

# The Raising of The Cat's Meow



by Pam Hagerman  
Photos by Carolyn Shearlock

*The Cat's Meow* is a 52-foot wooden custom converted fishing trawler that had been made into a beautiful spacious home for her owners, Martin and Robin Hardy. On May 18, three boats left Puerto Escondido, Mexico with *The Cat's Meow*, *RDreamz* with Royce and Pam Hagerman, *Cat House* with Joe and Vicky Mccord, and *Que Tal* with Dave and Carolyn Shearlock. We had planned to go to the hot springs for a day or two of beach combing and playing in the water. The water was warm and the beach was sandy with lots of cool stuff to look at.

On the second evening we were all invited to *The Cat's Meow* (*TCM*) for a dinner of clams and spaghetti. Before dinner we got the grand tour of *TCM* and it was spectacular, with living spaces bigger than most apartments. Martin and Robin live off *TCM* with their two cats, Toes and Squeaks, and have been in the Sea of Cortez for the last three years. In November 2003, *The Cat's Meow* was credited with saving more than 12 boats by pulling them off the rocks during and right after hurricane Marty.

With the evening festivities coming to a close, we got in our dinghy and headed back to *RDreamz*. We had turned off the radio so we could sleep late, so we missed the calls for help.

At about 2100 we heard a dinghy coming along side; Carolyn and Dave from *Que Tal* yelling that *The Cat's Meow* was on the rocks and needed dinghies to help push her off. We scrambled into our dinghy and headed over to *TCM*, pulling on cloths as we went. The wind had picked up and was blowing in the 30-knot range. There was no moon and the overcast made the night pitch black. We found *TCM* stranded on the rocks not too far from the area we had left them in earlier. We were told later that when the wind picked up, Martin felt *TCM* hit bottom or a

rock, and he had decided to go out farther and re-anchor. In turning around in the dark, he got disoriented and hit the rocks.

We got the three dinghies together and tried to push *TCM*'s stern off the rock. With Martin's engine going full astern and all three dinks going wide open, we still were not getting anywhere. It was decided at this point to get *RDreamz* to try and pull her off. By the time we got the anchor up and in position with *TCM*, the tide was going out and *TCM* was higher up out of the water. We got a stern line attached and tried to pull this 40-ton trawler off the rocks. Because of the 30 knots of wind and the rocky area, it was necessary to use the dinghies as bow thruster on *RDreamz* to keep position and run the towline into *TCM*. As the tide went out farther, *RDreamz* was pulled closer and closer to the rocks and ended up hitting the rocks three times. Each time it was just a bounce or a glancing blow, but enough to get our attention and make our hearts race. Luckily, *RDreamz* was able to power off the rocks and was not damaged except for a little less bottom paint on her steel bottom. Royce finally decided our luck was about to run out, it was time to rethink the situation and that enough was enough.

After talking to Martin on *TCM* we decided that if we positioned *RDreamz* off the *TCM* port beam, we might be able to hold her from being pushed any further onto the rocks. With the dinghies pushing and lots of jockeying on the part of *RDreamz*, we finally arrived in position to run the stern line back to *TCM*. *RDreamz* set her bow anchor with 150 feet of 3/8" chain, then the stern line was pulled tight and all was well for a while. About the time we thought we could breath a breath of relief, the wind decided to make its presents known. Gusts of 30 knots plus broke our anchor loose, but of course we didn't

notice this until *RDreamz* was only 50 feet from *TCM*. Caroline was standing by on the poop deck with a sharp knife asking if she should cut *RDreamz* loose from the stern line that was dragging us into the rocks. After a few tense moments ensuring the towline was free of the prop, the skipper gave Caroline the go ahead to cut *RDreamz* loose. *RDreamz* came loose with a surge, but it was short lived as she went aground hard enough to bring her 30 tons to a stand still. Royce figured with nothing to lose, we would either come loose or there would be two boats on the rocks to be pulled off the next day. Royce let her have her head and all the power the 130hp engine could muster. I guess Neptune was feeling generous to *RDreamz*. She slid sideways a few inches, then floated free. *RDreamz* cruised into deep water with a sigh of relief and gratitude toward Neptune.

