

BOAT



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Aurora

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phenomenon
– exclusively
inside*



On board with **MILTON SENDER**

Retired businessman Milton Sender tells Stewart Campbell how, after five decades of tight schedules in the office, his 26m catamaran now affords him a life of carefree cruising

MILTON SENDER HASN'T QUITE GOT IT ALL FIGURED OUT, but he might be as close as anyone's ever managed to get. "I literally have no worries," he says candidly on board *WindQuest*, his 26 metre catamaran, which is riding at anchor in Bermuda's Hamilton Harbour. "I'm totally unstressed. If I get three or four emails a day, that's a lot. I do not work. I mean, occasionally I might have to push a button on the boat, but that's about it." That feeling, the one in the pit of your stomach? Probably envy. (But if it's still there tomorrow, see your doctor.) Sender says he hasn't totally rejected the modern world - there are iPads, computers and phones on board - but he has managed to break free of its demands, which keep most of us glued to our phones, impatiently scrolling news or checking emails. His escape from all this was meticulously planned.

Sender co-founded Daymon Worldwide, a global leader in private label (own brand)

supermarket goods, in 1970. In 2000, at the age of 57, he set in motion a plan to divest himself of his entire shareholding in the company. The equity would go to his employees, so that by the time he turned 70 in 2013, he would be stock-free and ready to roam. "I planned it way in advance," he says. Running in parallel with his inch-at-a-time exit from the business was the construction of *WindQuest*, the means of his escape. With precision timing, the yacht was delivered by JFA Yachts in Concarneau, France, just three months after Sender turned 70. He was a free man.

"I worked real hard for 50 years and when I retired I said I wanted to play hard," he says. To most that might translate as cocktails, parties and late nights, but to Sender it means seeing and doing anything that interests him. If you can get to it by boat, it's in his cross hairs. "Most summers, we have a starting spot and I have a place that we're going to sort of end and in between we say 'oh that's cool', or 'this town is

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Sender (above right) sailed WindQuest to London (below left) followed by a tour of Ireland, where he passed up the River Bann to Coleraine near the Northern Irish coast (this picture)

near there, let's do that," says Sender's long-time captain Drew Meyers. "And then it just sort of snowballs." From Concarneau, *WindQuest* cruised up the River Thames into the centre of London, just because "it was there and looked like fun", Sender says. A tour of Ireland and Scotland followed, but it was a chance visit to a small Irish town that best exemplifies the spirit on board. "I spotted this little town on Google up the River Bann called Coleraine," says Meyers.

"We were told we would never fit up the river, but I called up a local guy in Coleraine and he said, 'absolutely, we'll just have to raise the bridge for you'. It all sort of just developed and it was one of those fun stumbles. And it was one of the nicest docks we've ever had! It was right at the head of a bridge in the centre of town. Beautiful." This approach is a total 180 for Sender, who says he spent his entire working life with a tight schedule. "I travelled incessantly," he adds. "We're still travelling now, but we're going at our own pace and if we like something we stay long, if we don't like it we leave. We can do what we want to do when we want to do it."

In the off season, Sender heads to his farm in Middleburg, Virginia. This son of Pennsylvanian dairy farmers can't quite resist the lure of the open country, and he spends his winters fox hunting on the estate he bought in 1995. He shows me a picture of the farm that could be a 1950s postcard of rural America. As bucolic as it gets. But the big farmhouse I can see isn't Sender's - he lets his farm manager live in that one. He lives in the guesthouse. "I have no interest in living in a big house. I love living in a little house; I have one bedroom. The whole thing

Right: members of WindQuest's full-time crew, who Sender describes as "the world's best"



