

Tahoe Pontoon Run from Baltimore to Key West

Tahoe Pontoons took an extraordinary step to prove that Tahoe pontoons are the strongest pontoons made. President Jim Wolf and V.P. of Marketing Greg Knight along with Michigan Dealer **North Shore Marine** took a stock Tahoe Grand Tahoe down the East Coast from Baltimore MD to Key West, FL! The Tahoe Grand Tahoe was durable even in the roughest water, and was durable all the Way to KEY WEST!

Read the details and see the pictures below:



Day 1: (Saturday Nov. 13th)

We arrived at the boat at 7:15 am. Pontoon & Deckboat magazine took some nice early morning photos at the marina in the inner harbor of Baltimore. We departed at 8:00 am. It was sunny but was approximately 55 degrees and windy. However with the camper enclosure it wasn't too bad being out of the wind. Within the first 25 minutes or so we had to do a little work on the cover where it connects to the ski tow bar. The wind was blowing at 30+ knots so it was understandable that we would have to do a better job securing it. The duck tape and bungee cords were useful right away.

We cruised out of the harbor fully loaded and the boat ran 5100 RPMs at 38MPH. We had Brady Kay on board from Pontoon & Deckboat. We worked our way past the Key Bridge. At the Bay Bridge we cut over to the Eastern side of the bay (about 2 miles) so photographers could get a running shot of the boat. The waves were starting to build pretty good at the Bay Bridge 2 - 4 feet. We continued from the bridge and went down the Chesapeake, gradually working our way back over to the Western side. About 25 to 30 miles later, the waves were really building, however the boat performed well in the following seas. A few big waves came over the front which made things interesting.



We lost the fix on the GPS, so we could not see where we were on the map. Doug turned on his handheld GPS, which also failed to get a fix. As we were dealing with this issue, we hit the backside of a really big wave. We buried the front end of the boat. The water that came over filled the top of the front cover and the weight of the water collapsed the tarps. We were now exposed to the elements with 6 inches of water in the boat. The water drained quickly and we tried to evaluate the situation. We broke a zipper on the port side tarp and jerry rigged a quick fix. We limped along working on the tarp for 30 minutes or so. We didn't have a fix and spent some time figuring our exact location. Skies were clear but we were on the edge of some storms. Being on the edge of the storm and 40 miles or so down the Chesapeake with the wind at our back, we started encountering even larger waves. In addition, the only other boat we had seen in the last 3 hours was a Coast Guard cutter running parallel to the bay bridge.

We turned and put the nose into the wind while we were trying to figure out where the closest port was. With no protection and waves coming over the front, and a Gale warning with wind gusting to 40 MPH, we got wet.

We identified our point of exit to be Flag Harbor, near St. Leonard MD. All in all, we ran about 75 miles in very tough conditions. We pulled into the harbor. It was a small town with a few houses. We quickly made some friends who helped us out. The locals at Flag Harbor were amazed that we were out in those conditions. They said they get only one day every six months as bad. The fishing charter boats that come out of the Potomac had all stayed in.

We found a lady in a back room (Sewing by Laura) to sew in a new zipper. We identified the GPS problem and fixed it. We came into port at 1:00 PM and used a trailer lift to pull the boat from the water. We called Tom (our driver) who showed up about 2:30. With the Gale Winds and Storm Warnings we needed another game plan. We had two options: Either trailer the boat south, out of the Gale Warnings, or wait it out. This is the problem you face when you have a fixed start date for a trip of this nature. It is not worth the risk to go up against Mother Nature and we did not have the wherewithal to wait for the weather to turn. We decided to pull out and go south to Morehead City, NC where we would be better protected by traveling the intracoastal. That was an ideal locale to re-start, because we could stay the night at our family condo which is located on the water at Morehead.

Day 2: (Sunday Nov. 14th)



We departed Morehead City at 8:30 am with sunny skies but high winds at 15 to 20 knots. Being that we were now in the intracostal with calmer waters we were able to get off to a good running start. Approximately 30 miles down the intracostal we started heading up the Neuse River towards Jacksonville, NC. About 15 miles later we realized that we should not be going up the Neuse River towards Jacksonville. We turned around to make it back to where we were supposed to be. The scenery was nice but we had just lost more than an hour. Thereafter we paid much closer attention to the charts to ensure we remained on the right route.

