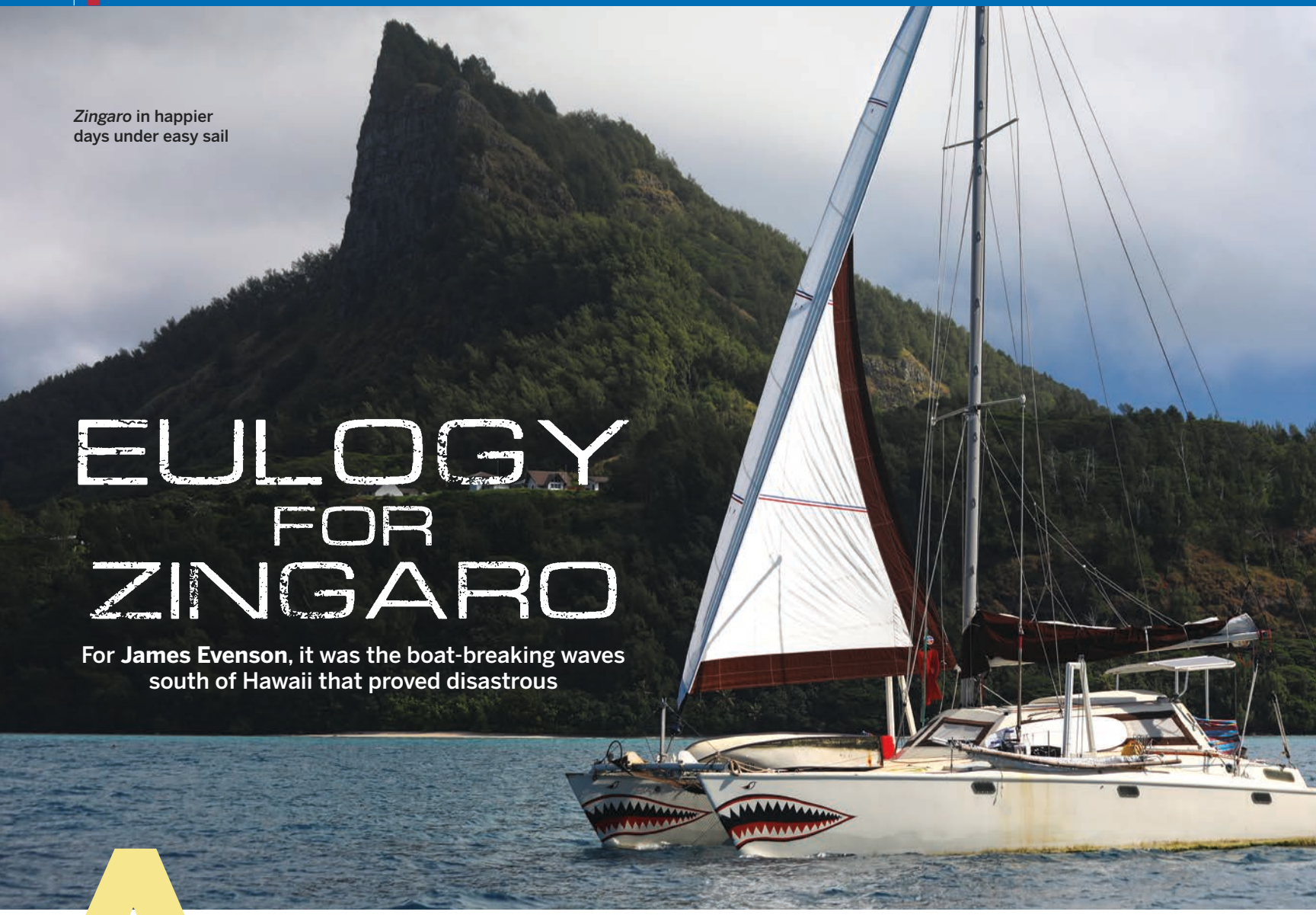


Zingaro in happier days under easy sail

EULOGY FOR ZINGARO

For James Evenson, it was the boat-breaking waves south of Hawaii that proved disastrous