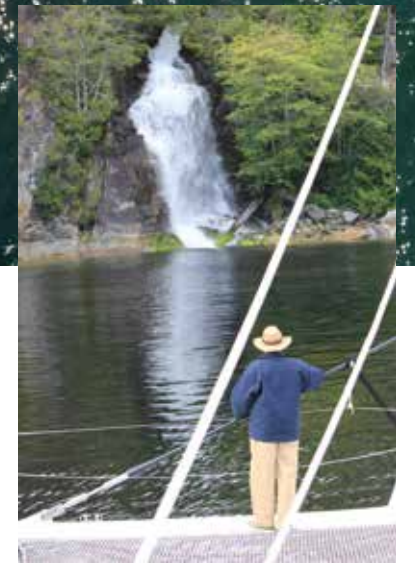
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OWNERS' CLUB

is about the same size as this boat!" he says. Each summer, hundreds of his neighbours descend on the farm for a big dinner that Sender hosts, but mostly it's just him, his horses and vast tracts of unspoiled America.

But given the choice when he was young, he turned his back on farm life and got accepted into Wharton, sharing a year at the famous business school with Donald Trump. "He used to drive around in a brightly coloured Jaguar XKE, which cost about a gazillion dollars back then," Sender remembers. "He used to park it in front of a fire hydrant outside his fraternity house, so he'd get all these parking tickets, but he just said, 'I don't pay parking tickets.'" Sender's college experience was a little different - he had to fund his education by working as a butcher and upon graduating was offered a job as a driver and salesman for a big meatpacking business. He turned it down and went to work instead for a co-operative of 18 small supermarket chains that had banded together to develop their own private label products to compete against the "big three": Kroger, A&P and Safeway. He stayed for two-and-a-half years, then spent another two-and-a-half years at Kroger, before co-founding Daymon with friend Peter Schwartz in 1970. "It was at a time when nobody knew anything about private labels. They were one or two per cent of sales. We were lucky that we were at the right place at the right time and that nobody else wanted to do it because it didn't offer a lot of profit. It was a very, very tight margin business." >

"If we like something we stay, if we don't we leave. We can do what we want when we want to do it"

Clockwise from top: WindQuest; a waterfall on Cassel Lake, West Redonda Island, near Desolation Sound; The Wharton School, where Sender shared a year in the late 1960s with Donald Trump; Tower Bridge was raised for WindQuest



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OWNERS' CLUB

From top: fun on board WindQuest; Sender bought Enticer in the late 1970s; Lake Erie, where a young Sender sailed six metre Lightnings



The pair set the business up in New York, but Sender – a man who loves big horizons – hated living in the city. “I had an apartment on 48th Street, right next to the United Nations, but I really didn’t want to be there on the weekends.” His answer was to buy a boathouse in Connecticut that was built by C Russell Feldmann, inventor of the car radio. Sender planned to move in himself, but then learned that the property had been granted a commercial permit. “So the whole thing could be turned into offices on the water, on the Greenwich/Stamford border, which would be priceless. So I couldn’t afford to live there, it would have been stupid.” He moved the business into the building instead, and was therefore still without a weekend bolthole. It was then that a friend suggested that he buy a liveaboard motor yacht he could tie up at the boathouse’s expansive dock.

Sender had grown up sailing six metre Lightnings on Lake Erie but had never thought about anything bigger, least of all a motor yacht. But he was sufficiently convinced to fly to Florida to see what was on the market. It was a great time to buy – fuel prices were sky high, driving boat prices way down. “It was then that I saw *Enticer*,” Sender says. The 26 metre was designed by the legend John Trumpy and built by Mathis Yacht Building in 1935 and was unquestionably beautiful, but more knowing buyers might have steered clear of such an old boat with potential



WindQuest’s comfortable aft deck seating area

QUICKFIRE
Milton Sender

SPEED OR STYLE

On a sailing boat I want speed. Speed is important, but ideally I’d want it to look good, too

CHAUFFEUR OR CHEF

I want both. I don’t want to drive and I love having someone who cooks good food



FIRST THING YOU PACK

Clothes

FIRST BOATING MEMORY

On Lake Placid in upstate New York when I was five or six. We took out one of those old mahogany boats and did a tour

