

Winter in Miami

We stayed on a mooring at Dinner Key for most of January. The rate was \$20 a day, or \$340 a month. Anything more than 17 days, you might as well pay the monthly rate. Mooring rates vary considerably. It's \$10/day in Stuart; \$20/day in Dinner Key and Marathon, and \$30/day in Ft. Lauderdale. Even in Ft. Lauderdale, it's still cheaper than south Florida transient dock rates!

When we're "stopped" it's time to catch up on maintenance. For example, replacing the zinc on the shaft. Water temps were in the mid 70's. Time to get a mask on and get to work! That's the boarding ladder for the boat, and I have allen wrenches in my left hand.

Another project arose by necessity. The mooring field is about a mile from the marina at Dinner Key, so it's a pretty long dinghy ride. Twice we were stranded, with the outboard dying while we were buzzing along in our inflatable returning to the boat.

Mary joked that we should call Tow Boat U.S. Yes, it would be covered, but it was easier to flag a fellow sailor in their dinghy, and get a tow back to the boat.

I had gone over the little outboard before leaving South Carolina. I knew it was in good shape, and I knew how to take the cover off and check the sediment bowl. Ah ha! Water in the gas!



Gee, operating in a marine environment, with jerry jugs and the outboard tank left out in the salt spray and in the rain, how could that happen?

Getting stranded twice bothered me, so I installed a fuel filter with a water separator mounted on the transom of the dinghy. Voila'! Now if there's water, I just twist the draincock and get rid of it.

I've also heard that a filter like this is good when getting gas in the out islands, where quality may be questionable. I'm all set !





So, how is it living on a mooring ball? Not bad; you just have to change your ideas about things like electricity, water, and transportation.

Transportation is the dinghy. You depend on it... a lot! We have a Caribe light 10' rib, with a 2-stroke 15hp motor.

I like the 2-stroke; it's lighter weight, so there's fewer pounds to lift when hoisting the thing. And, 15hp is enough to get the

dinghy on plane even with Mary and me and groceries all in the boat together. Hey, buzzing around in a fast little boat is fun!

Here's our solutions for electricity and water. Electrical management is a science of its own. I started by having everything 12V. I could run the TV and the computer from 12V. But, I could never get the battery bank fully charged. What's wrong? Ah... If I'm charging 12V while also running several 12V appliances, it reduces the voltage on the buss! It's better to run the appliances on AC if you have it, so the batteries get the full 13.5V from the charger.

You can make 12V by running the engine to charge the house battery bank. But, with a little Honda generator, you get the 12V charge and you also have AC. Hey, with AC we can watch TV! We watch about 3 hours of TV in the evening, which is also enough charging time to replenish the 12V bank for another 24 hours.

Meanwhile, my little Honda is paying for itself in cost avoidance. I could recharge by running the diesel. But, it costs \$8,000 to overhaul a boat's diesel engine. If you figure engine life as 4,000 hours, that's \$2 an hour. The little Honda is cost-justified since I avoid putting hours on my diesel!



Fresh water. At a dock it's no problem. But on a mooring, you either bring the water to the boat, or, take the boat in to refill with water. Our tankage is 157 gallons. That lasts about two weeks if we're taking showers ashore.

When the docks are nice, I prefer to take the boat in. We did this three times over two months at Dinner Key. Wait for a calm day, dock the boat, and fill 'er up!

If docking isn't attractive, you tote it in the dinghy. But, it's heavy work hoisting 40 lb jugs onto the deck. Docking doesn't look so bad, compared to weight lifting!

Once you have it on board, you use a funnel and hold the jug while it pours into the tank. It's tedious and your arms get tired.

Or, you can do it the easy way. If you have the right kind of jug you can just sit it over the water inlet. Here's one draining into the water tank. We ported a couple of jugs while we were in Ft. Lauderdale.



The real highlight of January wasn't working on the boat. We took some time off. Guess what? We went on a cruise!



Mary and I were on a cruise ship before. She reminded me it was 20 years ago! OK honey, I promise, we'll go again before 2030!

The cruise ship left from Miami, so it was a "natural" to leave the boat at the Dinner Key mooring field. That was part of the logic in staying there.



We got a deal on the cruise through Mary's Dad. His friends in the Sun Seekers trailer park organized it and got a nice discount. Mary and I tagged along, and had a week to spend with "Pops" and Joyce.

Here's Pops, Joyce, and me on the pier in Cozumel. Yup, we're bright eyed and alert. This is "before" we visited the Tequila Factory!

There were activities in each port. I think the most exciting one for us was a zip line through the jungle canopy in Belize. WOW...



It was an excellent cruise! Sort of a vacation from our life style vacation!

Meanwhile, in each port, I took notes on where the anchorages were. (smile!). Next time I hope of visit these beautiful Caribbean ports on our own boat!



It's the last week of January, and time to get underway again. We "stocked up" for the Bahamas before leaving Miami. \$500 at Publix! Our goal is the Abaco's, so we're migrating from Miami north to Ft. Lauderdale. The "North Route" to the Bahamas is either West Palm or Ft. Lauderdale over to West End.

Here's the Las Olas Municipal Marina in Ft Lauderdale. Gee, I didn't realize the ICW had a parking lot!

And, here's "Gideon" in the marina mooring field. That's the Las Olas drawbridge in the background.

The marina offices are behind the bridge. We'd dinghy over each day to go ashore, do laundry, and take showers in the marina facilities.

There are only 10 moorings here, and they stay full. You need a bit of luck to get one. There are some small local anchorages, with Lake Sylvia being the most popular. Because lots of boats come through and space is scarce, the anchorages are crowded in the spring and fall. I hate close quarters anchoring; when the boats swing I get really nervous. So, I prefer the mooring field. Moorings in Ft. Lauderdale are pricey, at \$30 a day. That's still a LOT cheaper than Bahia Mar Marina !



From Port Everglades it's 78 miles northeast to West End in the Bahamas. Sounds easy, right? But when you check the off shore forecast, you often see 8' waves! It's the gulf stream. With wind from the north and the current from the south, it builds steep waves. You have to wait for a "weather window" to cross, with light winds from the south so the wave heights are reasonable. My favorite web site for checking wave heights is:
<http://www.weather.gov/forecasts/wfo/sectors/mflMarineDay.php#tabs>

So... end of January... we're hanging out in Ft. Lauderdale... going to the beach... going to West Marine... and waiting for weather so we can cross to the Bahamas !

.Roy & Mary
 S/V "Gideon"