



BAY AREA AND CALIFORNIA

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BAY AREA FOCUS

Return Adventure

Intrepid Japanese sailor back in S.F. — will cross Pacific in beer-barrel boat



Left: Kenichi Horie is the most famous sailor in Japan. Below: Horie jumped off the boat, now in the Maritime Museum, that he sailed across the Pacific in 1962.

BY MICHAEL MAJONIE/THE CHRONICLE



528 beer barrels make up the hulls of the 32-foot boat.

By Carl Nolte
Chronicle Staff Writer

Kenichi Horie, who is probably Japan's most famous sailor, announced big plans in San Francisco this week for the last great sailing adventure of the 20th century.

In the spring, he said, he will voyage single-handedly across the Pacific from San Francisco to Japan on a 30-foot boat with a hull made of steel beer barrels and a deck, sails and cabin built of recycled polyethylene bottles.

"When one challenge has been met, a new one appears as morning follows the night."

—KENICHI HORIE, Japanese adventurer

A long voyage in a strange boat is old stuff to Horie, who first came to San Francisco in 1962 at the helm of a 19-foot plywood boat named Mermaid that he'd sailed alone from Japan. Since then, he's crossed the Pacific in a nine-foot boat. "I wanted to sail the biggest ocean in the smallest boat," he said — made a nonstop voyage around the world and crossed the Pacific in a solar-powered boat made of recycled aluminum cans.

Horie said he does it because yachting is a sport, and his record voyages are challenges. But his main purpose, he said, "is having fun."

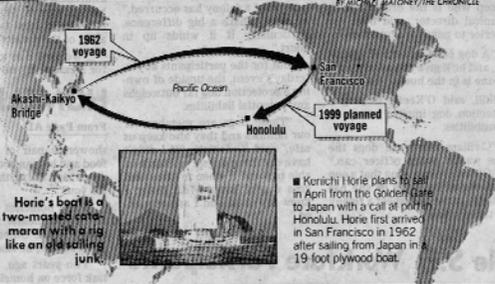
"Being out there is very exciting to me," he said.

Horie announced his plans at the Maritime Museum at the foot of Polk Street in

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BY MICHAEL MAJONIE/THE CHRONICLE



Horie's boat is a two-masted catamaran with a rig like an old sailing junk.

■ Kenichi Horie plans to sail in April from the Golden Gate to Japan with a call at port in Honolulu. Horie first arrived in San Francisco in 1962 after sailing from Japan in a 19-foot plywood boat.

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San Francisco, where his first boat is on display. Horie caused a sensation that summer 36 years ago when he sailed into the bay in his odd little boat and announced in his limited English that he'd sailed it from Japan all alone. No one had ever done such a thing before.

He was 23, bashful and charming and was immediately the toast of the town. He was wined, dined and given the key to the city by Mayor George Christopher and a free wardrobe by an admiring businessman.

He remembers it all fondly. "I still think of San Francisco as my second home," he said.

Horie was hailed in the Japanese press as a second Lindbergh for his achievement and he wrote a book, had a movie made about his life and opened a coffee house in Japan.

But the sea was always his love and still is. "The ocean," he said the other day, "is the essence of life." His various voyages are designed to draw attention to the sea and its resources and to recycling, which has become one of his interests.

At 60, he is no longer the young man he was when he first crossed the Pacific. His hair is gray and he has lines around his eyes from the sea and the wind.

He sometimes talks cautiously about conservation of resources and "giving courage, hope and a dream to children" who will take over in the next century.

There is, however, a certain oddness in his adventures. "Some might think of me as a foolish person," he said.

For this trip he insisted on sailing the first boat ever built of beer

barrels, a kind of peculiar union between recycling and Horie's sponsor, Suntory Malt, a big-time Japanese beer.

His ideas for a boat built of 528 beer barrels were at first regarded as "curious" by Kennosuke Hayashi, a top Japanese boat designer. But Horie, who has great influence in Japan, persisted and Hayashi came up with a two-masted catamaran design with a rig like an old sailing junk. Even then, the shipyard balked and only finished the vessel after what were described as "animated discussions."

The boat, called MALT's Mermaid II, was launched in June and Horie has taken it on shakedown runs in Japanese waters all summer. It will be shipped to the San Francisco Yacht Club in Belvedere in February and Horie plans to sail out under the Golden Gate Bridge in early April. With luck and a stop in Honolulu, he hopes to sail under the Akashi Bridge in Osaka Bay four months later.

"When one challenge has been met," Horie is fond of saying, "a new one appears as morning follows the night."

Tad Lyford, a ranger at the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, put it differently. "The bottom line here is pure adventure."