With the tide going out fast, *TCM* was starting to heal over very badly and started to take water over her gunwales. As she healed over onto her side, Martin and Robin grabbed their very scared and upset cats, important papers and the clothes on their backs and abandoned ship. While all this was going on, Caroline from *Que Tal* was putting out a call for help for anyone in Puerto Escondido with pumps to help pump the water out. By this time it was 0100 and with no response from anyone, we then tried the Mexican Navy. Their response was that they would have a ship to our location in five or six hours. We found out later that Ted and Billie Morgan on *Sabado* in Escondido had heard our call and responded back to us, but we could not hear them. They heard the information we gave the Navy; our location, that we needed pumps and help to get *TCM* off the rocks.

Elvin, with the panga *Sea Lover*, and his wife Connie, also heard the Navy call. It was dark, windy and 0300 when Elvin and Connie, along with Ted from *Sabado*, got the pump from the Hidden Port Yacht club and headed to our location in the panga. This was a two+ hour trip in the dark and we were never so glad to see anyone. The pumps were hooked up to try and keep any more water from rising in *TCM*, but it just was not enough. Several cruisers put out the word that *TCM* was in trouble and gave our location. Now it was time for other cruisers to come to the aid of *The Cats Meow*. In less than five hours we had over 20 boats there to help.

Since *RDreamz* had room we took Martin, Robin and their two cats on board. *RDreamz* also started handling all the water/diesel soaked items taken off *TCM*. When there was no longer any room, we put out the call that we needed some place to store things. Several boats stepped forward and made room on their boats for Martin and Robin's possession that we were able to salvage. Caroline and Dave on *Que Tal* worked nonstop bringing things to be cleaned and stored. Vicky on *Cat House* got in her kayak and picked up things that washed over board. Everyone was busy with something. As the day went on, *RDreamz* used up what bread, eggs, tortillas and juice we had on board feeding the work crew. When we put the word out that we needed help with food, the donations came in from everywhere.



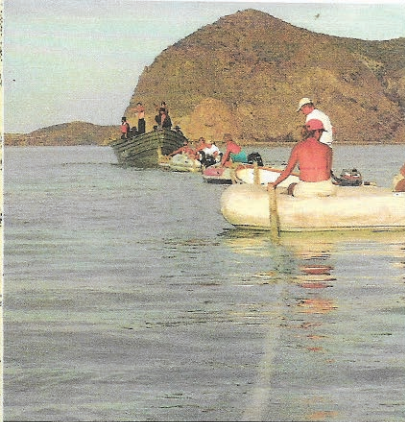
We had a wonderful group of ladies from different boats - *Two Can Play*, *IWA*, *Endless Summer*, *Alkahest*, *Lightheart*, *Lunasea*, *Francis Ray* and others, volunteer to deal with the food and drinks. The work was hard and the heat was brutal, but the ladies always had food and drinks available on the work site and always had a smile. It really made you feel better knowing they were there helping. Without them the workers could not have continued working to raise *TCM*. Not only were they feeding the 20 or 30 cruisers working on the boat, but also they fed the 20 some Navy personnel that were working.

The navy had several divers in the water who placed the lines around *TCM* in order to pull her off the rocks. The next step was to get the biggest powerboats we could find with the most power, and have them pull bow, amidships and stern at the same time. The powerboat, *Bydand*, was the first to offer his assistance. Then two big power sportfishing boats stepped forward, *Reel Time* and *Online*. All three were hooked up to the towlines and as soon as the tide came in they pulled and pulled, but *TCM* never budged.

When this didn't work, the Navy stepped in and agreed to pull the boat. The Navy had a large 300-foot boat that they hooked a very long towline onto and tried to pull the boat off. The only problem was the line was old and very used. The line broke four times before they decided to pull out a newer towline. The new towline did not float







and was not long enough to reach the Navy boat with the line lying on the bottom. The Chief in charge of the operation of the Navy ship asked the cruisers to bring their dinghies to the rescue once again. The plan was to lay the line across a line of dinghies and hold it up in order to reach the boat. They placed approximately ten dinghies 150 feet apart. Once the ship was in position and the line was ready, the Navy took up tension and everyone was told to clear the area. The Navy ship started pulling. This time the *TCM* started to move. Everyone had their fingers crossed as the Navy had told us this was their last attempt. If this didn't work, they had to quit.

Well, you can only imagine the cheers and yelling from everyone when *TCM* came off the rocks. It was a great sight. Now the boat was floating, but it was full of water. *TCM* was moved into 30 feet of water with not enough time to get the pumps working. She was sinking fast.