After the accident, as we were getting ready to put *Zingaro*, our Lock Crowther-designed Spindrift 38, up on the hard, clean her up and say goodbye, my partner, Kimmi, and I were more than a little overcome by nostalgia. *Zingaro* is my fourth boat, but my first catamaran. On her sea trial, the wind picked up and the port jib sheet ripped out of my hand, slapping me in the face hard enough to throw my sunglasses 30ft into the air. It was a humbling experience. It was as if she was saying, "You better show me some respect, boy. I ain't no Morgan."

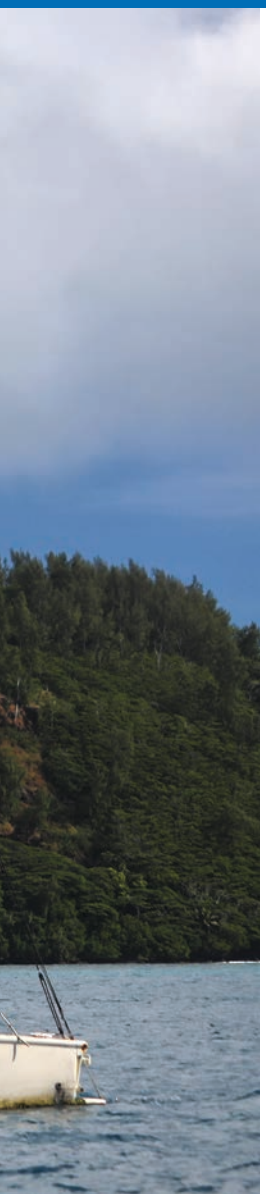
The first year was difficult. She was constantly testing me. Both rudders snapped off. There were plenty of broken shackles and halyards. The port engine died. I couldn't get parts for four months. I never slept well on passage. I was terrified of somehow flipping her— a healthy fear that never really left me.

I seriously screwed up about three months into the trip when I fell asleep and ran her aground under full sail. I attribute her survival to one thing: Airex foam. If you're not familiar with Airex, it's a structural core material used to manufacture everything from wind turbine blades to parts for the aerospace industry. The stuff is insane. How something can be that light and that strong is beyond me. *Zingaro's* hulls are made with a robust layer of Airex core, including an inch of it under the waterline. During the three hours she spent high and dry on the Mexican shore the rocks punctured her hulls multiple times. It was 400 miles to the nearest boatyard, and the instant she was lifted out of the water I was floored. There were rocks literally embedded in the fiberglass. Yet still she held together.

The second year was much better, as we began to get used to each other. Among other things, I learned to stop sailing so fast, which cut down on breakages. Another problem materialized, though: plywood. One little crack in the fiberglass and whole areas of the boat would be eaten away by seawater. It was amazing how fast it happened. I told myself I would never again own a boat with plywood in it. Not sure I feel that way now. Plywood is a fine material. It just needs proper care.

This was also the year the cruising kitty ran out. I had spent our last $7,000 on sails. I figured, "Screw it, we're not going anywhere without sails, so we'll be broke, but moving." Problem was, we couldn't go anywhere because we couldn't afford the $2,000 to get through the Panama Canal. We ended up borrowing the money, because we were going crazy stuck in one place. It was a tough time, but getting through the

PHOTOS COURTESY OF **JAMES EVENSON**



canal and out onto the Pacific was such an amazing feeling as we started planning next steps.

This past year was the best by far. Kimmi and I took *Zingaro* to some of the most remote islands in the world: Easter, Pitcairn, Henderson, Fanning. We hit the heaviest weather we'd ever experienced—50-plus knots of wind and 30ft waves. Through everything, we stayed safe and dry in our little capsule. That's what it felt like: a warm, dry pod that kept us safe from the weather. We'd reef her down, set the autopilot and watch a movie in our "passage bed" as we call it—the saloon table folded down and converted into a queen-sized berth.

