

# □ PDB ADVENTURES

By Jim Wolf; Avalon/Tahoe President & CEO



## Avalon's latest adventure...

**Beached.** (From L to R) Avalon President Jim Wolf, along with dealers Doug Haskell and Bruce England stop for a moment after reaching the Dry Tortugas National Park on a 26-foot pontoon.

## Key West To Dry Tortugas Excursion

It was 8:45 a.m. on Thursday, October 15 as I made my way to the Bishop International Airport in Flint, Mich. I had left 45 minutes earlier from the Avalon & Tahoe Pontoon Boat manufacturing facility located in Alma. As I drove, I was pondering the weather report that I had just viewed prior to leaving the office. It was a typical fall day in Michigan: 38 degrees, light rain and 15 mile per hour winds coming out of the northwest. The weather report that concerned me was not the local weather, but the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) weather report for Key West, Fla. I had been monitoring the weather for Southwest Florida over the past week and as luck would have it, on the day of departure the report suddenly took a turn for the worse. As recent as the prior evening the report had shown that our window of opportunity was still open, but now, just 12 hours later, it was closing quickly.

As I paid attention to the wet and slippery road, my cell phone rang. It was Doug Haskell, a Tahoe dealer from Devils Lake, Mich. "Have you seen the

weather?" Doug asked. I laughed and made the statement, "Here we go again!" It had been over three and a half years since our last excursion trip on an Avalon & Tahoe pontoon boat. On that trip we crossed the Atlantic from Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., to Bimini Island in January of 2006, going straight through the heart of the Bermuda Triangle. In August 2005, we took a 450-mile ride from Chicago, Ill., to Mackinaw Island, Mich., crossing the entire length of Lake Michigan. Other trips had taken us 300 miles down the Mississippi River and our longest journey had been a five-day, 1170-mile ride from Baltimore, Md., to Key West, Fla., in November of 2004. As the weather report began to change, both Doug and I instinctively knew that we would have to change with it. Although each of our previous ventures had their own unique challenges, it was a given that weather would be our biggest obstacle to overcome and an obstacle that was totally out of our control.

### COMING TOGETHER

"Where are you?" I asked. Doug

replied that he was in central Florida, approximately three and a half hours from our destination of Ft. Meyers Beach, Fla. "Where is Bruce?" Doug stated that Bruce England, a Tahoe dealer from Jackson, Ga., had left his hometown near Atlanta around 5 a.m. and that he had just crossed the Florida border. Doug had left the previous morning from south Michigan and was towing the 26-foot Avalon pontoon boat that we planned on taking for a ride around the Keys. The boat had just come off the production line the previous week. It was a stock model with the only modification being the installation of three additional fuel tanks. In terms of fuel we had the standard 80-gallon tank that comes mounted in the center pontoon, the 36-gallon tank that comes standard on two tube models was mounted in the port rear corner and then two additional 45-gallon tanks were mounted into the privacy station area towards the rear of the boat. The guys at the plant did a great job integrating all of the tanks and even installed a knob on the dash so we could easily monitor and switch

between the tanks.

In addition to the 206-gallon fuel capacity, the boat had the following upgrades: Rough Water Package (aluminum tubes are .110 instead of .090 and all seams are joined with continuous welds), Water Sports Package (includes the addition of a center pontoon with a built-in fuel tank, aluminum under sheeting, and high performance lifting strakes for all three pontoons), Captain Stand upgraded (includes a built-in stainless steel refrigerator, retractable wine rack and sink), Double Bimini Top (includes two 10-foot bimini tops for maximum shade coverage), Wake Board Tower (with optional high powered Infinity tower speakers), Colored Wall Skin upgrade (we choose black walls), Sport Graphics Package (upgraded graphics) and the Teak Front Deck option (simulated teak wood instead of carpet). Powering the decked-out Avalon was a 250hp Yamaha four-stroke engine with its digital shift controls. Yamaha was excited to team up with Avalon & Tahoe on this project and all of us at Avalon & Tahoe were excited that the boat would be powered by such a reliable and maintenance-free engine.

### ORIGINAL PLAN

After looking at a detailed weather report for the next few days we both knew that our plans needed to change and they needed to change fast. The original plan was for the three of us to rendezvous in Ft. Meyers on Thursday late afternoon. We would prep the boat, go out to dinner and then get some rest. We would depart from Ft. Meyers on Friday morning and go to Marathon Key to pick up some supplies from Bruce's boat that he had stored there. We needed some fishing poles, his 200-watt Honda generator, his George Foreman grill, spear guns, etc.

