

# Tauranga Yacht's Voyage To America

## LEDA'S CREW FEASTS UNDER SUNNY TONGAN SKIES

(By W. A. Wilson)

The 54-foot Tauranga yacht Leda is at Tonga, having completed the first 1100 miles of her proposed 7000-mile voyage to America. She is crewed by her owners, Messrs C. G. and W. A. Wilson, their wives, Kit and Erica Wilson, Mr D. E. Woolf, of Tauranga, and Mr and Mrs C. G. Wilson's three children, Jan, Ruth and Nicholas. Here is an account of the first stage of the voyage.

On the morning of the second day that Leda lay becalmed in the 90-mile stretch of water between Ata and Tonga Islands she had acquired two pilot fish. I saw them when I dived overboard for a pre-breakfast swim.

Tiny blue fish with yellow stripes, they swam on the port side beside the rudder as the yacht ghosted along at about half-a-knot. They swam toward me inquisitively, but scuttled round to the other side of the boat when I came too close.

The others on board all came to look. Even six-year-old Jan and four-year-old Ruth lowered themselves over the side on a rope, ducked their heads below the surface and declared that they too had seen them.

The water was deep blue, warm and amazingly clear, but what appeared to impress the children most was the knowledge that they had "swum" in water which was over their heads—the depth was about 1200 fathoms.

### Calm After Storm

We had spent all the previous day drying clothes, tidying up and lazing in the sun, so, as there was still no sign of wind at 11 o'clock, we started the engine and headed for Tonga once more. It was our ninth day at sea since leaving Russell, and already unpleasant memories of some of the first seven days and nights were fading.

It was hard to realize that only the day before the wind had stopped howling in the rigging for the first time in a week; that big seas had been crashing constantly over the foredeck and the ocean had been a vast heaving mass of whitecaps.

No one had been particularly happy during that week except perhaps five-months-old Nicholas, who faces everything except hunger with a jaunty smile. Jan was very sick most of the time. She announced after two days that she would prefer to live on a farm and only found her sea legs for brief periods during the next five days. Ruth's stomach is made of sterner stuff, but she allowed after four days that she would be glad when we got to Tonga. By the following day she had made a complete recovery, however, and was eating at every available moment to make up for lost time.

### "George" Works at Night

Dave Woolf became a minor casualty, what with loss of sleep and lack of accustomed exercise, but he was always on hand to do more than his fair share of work. Trying to sleep in Leda's forward cabin when she is really driving into a head sea is like trying to sleep on the Big Dipper at Luna Park in Sydney. The rest of us managed to scrape along, however, no doubt fortified by the knowledge of how much worse the return trip from Sydney had been after the 1951 Tasman race, when we were 17 days hard on the wind.

This last trip hadn't been so bad really. We had only sailed the boat on two nights out of seven. The other five, when the wind started to pipe more shrilly through the rigging at nightfall, we dropped the mainsail and handed over to "George," our new staysail. Under this staysail, Leda sailed herself perfectly right on course. The tiller would wag knowledgeably about across the cockpit all night while the yacht maintained a steady and moderately comfortable two to three knots until we hoisted sail again in the morning and bumped the speed up to six or eight knots again.

For the first four days the wind was from the east and we were just able to lay a course straight for Tonga. Gradually it backed to the

north-east and headed us, blowing fresh all the time. After three days we had left behind the albatross latitudes, the cold winds and grey seas. Woollen jackets and long trousers were put away and we reverted to proper summer sailing rig of shorts and shirt.

The seas grew warmer and the skies sunnier each day, and each day until the eighth, the wind freshened steadily from 3 p.m. until midnight. On the morning of the sixth day I came on watch to find Dave looking happily at a flying-fish which had landed practically in his lap as he sat at the tiller. After that we often saw them skimming over the water but only one more—about the size of a threepence—landed aboard.

### We Meet a Whale

And so on the morning of the 10th day we sighted Eua Island, the landmark for Tonga, ahead. Porpoises moved toward us in arrowhead formation to escort us in and suddenly ahead we sighted an immense whale, sleeping on the surface. We motored to within 50 feet of him before he lifted his great flukes in the air and dived deep.

Rain squalls came up from astern as we rounded the corner of Tonga and headed for the Narrows into Nuku'alofa, and we just managed to negotiate the reefs before nightfall. We dropped anchor beside the ketch Sundance, from Whangarei and Auckland, which had put in 18 days out from New Zealand on the way to Rarotonga. Next morning we were cleared by Customs and doctor.

We had some trouble getting a permit to stay, as the authorities in Auckland apparently had not given us the right forms to fill in, but friends put in a good word for us and we were eventually allowed the 14 days we asked for. Sundance had only been allowed a week.

We went ashore and strolled happily on dry land, gravitating automatically to a fruit stall. For four shillings we bought a bunch of bananas weighing about 30 lb, mandarins, taro, yam, breadfruit and pawpaws.

### Roast Pig and Trimmings

Back on the boat we strung the bananas up from the boom and alternated our eating of them with mandarins until we no longer had the strength to stretch out our hands for more. Since then our supplies have been constantly replenished as every visitor brings a substantial gift with him when he comes aboard.

We have been feasted and feted, with kava, roast pig and all the trimmings. The natives are amazingly friendly and hospitable and all have greatly admired Leda, which they say is exactly like the yacht of the late King of Tonga (Onelua, built by Chas. Bailey of Auckland and long since wrecked).

Some of the crew are showing signs of becoming surfeited with bananas and oranges but personally I find that my taste for them is only being whetted. Life on a tropical island is just the life.

(To be Continued)