

Encore at sea

40 years later, sailor
repeats famous solo
trip from Japan to S.F.

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"Forty years ago, I was treated so warmly. That experience changed my life."

KEN-ICHI HORIE, Japanese sailor who crossed the Pacific from Osaka to San Francisco



Photos by MICHAEL MACOR / The Chronicle

Ken-ichi Horie points his 19-foot sailboat, MALT's Mermaid III, into San Francisco Bay after duplicating his 1962 voyage from Japan. He left Osaka on May 12.

Better with age

Japanese sailor shaves a month off his 1962 time

By Jim Doyle

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Forty years ago, Japanese sailor Ken-ichi Horie's epic solo voyage across the Pacific in a storm-battered 19-foot sloop called Mermaid inspired a new generation of adventurers and armchair sailors.

In 1962, the 23-year-old sailed through the Golden Gate after a 5,270-mile crossing from Osaka to San Francisco in 94 days. He was penniless and without a passport. He could not speak English. And federal immigration officials wanted to immediately repatriate him.

He became an instant hero in the Bay Area and in Japan. Impressed by the young sailor's courage, then-Mayor George Christopher gave Horie a key to the city, named him an honorary citizen and persuaded immigration officials to grant him a 30-day visa.

On Wednesday afternoon, the intrepid sailor did it again.



Horie was greeted onshore with an oil portrait of George Christopher, the late mayor who gave him a key to the city 40 years ago.

The old salt, now 63, crossed under the Golden Gate Bridge at 3:40 p.m., completing a two-month commemorative voyage in a 19-foot, newfangled replica of his epoch-making sailboat.

"Forty years ago, I was treated so warmly. That experience changed my life," Horie said in Japanese at a

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KEN McLAUGHLIN / The Chronicle 1962

Horie, after becoming the first Japanese sailor to cross the Pacific alone, donated his first Mermaid to the National Maritime Museum in San Francisco.

Sailor repeats historic voyage

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dockside news conference. "I feel blessed. I was just happy throughout this whole trip."

But minutes after landing at Hyde Street Pier, the sailor had a moment of high drama when he anxiously dug through his sea bag for his red Japanese passport. "My heart stopped for a second there," he said, smiling broadly.

Asked how he spent his spare time, the author and lecturer said: "I hummed a lot, but please don't ask me to sing anything. I read a few books."

He ate freeze-dried food, including rice, but lost his appetite for several days when the sea swells rose to 20 feet. He brought along four cases of beer, arriving with 25 bottles left.

Horie's latest boat, MALT's Mermaid III, was made from recycled materials and new technologies. The hull is recycled white oak plywood derived from whiskey storage barrels from the Mississippi River basin, an aluminum mast from recycled cans, and sails from recycled plastic soda bottles.

The final leg of Horie's 67-day journey took patience. Wednesday morning, his one-ton vessel was bobbing on a windless sea 15 miles west of the Golden Gate Bridge. Late in the afternoon, the wind picked up and a flood tide helped push MALT's Mermaid III into the bay.

He was greeted by several vessels — including one carrying yachtsman Bill Fisher, who discovered Horie drifting outside the Golden Gate 40 years ago.

