

high seas

Hunkering in the bunk

A bunk is more than a bed and **Rob Latimer** reveals the secret desire we all hold when cruising.



Every bunk is different in its own particular way. But all act as a haven, a retreat, a place to curl up and feel snug inside, while outside the elements rage.

On our recent voyage to Vanuatu my bunk was the lower of two, in my own cabin no less, on the port side. We called it the 'wardrobe cabin' because of the, you guessed it, wardrobe which takes up one corner. A rather flash, solid affair with shelves and two doors, one of which has a full length mirror.

The cabin opposite, on the starboard side, we called the 'honeymoon suite' for the enormous double bed that takes up all but a small piece of floor where the door swings open.

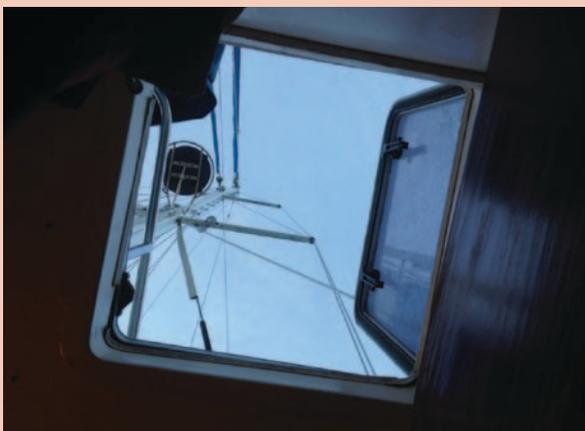
But, returning to my bunk: it is an odd kind of shape to fit in with the contours of the cabin.

The mattress is a cheap slab of old foam and, after an extended period at sea, the blanket and sheets could probably (no, definitely) have done with a serious scrub.

After a lengthy spell on watch, however, with the wind, the waves and the cold chipping away at my senses, a return to my bunk was like a welcome home. A warm embrace where sleep quickly consumed all ills and restored the soul. A space where time stood still as the boat crept forward, closer to our eventual destination.

Lying on my back there's the clear deck-hatch above me, revealing the stars of night and the passing clouds across the blue sky of day. There's the mast and sails which can clearly be seen, their set and angle, along with the heel of the boat, revealing our state of progress through the water. At the top of the mast I can see the navigation lights shining at night and the wind vane giving away the direction and force of the passing air.

Cracked open just a little, my hatch lets in the passing breeze and, on gentle nights when the rain begins to fall, light droplets land on my face through the flywire; letting me know



it's time to get up on deck and bring in the washing. At other times when we're pounding into the sea and water extends across the deck from the breaking waves, there's contentment in looking up from my snug, dry nest and watching it all pass by.

On one side, my bunk is defined by a raised wooden board which helps hold me in on a port tack. On the other side, the curve of the hull forms a wall through which the ripples of the passing sea can be heard, along with the click, click, clicking of dolphins when they care to accompany us for a time.

When the wind is strong its shrill, high-pitched voice, like a dozen whistling kettles, seems to enter the cabin from every quarter. Then at other times, as we wallow on the 'big blue' in search of a zephyr, the flap, clatter, bang of the sails and rigging strike a mournful tune.

With my body running on empty and the necessities of the ship ever-present, the warm, snug embrace of my bunk conceals a trap however; a voice that whispers from somewhere deep in my pillow. Words like "it's OK, the sails are fine. Go back to sleep. The wind isn't that strong. You don't need to reef the main. It's cold and wet out there. You're on a good course. If you go outside you'll need to put all that gear back on. Stay here."

Then consciousness fights back and the return to reality begins; sometimes with a bang literally, and sometimes with a shuffle to the cockpit and a gentle inquiry to the one on watch: "how are things going?"

To hear the words my pillow would never utter: "wind's up, I think we need to reef," or "it's just about time to tack".

The task complete, my warm bunk and I are once more united, as the shiver of the night recedes and my pillow resumes those words of comfort "... go to sleep, everything outside is OK".

cruisinghelmsman Robert Latimer



Robert Latimer is a recreational sailor who established Medical Sailing Ministries in 2008 using the jointly-owned 53 foot steel cutter Chimere to provide remote-access transport and logistical support amongst the islands of Vanuatu. www.msm.org.au.



LEFT TO RIGHT: The warmth and comfort of the bunk might form a welcome retreat from the cold and wet outside, but it can also hide a seductive trap; luring you away from the uncomfortable, yet essential tasks of tending the ship. The author embraces his pillow in the 'wardrobe cabin' aboard *Chimere* enroute to Vanuatu. A clear deck-hatch is located above the bunk in the wardrobe cabin where the forward progress of the ship can be determined from the set of the sails and the movement of the wind instruments at the top of the mast. On a good day the open hatch lets in a welcome breeze and when things turn bad it's reassuring to be able to secure the latches and gaze out at the passing spray and driving wind; On the starboard side lies the 'honeymoon suite' cabin, so named for the enormous double bed that takes up all but a small piece of floor.



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