

NEWS OF THE CCRC WORLD

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MONS MEG's FASTNET or Great Guns Around the Rock

Whether it was the euphoria engendered by MONS MEG's return to the water after eighteen months of frustrating storm damage repairs, the realization with my fiftieth birthday that old Anno Domini really was starting to chase me (and that bits could start dropping off in the near future), or simply Peter Wallace's declared intention of entering GUNSHOT, that finally motivated me to a Fastnet campaign of my own, I do not know. Probably a combination of the three led to the crystallization of a vague but long-held ambition.

Motivation is necessary. A number of hurdles have to be cleared in order to qualify as a starter. Firstly, the boat has to be equipped to ORC Category 2 status and although many of the requirements are simple, the sum total of the work to be done is considerable. A second bilge pump had to be fitted, a danbuoy and a jury tiller manufactured and mounted. Additional harness attachments were fitted in the cockpit.

Secondly, the boat, and at least half the crew, must qualify for the Fastnet by competing (together) in at least two long RORC races, or by equivalent nautical feats acceptable to RORC. MONS MEG took part in the St. Malo Race and the Channel Race, with four of the final five Fastnet crew on board.

Which leads on to the matter of the crew itself. MONS MEG is, of course, well known for her uncluttered deck and cockpit, but it was decided at an early stage that this was no race for singlehandeding and a rare galaxy of talent was assembled! "Big Bob" Hopkirk, participant in many of the longer MONS MEG voyages over the past few years despite the near lethal effect of boat living on his digestive system, came over

from Switzerland for all three races. (He survived the Fastnet by eating very little.) Malcolm Ian Campbell has also sailed with the skipper (and other CCRC skippers) over many years, I think he sailed on WHITE SALTIRE before MONS MEG. Andy "Hair" Caldwell forsook his black leather jacket and Doc Martens to become a tall and muscular presence on the foredeck, but kept his "Heavy Metal" headphones clamped over his ears for a bit of "peace and quiet" during his watches below. The final member of the Fastnet squad was Andy Roberts, a young New Zealander from the crew list, now fairly well known in the CCRC fleet. Andy stood in at only two day's notice in place of John Cogley, a very competent all-rounder who was forced out of the St Malo and Fastnet races by chronic back trouble, to his great disappointment. John played his part in the overall venture, though, by helping MONS MEG to a second place in Class 5 of the Channel Race.

This account so far seems to lack narrative thrust, so let us proceed to the start, leaving the sordid administrative details, important as they are, for later.

Freshly scrubbed from Northney Piles MONS MEG presented herself at the RORC checking gate at around noon on a fine Saturday. Although the crowd pulling Admirals' Cuppers and Maxis were not due to start for another 24 hours there was a considerable number of spectator boats about. Motoring through the melee we encountered GUNSHOT, her crew looking very smart in their uniform shirts. We looked for SAREEMA also but did not see her until after the race.

Ours was the first start, just twelve of us including seven Contessa 32s. The start line was as for RTI, i.e. RYS to West Bramble. A puff of smoke, a delayed bang and we were away. Up went our ten year old spinnaker, with its repairs and patches, to a light North Easterly breeze as we picked up the start of the West going tide. GUNSHOT and SAREEMA would start ten minutes later in Class 4. Progress was steady rather than spectacular and it was about 4 o'clock before we cleared the S.W. Shingles buoy, with only ten miles on the log - the rest was tide.

I had resolved to head south and west "outside all" rather than attempt to cheat the tide and fickle winds along the shore. The latter course demands a navigator / tactician who is wide awake 24 hours a day, and is something of a lottery even then. Anyway, we carried a fair tide until nine in the evening, the wind falling light and backing through North West during the night. We made very little progress during the east going tide, and by the turn at 3 a.m. the wind had come South West, force 2. It was to remain in the westerly sector for the remainder of the race.

It was 5.30 a.m. on Sunday before we had the loom of Portland Bill light bearing east of north, and the rest of Sunday was spent in crossing Lyme Bay, out of sight of land and indeed the rest of the fleet.

