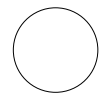
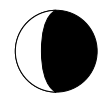


First Quarter 6/3



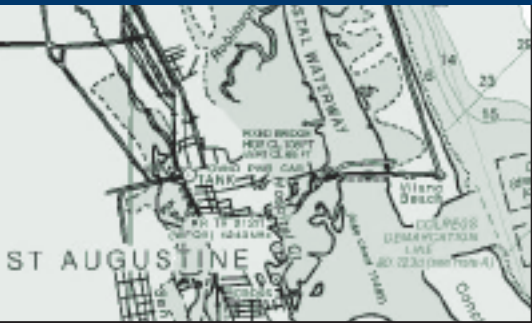
Full Moon 6/11



Last Quarter 6/18



New Moon 6/25



# Home Waters

FLORIDA & THE SOUTH

JUNE 2006



## QUICK THINKING SAVES 44-FOOTER

By Jim Flannery

SENIOR WRITER

Isaiah and Mary Cunningham have cruised the Bahamas for more than 20 winters without incident — until this time, when their 44-foot cabin cruiser nearly sank returning across an angry Gulf Stream.

Cunningham, 60, owner of a campground in Milton, W.V., said the Coast Guard rescued him, his wife, Mary, 44, and a passenger just as the three were about to abandon Fox Fire II to the sea, and a quick-thinking salvor who arrived in the nick of time saved the boat.

“I thought we were [going to sink],” Cunningham said. “At that point, our bow was just a foot out of the water.” The forward cabin was filled with 4 feet of water. The refrigerator was floating in the galley.

A front swept into the Straits of Florida late on March 6 a little earlier than expected, catching Fox Fire II some 15 miles off Boynton Beach, Fla.

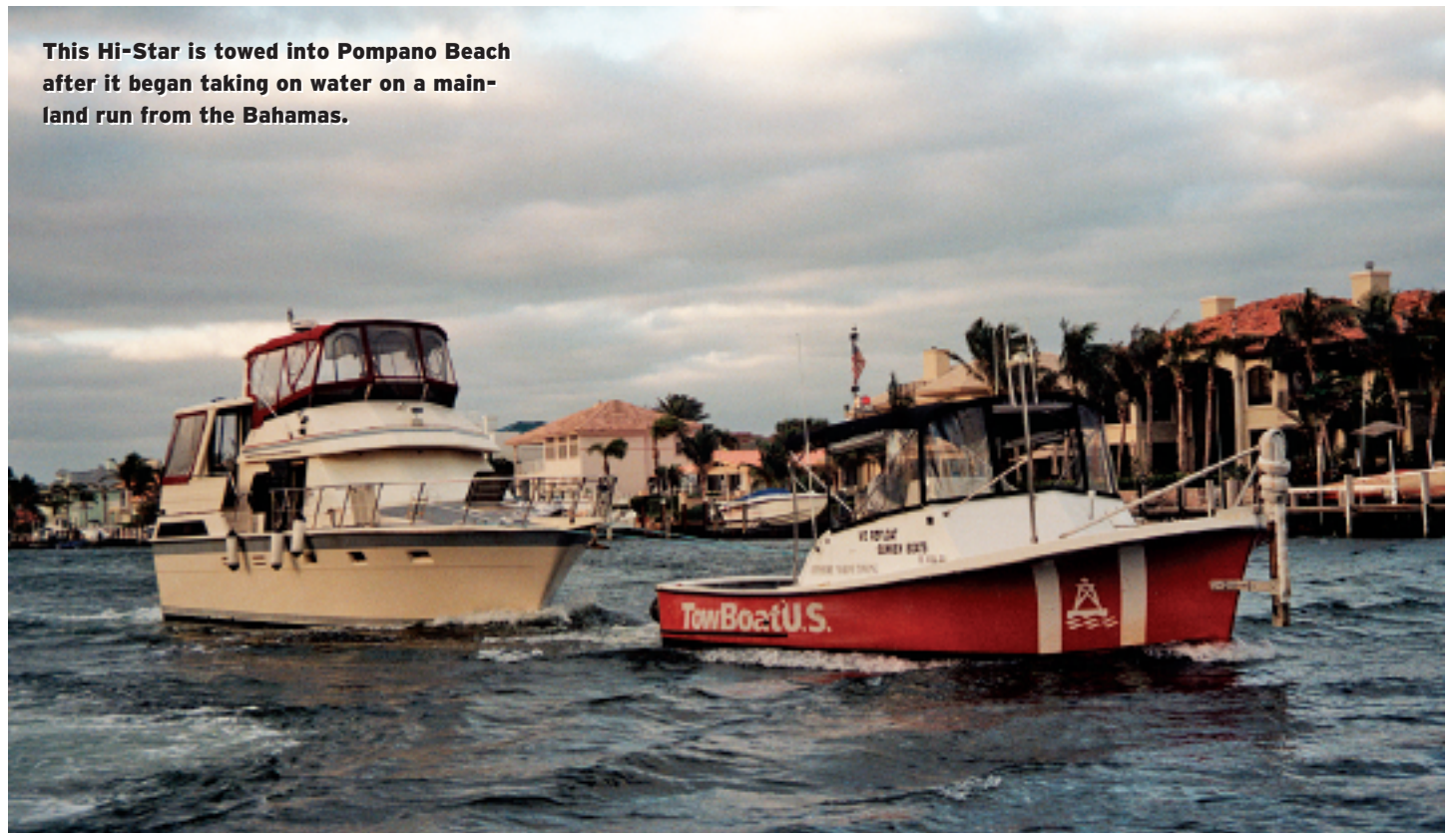
“It was so rough and we were pounding so hard, it was launching me out of my helm seat into the dash,” Cunningham said. The seas were 4 to 6 feet, occasionally 7, and both steep and close together.

