

## British Couple Saved After 40 Days Stranded At Sea

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**A British couple was rescued from the middle of the Atlantic Ocean by an Italian tanker after spending 40 days lost at sea.**

Stuart Armstrong, 51, and his partner Andrea Davison, 48, are heading back to Britain on board the supertanker Indian Point. Although unhurt, they were tired, exhausted and grateful to be returning home after their six-week ordeal in which they "stared death in the face."

The drama began on Jan. 9, six days after the couple left the Cape Verde Islands off the West Coast of Africa on board their yacht Sara. They were headed for Antigua where they intended to anchor until April. But, midway through the 2,550-mile journey disaster struck and the rudder on the yacht jammed to starboard. Attempts to fix it were useless. At this stage the couple, who live on the yacht in Majorca, were in the middle of the Atlantic, 1,200 miles from Antigua, five days sailing time away and out of range for any rescue attempt.

"In effect we were sailing round and round in circles as the rudder was stuck all the way over," Armstrong said, speaking from the Indian Point. "We tried to counteract this by putting droves over the side to try and help point the boat towards land but we didn't really have any great success. At first we were not too bothered as we had a good supply of dry provisions, the usual things you have on a boat - pasta, kidney beans, biscuits, rice and soya. There was also plenty of water to keep us going, the radio was still working and we had power so there was no need to be too worried. I have crossed the Atlantic seven times and this was Andrea's fourth so we are pretty experienced and for the first few days it was a challenge and a bit of an adventure. We alerted the coastguards in Britain and America and we also let our families know. I spent a good few days trying to fix the rudder as well but I just didn't have any luck."

Their first problem was around 10 days or so later when the alternator broke which meant they had no power. "All that we had was a small solar panel which gave us enough to fire up the satellite phone but we had to ration it," he said. "The loss of the alternator also meant that we could not use the desalination unit which turns sea water into drinking water so we also had to start rationing that as well."

The American Coast Guard monitored their position but because of their remote location a rescue attempt was impossible and the couple simply carried on drifting with the current pushing them slowly towards the Caribbean. During their weeks at sea the couple's yacht was battered by storms but they managed to escape unscathed. However, as they neared the Bermuda triangle after more than a month at sea conditions began to worsen. The reduced electrical power meant that Armstrong could only talk to his daughter once or twice a week and it was the same for Davison and her two children.

Ms Davison, from Wallsend, Newcastle, said: "At first they were OK with our situation because they know Stuart is a good sailor but I think as time moved on they started to get more concerned and so did I. We kept getting hit by storms but we managed to get out of them with no real problems. But I knew we were riding our luck and we wouldn't be able to go on for much longer. With the power down to a minimum because of the alternator going we were also down to our last few rations of water and the food was also beginning to run out."



The Sara is dwarfed by the Indian Point supertanker

The couple's plight ended around 320 miles south east of the coast of Bermuda just as they began to enter the infamous Triangle and following another battering from a hurricane force storm. They had drifted 1,000 miles north of Antigua and were warned by coastguards that another powerful storm was heading towards them as their SOS was picked up by the Indian Point, en route from South America to Amsterdam.

The 183-metre tanker immediately changed its course and began heading towards the Sara. Captain Michele Cancrini said: "When we saw the yacht you could tell it had been through some rough seas but it was still floating and upright. We had been in radio contact with the Sara and Stuart told me that Andrea was not really in a position to climb on board. It was actually a very difficult and complicated rescue because we had to line up a 30,000 tonne, 183-metre supertanker alongside a 16 tonne, 13-metre yacht, all that in a heavy northerly swell."



Stuart and Andrea after their ordeal

"The yacht was banging against the side of the ship all the time during the rescue and we could not lower a rope ladder down to it so we had to throw out a line to secure them and then throw out two body harnesses."

Mr Armstrong said: "As she drew close the size of the tanker was amazing, it was absolutely enormous and the swell was sending us banging into the side all the time – we were also riding some very high waves. It was very frightening and the whole rescue operation to get us off the Sara took almost two hours because it was so dangerous and we had to be very careful."

The Indian Point is in the mid-Atlantic sailing towards Amsterdam where it is expected to dock next Sunday.