

The good-old Peterson 44 – After 45,000 miles

After nine years and 45,000 miles, on an unintentional circumnavigation of the world – after numerous refits and a re-rig – the P-44 Zorana has proved herself to be one tough and fast passagemaker

by Jack Kimball

I think it was back in 1976, at a boat show in San Diego, when Sandi and I drooled over the newly introduced Peterson 44. It seemed to combine good sailing performance, sound construction, and a common sense, comfortable layout. But, alas, we were only kicking tires; she was way beyond our budget.

As the years and boats slipped by, we were able to save our pennies, and while working in Europe in 1984, we were able to afford our “dream boat.” *Zorana* (we don’t know what it means either) was advertised in a German yachting magazine, and located in Flensburg, on the Baltic Sea. She was built in 1980, which made her one of the later models. We flew up to survey her and discovered she had been used only a few months each summer and then conveniently frozen for each winter. We figured she was the equivalent of one year old. The price was right, and she was ours!

After having owned several older wooden yachts, and sailing and delivering others thousands of miles, we compiled quite a list of wants and not-wants for our long-distance voyager. We chose the Peterson 44 for a number of reasons: **Material:** We wanted fiberglass for strength and lower maintenance.

Size: We’ve discovered that larger is better as a stable sailing platform, and for speed. Besides, you need all that room for your toys!

Layout: I had to be sold on center-cockpit, as I was a traditionalist, but as a good friend has said, “If it works, it looks good.” The three cabins with engine room offers great separation and privacy.

Rig: The cutter is great, simple, and efficient. It’s tall enough to handle light airs and with a roller-furling headsail, sail area is easily reduced. The staysail



Designed by Doug Peterson and built in Taiwan by various builders, the P-44 embodies many attributes valued by long-range voyagers.

makes a great storm sail and helps to move the forces inboard.

Seakindly: Although we bought *Zorana* without sailing her, we were confident she would treat us right in a seaway, and so far, after 45,000 miles, she has done just that. Her deep draft, long keel with cut-away forefoot, and skeg hung rudder can handle (I hope) anything Mom Nature can throw at us.

Looks: She has to look good – we all have to have a little vanity – and we think with her pleasant sheer, low cabin profile and proportional rig, she is a real head-turner. The only feature we don’t like is the plumb-cut stern (when seen from the side), but it holds the Aries windvane well, has a nice swim ladder, so I guess since it works. . . .

The Peterson 44 was the fruit of the combined effort of red-hot racing designer Doug Peterson and San Diego yacht broker Jack Kelly. They wanted to create their ultimate cruising yacht. I believe the original boats were built by Yu Ching Marine in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. There have been many copies of this popular boat, which some people call

“Cheatersons.”

Construction

The construction of the hull is heavy, hand-laid fiberglass mat and roving with polyester resin, over one-inch thick at the turn of the bilge. The keel is molded with the hull and the 10,000-pound iron ballast is encapsulated in resin. Total displacement is around 30,000 pounds. The rudder is solid fiberglass over the stainless steel stock and tangs. The heel bearing is bronze with s.s. bolts, which should be checked and, if corroded (like ours), replaced with bronze bolts.

The deck is fiberglass/plywood/fiberglass sandwich, and the deck-to-hull joint is formed at the bulwarks lip with plywood sandwich and fiberglass taped under deck. This seems to form a really strong joint, and other than the odd leak from a genoa track bolt, it’s watertight. The decks were originally gel-coat/non-skid, but several boats, like *Zorana*, had teak decks installed at the yard. Through the years, the bedding compound has given up, and instead of replacing the teak, we opted to remove it, fills the

zillions of holes and put nonskid back on.

For air circulation, the P-44 has 14 opening bronze ports; early boats had only 10 with fixed portlights amidships and teak trim rings instead of the bronze that *Zorana* has. There are three opening hatches (early boats had wood, later aluminum) and two companionways. All in all, there's enough air flow to keep you cool in all but the stillest days. But that's why they invented fans!

