

# STUCK AT SEA

## Not to be confused with lost at sea — I knew where the hell I was, I just couldn't get back (In Baja)

By Frank Goddard

This is a tale about survival at sea. What this actually is will be a lesson in gauging your ability, sailing safe, and using good judgement, especially about so-called self-rescues.

The basic ingredients were offshore winds (first clue) and advancing too fast to a shorter board for the given conditions (second clue). Punta Chivato, in Baja California, is a point that sticks out into the Sea of Cortez. With typical El Norte (north) winds the water is relatively flat inside the point (like by the windsurfing school and hotel) but not so flat east of the point.

Well, the obvious happened. I "promoted" from my flat water lake-type funboard to a slalom board and made one tack too far east. The wind also promoted itself up to eventually about 30 mph, with six-foot-plus seas.

I'll be the first to admit, nothing was broken. I became overpowered, too tired to water start a board too tippy for my ability in those condions, and

finally decided I was in deep doo-doo. I first tried to swim with the rig back to the beach and into the wind and waves. Not likely.

My next inspired move was to implement phase one of the self rescue technique I had read about; that is to "simply" roll up the sail on the mast and put it and the boom

**"If you're too tired to sail or something is broken, good luck even if your Mark Spitz on a comeback"**



Frank Goddard with the rescue plane. Notice the rescued board on the Jeep in background. With him are relieved family members Melanie, Tara and Alix.

on the board and "just" paddle on home. Not likely. A 15' mast and a boom on a 9' board would be hard to paddle on flat water!

As I was rapidly heading south with no sign of help ("Oh, is Frank gone?") I made the really genius decision, which I also read about, to ditch the rig and just paddle on home. Not likely. If you're too tired to sail or something is broken, good luck even if your Mark Spitz on a comeback.

Furthermore, when you ditch your rig you forever lose your ability to sail anywhere if you don't get rescued, when eventually the wind does drop to managable levels and you are a little more rested.

(As a technical footnote, I was "stuck at sea", which is not to be confused with lost at sea — I knew where the hell I

was, I just couldn't get back!) The only smart thing I did do (other than come to Baja with my best friends; "You know, I think Frank is gone!") was to wear a semi-dry wetsuit and a PFD. The only problem wearing a black wetsuit on a white board on a sea of white caps is that it tends to make great camouflage (especially without a colorful sail).

Moral: beyond the obvious (sail within your ability and wear a wetsuit and PFD, especially with offshore winds and no coast guard) don't jettison your rig without serious consideration of your options sould "Plan A" fail.

Luckily, the karma of Baja held and my friends found a pilot on vacation (at the dirt strip at Punta Chivato), found

a new friend who thought he saw me bobbing miles out, and borrowed a local fishing boat for what became a Baja-style air-sea rescue.

As I climbed into the fishing boat some six plus miles out to sea the sun had just dropped below the mountains of Baja. One irony was that this was the last day of the year and the next New Year's morning I woke to the sight of dolphins jumping fast off the beach.

Baja has a magic that John Steinbeck found in 1941. It's still alive.

*Frank Goddard, of Susanville, in the northeast part of Calif., first wrote about family Baja tripping in our Fall/Winter '90 issue. He works for the U.S. Forest Service.*