Bruce had been visiting the Keys for several years and was well versed in the crafts of spear fishing and lobster diving. Depending on the time and the weather conditions, we would hit some lobster holes in the area, goof off most of the afternoon and be in Key West by sundown. We planned on spending Friday evening in Key West, gassing up the boat and heading out at day break to the Dry Tortugas National Park located 70 miles due west of Key

West. We would hang out in the Dry Tortugas all day Saturday and spend the night on the boat. Sunday we would cruise back to Key West, refuel and then kick around the Keys for a day or two before returning to Fort Meyers. It was a tentative plan and one that we all felt comfortable with. All I knew is that I had a return ticket booked out of Ft. Meyers for Tuesday morning and I had every intention of making that flight.

Spending four days traveling around the Keys on a pontoon boat, spear fishing and diving for lobster sounded like a blast. The trip to the Dry Tortugas would take us through the Gulf Stream and out of sight of land for several hours. Traveling the open water on any craft comes with a certain degree of risk. We knew that the three of us all had significant boating experience. We knew that the Avalon was a well-built boat and could withstand some pretty harsh conditions. We knew that the Yamaha was an extremely reliable engine and would get us there and back without failure. We also knew that there was a slight craziness in the fact that we planned on taking a pontoon boat over 350 miles of open ocean with many of those miles being run out of sight of land as well as out of contact with those who knew our trip plans. Most experienced boaters know the old adage of "safety first." We knew that we were putting ourselves in harm's way and we did our best to ensure that we had prepared for the unexpected.

When it comes to safety, no expense was spared. On board we had: lifejackets (Type V PFD), flare kit, strobe lights, an EPIRB (emergency position indicating radio beacon), a hard-wired marine radio with a six-foot whip antenna (range of 14 nautical miles), submersible VHF radios, first aid kit, spare prop, tool bag, flashlights, and a SPOT GPS satellite tracker. The SPOT system was new to our safety arsenal and was discovered while poking around a West Marine store over the previous weekend. It's about the size of a cell phone and when activated tracks your location at 15-minute intervals. It is connected to a website ([www.findmespot.com](http://www.findmespot.com)) so friends and loved ones can track your progress and identify your exact location anywhere in the world. The service was inexpensive



**Power To Spare.** Powering the decked-out Avalon was a 250hp Yamaha four-stroke engine with its digital shift controls. Yamaha was excited to team up with Avalon & Tahoe on this project and they were just thankful to have such a reliable and maintenance-free engine.

**Finders Keepers.** Doug Haskell proudly holds up the laundry basket that the crew found on the way to Dry Tortugas. This basket would come in handy later that night. Haskell is a Tahoe Pontoon dealer (North Shore Marine) from Manitou Beach in Michigan.

**Worth The Trip.** In 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt set aside Fort Jefferson and the surrounding waters as a national monument. The area was re-designated as Dry Tortugas National Park in 1992 to protect both the historical and natural features.



for having this additional peace of mind.

### CHANGING OUR DEPARTURE

We had the boat, we had the crew, we had the safety equipment and everything was going according to plan. The wheels were in motion; Doug was within striking distance of Ft. Meyers with only three and a half hours to go. Bruce was three hours behind Doug and closing in fast and I was an hour from the Flint airport with an on-time flight status. It was now 9 a.m. and our immediate thought was that we needed to step up the plan by a day. We did not want to be in the open waters of the Dry Tortugas when the cold front came in and the winds and waves picked up. This was supposed to be a fun adventure, not one that could potentially kill us. The front was coming in Saturday afternoon, which means we'd have to be over to the Dry Tortugas and back by early Saturday afternoon. We could not afford to burn Friday going from Ft. Meyers to Key West. During this leg of the trip we would be offshore by five or 10 miles or so and would be in sight of land anyway. It was our desire to go offshore and we wanted to explore the remote islands that made up the Dry Tortugas. We discussed options. We decided that we would drive straight to Key West and would depart in the morning on the boat trip to the Tortugas. Doug would continue to pull the boat and Bruce would pick me up at 4:30 p.m. in Ft. Meyers. Doug would get to Key West, find a place to put the boat, locate a hotel and wait for our arrival. We would all have loved to have been on the water traveling in our Avalon down the Keys instead of driving on the slow two lanes of A1A, but we had no other option as the weather was now dictating the plan.