It was decided to tow her to shallow water to make the repairs. Joe on *Cat House* stepped up to the plate again and hooked a line to *TCM* and started to pull her back into shallow water. This time we picked out a place that was sandy. Joe pulled her until he ran into shallow water and *TCM* settled in a depth of 12 feet. Once in shallow water, the divers, Royce from *RDreamz*, Dennis from *Two Can Play*, Jim from *Manana*, Ron from *En Dorfin*, and Terry from *Manta*, went down to check the bottom. They found a hole in the bow the size of softball and a hole in her

side where the stabilizing fin had been bent over during the tow off the rocks. The stabilizer hole was approximately 18" across.

There was no way of getting the water out until we got the holes patched. Again the call went out for supplies. We needed barrels and other flotation devices to help get her off the bottom so the repairs could be made. Every boat donated their fenders to be used. Johnnie and Nancy Johnson from *Topaz*, loaded up his truck in Puerto Escondido with ten 50-gallon barrels that he borrowed and drove to the site. He did some real off road driving to get them there, and they were really a welcomed sight to see. Additional barrels and pumps arrived from La Paz.

It took several more days to patch the holes in the hull and cover the scuppers to keep unwanted water out. We had a couple of nights where *TCM* was left alone and vulnerable. Susan on *Two Can Play* organized a list of cruisers to do night watches at the site. The volunteers got up in the middle of the night to dinghy over to *TCM* to sit in the dark and watch for any problems. With their help, Martin and Robin were able to recuperate and get a little sleep. The security boats were *Two Can Play*, *Alkahest*, *Mikelali*, *Lunasea*, *Light Heart*, *IWA*, *Journey*, *Serendipity*, *Manana*, *Mutineer 5*, *Laura K*, *En Dorfin*, and *Wildflower*.

The rescue continued as the divers attached fenders and barrels on the sides of *TCM* and placed the patches. They were waited for a low tide. It was nerve racking and there were a couple of false starts. The rescue crew was up and working at 0400. The pumps were started and the barrels tied around the hull were filled with air. *TCM* floated higher and higher in the water. Once she was stabilized, the call went out for bailers. People came out of the woodwork. The bailers and the four pumps started to go ahead of the tide. The patches on the hull held and the bailers and the pumps kept making headway. There were a few tense moments until the divers came up and



said the whole keel was rising with the tide. At the crack of dawn on the fifth day, just like a cat (reluctant) the ship rose as the tide went out at 0500. The cheer went up again.

The cruisers did what the Navy didn't have time to do. The Mexican Navy worked really hard and did great things, but they were called away before they could finish the job. A thanks has to go out to Daniel Garcia, the Lieutenant in the Mexican Navy and the Chief in command on shore and to the Captain of the ship that hung in there as long as they could. The cruisers working on *TCM* were very much impressed with the work the Mexican Navy did and the overall professionalism.



be done before she would be ready for the tow to La Paz where she was to be hauled out for repairs. The temporary patches had to be reinforced and more cleaning had to be done to her interior. But in less than a week, with all the cruisers working on her, she was ready to be towed (a big thanks to Captain Ron Miller and Jerry on *Argo* for the two-day tow to La Paz).

Martin and Robin have a lot of work ahead of them to get *The Cat's Meow* back to her glorious condition from before the accident. It will take time and money. One of the unfortunate parts of this story is that they had no insurance on *TCM*.

There was only one injury of note and that was Dennis of *Two Can Play*. After putting the final patch on *TCM* in Puerto Escondido, he was getting back aboard *TCM*. He slipped off the side of the boat and cut his shin. In the states it would have taken ten-plus stitches to close, but Carolyn stepped up, once again, and pulled out some steri strips and did her thing. He was loaded into a truck and taken to the Doctor in Loreto. The Doctor said he couldn't improve on the job Carolyn had done, so he gave Dennis a tetanus shot, an antibiotic, pain pills, and sent him home.

A sincere thank you goes out to all of the rescuers from Robyn & Martin, for a super human effort in saving the *The Cat's Meow*. ♪



Next came the job of getting *TCM* back to Puerto Escondido. The barrels around the hull had to be set free. This was an interesting task as they were still full of air and if you cut them loose, they came out of the water like missiles. So, they pumped water into the barrels and once they were almost full, they were cut loose and pulled to shore with the dinghies.

We attached a towrope to *Sabado*, and with Ted on the stern watching the lines and Billie at the helm, *The Cats Meow* was finally underway. Her trip back to Puerto Escondido was uneventful and went without any problems. In less than five hours she arrived back, the lines were released and *TCM* was docked to the sea wall at the harbor with the help of more cruisers and their dinghies.

It was a great to see her underway again and even better to see her tied to the wall. There was a lot of work to