As we merged back into the intracostal we were determining exactly which channel to take and in doing so, ran aground on a sand bar. We tried for 10 minutes or so to back the boat out on its own power. Unfortunately that wasn't working too well. A minute later, two of us were out of the boat pulling it out. We were wet, but underway once again. We lost 20 or so minutes, once again, learning the importance of proper navigation. We were quickly getting a feel for the lay of the land and realized that this trip may not be as easy as we had planned.

We stopped for 51.1 gallons of gas at Wrightsville Beach NC and hamburgers to-go. We then stopped at Little River, SC around 5:00 PM for more fuel. We ran the rest of the day with no major incidents.

As night fell we learned that it gets dark fast. The first 30 minutes were a little hairy as we learned how to navigate in the dark: reading the chart plotter & radar, working the spotlights, etc.... After that we began to get a good rhythm with everyone working together to get us to where we needed to be.

In many instances we only had a channel 50 feet wide with shallows on both sides. We didn't want to get wet again by getting stuck. We only saw one or two other boats the whole evening and it was very remote traveling the intracostal from Georgetown to Charleston through the Francis Marion National Forest. We arrived into Charleston, SC at 12:00 am. We moored the boat at the Charleston City Marina.

We ran a total of 303 miles for the day. Trip total = 378

Day 3: (Monday Nov. 15th)



We had to wait to fill up with fuel at Charleston and we did not depart until 9:15 am. At around 11:00 am we were just checking on switching over to a different fuel tank when it ran out. We were in the middle of the channel, but did not cause any other boats any problems. It took a few minutes to get the motor running again after switching tanks. We burned through 36 gallons of gas in 1 hour and 45 minutes, running about 38 miles per hour. We continued into Georgia where we journeyed out of the inland waterway to take a look at the ocean. The waves were pretty big with winds at 20 – 25 knots, so we decided not to push our luck. We zigzagged through the intracoastal where there were several islands, including Hilton Head. We also cruised through the Savannah Wildlife Refuge. We stopped for fuel at the Bahia Bleu Marina in Thunderbolt, GA and filled up on 64 gallons. We grabbed a hamburger at our last fuel stop at Jekel Island where we put 60 gallons in the tank.



Around 9:00 PM we were navigating through a channel and ended up on another sand bar. We slowly reversed our way out of the shallows and continued on. At around 10:00 PM, the light bulb burned out on one of our two spotlights. This made it a little more difficult; however, it did not slow us down too much. It was very difficult to navigate into St. Augustine at night, but we made it. We docked at the municipal marina around midnight.

Total miles traveled for the day 305. Total trip mile = 683

Day 4: (Tuesday Nov. 16)

We departed St. Augustine at 6:30 am as dawn broke. We ran pretty good for the first hour or so and then got slowed down by several miles of no wake zones for Manatees, thereby slowing our progress. We were actually passed by a sailboat.

We passed through the Daytona Beach area. We started rolling pretty well and when we switched to our last tank we started looking on the maps to figure out our next fuel stop. This took about 20 minutes. We determined that we did not have any major cities for quite some time. By now it was too late to turn back so we decided that Titusville, FL was our destination. We started monitoring our remaining fuel range and determined that we would either run out of gas or roll in on fumes.



As we were going through the channel to enter the Indian River, our fuel tank gauge was reading "E". We still had 12 miles to go and felt that we would run out of gas. We ran at 3500 RPM or 20MPH to conserve fuel. We made it with a gallon to spare. We filled up in Titusville around noon.

On the way out, Pontoon & Deckboat magazine had a photographer there to get some shots with Palm trees in the background. We departed and headed south down the Indian River. The river was several miles wide, more like a bay with some decent size waves. We passed under a lot of big bridges. We navigated around several large 70 – 120 foot motor yachts that threw off huge wakes. A couple nice captains slowed down to let us pass. Others would let us jump over their wake while they looked on to see if we could make it. We passed them all and we were making some serious headway, as in Florida, it's a straight shot down the coast rather than zigzagging around islands.

Bombardier asked us to stop into their Tech center in Stuart Florida to conduct some diagnostic testing on the 225 hp Etec engine. We had been running the engine wide open for three days straight and they wanted to use this opportunity to evaluate the engines performance. At this point in the trip, we were looking forward to a little downtime. We arrived at the tech center at 5:00 PM. As it was the end of the day we left the boat at the center and found a room for some much-needed downtime.

Total miles traveled for the day 198. Total trip mile = 881