



## Mechanic can't resist SOS from afar

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Next time you're feeling dissatisfied with your mechanic, mention Joe Bradish and his rebuilt starter motor that saved the day for a sloop stuck without engine power in the middle of the North Pacific.

It's an adventure story made less adventurous thanks to Bradish's conscientious customer service.

For 28 years, Bradish, 58, of Wales has rebuilt starter motors for Kaestner Auto Electric, a Milwaukee company dating to 1919 that moved near Waukesha in 1994.

The Katmai is a 51-foot racer-cruiser built in France in 1987. It was once stationed in Chicago and Milwaukee, raced the Great Lakes and cruised the tropical Pacific. In 2001, Eric Paerels, a reservoir engineer for BP Exploration, bought it, sailing the fjords of Alaska until June. That's when Paerels' friends Dick and Peggy McKibbin began a voyage to deliver the boat 8,000 miles more or less to Paerels, now on Australia's west coast.

As sailing trips halfway around the world go, this seemed relatively smooth, according to the sailors' diary. A little too cold to start, a close call with a whale, a gale here and there, a malfunctioning part now and then.

About two weeks after the trip started, Paerels called Kaestner in desperation from Australia. The starter motor on his boat had exploded - the fault of a failed ignition switch, not the motor, Bradish learned. Paerels called experts from around the world, but they were "scratching their heads" and unable to identify a replacement.

Although the Katmai could still move under sail, Paerels wrote in the diary that "it is not particularly prudent or pleasant to cross the high seas without navigation equipment, HF radio, water maker or refrigeration" - all dependent on engine power or batteries recharged by it.

But the sailors found the Kaestner company name and phone number on the part, so Paerels tried it. Bradish, amazed that the ID sticker was still in place after nearly 15 years, agreed to do what he could to help.

"Suddenly, a bazillion brilliant questions about angles, bolt patterns, dimensions and pinion gears, and over the course of a couple of days and nights, Joe came back and had eliminated all but four potential (part) choices," Paerels wrote.

Hours more of research, including off-hours exchanges with Paerels and colleagues around the country, and Bradish nailed it.

But first, a bit more drama.

With Paerels' help, the McKibbins got permission from the U.S. Coast Guard and the Fish and Wildlife Service to land on the protected Midway atoll. Midway Island was the site of the famous World War II

battle that tilted the naval war to the United States, but now it's a wildlife refuge and home to 2 million birds, including the world's largest population of Laysan albatrosses.

Once he'd identified the part with certainty, Bradish built the starter over the weekend and then had to get it shipped to Honolulu overnight so that it could catch a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service flight - the last for a month - to Midway.

"It worked perfectly!" Paerels wrote. Not only the timing, but the starter. It was installed at Midway, and the McKibbins sailed on, arriving in Fiji this week.

"Joe is our hero," Paerels wrote. "Well done, mate," he told Bradish.

The bill was \$562, including shipping - no doubt a bargain.

Bradish doesn't sail, but he still likes adventure. Hours after he got an e-mail saying the part was installed and was working, he and his wife took off on a 4,000-mile Harley trip to Nova Scotia.

I'd say he earned a bonus.

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