### FINAL DETAILS

It was about 9 p.m. when the three of us finally sat down for dinner at the Tavern N Town Restaurant in the Marriott hotel. Tired and full, we discussed last minute details and agreed to meet in the lobby at 7 a.m.

During breakfast we used a laptop to purchase non-resident saltwater three-day fishing licenses and non-resident lobster permits for the three

of us. The website ([www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com)) was very user-friendly and graciously accepted our credit card for the \$17 fishing permit, \$2 lobster permit and the \$2.78 convenience fee, per person. After breakfast we headed over to the City Marina at Garrison Bight where Doug had dropped the boat the evening before. There she stood: shrink-wrapped on the trailer in the middle of the parking lot. We pulled up at 7:45 a.m. and went to work loading supplies from our vehicles as bystanders looked on. Doug and Bruce went into the marina office to notify them of our plans, pay the ramp fees, etc. When the marina dock master and dock hands heard of our plan to take the 26-foot pontoon boat to the Dry Tortugas, they thought it was a sick joke. They did their best to talk Bruce and Doug out of it and said we were crazy to attempt that journey on that (pointing to our rig), especially with the impending storm on its way. As I was trying to find more room for our supplies, Bruce and Doug returned and began to talk about their conversation with the dock master. We knew that the storms were coming and I could see the look of concern on their faces. There was an uneasy feeling over the next 10 to 20 minutes as the reality of the situation hit us. Up to this moment it had been all talk, planning, coordination, etc. Even with all the planning, the moment of truth had now arrived as we prepared to splash the Avalon. Supplies were set and the boat loaded. The last task was taking her across the street to fill it up. After topping off all the tanks we backed the Avalon down the ramp and put her in. We were all anxious to see how she floated when fully loaded and carrying the additional 1500 pounds of fuel. The 27-inch diameter pontoons appeared to do an excellent job keeping her high, dry and well-balanced. The 250 Yamaha turned over quickly and all was good to go. As Doug parked the trailer I could still see the look of concern and anticipation on Bruce's face. I tried to make light of the situation by giving my best remembrance of the *Gilligan Islands* theme song, "Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip, that started from this tropic port aboard this tiny ship—a three hour tour—a three hour tour." With Bruce

and I nervously laughing, Doug jumped aboard and we were ready to go. As we backed away from the dock, Doug looked at me, and I at him, and in unison we blurted out our team motto, "Let's get 'er done!" It's a saying that started on our first excursion trip from Baltimore to Key West in November of 2004 and a saying that we have used frequently ever since. With that we were off. It was 10 a.m. Friday morning and we were headed into the unknown.

### FULL THROTTLE AHEAD

With Bruce at the controls, Doug immediately started dialing in the coordinates on the handheld GPS while I pulled out my new Nikon D-90 that I had purchased for the trip. I started snapping photos to document the event, catching the dogs barking on the break wall as we passed the floating tiki bar in the distance and the ever fading City Marina in the background. We all noticed the large and impressive Coast Guard complex as it came into view on our port side. Sector Key West of the United States Coast Guard has a unique area of responsibility: 55,000 square miles that borders the territorial seas of Cuba and the Bahamas. Along the banks of the complex we saw several rescue boats, helicopters and small inflatables. Tied up along a large pier was the 270-foot Coast Guard Cutter Mohawk (WMEC-913). "Sure hope we won't be in need of those guys," Bruce stated as we passed. It was hot, about 85 degrees and it was forecasted to reach a record high of 96 later in the day. We passed the sunscreen around as we continued to motor through the no wake zones that surround the island of Key West. Soon we were free to roll and we took the Avalon up to cruising speed and settled in around 23 to 25 knots. We discussed fuel and verified that we were running off of the port rear tank. We wanted to consume the fuel in the 36-gallon tank first to give us better balance from side to side. The water was choppy and the waves were sporadic in nature. We passed several pleasure boats as well as a large commercial catamaran with several customers going out for a day of fun in the sun. As we moved past the other boats, we would give a simple wave and most, if not all, waved back

in acknowledgement. We joked about what the other boaters must be saying on their vessels when they saw us pass. As the Island of Key West faded in the distance we adjusted course and it was steady as she goes as we headed towards our destination.

### **HISTORY OF DRY TORTUGAS**

Almost 70 nautical miles (80 land miles) west of Key West lies a cluster of seven islands, composed of coral reefs and sand, called the Dry Tortugas. Along with the surrounding shoals and waters, they make up Dry Tortugas National Park. The area is known for its famous bird and marine life, its legends of pirates and sunken gold and its military past.

