshore medical kit for the human crew I also put together a Jessie version. According to my veterinarian I should treat Jessie as if she were a sick child and administer appropriate child size doses, so back to the drug store I went. Jessie's medical kit includes children's aspirin, child's graval, a rectal thermometer, Pepto Bismol liquid, monthly doses of revolution (for parasites), a prescription sedative for dogs (to be used when/if she is flying home) and activated charcoal (for food poisoning). Things that might be needed but can be scavenged from the human medical kit are hydrogen peroxide, bandages, gauze pads and adhesive tape, pressure pads, antibiotic ointment, a surgical scrub, surgical gloves, sutures, razor, and a topical anaesthetic. So far there have been no major accidents and the occasional cactus encounter is fixed with a pair of pliers (which we always carry on our walks ashore).



Other than the medical kit the only other additional Jessie items were child/dog netting along the lifelines, a chest harness and doggie sunglasses. She already had a lifejacket. The netting has been great, and although it detracts from our Curare's appearance it keeps her restricted to the deck and we let her race around barking at the dolphins and whales even while we are sailing. However if it is very rough we do not let her beyond the cockpit area and she actually prefers to stay below sleeping. The harness and the sunglasses have not been a hit. I thought I could use the harness and clip Jessie into the jacklines while we were on

passage but she hated the tether so the harness remains in a locker. She tolerates the sunglasses with a lot of human encouragement but she will not wear them for long periods of time and it is too much effort for me to make her keep them on.

Jessie is a medium to large size, short haired dog and weighs about 70 pounds. She is not the sort of dog that people generally think of when they consider taking a pet along with them. Although we have met a few other dogs her size most of the ones we meet are smaller. Living on a boat everyone assumes she loves swimming but she does not. For us this is a good thing because we never worry about her jumping into the ocean from the deck, or leaping out of the dinghy before we reach the shore. However she is very agile and leaps on and off Curare's deck into and out of the dinghy without our help and she also goes up and down the companionway ladder on her own, going down below to take a nap and coming back up to check what's going on. On land we bathed Jessie in a bathtub but on the boat we use the dinghy and a bucket of



fresh water, not a problem. In general she is a very silent crew member but when people come close to our boat she starts barking and running around. Most strangers stay away because she is big and black and barking very loudly. Who needs an air horn or alarm system? She also talks to the dolphins and whales, is often the first crew member to notice them and we think the dolphins stay around our boat longer than is usual wondering what she is saying.



Curare does not have a bimini for shade while sailing or a full boat sun awning when at anchor. When we first arrived it was winter and this was not a problem but now it is approaching summer and the sun is intense. I have sewn a cockpit awning which we put up while at anchor and Jessie is happy lying in the shade on a cushion but while sailing the sun is a bit of a problem for her. One solution is the wet towel drape, the evaporation keeps her cool, and another is lying in the cockpit well in the shade of the solar panels. Neither of these solutions is ideal because she is taking up a lot of our outside living space but she quits panting and starts relaxing and that

is the most important thing.

All of the pet issues we were concerned about prior to starting the trip Jessie figured out on her own. When she realized that after 2 days that we were not going to stop she "did her business" on the deck and received lavish praise from the human crew. For 14 nights she slept down below in the center of the cabin on her own cushion on the floor and she jumped into the cockpit well on her own to escape the waves which were splashing onto the bench seats. Jessie walked around on the decks keeping her balance better than the 2-legged crew and she did not get seasick even when we were in the 4 day gale. She adapted so well that it seemed to us like she had been to sea before.

Having Jessie along has been a positive experience; we are more often recognized as Jessie's owners than as being from Curare. We meet a variety of people who want to talk about or pat Jessie; fellow cruisers, vacation package tourists, and Mexicans, we talk to her when the other person is feeling grumpy, we use her as an excuse to run and play in the sand like a child, she is always happy to see us even when we have had a stressful day ashore, and she snuggles up to us in the cockpit (often pushing one of us out of our seat). If we had left her at home I am sure I would have thought about her every day; wondering if she was happy, did she miss us, would she remember us when we got back and was she having any fun? She is a family member as well as our pet and we are glad we chose to bring her with us. Taking your pet offshore may not be an option depending on what your pet is like but if people say that having an animal on a boat is a nuisance don't believe them. Animals are very adaptable and are generally happier being with their family than to be displaced from the "pack" they have known all of their lives.