The P-44s were shipped without rigs and then set up where they were, so that the California boats were usually Kenyan spars and Nav-tec rigging, *Zorana*, which was shipped to Germany, has Reckman/Shultz spars and Nav-tec rigging, plus special roller-furling gear built for Hood by Reckman/Shultz. The stainless-steel chainplates pass through the deck and are securely bolted to the hull/frames. Because these boats are over 18 years old now, all the bolts should be pulled, inspected, and replaced if necessary. At the same time, you should pull the genoa-track bolts and check them too.

Cockpit & deck

The cockpit is one of our favorite features. We enjoy warm-weather cruising and virtually live outside. The P-44's cockpit is comfortable and secure, with over six-foot side cushions (for naps), bridge-deck forward, and our custom made propane box/helm seat aft. With a dodger and bimini with side flaps, we can enjoy most weather conditions. There's plenty of storage in the pukas, port and starboard, and the port seat locker is quite large. The starboard seat locker opens to allow air to the walk-through for those miserable days when the engine must be attended to. The cockpit sole is a soft patch that can be removed for those major engine-room jobs.

Steering is via a Yacht Specialties wheel and binnacle with cables running down the port side aft to the bronze quadrant. Despite the long run, about 20 feet, the steering feels good with normal feedback. The emergency filler fits onto the rudderpost beneath the aft bunk. This is not the best setup, and you certainly wouldn't want to steer this way for long, so carry a spare cable.

The deck layout is good, with wide side decks, high lifelines, with securely-mounted stanchions and bow and stern pulpits; however, we had to move ours over to accommodate the Aires windvane. The aft deck is great – good for sun bath-



A surprisingly good sailing boat, the P-44 knocks off 160-mile days regularly in the trade winds and can hit 190 when pushed. Her long waterline means she has a high average speed for passagemaking.

ing, fishing, leaving your diving gear, and the like. We see a lot of P-44 owners clutter this area up with deck lockers, life rafts and what not; they don't know what they're missing. There is a teak splash-guard for the dodger and a teak garage for the main hatch. Around the mast we have sissy bars, which are optional, but we love them for the security when reefing the mainsail.

Rig & Sails

The rig was designed for light California winds, so there is plenty of it. The mast is 60 feet above the waterline, keel-stepped, double-spreader with 3/8" cap shrouds, headstay and backstay. The lowers and intermediates are 5/16", forestay is 9/32", and the running

backstays are 1/4". *Zorana's* sail inventory: 356 sq. ft. mainsail, 205 sq. ft. staysail, 560 sq. ft. No. 2 genoa, app. 1400 sq. ft. cruising chute, 90% yankee, and storm staysail. We had a third set of reef points put in the mainsail, and the roller-furling No. 2 has a foam luff to help shape it when reefed. The mainsail sheeting is from the end of the 17-foot boom, which helps keep it out of the cockpit. The original boats had mainsails to the end of the booms; however, this was too overpowering, so they cut the mainsail back 30 inches on the foot. We have a 17'6" spinnaker pole that works great for downwind work.

For sail trim, the P-44 has turning blocks (we oversized ours), No. 55 Lewmar self-tailing primaries, and three Custom Yacht No. 22s for mainsail and



The semi-permanent bimini over the center cockpit, attached at the aft end to the boom gallows, provides plenty of sun protection. The nicely bowed dodger is strong enough to stand up to bad weather and keeps spray and rain out of the companionway. The Windbugger, solar panels and antennas are mounted on the simple arch on the afterdeck.

staysail/spinnaker. On the mast are three No. 22s for main and two genoa halyards, a No. 16 for the staysail halyard and a No. 16 on the boom for reefing. We've now added a dedicated roller-furling self-tailing winch.

Accommodation

Down below, the P-44 is relatively straightforward and, by today's standards, old fashioned and traditional. Entering forward, the functional U-shaped galley is to port with large double-sinks close to the centerline for good drainage on either tack. There is a decent size stove with oven, with enough room to gimbal in a seaway. The counter space is adequate (is there ever enough?). *Zorana* has excellent ventilation with two opening ports and a Dorade. The boat comes with two cold boxes: one under the companionway steps and the larger one to port, outboard of the sinks. On *Zorana*, we only use the smaller box for our combined freezer/refrigerator, and we use the large box for dry storage.