Water began pouring into the forward bilge of the 44-foot Hi-Star. Cunningham didn’t know where it was coming from, but it was already 2 feet deep when he radioed a mayday. The couple was towing a 15-foot Boston Whaler, their lifeboat if they had to abandon Fox Fire.

Cunningham said the Coast Guard arrived an hour later — about 9:30 p.m., just as they were contemplating retreating to the Whaler.

The Guard took the three relieved crewmembers off Fox Fire, and just two minutes later Capt. Chris Stevens from TowBoatU.S. arrived on scene. The Coast Guard had decided it was too dangerous to send a team aboard with pumps, so Stevens asked a

**This Hi-Star is towed into Pompano Beach after it began taking on water on a mainland run from the Bahamas.**



Guardsman to take the controls of his rigid-hull inflatable tug while he boarded Fox Fire in dive gear. Stevens rushed through the boat checking through-hulls and seacocks, at one point diving under 4 feet of water in the forward head to check the plumbing fixtures. With the water continuing to pour in, Stevens called for electric pumps to try to pump the water out of the boat.

Meanwhile a second salvage vessel had arrived, and took Fox Fire under tow to keep it from wallowing. With four pumps going, finally the water began to recede. But Stevens still hadn’t found the source. According to the salvage report, Stevens could see water pouring from the bow above the bulkhead under the main stateroom berth. He couldn’t get to that bulkhead, so he climbed topside to check the chain locker, and found both hatches open and the lockers flooded. He closed the

hatches (neither had latches) and finally the flood was stanchied.

“He saved the boat,” said Capt. Larry Acheson, president of the Fort Lauderdale TowBoatU.S.

Cunningham agreed. “Larry’s bunch did a great job,” he said. “Basically they saved the vessel.”

Cunningham said the forward hatches evidently bounced open in the pounding seas. He thinks his anchor chain might have cracked the bottom of the anchor lockers, letting water into the forward bilge.

Acheson and crew towed the \$200,000 Fox Fire into Pompano Beach, then to Hinckley Yacht Services in Stuart for repair. Cunningham said the engines weren’t damaged since most of the water was in the bow.

“We were just eight hours from being back home at our boatyard,” Cunningham said. ■



**The boat owner credits the tow crew with saving his boat.**

JIM FLANNERY