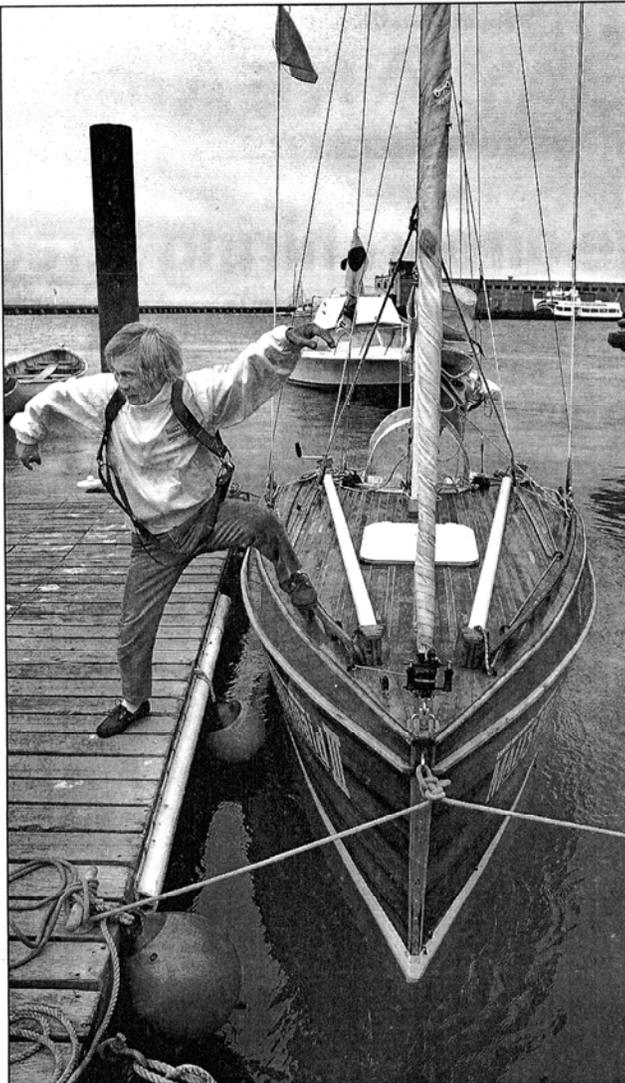
Ashore, Horie accepted a bouquet of roses and an oil portrait of the late Mayor Christopher. "Thank you," the silver-haired, clean-shaven sailor said in halting English, repeatedly bowing his head.

A Buddhist, Horie approaches the sea with a Zenlike vision. Asked whether the trip was any easier this time around, he replied: "The ocean is the ocean. It's always the same. There really wasn't anything that was tough."

His initial voyage in 1962 captured the imagination of Americans and inspired Japanese citizens who were still struggling to rebuild their nation after World War II. He became the first Japanese sailor to cross the Pacific alone.

Horie donated his first Mermaid, a boat made of lauan plywood, to the National Maritime Museum in San Francisco. His first odyssey quickly became a feature-length movie, "My Enemy, the Sea."

Since his first transpacific crossing, he has completed a series of solo ocean voyages in small sailboats, including a 31,000-mile solo circumnavigation of the world. He has also written five books about his adventures. In 1989, he sailed from San Francisco to Okinawa in a midget-size ocean yacht, a 9-foot vessel slightly bigger than a bathtub. In 1992,



MICHAEL MACOR / The Chronicle

Ken-ichi Horie, at the Hyde Street pier, takes his first step on land since his transpacific voyage began.

he voyaged by pedal boat from Hawaii to Okinawa.

More than 150 yachts at the Shin-Nishinomiya Yacht Harbor gave Horie a big sendoff on May 12 for his latest challenge. His voyage to San Francisco took him on a 6,000-mile arc across the North Pacific Ocean.

MALT's Mermaid III has a fin keel with a lead bulb to enhance its performance. The boat was designed by Ichiro Yokoyama, who also designed the Nippon Challenge racing yachts for the 2000 America's Cup trials.

Horie was aided by Global Positioning Satellite technology and communications gear unavailable for his original voyage. He also relied on a self-steering vane.

And the boat used hydrogen fuel cells to help power its navigation lamp at the top of the mast, a radio transceiver, a personal computer, general lighting and a weather fax.

Horie dedicated his latest voy-

age — sponsored by Suntory Ltd., a large Japanese brewing company — to the citizens of San Fran-

isco and in memory of Mayor Christopher, who died in 2000.

"This is not going to be my last voyage, — 63 years old is too young to retire."

KEN-ICHI HORIE, Japanese sailor

young to retire."

He plans to spend about 10 days in the Bay Area. Today, he will visit Mayor Christopher's grave at the Greek Orthodox Memorial Park in Colma. He also plans to stop by City Hall and pay his respects to Mayor Willie Brown.

Horie averages about one long voyage every three years. Asked how long he will continue to sail the oceans, Horie re-

plied: "As long as my heart is beating. . . This is not going to be my last voyage — 63 years old is too

Chronicle researcher Johnny Miller contributed to this report.

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Boyfriend charged in