The navigation station is to starboard, straight across from the galley. It faces forward and has a large storage area for charts under the hinged table but the bookshelf is too small for those large

nautical books. The electrical panel is outboard the seat, and when heeled over to starboard, your body leans onto it, not exactly comfortable but not a big problem.

The main saloon inconveniently has a mast coming through the middle of it, but it works well as a handhold. There is a settee to port and pull-out couch to starboard, with cupboards and bookshelves on either side. Some boats have a U-shaped dinette, which made for a small table.

Forward is a large head and shower to port, large cupboard and counter to starboard. The forward stateroom has its own door and private access to the head. It's a large double with a nice hanging locker to starboard, and forward of this is the anchor locker with access door.

Moving aft in the walk-through is the engine-room, which is really accessible via the removable sliding doors. The normal power plant is the venerable 62-h.p. Perkins 4-154 with a Borg-Warner 71CR transmission. However, some boats came with Ford Lehman's. The shaft is 9', 1 1/4" s.s., supported by two cutlass bearings. *Zorana* has a two-bladed 18" Max Prop, and we wouldn't

leave home without it. We recently installed a PSS Shaft Seal, and this has eliminated that maddening drip problem. Across the engine-room, on the port side, is the boxed in 50-gallon fuel tank. Mounted on top of it is the hot water heater and the 12V Adler/Barbour compressor, which leaves a lot of storage space for spare belts, hoses, water and fuel jugs.

To starboard of the engine-room, in the walk-through, is the other built-in fuel tank and the battery storage area. *Zorana* has two banks of two each, 120-amp. Truck starting batteries. Some early boats had the batteries in the bilge area under the companionway steps, but I prefer where ours are. On top of the battery box is my work shop/nuts-and-bolts storage.

Aft is a comfy stateroom with a double-bunk large enough to sleep fore and aft or athwartships (good in a seaway). A large hanging locker is to starboard and a small head to port, with shower if you're small. The aft companionway allows privacy and great air circulation. Storage is more than enough with large lockers under the bunks and drawers and cupboards everywhere. We have always been amazed at how much junk we can get aboard.



The P-44's main saloon is, unfortunately, dominated by the presence of the mast running right through the dinette table. But it's a "feature" you get used to that provides a good handhold in rough weather and a good place to fix a kerosene lamp. Across the way, the starboard settee makes a great seaberth.

Tankage for water is under the cabin sole in four s.s. tanks totaling 125 gallons. These tanks have been known to leak, so be sure to inspect them. The fuel tanks were originally steel and also have caused problems; on *Zorana*, we just had the great fun of replacing them with nice new aluminum ones.

Back in the '70s and early '80s, several P-44s were put into the charter trade down in St. Lucia, West Indies, and Raiatea, French Polynesia. They became quite famous for their bullet-proof qualities. These P-44s were ridden hard and put away wet, so buyer beware. A few P-44s were imported to Europe in the early 1980s, and *Zorana* was one of these.

The shakedown

In the spring of 1985, we drove to Flensburg to commission our new/old boat. Our plan was to enjoy *Zorana* for the Scandinavian summer, see what she needed, and sail to England to outfit her. She was really bare-bones, with only the original three sails, one 45-lb. fake CQR and minimum electronics. We put on a VHF, hard dinghy with motor, and a secondhand spinnaker. By the time we got to England, we had proven she could sail with the big boys, as the summer had proven to be mean and nasty. As we moored in Emsworth on England's south coast, our list included installing an Ar-

ies windvane, Sat-Nav (remember those?), stove crash-bar, binnacle crash-bar and getting a 90% jib and a storm staysail made.

Completing our first outfit, we skedaddled out of England as it was time to get south. Our trip down the Bay of Biscay, northwest Spain, Portugal and Madeira was uneventful as far as *Zorana* was concerned. However, we weathered several gales and continued to drag our fake CQR anchor in several countries anchorages. We should have bought a real CQR in England, but you can't remember everything!