The Tortugas were first discovered by Ponce de Leon in 1513. Abundant sea turtles, or "Tortugas," provisioned his ships with fresh meat, but there was no fresh water—the Tortugas were dry. Since the days of Spanish exploration, the reefs and shoals of the Dry Tortugas have been a serious hazard to navigation and the site of hundreds of shipwrecks.

U.S. military attention was drawn to the Keys in the early 1800's due to their strategic location in the Florida Straits. Plans were made for a massive fortress and construction began in 1846, but the fort was never completed. The invention of the rifled cannon made it obsolete. As the military value of Fort Jefferson waned, its pristine reefs, abundant sea life and impressive numbers of birds grew in value. In 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt set aside Fort Jefferson and the surrounding waters as a national monument. The area was re-designated as Dry Tortugas National Park in 1992 to protect both the historical and natural features.

As we cruised, we were soaking up the rays and enjoying the scenery. As one heads due west from Key West, you travel along a series of outer islands (Keys) that are spread out over a 30-mile stretch. The Mule Keys are a group of scattered islets between three to 12 miles west of Key West. After Mule Key we passed Crawfish Key, Man Key, Ballast Key, Woman Key and then Boca Grande Key. The United States Government has placed most of this area off limits, as a part of the Key West

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National Wildlife Refuge. The islands were to our north (starboard side) and we were running approximately three to five miles offshore in 10 to 15 feet of water. After another 10 miles or so of open water you pass the Marquesas Keys, which is another uninhabited group of small islands and overgrown by mangrove. As Marquesas Key faded away in the distance the GPS showed our position at approximately 30 miles west of Key West and getting close to the halfway point. Our next sight of land would be that of the Dry Tortugas. We had been on the water for only 90 minutes and everything was going according to plan.

### **IS THAT A PONTOON?**

As we entered deeper water the waves began to kick up and the ride became a little more rocky. There was no land visible and every half hour or so we would see another boat on the horizon come and go. We came within 100 yards of one commercial fishing boat and we were certain that they could not believe their eyes when they saw three guys cruising by in a pontoon boat. We kept our eyes peeled for shoals, constantly monitoring our GPS coordinates and water depth. As we cruised, we noticed something orange floating in the water up ahead. As we neared the object, we slowed down to take a closer look. It was an orange laundry basket and we snatched it out of the Gulf. I asked what the basket would be doing way out here. The other guys surmised that it most likely came from a fishing boat and the basket was used to store bait fish. We continued on. Eight miles later we slowed down to look for a sunken sail boat that Bruce had pre-programmed the coordinates for into his handheld GPS. The crystal blue water was 15 to 20 feet deep and you could clearly see the sandy bottom. We circled around in the area where the sunken sail boat was supposed to be; however, we could not locate it. We surmised that one of the hurricanes had probably moved the boat from this particular coordinate. Just then, we were greeted by a playful school of curious dolphin. They were swimming around the boat and checking us out. We laughed as we discussed the fact that these dolphin also had not seen



**Earning His Keep.** Bruce England, a Tahoe Pontoons dealer from Jackson, Ga., (B&B Watercraft) has spent a lot of time off the Florida Keys and knows a thing or two about finding dinner.

**Fresh Catch.** Jim Wolf (R) along with Bruce England show off their catch. With hand-held nets and a few long pokers to assist in their attempts, it didn't take long to secure their dinner plans for the night.



**Thanks George.** On the boat the George Forman grill came in handy as the crew successfully cooked up a seafood feast before camping out on the pontoon for the night.



a pontoon boat this far out and they were curious to see what us crazy guys we doing. After a few pictures we continued on our way with the final 15-mile push to the Dry Tortugas.

### ON THE HORIZON

Approximately 10 or so miles from our destination, Doug spotted the 150-foot lighthouse located on Loggerhead Key, three miles past Garden Key, which is home to Fort Jefferson. With Fort Jefferson still out of view, Doug kept saying, "Right over there at 11 o'clock, don't you see it? It must be the lighthouse." Both Bruce and I struggled to see what Doug was talking about and it wasn't until a few more miles that Bruce and I could make out the faint object on the horizon. We continued on a course of due west and knew that it was now only a matter of time. The sight of land was a pleasant sight, although at no point during our crossing was there ever any reason for concern. The trip was going as planned. We were now in the Dry Tortugas, the sun was beating down, the water crystal clear and we still had all day to explore, play and catch some dinner.