HOW MANY WATCHES

Probably four of five, but the one I wear 99 per cent of the time is a Skagen that cost me \$79. It’s light and it keeps the date and time. I had it cleaned recently, which cost more than the watch



FAVOURITE BEACH

I’m not a beach person. I’d love to have grass going to the water’s edge

FAVOURITE CAR

The prettiest car I’ve ever had was a Cadillac XLR. The most exciting car I’ve owned was a Daimler limousine. There were only two legal ones in the US and I owned one of them. They had been brought over for Prince Charles and I bought it at a charity auction



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Below and bottom:
cruising in San
Francisco Bay, where
whales swam alongside
the yacht. Below left:
the JFA yard where
WindQuest was built

issues under the hood. Still, “it was very inexpensive per square foot. I couldn’t have bought a shack for that price. I had the dock and it wasn’t going to cost me anything to keep it there.”

It took about three weeks for the regret to set in. “On the first day [of ownership] the wires to the wheel broke. It was costing me \$1,000 a week to keep afloat, and this was in 1978 when that was big money and I was not making big money. Every penny I had I needed to keep in the business. I realised I had made a big mistake.” His then captain suggested he make the boat pay for itself by offering it for dinner charters and business cruises. “It was in the days before cell phones, so if you wanted to pitch somebody for two or three hours uninterrupted, you put them in a boat and they couldn’t get off.” *Enticer* would work five days a week in New York, and then motor up to Connecticut on Friday night for Sender to spend the weekend on board. “On Monday morning we cruised back into the city and I went back to work,” he recalls.

It was all valuable boat-owning experience that he ploughed into the building of *WindQuest*, which also charters, albeit for a slightly bigger sum: from \$70,000 a week through Webster Associates in Fort Lauderdale, the same company that worked with Sender on *Enticer*. The yacht regularly books 10 weeks of charter each winter season, which pays the year’s running costs, making summers mostly cost neutral for Sender. “I have the world’s best crew – they are colossally smart, extremely well educated and they do an amazing amount of research. They create a very special atmosphere on board, which is clearly successful because most of our charters are repeat business.” A busy charter season also keeps the crew active, explains the captain. “We’d



always rather be cruising with guests on board than tied up alongside. It keeps us on our toes!”

Meyers was stationed at the yard for the last six months of the build and appreciated the dedication of the JFA team. “The people there really seemed to enjoy the process of building this boat and I think one of the reasons why we’ve had such a good experience is those who were involved from beginning to end,” he says. “There were no corners cut or things missed. I mean, our commissioning took one day. No, one afternoon! Everything turned on. It just worked.” Sender had been looking at a Privilege 745 catamaran after chartering one for several years but was ultimately convinced to build new at JFA Yachts, and decided to stick with the twin-hull concept: “I don’t like the idea of heeling the whole time”.

It’s been smooth (and flat) sailing ever since. The UK, Spain, Portugal, Azores, Cuba, New York, Panama, San Francisco, Desolation Sound, Panama... all ticked off. “I think we’ve forgotten

more great moments than most people get,” Sender says, after telling a story about cruising under the Golden Gate Bridge with a couple of whales swimming gently alongside them. One of the things that has made this cruising so special is that he’s able to share it with his crew, of which he speaks very fondly, especially his captain, Meyers. The pair have a deal – for every mile cruised, they bike a mile when they get to shore. “We probably ride about a thousand miles every summer,” Meyers says. More than just a way to stay in shape, Sender thinks biking gives you special access to a destination, allowing you to roam free. “That’s the only way to see a country,” he says. “By boat and by bike.”

They’ll be riding around St Petersburg in Russia next summer, if they stick to current cruising plans, which will see *WindQuest* nosing around the Baltic Sea, on no particular schedule. Why there? I ask. Sender has the best possible answer: “Why not?” ■