With the benefit of experience on the qualifying races, where a staggered watch system was used (2 on deck, 3 below changing one man every hour) and where the skipper got virtually no sleep at all, I chose to have Port and Starboard watches of two men (Bob and Andy Roberts, Ian and Andy Caldwell) standing watches of either three or four hours with three common watches of two hours corresponding to meal periods. The watches were so arranged that any given watch was taken by Port one day, Starboard the next or vice versa. The skipper stood out of the watch system and slept when he could, being on call at decisive moments or when extra hands were needed. It was found that this system worked much better and that

the skipper, except on the last day, got a reasonable amount of rest - about five hours in the twenty four.

A galley roster was established independently of the deck watches. Two crew members (including the skipper this time) were detailed in rotation to cook and wash up each meal, hence the necessity for common watches over meal periods. It had been noticed during the qualifying races that certain crew members had been unduly modest in displaying their culinary talents, and this was felt to be the best way of encouraging them to develop their repertoire. Menus had been prearranged and were posted daily. On that Sunday evening, after a "happy hour" following the forecast, the menu was due to include roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. The former was sizzling away merrily in the oven when the skipper (acting chef) realized that he had forgotten the recipe for the batter. The crew were no help, and, deciding that culinary advice did not constitute outside assistance under the racing rules, the skipper attempted to consult that eminently practical lady, Di Wallace of GUNSHOT, by VHF. Alas, although our call was apparently received by Peter, for some reason dialogue could not be established, and the skipper was ultimately forced to "take a flyer" with the proportions of flour, egg and milk. That the outcome bore more resemblance to a pancake than Yorkshire pud was probably due more to the lack of heat in our small oven than error in the mix. Anyway, EVERY BIT WAS EATEN!

Sunday midnight found us off Start Point on starboard tack with a NW Force 2. As the day dawned this petered out to a westerly Force 1, which picked up around midday to give us five or six knots on port tack during the afternoon. The land breeze again became evident at nightfall, and by midnight Monday we were making slow progress past the Runnelstone, near Land's End.

As winds were forecast to back NW in the longer term, the skipper decided to make good his westing by taking a favourable wind and tide to go SOUTH of the Scillies (This was optional on the outward voyage. Most boats went North of them.) Unfortunately, neither wind nor tide

lasted quite long enough and, come the dawn, we were short-tacking against a foul tide to clear the Bishop Rock. It was noon before we succeeded.

By 14.30 on Tuesday the wind had picked up to SW5, and we were reaching about sixty degrees off it on the 150 mile leg to the Rock itself. At four o'clock we had changed down to the No. 3, and with the wind still increasing we had two slabs in by six o'clock. No happy hour tonight! The rollers coming in from the south west were about fifty meters from crest to crest, and about twelve to fifteen feet high, not too horrendous in themselves, but with crispy bits on the top. It was rather like trying to sleep in an express lift as MONS MEG rode over them, which she did at a brisk rate - better than seven and a half knots for two consecutive hours. By 2300 it was working up to Force 7 and a third reef was taken in, the No 3 handed and the heavy weather jib set - the shortest canvas I can remember. The 0030 forecast (Wednesday) was S to SW 5 - 7 backing NW 4 - 5 later, so we adhered to our policy of staying west of the rhumbline course.

Because of the water coming aboard, the washboards had to be shipped (and threaded onto the securing lanyard), and the hatch closed. Water still found its way in, cascading in squirts on to the weather berth from a hitherto undiscovered cavity in the repaired fibreglass, whenever a green one hit the deck above. The skipper had a further tribulation during the first four days of the race: his right big toe, which had been stood on by the heaviest crew during the Channel Race a week earlier, had become so inflamed that the wearing of normal footwear was impossible. Relief was obtained by wrapping a wet flannel round the toe and wearing a sock over it. At one stage he thought that he might set a new precedent as the first skipper to sail the Fastnet in stockinged feet.

As dawn broke cold and grey, the wind eased a little and the rain hit us like horizontal hail, flattening the sea to some extent. Around eight o'clock we had a radio call from GUNSHOT. She had rounded the Rock about two hours before (we were some thirty miles short of it) which put her some six hours ahead at our

current rate of progress. The latter, alas, was not to be maintained. By nine o'clock we had shaken out all reefs and set the No. 1, and even so it took us till noon to cover another fifteen miles. Visibility improved and we sighted the Rock about 1400, but the wind came light and headed us. We tacked and tacked again in light winds and a lumpy sea, and it was not until 1744 that we were finally able to radio our rounding report to the RORC stewards on "Ocean 6".