Fort Jefferson was impressive as it came into view five miles in the distance. We backed off of the throttle and took our time navigating through the shallow water in between small islands that were made up of only white sand. We decided that the first order of business would be to set foot on dry land and visit the Fort. We followed the well-marked channel into Garden Key. Now going slow, we realized just how hot the day had become so we broke open some bottled water as we slowly cruised into the harbor. As we were admiring the fort and determining where to dock the boat, we passed the main visitors dock where a large ferry (the *Freedom Express II*) from Key West was getting ready to depart. I was standing on the rear sundeck snapping pictures. Through the zoom lens I could see the bewildered look on the faces of the tourists. Some were pointing, but all were looking as we moseyed into port.

### BEACHED

We decided to beach the boat directly in front of the fort where there was a sign and designated area for

"Dinghy's." As we pulled up to the beach, we startled a few snorkelers who looked up and paddled out of our way. As the boat hit the shore, we shut down the Yamaha and we were now on dry land. I was overcome with a sense of true remoteness. There were less than a dozen people in view, nothing commercial, only the ferry dock with limited activity and a huge brick fort staring us down and it was hot! We immediately began to sweat as the sun beat down upon us. A guy with a backpack was strolling by and we asked him to take a few pictures, which he graciously agreed to do. He was surprised to hear our story and he left saying, "Good luck on your adventure." We walked the 100 yards to the entrance of the fort and decided to have someone take a few pictures of us in front of the Fort Jefferson sign. I asked the only guy nearby to help us out. Bill Hamilton was wearing a Dry Tortugas Volunteer shirt and explained that he was one of only a few volunteers who were currently working for the Park Service on the island. He took a few photos and was very curious to see our boat. We walked back to the boat as Bill gave us some history regarding the island, the fort, how often the ferries ran, what to expect at night, where we were allowed to fish, snorkel, etc. Bill was impressed with the fact that we had attempted and made the journey and he was excited to have us as visitors. Bill explained that he worked on a volunteer basis for one month out of the year and the rest of the year he was the Captain of El Tortuga Dive Charters out of Panama City, Fla. After spending 20 minutes getting the lay of the land and soaking up all the information being provided, we decided to take a stroll through the fort.

The perimeter of the fort is surrounded by a moat. The 75-foot brick walls shoot straight out of the moat, making for a very impressive sight. The fort is built as an octagon with the interior of the fort peppered with trees and grass. The inside walls of the fort have deteriorated and you can see what once used to be the square rooms used for living or jail cells. During and after the Civil War the fort served to house prisoners, both Confederate Army and deserters from the Union

Army. The most famous prisoner was Dr. Samuel Mudd, the physician who innocently treated the leg of President Lincoln's assassin. For this he was convicted of treason and imprisoned at Fort Jefferson. He was pardoned in 1869 for his heroic efforts treating prisoners and guards who contracted yellow-fever.

### WATER BREAK

After our 15-minute stroll around the fort, we were dripping with sweat and decided that we needed to get back on the water to cool down. As we left Garden Key Harbor we once again passed the *Freedom Express II*, now in the final phases of departure. We immediately deployed the duel bikini tops which provided excellent protection from the sun. We motored out past the restricted fishing zone and picked a random spot to throw anchor. We donned our masks and fins and jumped into the clear 80-degree water. Bruce grabbed his spear gun and swam off. Within five minutes he was back with a large hog fish thrashing at the end of the spear. We placed the fish in our orange laundry basket and went back for more. Doug spotted some lobsters peeking out the rocks some 10 feet down. We grabbed our hand-held nets and a few long pokers to assist in our attempt to catch them. We soon had the two large and impressive lobsters on board. We were excited to know that we would not be going hungry later in the night.

After a few short hours we had six large (two and a half to three-pound) lobsters, and three nice sized fish on board. We were five to seven miles from the fort and the evening sun was slowly going down. As we motored back to the fort we cracked a few beers and played some songs on the iPod. As Bad Company blared over the speakers, we snapped several photos of our catch and reminisced about the great day we were having in the Dry Tortugas. The sunset was perfect and made for some great photos as the sun slowly went down over Logger Head Key.