We once ran from a storm for three days like this, only popping out to adjust the sails and check the reefing lines for chafe. As we did so, I really started to appreciate *Zingaro's* design, to understand her nuances. The first two years she'd been trying to communicate with me, but it was only this last year that I'd begun to truly listen. A little creaking from around the gooseneck meant we needed to reef the main. The jib car popping meant we had too much sail up out front. It was around this time we started sailing everywhere reefed down. We actually considered cutting off the lower half of the mainsail to save weight. *Zingaro* and I had come to an understanding. She'd keep us safe, and we'd keep her dry and not push her too hard. The rule was a simple one: at sunset we take in another reef in the main. Period.

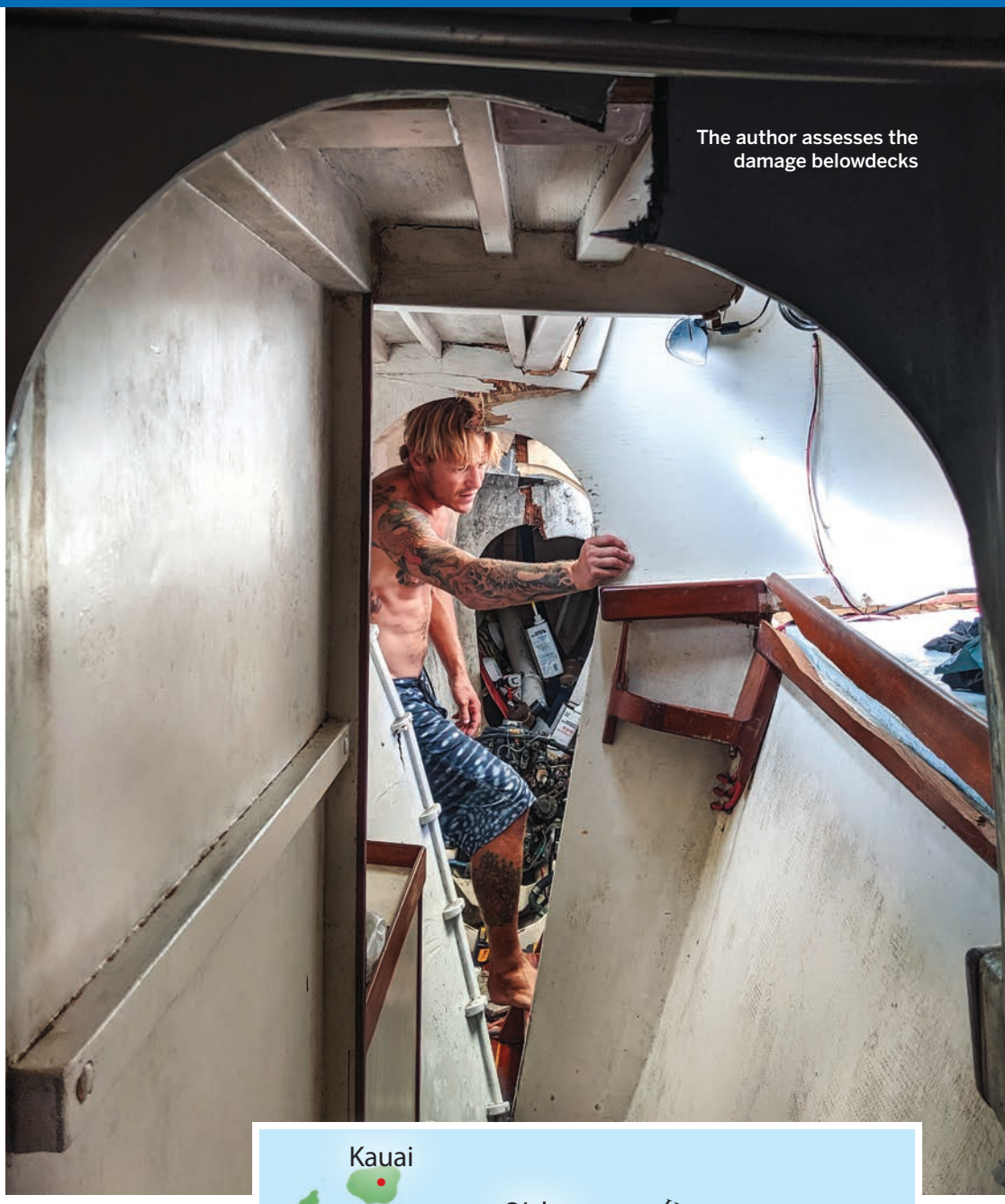
By now we were also starting to set our sights on some really cool places, like Alaska, Patagonia and Japan. The plan was to winter in Hawaii, then continue on to Asia with the coming of spring. We left Tahiti in early November in order to have a couple of months to explore Kiribati and the Line Islands. Everything went great until it came time for the passage from Fanning Island to Oahu. We picked a weather window that would give us favorable winds to make 400 miles of easting before crossing the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone. We saw some big systems rolling in over Hawaii, but nothing over 25 knots. No biggie, we'd been through much worse. Or so we thought.