It was a satisfying moment, but our joy was tempered by the thought that GUNSHOT must by now be almost twelve hours ahead. We forgot that she too must have been delayed by the light winds.

The breeze picked up again from the North this time, very shortly after rounding the Rock and we sped off into the dusk leaving the grey, cloudy hills of County Cork behind us. The kite was set again for three hours, but was handed as the wind strengthened and the sea got up. We roared on through the night logging twenty eight miles between 2000 hours and midnight. The forecast at 0030 Thursday was somewhat daunting, including a suggestion of SW 8 later in Fastnet, but only 6 in Plymouth. We had a hundred miles to go before leaving the former sea area! The forward ventilator cowl was replaced by a cap, and the big genoa by the working jib. The forecasts at 0555 and at 1355 were as bad or worse (SW 7 - 9 in Fastnet) but the wind actually eased towards dawn and was down to N 3-4 by midday enabling us to set the spinnaker again. By 1900 we had Bishop Rock bearing west of north and were on the final leg.

The wind backed round to the SW as night fell, and gradually increased in strength. We sped on under spinnaker for a while, touching 11.3knots in the surges but oddly, for MONS MEG on a run, steady as a rock, and leaving a wake like a destroyer, glowing with phosphorescence in the dark. It couldn't go on, of course: the kite was handed about 2300 as the wind climbed from 6 to 7. There was another gale warning at 0030, SW backing W, and two reefs were taken in the main without significantly reducing our speed. By 0200 Friday we had cleared the Lizard: less than fifty miles to go.

By 0700 the wind had dropped to 5 and the skipper, crawling on deck in a scarcely compositis condition, ordered more sail. At 0900 we had the kite up again, and held it almost to the finish. The wind, baffling and gusting around a hill to the west of the Sound had the dog-tired crew in all sorts of trouble, but we got the ram-paging spinnaker under control and set the No. 1. (We were luckier than GUNSHOT, who tore the head out of hers in stronger winds at 4 a.m. in the same place.).

Thus chastened, we took our hoot at the breakwater and passed up the harbour. Rest? Oblivion? No chance! Queen Anne's Battery Marina was full for the time being, and we secured uncomfortably outside the breakwater. We were able to creep in amongst the Admirals' Cuppers later.

The next Contessa followed us in only twelve minutes behind after one hundred and forty one hours, and SAREEMA was not far behind. We learned during the course of the day that GUNSHOT had beaten us by 18 minutes on corrected time, that we were 4th in Class 5, and 2nd Contessa out of eight, ILEX OF UPNOR hav-

ing beaten us soundly by five hours. Still, better than expected - my main objective was to finish! One of the competing Contessas arrived two days after us and her cook took the Galley Slave's Trophy (longest elapsed time).

Maggie and Ian Campbell's family had come down to Plymouth to meet us (they arrived about five minutes before we did) and in the afternoon, showered and spruced up - Andrew Roberts changed out of his tatty jeans into the pair of trousers I had been wearing for the past two days - we were bussed up to the prize-giving in a large marquee at Saltram House on the downs overlooking Plymouth. It was rather an Admiral Cupper's benefit, but interesting for all that. Our humble medallion was due to be awarded at a later date. Peter, Colin and Co were enjoying the local brew, but after a swift pint I was glad to get back to Plymouth have a quick meal, and hit the sack for my first real night's rest in a week.

H.A.C.

THE 1989 FASTNET RACE EXTRACTS FROM THE LOG OF SAREEMA A FULMAR ROUND THE ROCK

Saturday 5 August

The race started quietly enough at 13.30. The spinnaker was hoisted and we made a reasonable start. Fifteen minutes earlier a small crisis had developed when we discovered our water supply was leaking. We managed to disconnect the culprit hose and seal with a bung and jubilee clip.

The wind was slight and tide turning to the West. Drifted down to the Needles at which point the wind picked up.

20.00 hrs - kedging 5 miles South East off St Albans Head, so sat down to a meal with wine! Tide has turned due East.

