

FIorentino

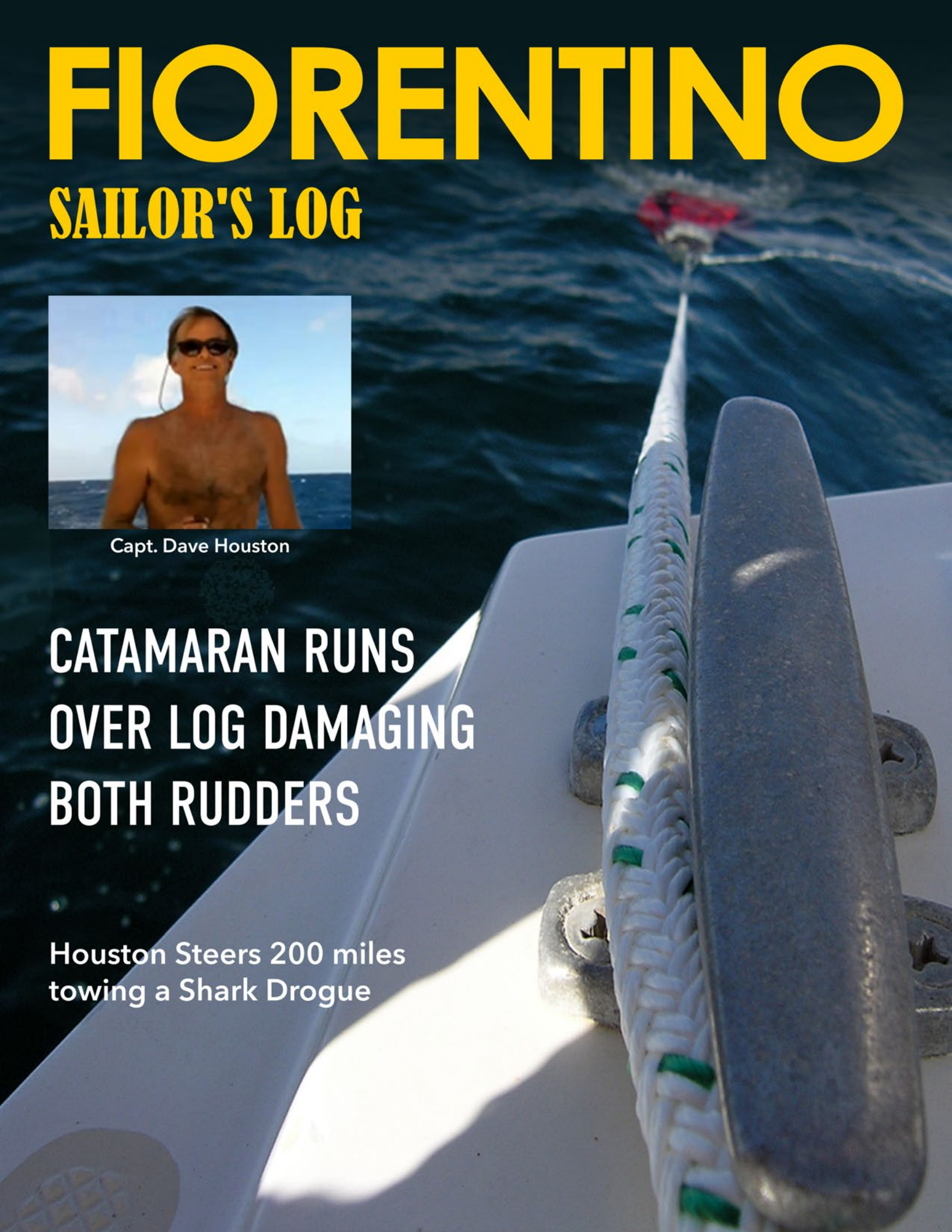
SAILOR'S LOG



Capt. Dave Houston

CATAMARAN RUNS OVER LOG DAMAGING BOTH RUDDERS

Houston Steers 200 miles
towing a Shark Drogue





“They were motoring towards the Galapagos Islands, about 200 miles off Panama in the pitch black of night when the catamaran ran over a tree. “Boom, we hit something,” said Houston.

The St. Francis 50, Ovive, at sail.

The bow rode up and over the trunk; the tree then forced four feet down and under the keel, lifting them up before rolling aft. Houston was immediately concerned that the large tree had struck both rudders.

Once clear of the tree, he put the engines into neutral and tried to assess the damage. Luckily, there were no holes or leaks.

It’s always great to run into sailors at boat shows; to chat about their adventures and lessons learned. But running into Dave Houston of Tavernier, Fla., at the 2013 Miami International Boat Show was particularly significant.

Houston shared a fascinating story about using a Fiorentino Shark Drogue as an emergency steering device that enabled his St. Francis 50, Ovive, to return 200 miles to Panama after losing its rudders. “The use of the drogue was unique; not its primary intention, but it saved the boat from being lost,” said 53-year old Houston.

Houston purchased his Fiorentino para-anchor and Shark

Drogue more than five years ago for Ovive’s uneventful journey from Florida to New Zealand. The catamaran was shipped back to Florida, then sold to a couple in Australia on the condition that he deliver it.

By the time all the paperwork was complete, it was mid-May 2011 and Panama’s rainy season had begun. There had been a storm in April; under a full moon that created big tides, much debris from local rivers had flushed into the ocean.

They were motoring towards the Galapagos Islands, about 200 miles off Panama, in the pitch black of night when the catamaran ran over a tree. “Boom, we hit something,” said Houston. Initially, they felt the crash, but did not know what it was. Then they saw roots and the trunk of a tree emerged from the stern. Houston figured they hit the 100-foot tree at a 90-degree angle.