After enjoying the warmth in the Canaries, we provisioned and set off for our first long passage – transatlantic to the Caribbean. After headwinds for a week and then less than normal trade winds, we were still able to average over 135 miles a day in lazy comfort with a poled-out genoa or occasional spinnaker.

Congratulating ourselves on a safe passage while anchored in Marigot Bay, I was restoring some gear under the aft bunk when I noticed that the steering cable had frayed at the turning block and was literally hanging by a thread. This would have been a real mess at sea if it had broken. After removing the block and filing off the offending eighth-inch of stainless, we have not had a recurring problem.

Refit for the Pacific

Number-two outfitting took place in the Virgin Islands as we readied *Zorana* for the South Pacific. Now we're getting serious about anchoring. We had a better and stronger bow-roller made, and put the old one on the port side. We purchased a *real* 60-lb. CQR to go with our 200-feet of 3/8" chain for our main system. For storms, we got a 66-lb. Bruce with chain and rode, plus a 40-lb. *real* CQR for back-up. Then we had a full-length cockpit bimini made, and with closed-cell cockpit cushions, we have our comforts. Noticing a flex problem at the forestay deck chainplate, we had made a backing-plate with padeye and installed a babystay down to the hull. Next, we had to change our propane system for the European trade-in bottles to two American 20-lb. aluminum bottles, which entailed enlarging our propane/helm box, but now we had enough gas for three to five months.

Departing the Virgin Islands, *Zorana* zoomed downwind to the Panama Canal and then to the San Blas Islands, which we had cruised in a previous boat back in 1973 and (nice to say) things hadn't changed that much. The Panama Canal, unfortunately, is not changing for the better; however, our passage was uneventful and reasonable.



The chart table, to starboard as you descend the companionway, is large and comfortable. The table will take a chart folded in half. There is limited room above the table for electronics, particularly if you want a CRT radar, and not a lot of space for books, tables and guides. The main breaker panel is next to the navigator's seat.

After debating about how simple to keep *Zorana*, we opted to have sent down to Panama a pre-charged Technautique's refrigeration system. This system was easy to install, and now we had cold beer, wine, and the ability to freeze those big Mahi Mahi we were going to catch.

Heading out into the Pacific at last, *Zorana* really thrived in the reluctant trade winds; even so, she still easily averaged six knots on the way to Nuka Hiva in the Marquesas.

Our original goal was to get this old geezer to the South Pacific before the big Four-Oh; success in the nick of time! But once you get out there, it seems easier to just keep going west. We never really set out to circumnavigate. By the time we got to the Kingdom of Tonga we had met four other P-44s, and comparing notes, we found we were all very satisfied with the overall performance of the boat.

Sailing to New Zealand, the "milk run" cruisers can usually count on seeing their first really bad weather, and our trip was no exception. Departing Tonga with 15 others during a good weather window, we slowly beat south. On the fourth day, a reported cold front was expected to pass us. As the wind increased to 20 to 30 knots, *Zorana* took off on a fast reach. The *Aries* was having trouble steering in the large beam seas, so we hand-steered as we clicked off 180 miles.

Conditions weren't great, but we figured it best not to dawdle as we listened to the other boats on the radio talk about heaving-to and waiting it out. We squirted out the south side of the front and arrived in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, where we congratulated ourselves and the three other boats on our fast passage. This soon turned into sadness as we listened to the radio and heard the horror stories as the others ended up getting pounded by a five-day gale. Anyone can get caught out; however, we believe, at least in this case, speed really helped us to avoid a dangerous situation, and the P-44 can pull this off.

Unlike a lot of passagemakers, we did a short (two weeks) haul-out in New Zealand, where we discovered our shaft was bent (from the previous owner), so with the help from the industrious Kiwi's, we installed a new one and replaced the two cutlass bearings.