Sunday 6 August

01.30 hrs - Wind picking up slightly, tide turning. Weighed anchor (all 75m of warp and chain).

06.30 hrs - Two miles South of Portland Bill. Little wind. Decision taken to enter the Race to take advantage of the tide. The ride was bumpy and we lost steerage.

08.00 hrs - Kedging again as tide has turned.

13.12 hrs - Anchor weighed, wind now Westerly 8 knots. Went "looking for wind" and headed offshore.

22.04 hrs - 10 miles South East of Start Point.

Monday 7 August.

04.12 hrs - 15 miles South of Start Point. Slight Westerly wind.

06.00 hrs - Dropped anchor due South of Plymouth. Enjoyed a swimming session!

12.00 hrs - Weighed anchor, little wind, slow progress. Lunch made by David (New definition of Doorstop Sandwiches).

20.00 hrs - Position due South of Lizard Point. Kept outside the Race.

21.00 hrs - Coastguard heard on VHF warning YEOMAN she is running into danger on the Point. White flares reported, seen by HITCHHIKER. Coastguard given warning to stay clear of Lizard Point. One yacht reported aground. Crew on SAREEMA smugly eat dinner.

Tuesday 8 August

01.45 hrs - Position 10 miles South West of Lizard Point. Passed by KAMAKI - another Westerly Fulmar. Light winds persisting.

08.30 hrs - Position South West between Lands End and Wolf Rock with KAMAKI just ahead. COUNTERPOINT-J (the third Westerly Fulmar in the race) was sighted behind us. Spent the day trying to outsail our sister boats. Course for FASTNET ROCK - 302 degrees True.

17.50 Shipping forecast - Strong wind warning Force 7 in sea areas SOLE / FASTNET / IRISH SEA. VHF cable broken.

21.00 hrs - wind now building up. Position 90 miles South East Fastnet Rock. Changed down from No 1 genoa to No 1 jib, and put one reef in the main. Speed 7 knots.

24.00 hrs - Navigation lights on the pulpit have failed due to a broken wire. The skipper,

half asleep in his bunk, overhears talk from the cockpit of white flares being required. This was enough to get him up on deck very smartly, clutching the newly acquired emergency lights which were promptly rigged. The Decca was also very unhappy constantly losing and then re-finding its position.

Wednesday 9th August

01.00 hrs - Wind increasing to 29 knots plus and a second reef has been taken in the main. The skipper and one crew member are suffering from seasickness - a miserable night. The three on three off Watch System with four hours on / off was from now on strictly adhered to. (It was generally felt after the race that four hours on watch was too long and a three hour watch may have been more comfortable.)

06.30 hrs - Third reef taken in. Speed 7.5 knots plus. Rain.

07.00 hrs - wind 34 knots - main taken down.

09.00 hrs - wind has dropped to 18 knots - full main resumed, and No 1 genoa. Position now 40 miles SE Fastnet Rock. Wind still dropping and rain clearing.

19.30 hrs - Rounded the Rock!! OCEAN 6 called and our rounding time reported using the emergency aerial. Spinnaker hoisted.

23.00 hrs - wind up to 22 - 24 knots, spinnaker taken in and No 1 genoa hoisted.

Thursday 10th August

05.00 hrs - wind dropping, spinnaker hoisted.

11.00 hrs - wind down to 5 knots.

13.55 hrs Shipping forecast - Severe gale 9 expected in sea areas Irish Sea and Fastnet. We dig out the storm jib and trisail!! Very little wind all afternoon. Main halyard

shackle breaks and a crew member goes aloft to retrieve the wayward halyard and fit a new shackle.

21.00 hrs - wind has picked up, allowing a close reach under spinnaker around the Bishops Rock. Two yachts in sight behind us, and one ahead. speed 7.5 knots.

22.00 hrs - spinnaker replaced by No 1 genoa.

Friday 11 August

00.00 hrs - wind very strong from the west around 32 knots. We are surfing averaging 8 knots, but peaking on one occasion at 14.1 knots! The adrenaline and nervous energy are now really flowing.

01.30 hrs - sails are progressively reduced to No 2 genoa then No 2 jib, and first then second reef in the main.

