



## Tea Time

*by Warren Johnson  
s/v Mico Verde, Westsail 32*

In the great history of around-the-world sailing and cruising, there have been numerous Herculean feats of bravery, seamanship and innovation in the face of certain doom. This is not a story of one of them. I just wanted to make a cuppa tea.

My scenario is one which will be most familiar to any boat owner, particularly new ones when the desire to perform the most simple and insignificant of tasks becomes a much larger and heroic endeavor.

My significant other and I had recently purchased an old but solid Westsail 32 in San Diego, which we cruised to our marina in Seattle at 65 MPH to windward.

After spending a good month in the local yard, the launching day finally arrived. While we waited for a larger liveaboard slip, we were relegated to the visitor's dock with the racing fleet and the yacht brokers.

The day following the launch, we found ourselves settling in comfortably to our new surroundings. It was a beautiful fall day in the Puget Sound. Before taking the boat out on her first cruise around the bay, we started the process of unpacking the remaining items shipped with the boat like the dinghy and the outboard, securing anchors, and sorting out the galley. The last of these is where my story really begins.

After feeling quite satisfied at the state of the boat after lots of reorganizing, I decided that it was time for a nice cup of tea to settle back and enjoy the sunset from the cockpit.

I started getting familiar with the workings of the galley stove: hopped up on deck to check the connections to the propane tanks, opened the valve on the one currently connected to the solenoid, hunted for the solenoid switch on the distribution panel, turned on the solenoid switch next to the stove (the light turned

green, OK so far), opened the first valve on the burner, pressed the starter and nothing. Keeping the valve open I listened closely for the familiar hiss, but only got silence. It was obvious that we were out of propane. This did not come as much of a surprise. In the previous year the boat had been used very infrequently by her previous owners in San Diego (during the sea trial in the San Diego Bay we actually ran out of fuel, and it was revealed that the owners did not know where the deck fill for the diesel was located).

After checking around a little, I found a shop selling propane nearby. Back on deck I simply needed to get the tanks off and drive a couple blocks to get the tanks filled and I would be kicking back with my tea in no time! The tanks were simply mounted to the deck via bolts and wing-nuts.

Boats often have other plans in mind than those of their owners. Upon closer inspection of the connection of the tanks to the deck, it was obvious that they had not been moved in a very long time. The combination of salty air and the dissimilar metals of stainless steel and aluminum meant trouble. I rounded up my dead blow, WD-40 and my first mate to start on the task of freeing the tanks.

Three hours and two cans of WD-40 later, the tanks were finally starting to give. After another hour they were free (question: should one really be banging on a propane tank, even if one thinks it's empty?).

This takes us to the next sequence of events. The mounting bolts were now completely toast from the combination of all the banging and corrosion. I realized I had some priorities that out-ranked filling

the tanks just yet. I needed to replace the mounting bolts. Tea was still just out of my reach.

The next sequence of events was such a blur of growing problems, that my still sensitive emotional state will only allow me to list them for you:

- \* In order to remove the old, corroded mounting bolts, I needed a center punch. A quick trip to the store marked that off my list.

- \* I realized that the wood ceiling/paneling below the bolts needed to be completely removed (which had JUST been re-installed after stepping the mast the previous week).

- \* Removed ceiling.

- \* Punched out eight mounting bolts.

- \* Ran to the hardware store to get new mounting bolts, wingnuts, nuts and washers. Unfortunately, it was a Sunday, and everyone was closed. Found close match at West Marine.

to even bother to find out just what was so special about OPD. Disheartened, I decided to just take a peek at some new tanks at West Marine on the way home. I happened upon my first lucky break of this entire escapade. They had two OPD tanks with horizontal mounts in the exact mounting configuration that I had just replaced on the boat. I then glanced at the price: \$250 each. Did I say something about a lucky break?

I knew this purchase would require a second opinion from the ship's purser. Not surprisingly, her quick response was, "Hell no! Find another way to make the current ones work." After all, she had just had her fingers glued together the previous day with 5200 while rebedding the new mounts for the old tanks.

I decided to sleep on the matter. Sure enough, I spent the whole night dreaming about propane. This actually turned out to be quite useful since one of the recurring themes in the dreams was about the fact that the new tanks looked suspiciously identical to the old ones, a fact that somehow managed to escape me in the heat of battle.

The next day, braced by all those new ideas, I decided to take a closer look at my old tanks. Well, what do you know? I found a sticker on the side which clearly stated in very fine print that these tanks were indeed OPD. So what was up with that kid



- \* Returned to the boat, installed new mounting bolts, got messy with 5200 bedding, and re-installed the ceiling.

By now, I was ready to make my move. Propane tanks? Check. Un-corroded mounted fittings?

Check. Propane seller nearby? Check. Propane seller still open? Uh, nope. So that cup of tea was going to have to wait till the next day.

The following morning, I headed off to my local U-Haul to get the tanks filled. The minute I took the tanks out of my back seat, the kid working the propane station took one look at them and said, "Oh, I can't fill those. They're not

OPD. But I'll buy them from you for five bucks."

I smelled something fishy, and we were nowhere near the marina. I kindly told the kid no and left frustrated. I was too annoyed at this point offering me five bucks for my "non-regulation" tanks? That's a racket if I've ever seen one.

I decided to try to get the tanks filled again, but this time at a different spot. I headed off to a nearby gas station. Predictably, the guy walked up, saw my tanks and said, "Oh, too bad. Can't help you since those aren't OPD tanks."

As he was walking away, I decided to get some answers. I stopped him. "Wait, how do you know these are not OPD tanks?" With scorn he said, "Well, you've obviously got the wrong handles." Now I saw what all these guys were using as their official point-of-reference for OPD tanks.

I pointed to a port on the side of the tanks. "What does the handle have to do with anything since you fill the tanks from this hole?" He took another look, shrugged, and said, "Oh yeah, you've just got commercial OPD ports. No problem." He then proceeded to fill both tanks for about eight dollars.

I drove back to the boat, connected the tanks, pressure tested the lines (thanks for the tips, Don Casey), and tried the burners on the range again. Success! Soon after that, I sat back, enjoying my first cup of hot tea. It only took two-and-a-half days to brew. I found solace in the fact that at least I didn't blow \$500 on an \$8 problem.

Now, let's take a look at that oil filter. When do you think it was last changed? ↴