The thing that did us in were the conditions we encountered just south of Hawaii, a stretch of ocean so notorious that the locals go over top when sailing inter-island whenever possible. The reason is the line of strong winds and erratic waves that shoot out to leeward of the islands whenever the northeasterly trades really blow. We could see this on the wind charts and figured we could handle it. Unfortunately, it isn't the wind that's the killer there, it's the waves. If you're unlucky enough to get caught in the wrong place at the wrong time you can get huge tripled-up waves—waves made up of the underlying swell, waves created by the wind and waves created through the refraction effect of the nearby islands—and it seems we were in just that spot when we got hit by one that I'm fairly sure was over 30ft. We were about 170 miles southwest of Honolulu at the time, and it was actually two impacts that did us in. The first one hit us hard. Then, before I could fall off, a second one ripped us in half. There is nothing that can prepare you for seeing the moon reflecting off the water as you look through a crack in your sailboat. I've been humbled many times by the force of the ocean, but this was something else entirely. I didn't know what to do.

My first reaction was to yell to Kimmi, "Baby! This is BAD!" after which she immediately suggested we try tying some lines around the boat to hold things together. Unfortunately, it was soon clear this wasn't going to work without one of us getting in the water. In preparation, I grabbed a roll of 3/8in dyneema I had left over from the re-rigging job I'd done a year earlier and hacked off a 20ft length. I then jumped in, wrapped it around the propeller strut, tied a bowline and handed it back up to Kimmi. As our eyes met, my heart sank, thinking the boat would not survive the night.



Zingaro's starboard hull, partially detached following the accident



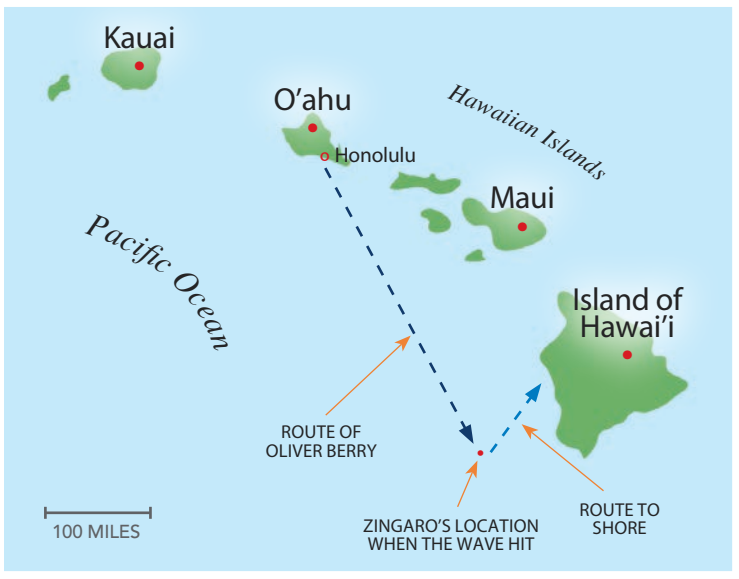
The author assesses the damage belowdecks