### A FRESH FEAST

Back at the dinghy beach, we quickly went to work preparing dinner as daylight disappeared. We cleaned the

fish, prepped the lobster and fired up the Honda generator. We cooked three lobsters, one at a time, on the small George Foreman grill. The lobster was sweet and the hog fish delicious! As we were cooking, Bill poked his head out of the dark to see how we were doing. He told us that the storm was picking up speed and he was concerned for our return trip. This too got us thinking again, and we agreed that we would depart at dawn to get ahead of the storm. We thanked Bill for checking in on us and went back to enjoying our seafood feast. After dinner, stuffed and tired from the day on the water, we pulled out our sleeping bags and shut it down for the evening. Doug and Bruce picked the front large 86-inch benches to sleep on while I took the rear sundeck. The bimini top did not extend over the sundeck so I had a great view of the star-filled night. The wind seemed to be growing steadier and after counting no less than 10 shooting stars, I slowly drifted off. It was a difficult night's sleep as we all tossed and turned thinking of the fact that we were 80 miles away from safety with a fast approaching storm coming our way.

### WAKE UP CALL

I awoke at 3 a.m. with the sound of the waves lapping up against the beach. It sounded like the waves were breaking right under me and I immediately became concerned. I grabbed my flashlight and shined it over the side of the boat. I quickly realized that the tide had gone out and three quarters of the boat was now solidly on shore. I realized there was nothing I could do at that moment and it took 45 minutes to fall back asleep as I wondered how we would get the boat off the beach in the morning. "If we can't get the boat off, we won't get back to Key West in time to beat the storm," I thought as I drifted back to sleep.

At 6 a.m. we were up and securing the items on the boat for our return trip. We assessed the situation and found that the quick and steep drop-off allowed us to trim the motor all the way down even though most of the boat was now on the beach. I took the controls as Doug and Bruce pushed from the front. At full reverse, the powerful Yamaha 250hp began to inch

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the tubes off of the sand and into the deeper water. Within moments we all sighed with relief as we floated freely a few feet from shore. Within 15 minutes of waking we were headed out of the harbor as we all knew, without saying, time was of the essence.

### TURNING BACK

The wind was blowing strong and the waves much larger than the day before. The wind was at our back and we quickly had the boat back up to cruising speed of 25 knots. We knew the waves would only get larger and the wind stronger as the day wore on. Fort Jefferson got smaller and smaller and then finally disappeared behind us. The sunrise was as beautiful as the sunset that we had observed just 12 hours before. On the horizon in front of us was a dark storm off in the distance. We were in two- to four-foot seas and at times I became concerned that we would bury the front end of the boat into the backside of a wave. The boat was running great and felt incredibly stable in the rough seas of the Gulf. Soon we reached the halfway point and we knew that we would soon be in sight of the Marquesas Keys.

The seas continued to build, which forced us to slow down to a cruising speed of 18 knots. We were pleased that all was going well and the feelings of concern began to wane as we began playing more rock 'n' roll. Off to our starboard side we noticed a water spout approximately five miles in the distance. It was an incredible sight and kept us pre-occupied for at least 20 minutes. We began to pass the series of keys that lay off of Key West and at that point we knew that we were getting out of harms way. We cranked up the Infinity tower speakers and listened to a variety of tunes as the miles clicked away.

The island of Key West was a welcome sight as it grew larger and larger as we neared.

### GOT 'ER DONE

We arrived back in Key West exactly 24 hours after we departed. It was 10 a.m. and we were dirty, tired and hot, but most of all we were filled with a true sense of accomplishment. We pulled up to the main Key West marina and tied up across from an impressive

120-foot yacht. As we walked down the pier Doug looked at me, and I at him, and in unison we said, "We got 'er done!" We made our way to the Half Shell Raw Bar for some lunch and learned that we had 30 minutes to wait until they would open at 11 a.m. We passed some of the time talking to the tour operator at the Yankee Freedom booth, getting information about the Fort Jefferson cruise. We learned that the cruise was cancelled for the day due to weather. We never told the operator that we just got back and had done it in a pontoon boat. We just looked at each other and without saying we knew what we had accomplished and that not many people would believe it if we told them. After lunch we took the boat back to the City Marina and pulled it out. Within five minutes the storm hit with a fury! Pouring rain, gusty winds and cold! The conditions continued to deteriorate throughout the day and we knew that we had got it done and just in the nick of time!

To learn more about Avalon pontoons visit [www.avalonpontoons.com](http://www.avalonpontoons.com) or call 800-334-2913. 🦄



To see more photos from the Avalon Excursion to Dry Tortugas see our digital issue at [www.pdbmagazine.com](http://www.pdbmagazine.com).

