

A rugged boat, a hardy couple with a mission

Polar Mist is the newest boat to join the mostly French adventure sailing fleet based in southern Chile

By WILLIAM SISSON
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The newest sailing vessel to join the small fleet of boats based out of southern Chile is Polar Mist, a 54-foot cutter designed and built especially for cruising icy waters.

The boat is operated by Richard and Sheri Crowe, two experienced skippers and boatbuilders who have logged more than 100,000 offshore miles in nearly 20 years.

The Crowes spent two seasons in the southern region between 1989 and 1991 aboard Confetti, a 44-foot Farr design they built themselves. "We just fell in love with the area," says Richard Crowe,

who for 17 years has been one of the skippers aboard the Alaska Eagle, the 65-foot former Whitbread winner (as Flyer) and flag ship for the Orange Coast College's sailing adventure program. "Working on the Alaska Eagle, we spent a lot of time in Alaska and we knew that southern Chile was the same type of terrain. We just decided we'd go a bit further and home-built a new boat."



The Crowes' vessel was designed by French naval architect **Philip Subrero**, known for his Arctic designs, including Kim, a steel ketch that wintered in the Antarctic ice.

The aluminum hulled Polar Mist has a 17-foot beam and is built to heavy scantlings, with a half-inch bottom plate and three-eighths inch at the turn of the bilge, tapering to three-sixteenths at the sheer. It has a displacement of 15 metric tons.

Polar Mist has a retractable ballasted keel and an articulating rudder, which will enable the Crowes to drive the vessel into very shallow water to avoid large pieces of ice. The vessel has a

draft of 3 feet with the keel up and 8.5 feet with the keel down, says Crowe. With the keel and rudder up, the vessel can be careened squarely on the bottom, allowing the Crowes to make repairs and inspections below the waterline. There are watertight bulkheads fore and aft.

Polar Mist is equipped with an 85-hp John Deere engine and can carry 600 gallons of fuel and 300 gallons of water. The boat carries three heaters and the hull and overhead are insulated. The interior includes four double staterooms.



Polar Mist is owned by the Crowes and a partner, John Gates, says Kim Miller, the sail training adventures coordinator for the Orange Coast College's sailing center in Newport Beach, Calif.

The couple will be leading trips under the college's program around Cape Horn and to the Antarctica Peninsula, the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. They are offering 10-day heavy weather sailing seminars off Cape Horn.

"People have read about all these things and now they want to go bump their own head and try out heaving to and towing a drogue instead of just reading about it and wondering," says Crowe. "So this is an opportunity for them to do that and make up their own minds about what works and what doesn't."

People who know Crowe say he's a perfectionist. Brad Avery, director of the sailing adventure program, calls Richard Crowe "a real Renaissance guy."

Boatbuilder Frank Sinek says the Crowes are the "most intense couple" he's ever met. "When they set a goal, it will be accomplished," says Sinek of Sinek Yachts in Graham, Wash., who built the Polar Mist's hull and deck along with the Crowes. "You can bet your life on it. They'll work without sleep to accomplish a goal if it takes that. They're phenomenal."



"They just want to go to the most remote places in the world," says Miller. "Richard is always looking for the smallest nooks and crannies . . . They're definitely intense people, but they're also good people-people as well."

Sinek says Crowe could not care less about publicity. "His life is sailing," says Sinek. "Richard is not a publicity man."

And he's a private person. Crowe refused to give his age or talk much about himself. "I'm going to talk about sailing," says Crowe.

The couple was to leave Southern California in mid-September and expected to arrive in Chile in December. Although initial interest has been good, Crowe expects it will take a few years to establish a strong customer base.

"This is our first year, so I think it will take several years for people to start making their plans," he says. Alaska Eagle has been operating so long that people can plan a trip a year or more in advance, which is one of the reasons for its success, says Crowe, who expects Polar Mist will attract a number of former Alaska Eagle sailors.

For more information on Polar Mist, contact Kim Miller at the Orange Coast College Sailing Center, 1801 W. Coast Highway, Newport Beach, Calif. 92663, (714) 645-9412.