

Mast Replacement in Mexico

Transportation

The mast we located for our boat was in Oakville, Ontario. There were several options for transporting it down:

(1) Driving it loaded on a trailer. The trailer can be a purpose-built trailer for masts, such as pictured here (photo from Klacko Spars website):



or, it could be an inexpensive utility or 2nd-hand trailer bought near the mast's location and then modified to add a support fork and lights.

Since the mast weight isn't much, a car can easily pull it. The only hurdle is that there are limits in some states and some highways on the maximum length of a vehicle+trailer combination. Our mast is 50.5 feet long and couldn't pass through several of the eastern states without special permits. Some info on each state's towing regulations can be found on RV websites or on their DOT website. Once you get into Mexico, the roads are pretty decent (straight, wide) for towing to Guaymas, but I don't know what the regulations are.

(2) Commercial shipper. This was the option we went with. We contacted Keypoint Carriers (Woodstock, Ontario 866-569-7964), as they had an office close to where the mast was located, and Klacko Spars had used them successfully in the past. They also had experience in shipping through all N. America. I would recommend checking with a mast manufacturer close to where your mast is located and see if they have any recommended carriers. Failing that, check to see what carriers operate out of the local area that have USA-to-Mexico experience.

We were lucky in that the shipping agent at Keypoint that we dealt with (James McKinnon) is also a sailor, so he had sympathy and understanding of the special requirements for shipping a mast.

The shipper dealt with all the logistics of scheduling the pickup, transfers, and delivery. However, they did not deal with the following aspects:

- **Packaging for shipping.** This was handled by the mast seller. In our case, accessories (spreaders, furling foils, etc) were placed inside the mast and it was encased in a long plastic sleeve. The mast was then slung from three (four would have been better) webbing straps along one wall of the truck. Here's a photo:



- **Shipping Documentation.** This was prepared by the mast seller. It included an Invoice, Bill Of Lading, and NAFTA Declaration. This was handed over to the shipper when the mast was picked up, and was needed for Customs clearance. I found it helpful to get scans of these documents emailed to me so I could forward them to the Customs Broker (see below) to expedite the clearance.
- **Transfer Through Mexican Customs and Paperwork.** This was handled by the Customs Broker.

The mast was transported inside a standard 53-foot long semi-trailer as part of a shared load from Oakville Ontario to Laredo, Texas. After crossing the border into Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, it went all by itself in the same trailer to Guaymas.

Costs for shipping were \$US 4250, which included \$50 for the customs bond while transiting USA, and \$200 for insurance while in Mexico.

It took 10 days total from the time it left the seller until arriving in Guaymas.

Customs

We explored several options for getting the mast into Mexico, eventually settling on hiring a Customs Broker to handle the details. The firm was Vazeli Group Ltd (vazeli.com) which we found via an internet search and getting three quotes (Vazeli was the middle-cost choice), and then later heard from the shipper that they were familiar with Vazeli and had not had problems dealing with them.

The Broker took care of:

- transportation of the mast from the border crossing into the Customs holding area
- reviewing the mast paperwork before its arrival at the border (I strongly recommend you forward them copies ahead of the mast, so they can correct any errors and speed things up)

- dealing with customs and paying the VAT
- transporting the mast from the holding area to the shipper's departure yard
- adding a fourth strap to support the mast, at our request

We paid \$6427 pesos and \$US 780 to the two offices (one in Mexico, one in USA) of the Broker. The actual amounts vary depending on the value of the mast (which determines the amount of VAT at 12% applied to the importation). So, the lower the invoice value of the mast (as long as it is credible), the better off you are.

Paying the Mexican portion of the broker's fees was easy – we were supplied with the account number, and walked into a local Banamex branch here in Guaymas and paid in cash. Took 10 minutes. Paying the US funds portion of the fees was harder – they wouldn't take credit cards, and we couldn't transfer funds to a USA bank from here in Mexico. So we signed up for an online service called WorldRemit, which for a small fee (can't remember, less than \$25) allowed us to transfer from a credit card to the firm's account in Texas. I imagine that you may not need to go through this hoop if you (or a friend) are physically in the USA to process the payment.

Other options we explored to avoid paying taxes on import, before going with a Broker, didn't pan out:

- using the boat's TIP as authorization was a no-go. We first tried at the Guaymas Banjercito office, where the clerk said that they used to do such authorizations, but not anymore. A letter from the the boatyard owner stating that the mast was needed to repair a boat would not help. We needed to go to the Banjercito/Aduana offices at km 22 in Nogales. So, we drove up there and spoke with a not-very-helpful agent. He said that the only way we could get out of paying tax on the importation was to (1) be present in person, with the TIP, when the mast crosses, and (2) prove to Aduana that the old mast has left Mexico. Neither of those requirements seemed easy to meet (traveling to Laredo where the mast was going to cross would have been a loong drive), so we decided to bite the bullet and pay a broker.

It might be possible to avoid the tax if one personally trailers the mast down across the border.

We didn't regret hiring the broker – it would have taken a lot longer and been more of a pain to do it ourselves. It took the broker less than 30 hours to get the mast over the border. Depending on what border crossing you use, that may determine what brokers you can choose from. Don't hesitate to ask them for quotes and ask them to itemize exactly what services they will (and will not) provide. As I mentioned earlier, we didn't go with the cheapest responder, as he didn't sound like he had a grip on what we were trying to do (i.e. a one-time importation of a personal item – we were not trying to set up a monthly shipment of masts into the country!)

Problems

There was a minor amount of shipping damage: one horn broken off a plastic cleat, and two areas of chafe where the mast rubbed against the wall of the truck. However, no metal was bent and we successfully extracted the spreaders, vang and furling foil from the inside. So the packing was not bad, with the observation that some additional padding between the truck wall and the mast would have avoided these problems.

Other Thoughts

The mast ended up staying in the same trailer for the whole trip (just changed tractors in Mexico). This was a good thing, as it minimized the amount of handling. We were worried that someone might forklift the mast from one trailer to the other – but the shipper arranged it so that wasn't necessary.