

[http://herald-zeitung.com/news/local\\_news/article\\_21d59fee-dbbf-11e2-bdb9-001a4bcf887a.html](http://herald-zeitung.com/news/local_news/article_21d59fee-dbbf-11e2-bdb9-001a4bcf887a.html)

FEATURED

## Former mariner motivated for massive motorcycle mission

By Jordan Gass-Poore' New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung  
Jun 22, 2013



Tom Stapleton sits Wednesday on his BMW K1600 GTL, the motorcycle he plans to ride on a 45-day journey across the U.S. next month.

LAURA MCKENZIE | New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung

After nine straight hours on dark roads from El Paso to New Braunfels last week, resident Tom Stapleton and his beloved "Silver Princess," a BMW motorcycle, were content at home.

For now.

The three-day, 1,500-mile solo night ride across the wastelands of Texas and New Mexico was in preparation for what Stapleton considers to be his last long motorcycle ride on July 8.

“It’s because of age — you have to recognize your capability,” he said. “And secondly, all during (my) married life, we tried to do activities that we share together ... Maybe we’ll get back into boating.”

Whether Stapleton will keep his “Silver Princess” remains to be decided, but his love of motorcycles is forever ingrained in him, with his first purchase being at 16 years old for \$700 — money raised from a newspaper route.

He has ridden across the U.S. three times and enjoys long-distance trips, which is why he purchased the BMW motorcycle, equipped with a GPS system, heated seats and anti-lock brakes. Not to mention his helmet has Bluetooth capabilities.

Stapleton and his wife, Martha, also make sure to stay hydrated by wearing CamelBaks filled with water and dressing the part of responsible motorcyclists with special heavy-duty jackets, pants and boots that serve as protective covering.

“Most people here don’t wear much protection at all, and the lesson that needs to come across is sooner or later everybody who motorcycles will go down,” he said, remembering when he and Martha were in an accident in 2006, which resulted in her breaking five ribs and an ankle.

Martha also experienced hypothermia on the motorcycle because of an unexpected snowfall in 2003.

## **Maritime memories**

Safety and risk management have been at the forefront of Stapleton’s life.

Throughout his 48 years of maritime experience, Stapleton has been involved in several rescues at sea and has responded to medical emergencies aboard ships, including death. He served 39 years in the Navy and Army reserves, having attained the rank of captain and colonel, respectively.

Memories of Stapleton’s experiences decorate his home, with a framed map outlining his crossing of the Atlantic in 1972 and a family photo showing him alongside his eight brothers and sisters, as well as his mother and father, who initially instilled in him his love of sailing.

Stapleton said he will be visiting his 94-year-old, World War II veteran father in Alameda, Calif., during his July trip, as well as his three children and 10 grandchildren.

Another inspiration was a series of maritime mysteries by Howard Pease that he read as a high school student.

“The finest captain I ever sailed with (Kenneth Orcutt), who recently died. He was a dyslexic kid who read the very same series of books and that’s what made him decide to go to sea,” Stapleton said.

Orcutt also attended the California Maritime Academy, decades prior to Stapleton’s enrollment in 1968. They sailed together from 1972 through 1974.

“There’s an old saying that fairy tales start out, ‘Once upon a time dot, dot dot,’” he said. “Sea stories begin, ‘This is no BS.’ That’s the difference between sea stories. And sea stories are generally all true.”

The meeting of Stapleton and his wife was a sea story.

Stapleton was the chief officer, the No. 2 in command of an American President Lines ship, when he docked in Mazatlán, Mexico, to get cotton. Through a series of coincidental events, they met and married a year later, while she was the executive secretary for the U.S. consulate in the country.

## **On the road**

The California native intends to ride most of the way through the Pacific Northwest solo, except for a week with his wife on the rear saddle for a BMW motorcycle rally.

“When I feel her helmet hit mine, I turn on the Mexican music,” said Stapleton, referring to events that occur when his wife falls asleep on the back of the motorcycle.

Stapleton has calculated his total journey’s mileage, which is about 9,500 miles through 28 U.S. states and Canada, using SPOT, an online GPS tracking device. He has used this program before, which has allowed his family and friends to keep track of his whereabouts and to ensure his safety.

“(H)e’s very responsible in knowing what he can do and going not so fast,” Martha said. “He’s planning everything.”

The route will include the Tail of the Dragon at Deals Gap, an 11-mile, 318-curved stretch that has led to it being known by some motorcyclists as the nation’s No. 1 riding challenge.

He intends to keep a written and photo journal of his travels.

### **The next adventure**

Since almost retiring as a container ship captain, having sailed around the world for 26 years, Stapleton said he wants to give back to the New Braunfels community by sharing his maritime experiences, which include being on one of the first U.S. cargo ships to northern China in 1979 and bringing the first containerized cargo in and out of the country.

He will do this in the fall by teaching a series of boating safety seminars, along with two other U.S. Sail and Power Squadron instructors. Stapleton also has written maritime software and installed the first personal computer aboard a U.S. cargo ship in 1984.

Six students are needed to turn the classes into a reality at New Braunfels High School. Lessons include motor boat handling, seamanship and knots, fuel and boats, as well as anchors and anchoring.