Departing New Zealand on a good weather report, we got slammed by yet another front, this one building up to 50 knots as we ran off under reefed mainsail alone in the building seas. *Zorana* was easily steered by the nervous helmspeople as she accelerated to over 12 knots at times. Fortunately, this only lasted for 24 hours and then laid down to a fresh breeze as we zoomed to Fiji. During this time, a sistership sailing to Tonga hit not one, but two, whales while doing

six knots with no damage reported.

Refit in Guam

Our next refit wasn't until 1988. While cruising in Australia, we had noticed several cracked swages, so we did a partial re-rig, changing to Norseman terminals and replacing most of the 1 x 19 wire. We also replaced several halyards and sheets, and installed some of those folding mast-steps for better reef viewing. For more power, we got a solar panel and put a toy tower on the stern. After an enjoyable year and a half, we departed Australia in favorable conditions and visited New Caledonia and Papua, New Guinea, where we blew out our mainsail, which led to a decision to go to Guam, where we could work and save some more fun tickets.

Not intending to stay as long as we did (two years), we were able to afford yet another refit as we bought a new mainsail and genoa, a second solar panel, water heater – and this newfangled navigation thing called a GPS. At the Navy base, we were able to do an extended haulout (three months), where we decided, rightly or wrongly, to do an osmosis job. What a mess! After removing all the gel-coat with a 4½" grinder, we found that the resin saturation was just fine, and this really wasn't necessary. Well, bully for us! Anyway, on went nine



The P-44's galley is as good as you'll find on a boat of this size, with quite a lot of counter space and good access to the freezer box. The configuration shines at sea, when you want to be wedged into place. Ample storage space for cooking utensils, dishes, glasses and cutlery is provided in ready-made racks and the

coats of System 3 epoxy, barrier coat, and lots of bottom paint. We also pulled the rudder to check the heel-bearing bolts, which we replaced with bronze. Finishing up with an Imron topsides job, *Zorana* was set to go.

T-boned in Thailand

Southeast Asia was great as we wandered through the Philippines, Borneo, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, where we entered the King's Cup Regatta. In the first race, we got T-boned by a 46-foot aluminum boat (his fault!), which certainly checked the strength of this old boat. We lost five stanchions, 12 inches of cap rail, and most of the port rigging. Luckily we weren't dismayed. During the repair we pulled all the genoa track bolts and discovered they were all suffering from oxygen-depravation and corrosion, so these had to be replaced. Being in Thailand certainly made the teak caprail replacement easy.

Sailing across the Indian Ocean, we were really thankful for all the storage space as we stocked up for six months to visit isolated Chagos Archipelago. The passage from Chagos to Madagascar was wet, wild and one of the fastest yet, with several 180 mile days. Again, we experienced some hefty seas, especially off the



At the George Town, Exuma, bread van, Jack mugs with the bread lady.

north coast of Madagascar, in excess of 20 feet, but *Zorana* seemed to be in her element and we always felt safe in her.

Sailing around South Africa and dealing with the famous Agulhas Current, we had to heave-to several times in the face of the approaching southwesterlies. We found that by double-reefing the main and tying the helm over, she would lie peacefully into the seas while the current would take us ever forward at two knots. South Africa is beautiful and the

people incredibly friendly, but we had a big, long passage ahead, and it was time to go.

Departing South Africa is always exciting as the Southern Ocean sends it calling card in the form of large rogue waves. For only the second time, we experienced a cockpit full of water as *Zorana* got dropped off a wave, but shaking it off, she was no worse for wear. Upon our arrival in St. Helena, we met another boat that experienced a 180° knockdown in the same seas.

The final 6,000 miles of our never-intended circumnavigation was a leisurely downwind sail to the Caribbean, where we tied the knot after only nine years and 42,000 miles. *Zorana* had lived up to her reputation as a safe, fast, comfortable cruiser. After another two-year work stint, then a semi-major refit – during which we replaced the fuel tanks, took off the teak decks, rebedded, rerigged, revarnished, repainted and spruced her up – *Zorana*, like the good-old girl she is, was ready to go again. And so are we!