03.40 hrs - Position 6 miles South of Lizard Point, still averaging 8 knots.

05.00 hrs - Gybed twice accidentally, once when

the preventer slipped. (It was later discovered that the metal feeder on the head of the mainsail had broken in two due to the violence of the gybes.)

08.45 hrs - Position 15 miles SW of Plymouth, fifteen minutes to the next change of shift.

Everyone is now very tired indeed, the spinnaker is hoisted and promptly wraps itself around the No 2 jib. The mainsail has to be dropped to enable someone to go up on the main halyard to unwrap the spinnaker from the No 2 jib, a manoeuvre which cost us about twenty minutes.

11.00 hrs - Spinnaker is replaced by the No 1 genoa.

11.52 hrs - We cross the finish line.

For the record we came 44th out of a class of 69 and were the first Fulmar over the line, beating the other two by 7 minutes and 1 hour respectively.

R. McL.

RACE 20 - 3rd September, 1989

As Seen From ARD RIGH

Waking to another bright blue sky the two legged members of ARD RIGH's crew set off from the Elephant Boat Yard to be race officers for Race 20. The two two legged crew had resigned themselves to this fate being short of crew and in particular short of four legs, two tails and two wet noses, who always make it first to the windward rail. The wind was N.E. 2-3 which brought the fleet awake as it was a little chilly and it was only 9.00 a.m.. It has to be said that there had been more than one suggestion, during the previous evening's merriment, that we should fly the postponement flag before we turned in.

Needless to say this did not happen and there we were anchored off Coronation watching the Alpha and Beta fleets slowly come to life,

get organised and jostle before the start. The Beta fleet were a little line shy but were lead away by THE ADVOCATE dazzling us with their new main. The Alpha fleet suddenly became a lot more active and produced a great deal more noise. There were ten boats milling about shouting at each other as well as the various crews. However, they got away without mishap with ANNA LOUISE luffing her way through the fleet. TOO MUCH thought that it was but did no more than shout. MONS MEG followed a few boat lengths behind but with a lot more control.

Once all fifteen boats were away we sorted ourselves out and followed down the Solent. Our course took us near to Browndown where we saw QUEST, PETRA, ANNA LOUISE, GOLDENEYE and MARIGOLD all round the buoy.

The fleet were quite spread out but PETRA seemed to have her own wind keeping high on her way to Saddle. This was theoretically a beat but the wind was all over the place resulting in everyone having to work quite hard. As the leading boats were approaching Saddle out popped several spinnakers just to show how contrary the wind was on this Sunday.

Through our Bins we watched Saddle being rounded by TOO MUCH, CRISS CROSS, MAJOR GAMBLE, FIRST SIGHT, BROWN BOMBER and THE ADVOCATE. This leg of the course had returned to a beat by this stage.

We then shot between the forts to try and reach the finish before those racing. Arriving at Chi Buoy we anchored at 13.00 and got ourselves sorted out to finish the race. At this stage the yachts were all still heading out to Dean Tail. CRISS CROSS had taken in her kite and unfurled the furling genoa. THE ADVOCATE took a leaf out of MAJOR GAMBLE's book and held the kite on a very shy reach, almost a spinnaker beat, and slowly but inexorably closed in in the Beta leader. Unfortunately, for Brian, they found one of the many holes in the wind and stopped for several minutes whilst CRISS CROSS rounded the mark and headed off on the final leg.

Approximately fifteen minutes later TOO MUCH crossed the finishing line, thanking us for the gun before they got it. Gradually another nine boats crossed the line, CRISS CROSS being the first of the Beta fleet. However, although we stayed on station until 15.00 no-one else came in sight. Whilst there we had a chat with a passing seal and Walter took quite a few photographs thus a few of you may be even lucky enough to receive documentary evidence of your efforts.

There were still five boats adrift but we had to go or we would not get back to our mooring up Fareham Creek. On the way we saw RED CLOUD who had retired and using the binoculars again Walter saw QUEST finish. But as far as the other three SAREEMA, MONS MEG and MARIGOLD we know not where they were and were only sorry we could not stay longer. From past experience there is nothing more disheartening than doing one's best in a race to find no committee boat to finish you - all we can say is "Sorry"!

Race Officers