After that we tied a line to the midships cleat and both bow cleats. These lines all went under the boat and then back up through a set of blocks to the boat's winches. I've had to go into the water before, including at night to cut away a fishing line we'd hooked on our prop, but this was something completely different. The sea was truly angry. *Zingaro* was rearing up and down so dramatically each time her stern lifted up out of the water I would be sucked in underneath. It was all I could do to keep the boat from crashing down on top of me. It's amazing how powerless and insignificant the sea can make you feel.

Twenty minutes later we discovered tying a line to the strut might not have been such a good move after all, as the latter snapped off, bending the prop shaft 45 degrees. Again, the Airex took the strain, as I got back into the water to tie on yet another line. By now, every wave hitting the bridge deck felt like it was going to tear us apart. The forces at work parted our lines not once but twice. We tried to keep *Zingaro* facing into the waves, but our sea anchor was too small and kept collapsing. We hauled it in no less than four times trying to figure out what was going on, but to no avail.

Finally, after nearly three hours of doing everything we could to save the boat on our own, we called the coast guard. We were exhausted, our batteries were dead, and the wind and waves were carrying us farther and farther away from land. The Coast Guard offered to send a helicopter, but we told them it wouldn't be necessary. There wasn't as much water coming in anymore (except for when a breaking wave would come on deck, which was manageable), and we were not yet ready to abandon the boat that also served as the foundation of both our business and our lives. We were scared, but we thought we could hang on. If the lines we'd wrapped around the boat failed or the boat flipped we could always evacuate to our OC Tender. Having an unsinkable dinghy like that gave us a great sense of security. Big thanks to the OC Tender team. That's a fantastic boat you make. We'll never sail with anything else.

To rescue us, the Coast Guard sent out the 154ft cutter *Oliver Berry*. They left Oahu at 1300 and arrived alongside *Zingaro* at 2130. You do the math, that's an average of 20 knots, an amazing accomplishment considering the sea state. By now, we'd gotten the motor started and were motoring into the lee of the Big Island. Every 10 to 20 minutes we'd still get a large wave, but it was nowhere near as bad as what we'd been dealing with earlier. The problem now was we didn't have enough fuel to get us all the way into port. Around 0200 the captain



MAY BY STEVE JYLKKA

Kimmi examines where the starboard hull became separated from the boat's central structure



The Coast Guard cutter *Oliver Berry* shortly after going on duty patrolling the waters off Hawaii

PHOTO COURTESY OF
U.S. COAST GUARD/PETTY OFFICER AMANDA LEVASSSEUR

of the *Oliver Berry* sent over a team with 15 gallons of diesel. Even with the decreasing sea state, the transfer was a dangerous maneuver, but they were psyched. It's the kind of stuff they live for. After that, the *Oliver Berry* followed us all that night and most of the next day. When we finally arrived at the dock we were almost in tears. The Coast Guard boarding party was stoked, and we made quick friends. My hat is off to the US Coast Guard, especially the Honolulu radio operator and crew of the *Oliver Berry*. If you're reading this, thank you ladies and gentlemen, you saved us.

So, what's the end to this story? There isn't one, only a new beginning. We will find a new boat, a stronger *Zingaro* 2.0, and take her on yet more adventures. I can hardly wait! S

To find out the latest on **James** and **Kimmi** and learn about their many other experiences at sea, go to the web site *svzingaro.com*