

## THE SHAKEDOWN CRUISE

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On April 27, 2019, I had the shakedown cruise experience of the century and want to share what I learned. I recognize most of you are seasoned Captains and very experienced, so I apologize for reiterating some of the basics to you guys.

I was scheduled to pick up my 2018 Pursuit 385 dealer demo on April 20, 2019 in Mattituck, NY and take it to Mamaroneck, NY. However, since there was a gale warning that day, the Delivery Team strongly advised against it. So, we put it off for the following week.

I was so excited, I read the owner's manual on line three times, studied the charts and was all set to go on April 27, 2019. Since this was my 5<sup>th</sup> boat, having traded my last boat – a Regulator 28 for the Pursuit, I thought I had the experience to face most seas, but was apprehensive because going from a 28 to a 38 is a big jump.

My brother, who is on his 11<sup>th</sup> boat, currently a Maritimo 58, joined me for this shakedown cruise. We watched the weather that week carefully. But it looked like another gale, without the rain, was coming. Sure enough, on Sat. April 27, 2019, the wind was gusting to 35 knots from the West, and the seas were over 5 feet under a clear blue sky. I named the boat "Shooting Star" because, among other things, life is fleeting. But with the heavy seas, and the water being less than 50 degrees, the name seemed to fit the moment.

Even though I have 40 years of boating experience, I always did everything possible to avoid heavy weather. Cancelled trips, left my destination days early, or stayed longer than planned, knowing a storm was coming. We had some scheduling issues with my brother's availability as he was traveling, and since we already put this Delivery off for a week, we were committed to take delivery on April 27, 2019. Although I was excited, I had a pit in my stomach as it felt like I was about to get into a car accident or about to experience impending doom. The anxiety was building.

We fueled up Shooting Star, briefly looked it over, took care of the paperwork, and then went out of the inlet into Long Island Sound for the sea trial. The Delivery Captain was experienced and was just doing his job. He wanted us to get it up to 4500 rpm and run it. But when we got out of the inlet, we hit 6-foot waves that pounded us. I quickly turned around and headed back to Mattituck. I told the Capt. I was waiving the sea trial and just wanted to start our journey back to Mamaroneck Harbor.

So, my brother and I dropped him off, then turned around to enter the most dangerous seas I have ever been in. There was a Small Craft Advisory in effect, the wind was a steady 25 to 30 knots, with gusts up to 35kts. The seas were angry, confused and relentless. My brother, who has his 100 Ton captain's license, and a lifetime of experience on the water, suggested we take it out of the inlet, which will be the worst part, and reschedule if necessary. But he left it up to me. If He was comfortable with the journey then I was ready to do it. He knew the boat could handle it but recommended that he take the helm for a few minutes to show me how to handle heavy seas. I accepted his offer and watched him navigate each wave. He was calm and focused. I was in over my head and knew if he wasn't there, I would have been in serious trouble.

When I took the helm, I had a crash course, no pun intended, of how to handle heavy seas and just want to share this with all of you.

First, I realized that hitting these waves head on was a sure way to put your dentist's kids through graduate school. The slamming was not fun. My brother repeatedly told me to hit the waves on a 45-degree angle, throttle down, slide down the back of the wave, then throttle up for the next wave. I thought I was throttling up, but that was not what my brother had in mind. I was babying the throttle thinking the boat would fly into the next wave. When he said hit it, he meant give it all she's got to get up the next wave, then back it down. After about an hour, I started to get the hang of it and actually started to feel calm and confident that the boat could actually handle it. I thought revving of the Engines like that would destroy the boat. Quite the contrary. The boat handled beautifully.

Second, when I saw massive waves breaking a hundred yards ahead of us, my brother told me to steer around the wave. Just because the wave is breaking in front of us, doesn't mean the wave stretches across the entire Long Island Sound. Big breaking waves can actually be avoided. You can steer around them if you see them coming in time to try to avoid them.

Third, huge waves come in series. Usually 3 or 4 in a row. That's when I got ready to work the throttle and my angle of approach to each wave to avoid slamming the boat in the hole between the waves. We were making 11 knots with 69 miles to go, so keeping up our speed was important.

Fourth, I realized that since we were going due West, and the wind and waves were coming from the West, with opposing tide – of course, we had to tack to maintain our ability to meet the waves at a 45 degree angle so we can avoid slamming the boat. So, we tacked making sure to clear Eaton's Neck and actually started using the autopilot to help keep us on each tack.

Fifth, when we were in the middle of the Sound, the wind really picked up. I saw long streaks of white on top of the breaking waves running parallel with our boat. My brother knew exactly what those streaks meant. When the wind gusts to 35 knots, it leaves telltale streaks on the water. Never saw that before, but it helped to notice it so that I was prepared for the angle and throttle routine of hitting the waves that surely followed.

Finally, never be too proud to accept advice from those who have more experience than you. When we arrived at Mamaroneck Harbor, I was still in shock, and realized I just learned more in this 4-hr. shakedown cruise than I had in my last 40 years of boating. Finding the rhythm of throttling up and down each wave, navigating the angle of approaching heavy seas while maintaining your course heading, tacking if necessary, and recognizing incoming wave sets really helps in handling heavy seas and making it safely to your destination. Like Iron Mike Tyson once said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched on the face."

I dedicate this Article to my brother Rich; that salty dog taught me more in 4 hours than I learned in 40 years of boating.