However when put in gear, the large catamaran would only travel in a port circle. To fix the problem, Houston inspected the hydraulics of both rudders, turning the bypass valves one at a time to isolate each individual

rudder, alternating combinations of forward and reverse gears. But the rudders were locked with the catamaran sailing in a circle. Houston could not steer the boat.

“If rescued that far offshore, you’d have to leave the boat,” he said. Not wanting to lose it, Houston looked to see what they could do with the emergency equipment aboard. He grabbed the Shark Drogue first, rigging it to its V-Shaped bridle, running a line through the snatch block and over to the main electric winch, usually used for the genoa. The Shark Drogue went out behind the boat on the starboard side. With both motors in forward, the effect of the drogue began to counteract the jammed rudders. With some adjustments that moved the Shark Drogue further starboard, the catamaran was able to go straight.

With daylight, the crew was physically able to dive under the boat and see what had happened. Although the bottom of the boat was U-shaped, the tree had forced both rudders upward into the hull to create a W-shape.

The drogue continued to work well in that they were safe and underway, but they were not moving quickly. Despite making minor adjustments for wind changes, they could not go faster than two or three knots with both engines running.

To increase speed, Houston and crew looked at what else they could do with what they had: anchors, chain and 200 to 300 feet of line. They tried to makeshift a U-shaped warp to replace the action of the Shark Drogue, but nothing worked. Whatever they tried, the boat would not go straight without the Shark Drogue on the starboard side.

“Most people buy these things more for storms than emergency steering. It’s a cool thing for people to be aware of; a storm drogue can make for a very good steerage device as well,” Houston said. “For a \$700 to \$800 investment, a \$750,000 catamaran was not left at sea for the insurance company to take care of.”

Conversely, there has been much buzz recently about an abandoned catamaran that was not equipped like Ovive. Multihullnews.com reported January 30, 2014 that four people were rescued from a new 42 Alpha, 300 miles east of Cape Henry, Va., after a rogue wave caused rudder damage and power failure.

“There has been much speculation among the online multihull sailing community as to whether the boat was in fact prepared for the ocean crossing, as well as the measures taken to rectify the problems on board before deciding to abandon the brand new \$700,000 catamaran,” wrote Ben of Multihullnews.com. “Despite this, it is clear that all of the facts have not yet been

reported, and with the editor of a sailing publication on board, the entire drama will no doubt be published in great detail, at which point more information will come to light.”

Houston believes that due to the similarity of the rudder problems, the Alpha would not have been lost if they used a Shark Drogue. “Based on their story about their engines turning the boat one way, and the sails turning it the other way, it tells me that with a drogue the boat would have gone straight. I was able to get 200 miles back to land without help,” he said.

Back in Panama, it took just two days to repair Ovive and get her back on course. They made the 10,000-mile trip to Australia via Galapagos Island, Marquesas Islands, Tahiti and the Cook Islands. Upon arrival, the new owner joined him and Houston left the Fiorentino Shark Drogue for his use.

Houston believes that due to the similarity of the rudder problems, the 42-foot catamaran would not have been lost if they used a Shark Drogue. “Based on their story about their engines turning the boat one way, and the sails turning it the other way, it tells me that with a drogue the boat would have gone straight,” Houston said.



“Most people buy these things more for storms than emergency steering. It’s a cool thing for people to be aware of; a storm drogue can make for a very good steerage device as well.”



Photo: Shark Drogue Manual

Video of Ovide Towing the Shark Drogue

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZoZv0cENLM>

Houston's adventure in sailing Ovide from Florida to Australia is captured on home video. The rudder damage and deployment of the Shark drogue starts at the 4 minute and 27 second (4:27) mark and ends at the 5 minute and 47 second mark (5:47).

Published: Oct. 2011

Shark Drogue Manual 2nd edition

<http://www.paraanchor.com/reports/shark.drogue.pdf>

The Shark Drogue Manual 2nd edition provides details on how to use the Shark Drogue, as well as comparisons with other storm drogues.

Published: 2008 - 2011

Storm Drogue Comparison Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4l3CbgUCU8&e&bc=ANyPxKq0>

[UO2z2awiJqWH6lcs1IryvyLU7XKvQrf_pfpRikSsOSohCZsAvyGzgyBnLw4c_01VfvOa](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UO2z2awiJqWH6lcs1IryvyLU7XKvQrf_pfpRikSsOSohCZsAvyGzgyBnLw4c_01VfvOa)

The world's top seven drogues are compared for the first time using Fiorentino's load cell equipment, measuring the amount of force placed on each storm device. In the first test, all

products are deployed as is—right out of the manufacturer's packaging. Nothing's been added. For the second test, chain placement is added to all the drogues and deployed a second time to measure and compare differences from the first test.

Published Jan. 2013

Storm Drogue Comparison Report

<http://para-anchor.com/reports/tech.report.136.pdf>

Detailed comparison report of seven tested storm drogues is compiled in this first-ever report.

Published 2011

Storm Drogue Unpacking and Packing Comparison Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubSBcDLdtKA>

Pam Wall, provisioning expert and respected cruising lifestyle speaker opens, deploys and retrieves all 7 of the market's storm drogues. In real time and with no advance details as to what to expect, except for the potentially harmful spring-action of one. Ms. Wall talks candidly, without a script, about each product while in use.

Emergency Steering Drogue Training Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubSBcDLdtKA>