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Autumn 2003



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CONTENTS

	page
Come and join us	3
The perils of being Race Officer	4
Spring Cruise	6
Brown Bomber crosses the Bay	9
Crash tack re-opens gate	14
Nicole and the psychological advantage	15
Massive wrap half way to Hard	18
All girls crew search for gold	20
Slow, slow, Fastnet go	23
Hurricane strikes the Oysters	28
Round Ireland without a fridge	33
Cover: Spring cruise party aboard Gunshot at Honfleur (Photo: Jacky Black)	

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Officers 2004*

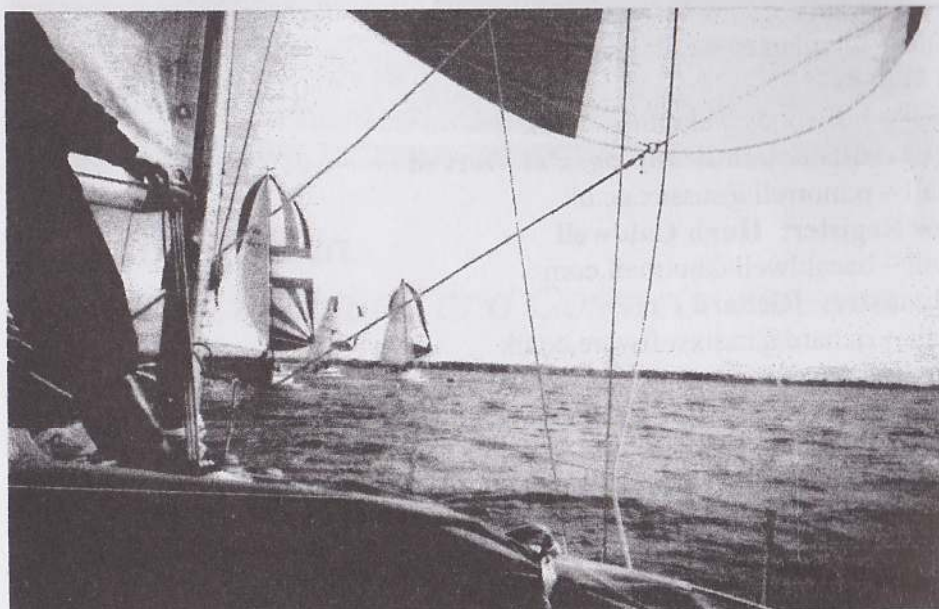
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* subject to election at the AGM

Come and join us

A message from Commodore Jacky Black

Welcome to the latest edition of CCRC News. I hope you enjoy reading about our adventures - and misadventures! If you are reading this as a non-member why not get in touch and come along for a "taster" of our activities. We are a friendly crowd, even when we are racing competitively, and enjoy our socialising, as you can see from the picture on the front cover. This was taken on our annual cruise to France but most of our racing takes place in Hayling Bay and the Solent. Wherever we are, we believe in enjoying our sailing. Those of you who prefer not to race on a particular day are welcome to cruise to any of our venues and join us for the evening activities. If you would like to join CCRC you will find a membership application form at the end of this magazine. There is also a Crew Register for those of you who are looking for crewing jobs. Please call me for a chat if you would like to know more about us. Good sailing!



CCRC yachts in line astern on a pursuit race (Photo: Jacky Black)

The perils of being Race Officer

by Martin Sewell (Arcadia)

Race 2, Saturday 3 May 2003

When I looked though the new handbook and found my name against Race Officer for the second race of the season, I thought someone had made a mistake. What do I know about being Race Officer? I usually just follow all the others till they sail out of sight.

I rang and sought advice from various quarters. They all said just read the handbook and you will be fine. It gives the rest of the club a chance to race if everyone takes a turn. Fair enough, so here we go; perhaps I will take some pictures of the start for the magazine.

After a few days of gale force winds Saturday 3 May came around and conditions had eased to Force 4 or 5 thankfully, but Chi still looked like it was going to be a lumpy place to drop anchor. I had to pressgang two friends, one who had not sailed at all before and another with a little experience to help Andrew and myself.

We left our mooring at 08.45 in plenty of time and consumed egg and bacon on our way out. We picked up a buoy at HISC and prepared the boat. This all took far longer than we expected and as Gunshot did a fly past at 11.10 we thought we'd better get on station.

Battling out to the bar against the tide and 25 knots of wind took time. Fortunately everyone else had the same problem. But as we passed West Pole our anchor was knocked off its roller and started to beat itself against the hull, swinging from its safety line. Andrew was dispatched forward and retrieved it with some difficulty before too much damage was done to the boat. Unfortunately for Andrew he was pushed through some large waves in the process and was now thoroughly soaked.

Undaunted, we steamed full ahead for Chi buoy. It was now 11.45 - just enough time to lay anchor and start the race. At this point my hat blew off. It was not just any hat; this was an embroidered Christmas present from Auntie Nic. Oh dear. Decision: wrath of CCRC for late start or wrath of Auntie Nic? No contest! Follow that hat I shouted to Kevin and swung the helm 180 degrees. I grabbed the boathook, ran along the deck, and with one majestic motion, bent, stretched and swooped the hat back aboard, much to my and the crew's amazement! We lost about two minutes and then set about laying anchor.

Course now displayed, string and lines flying everywhere on the wildly pitching and windswept deck, we hoisted class flags at 11.55 only five minutes late. As the contestants jockeyed for position and the clock ticked away I realised the start line was getting smaller. Our anchor was dragging! At this rate there would be no start line left in five minutes. I sent the already soaked Andrew back to the bow to pull in the anchor as we motored against it, but this proved difficult so I settled for holding position, rather than making the line longer.

Well, the flags came down, the hooter went off; Andrew enjoyed that bit. Penrose and Gunshot dived across the line neck and neck, with the rest of the fleet following later. I hope we did not cause too many problems for anybody. Apologies if we did. Try harder next time. Oh, you might gather we didn't have time for taking pictures!

Apart from five minutes spent trying to catch the main halyard that whipped out my hand as we took the start flag assembly down, all went well, and we retreated to the bar at HISC for a well earned pint of Guinness.

Footnote: Ten boats started from Chi buoy in a fresh SE wind on a passage race to Cowes. Winners: Alpha, Gunshot (Peter Wallace); Beta, Sycorax (Brian Dandridge).

Spring cruise 2003

Race 7, cross-Channel to Le Havre, Friday 23 May

By Jacky Black

I was unable to participate in the race due to work commitments and therefore travelled courtesy of P&O Ferries in rather more comfort than the rest of CCRC who were subjected to almost persistent rain for their crossing. On arrival in Le Havre driving a strange car and negotiating the unfamiliar roads in the dark in a torrential downpour I began to wonder who had the better deal! Eventually we managed to find Honfleur, where the boats had sailed to earlier, and my 'ferry party' joined up with the 'cruise' group. Sunday morning dawned bright and clear and that was how the rest of the week turned out.

Everyone enjoyed the welcoming party on board Gunshot in Honfleur, and we also celebrated the 60th birthday of one of our longest standing members. The picture on the front cover shows what a good time was had by all. The musical entertainment provided by Brian, Peter, Bill and Trevor was terrific and even the locals passing by on the harbour front stopped to listen. Thanks to our resident musicians who always add an extra enjoyable element to our activities.

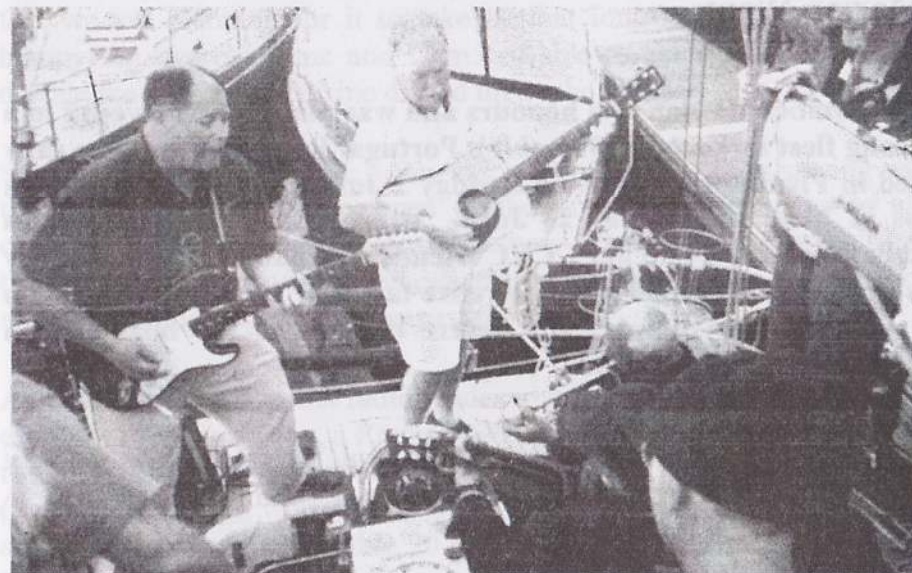
The following day we made sail for Deauville; in fact with the lack of wind it was a short motoring job. CCRC had not visited this harbour for several years and we were made very welcome, with berths outside the yacht club. Peter Wallace, our cruise leader, had organised three events - a visit to a go karting centre, followed later by a date at the Yearling restaurant for a gastronomic feast, and the annual CCRC golf tournament for those who enjoy this excellent game. A Texas scramble was organised and the winners were a combined team from Green Pepper and Aquarelle, two Contessa 32s. The go karting was great fun, with a steely competitiveness being shown by the eventual finalists. Our meal at the Yearling was also a great success.

The next port of call was Dives, fast becoming a favourite now our ex-Commodore Mike and his wife June have bought a small *piéd a terre* overlooking the marina. The activities organised here were sand yachting, Hobie Cat sailing, the annual boules tournament, the cruise dinner and the Commodore's cocktail party. A very busy schedule! We took the local bus to the sand yachting venue and despite a serious lack of wind everyone enjoyed the day. Those doing the sand yachting managed to get up enough speed by 'sailing' down the rather wide concrete groyne, before rolling to a stop on the sand. It was the first time I had donned a wetsuit for twenty years – but I thoroughly enjoyed my trip out on the Hobie Cat!

The boules tournament took place on waste ground north of the visitors' berths at Dives and was followed by passing French locals with great interest – the eventual winners being the Gunshot team. Later that evening there was much drinking and singing on board Rimau and around the adjacent pontoon as we hosted the Commodore's drinks party. It was good to welcome members of Chichester Yacht Club who were also on a Seine Bay Cruise. Our cruise meal was at a super venue - the Casino, on the seafront at Cabourg, a beautiful building with a very pleasant brasserie-type restaurant.

The finale to the week was the annual 'Driftwood' challenge, in which participants have to make a vessel from flotsam and jetsam collected off the beach. These are then 'raced' across the harbour. The event was preceded by much banging and sawing, and various test sails before some 10 entries lined up at the start. Unfortunately, there was a serious lack of wind and several entries never made it across the harbour. The conditions definitely favoured the lightweight rigs and the eventual winner was Andrew from Arcadia.

Several boats left for home from Dives on the Friday night while one or two continued on to Ouistreham to spend more time in France. It was a really splendid cruise this year – no doubt helped by the excellent weather but also by the superb organisation and planning provided by Peter Wallace on Gunshot. I am looking forward to next year – if you like the sound of our exploits why not join in for 2004?



Impromptu concert aboard Gunshot at Honfleur, (from left) Brian Dandridge, guitar; Peter Wallace, guitar; Trevor Rose, trumpet; Bill Woods, guitar (behind head). Photo: Hugh Caldwell

Footnote: Rimau, sailed by Andy Reynolds and Robert Black, won the cross-Channel race from Chichester to Le Havre at the start of the Spring Cruise with a corrected time of 12.00.16. They took 13 hours and almost 48 minutes to cover the course. Glenn Jones in Petra was second on handicap with a corrected time of 12.17.13 and an elapsed time of 12.40.01. Line honours went to Trevor Rose, sailing Lohengrin, which took 12 hours 27 minutes to complete the course. Seven boats took part sailing in a single fleet under their CCRC ratings.

Brown Bomber crosses the Bay

by Marian Ware

Brown Bomber III won line honours and was placed third overall in a 23 strong fleet in *Yachting Monthly's* Portugal Rally in June. The rally started in Plymouth at 12.00 on Sunday 1 June and BB III arrived in Lagos at 20.00 on Monday 23 June. Brown Bomber's success was warmly welcomed by all her CCRC friends who had been saddened by news of the yacht being forced to retire last year because of injury to Paul Chivers, her skipper, and severe damage to the boat after a collision at the start of the 2002 rally.

"We had better get some more fuel," said Paul, "the forecast is for very light winds all the way so we could be motoring it." Famous last words!

Brown Bomber III [a Beneteau First 45F5] is setting off to cross the Bay of Biscay with the Yachting Monthly Rally Portugal. This is our second time of trying, having had an 'incident' at the start last year which stopped us going – but that's another story. Sunday morning sees us out on the start line bright and early – if slightly nervous!

It's a beat out of Plymouth Sound and Paul is lamenting the roller-reefing jib, which is not getting us to windward quite as we would like. There is a Dehler 36, Endeavour, which is well to windward and going like a train. However, we do manage to pass a few boats to leeward and that cheers us slightly. So we're off!

On board are Paul Chivers, the skipper, Helene his wife, and his son Roger, who has managed to complete his finals at Durham University just in time. Mike and I make up the motley crew.

We settle quickly into our watch system and have our first lunch on board. There is enough food stacked away to keep us going for a fortnight – not that we are planning for it to take us that long! Sadly the nerves and bumpy sea overcome me and I am not able to eat again for three days, despite the wonderful cuisine dished up by the skipper.

Sunday night is uneventful, a few ships around and we are staying well to the west. "Go West, young man" is the advice we were given by all the old hands who have been this way before. By Monday morning [2 June] the first indication of the bad weather ahead has come through on the navtex – southerly gales are forecast for the Bay. Hmm!

At 13.00 we have our first radio rendezvous. We are reporting our position each day to Hans on Joy, a Regina D49. This will be relayed by SSB radio to rally control so that our position can be posted on the website (www.rallyportugal.worldcruising.com). We seem to be doing OK – Joy and Endeavour are both within 20 miles of us and are the only ones we can hear on the VHF at this point.

Sure enough the force 8-9 gale hits us as it gets dark on Monday night. The sea is really confused and the waves seem huge. A well-reefed main and a smidgen of jib is all the sail we have out but we are not really able to make much headway in the mountainous seas. Sleep is impossible for those off watch, as one's bunk resembles a tumbler drier. Paul takes the helm for most of it with Roger taking over to give him a break. I have a go but am too tired after half an hour to keep the nose to the wind.

After six hours it all blows through and we are back on track with more sail out, the seas moderating and sailing along quite nicely. George (the autohelm) is coping well. But we are still beating to windward – where are those nice northerlies?

On the radio rendezvous Hans too has seen the forecast for tonight – another low coming though with its associated southerly gale. "If it's the same as last night, I'm going home!" he says. We calculate that it is about equidistant to La Corunna and to Brest so it looks like we are going on. We

are better prepared for this one and once again Paul and Roger do the night watch while the worst of the weather is coming through. About three in the morning it has abated somewhat so they tack, let out more sail, and set off at about seven knots. Wedged in the saloon seat, I become aware of the fantastic phosphorescence – inside the main cabin. Struggling out of my bunk I alert the skipper to the fact we have a bit of a swimming pool in the saloon. Paul takes one look down below and immediately tells Roger to slow the boat down.

Sure enough there have been sweeping waves across the deck – and down the ventilation hatches under the coaming. Paul, Mike and I start to bail out – with jugs, saucepans and buckets. The electric bilge pump is underwater so we can't use that. Roger is trying the manual bilge pump but that is blocked. He volunteers to go down into the back locker to sort the problem – not a nice task when the boat is acting like a bucking bronco. After about an hour all is back under control. Paul checks all the seacocks to confirm that water isn't coming in that way and that the keel bolts are still in place. We set off again into the dawn.

By Wednesday night [4 June] there's little wind so we steer our way round the shipping lanes off Cape Finisterre in flat calm under a beautiful starlit sky. The first of the dolphins arrive to accompany us as dusk falls and we spend the night watching the radar and the ships' lights as they all process round the 'iron road'. At last the off watch crew is able to get some sleep.

On Thursday [5 June] we spend the day dolphin watching as these graceful creatures appear and play around the bow. We all climb out of our oilies, have showers and generally feel much better. There is even a moment as we approach the Spanish coast that the northerly wind finally arrives and we put up the spinnaker for about 30 minutes. More as a drying out exercise than a serious spinnaker run.

In the late afternoon we finally contact rally control to say we are approaching the finish line in Bayona. Sue and Andrew from rally control are on the dock to greet us, as they are for all the yachts, and we are



Brown Bomber III takes line honours

pleased to find out that we have won line honours. The sangria and tapas at the very splendid Monte Real Club de Yates are our first moments in real cruising mode!

There are varying tales about the other 22 yachts in the rally. A number put into port on Monday night and are now on their way again. It is great that most arrived in time for the Friday night welcome party and to catch up with their experiences. I am delighted to report that the Biscay diet has worked wonders and my shorts are defiantly looser round the waist – a marketing opportunity perhaps!



Paul receives his prizes (Photo: Marian Ware)

The rally now starts in earnest. Trips are available to all the crews to Santiago de Compostela from Bayona, around the hinterland at our next port of call, Povia de Varzim and to the Sandeman's port wine lodge in Porto. We have a great night out at the casino in Povia and are royally entertained at the various yacht clubs.

Sadly Mike and I have to leave from Porto on Friday (Roger had already flown back on Tuesday to attend a college ball or three). It is sad to watch all our new found friends sail off on the next leg but I am sure that Paul and Helene will have a marvellous time over the next couple of weeks as they make their way to Lagos.

The final twist to the tale comes as we are on the plane home "due to thunderstorms," the captain announces, "it will be bumpy as we cross the Bay of Biscay." He doesn't know the half of it!

Crash tack re-opens gate

by Bill Woods (Innatwist)

Race 16, Yarmouth – Chichester, 13 July

The day dawned sunny, clear and with eight knots of easterly breeze. It was decided to sail a short course using the 1.5 hours of fair tide with a finish at East Lepe buoy to allow yachts to make their own arrangements for the passage home in the afternoon. Nine boats made the gate start at YMS 2 at 09.30 with Innatwist opening the gate. It was promptly shut again by Gunshot! And the bemused fleet watched the start boat crash tack and head off opening another impromptu line in the opposite direction! Undaunted, the rest of the fleet started themselves and were soon making seven knots towards Salt Mead, the windward mark five miles away, with a spring tide amply compensating for the gentle force 3 easterly. Penrose and Innatwist crossed tacks all the way up the first beat and were together down the spinnaker reach to West Lepe. The faster boats, Rimau, Excalibur, Sweet Pea, Mantra, and Gunshot had disappeared into the distance. The winds became fickle as the fleet tried to reach Elephant, tucked in close to the Salt Mead ledges. Excalibur, The Harribelle, Sweet Pea, and Gunshot rounded Elephant in close succession whilst Penrose and Innatwist needed several tacks to lay the mark. A fetch to East Lepe seemed straightforward until around midday when, with a mile to run, the spring tide exceeded three knots and Innatwist admitted defeat (it took another hour under engine to make the mark!). Nevertheless, all of the faster boats finished the race, with David Perrin (in Harribelle) doing particularly well, sailing single handed and finishing just behind Sweet Pea. As on Sunday, line honours fell to Excalibur.

Nicole and the psychological advantage by John Dunkley (Marigold)

Race 17, Ladies' Race, Saturday 19 July

"I don't believe Nicole exists - she's a figment of your imagination," said Glenn as we were having a drink in Chichester YC the evening before the CCRC Ladies' Race on Saturday 19 July.

Glenn had invited Angela to helm Petra in the race and had recruited an eager crew of young men to ensure they did well. While he wouldn't have disputed that on Marigold, Donald and I were well beyond the age we could have played the role of Papa in the Clio ads, he seemed unwilling to accept my assurance that the Commodore had given me permission, as Race Officer, to have a gate start and compete in the race providing I could find a lady helm. As Donald and I were leaving to return to the boat, Nicole arrived. So we went back to introduce her to the competition. John Skillicorn (more the right age to be Papa, though he doesn't drive a Renault) spoke to her in impressively fluent French. "Can you say that again," she asked politely? Despite her name, Nicole is Australian, and, as all the world knows, the Aussies are pretty good at yachting. We left feeling we had established a psychological advantage.

Being Race Officer is stressful at the best of times and my sense of psychological superiority soon disappeared the following morning as we threaded our way through 300 dinghies tacking out to sea from HISC for the 420 world championships. Would our start at Chi conflict with the course set for them in Hayling Bay? It soon became apparent that only one of the three courses in the CCRC handbook would keep us clear, so we chose number 50 - Nab East (S), Cambrian (P), Horse Elbow (S), Royal Albert (P), North Sturbridge (P), Saddle (P) and Boyne (P). It certainly kept us clear of the dinghies but it put the 10-strong CCRC fleet at risk of obstructing a large number of ships coming and going in the deep water channels.

The gate start seemed to go well although the fleet was a little line shy. The moderate southerly wind made the favoured option a long port tack towards Seaview to gain the advantage of being lee-bowed by the eastgoing tide, with a few shorter tacks on starboard approaching the windward mark. Leo Lady (crewed mainly by ladies and sporting sexy black sails) established an early lead, with Gunshot, Petra and Sweet Pea among the other front runners.

Spinnakers were set for the two-mile reach to Cambrian but had to be dropped for the short close fetch to Horse Elbow and their absence on certain boats on the next leg to Royal Albert suggested that many crews had been short of packing time. Sycorax was hot on the heels of Sweet Pea and was equally closely pursued by Rimau. Among the slower boats there appeared to be some uncertainty about the location of the mark and widely divergent courses, some with spinnakers, some without, were sailed before they found their way to the little yellow buoy beyond Gilkicker. The wind shifted to the south west, giving a close fetch to North Sturbridge, and then began to fade as Kandy, Jezabel, Odds On and Marigold faced another spinnaker reach to Saddle, with a gybe at the mark for the short leg to the finish. A profusion of passing ferries, which Leo Lady had missed, added to the frustration of the rest of the fleet as they suffered from the wind-shadow and wallowed in the wash.

Leo Lady, helmed by Sally Cantello, last year's Alpha winner, took line honours, with Gunshot just over a minute behind, but after allowing for handicaps Sycorax, helmed by Julie Zelent, was the Alpha fleet winner with a corrected time of 2.36.58 against Leo Lady's 2.37.03. Commodore Jacky Black was the Beta fleet winner in Rimau with a corrected time of 2.36.38 and Angela Thompson was second, helming Petra, with a time of 2.42.13.

Any spurious suggestions that Marigold's lateness at the following day's start was caused by Nicole meeting a nice young man after the Ladies' Race are totally without foundation! To be frank, she only started sailing a couple of years ago and the race was the first time she had helmed anything bigger than a Laser dinghy. But to have admitted that would have

been to concede a psychological advantage. Papa, being French, would not have seen things in the same way as we Poms do. With all you experienced Sheilas helming the competition we weren't going to do that!

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A massive wrap half way to Hard by Jacky Black (Rimau)

Race 18, Crews' Race, Sunday 20 July

Sunday dawned with predominantly blue skies and a fair wind from the south west for the Crews' Race on 20 July. Those of us who had spent the night on the Fieldhouse jetty at HMS Hornet exchanged pleasantries and discussed the forthcoming race, which was due to start at 11.00 from Gleeds buoy. As the acting RO, I left the jetty in Rimau in good time to make an assessment of the wind direction and strength in the vicinity of the start. Course 67 was chosen, which sent the fleet to Royal Albert, almost a fetch, followed by Nab East, Dean Elbow, Hard, Winner and Chi to finish. The wind held its strength and we were glad we had chosen our number two genoa, as with only three adults on board we would have been overpressed with the number one. We had an excellent crew on the helm, Wiz Leslie, with Andy and me as the foredeck and winching crew, and young Harry as an extra pair of hands when needed.

The gate start went smoothly and a bevy of boats crossed the line in close company on port tack. Sycorax, Petra and Gunshot were soon flying ahead. Unfortunately, Leo Lady had started late due to a misunderstanding about the mark, but was soon seen charging back to make the correct start at Gleeds. Marigold called in as a late starter, having been delayed by problems with her engine cooling water system. The fleet were soon rounding Royal Albert and there followed a fast close reach to Nab East. The wind seemed to bend round to the south as we went through the Forts and what started as an easy reach became almost close hauled. Ahead of us Petra, Gunshot and Sycorax were sailing well, but Rimau held Leo Lady astern until we were approaching St Helens but they made a sail change and powered past us before we reached Nab East. Odds On was also close behind Rimau, followed by Jezebel, Kandy and Marigold. Nab East was a gybe mark and inevitably the timing of our arrival on the south side of the shipping lane co-incided with the incoming P&O ferry from Le Havre! The boats ahead of us were able to cross to the north side of the channel before

the ferry arrived but we held on to the south side until she passed. This enabled us then to reach down to the mark and it was decided to hoist the spinnaker to help us get there – a decision we came to regret!

Meanwhile, behind us Jezebel and Odds On appeared to be engaging in some close competitive sailing at the mark, and both subsequently retired. Our attempts at gybing the spinnaker were disastrous. It certainly pays to have more hands available on deck when undertaking this type of manoeuvre in a brisk breeze. We ended up with a massive wrap, which took some time to unravel – we had to take the spinnaker down and eventually hoisted the genoa half way to Hard. This probably cost us the race!

The boats ahead made a fast passage to Winner and they passed us in the opposite direction as they sailed back towards the finish at Chi with their colourful spinnakers flying. Petra was in the lead, with Leo Lady and Sycorax in close contention. Gunshot had retired. We were able to hoist our small spinnaker for the final run to the finish and Wiz continued to helm in her usual unflappable way to bring us home with a finish time of 13.22.00. Behind us were Kandy and Marigold. It had been an exciting race with plenty of wind and glorious sunshine. It is not often that we get to sail in T-shirts and shorts when the wind speeds are strong enough to give us wonderful sailing.

Results (corrected times): Alpha 1 Sycorax (helmed by Bob Garrett) 1.59.51; 2 Leo Lady (Bob Ange) 2.06.28. Beta 1 Petra (Nicholas Jones) 2.03.07; 2 Rimau (Wiz Leslie) 2.04.15.

Don't miss the annual CCRC prizegiving and dinner dance at the Brookfield Hotel, Havant Road, Emsworth, Hants at 18.30 for 19.30 on Saturday 22 November, with dancing to The Regis Jazz Band.

All-girls-crew in search of gold by Marian Ware

Anna Louise VI finished fourth in Family Class B at the International X Yachts Gold Cup in the Solent from 17-19 July

The start of the first race was VERY INTERESTING. Amongst the melee of over 80 yachts vying for position on the line, we got a riding turn round the winch! Sorted out, we tacked round and set off for the line. "Excuse us, but we've started", we yelled and, kindly, all the boats lining up for the second start let us through

And so we set off in pursuit of the rest of our class, very conscious of the other classes starting just behind us. For the next couple of hours or more we did lots of tacking and gybing and stuff round a complex Solent course and finally crossed the line.

Perhaps I should have mentioned that the start of this race was delayed by the amount of wind that was gusting around in the Hamble that morning. We were kept at our moorings, which did nothing to help the nerves. Finally, we set off in about 20 knots of breeze, so we decided that we should follow Roger's advice and have a reef in the main.

One of the great advantages of sailing on Anna Louise VI is the quality of the lunch – beer and smoked salmon sandwiches (not to mention the luxurious five-star facilities below deck – soft furnishings to name but one.... after all she was purchased to cruise not to race!). We relaxed as the last of our class crossed the line but were quietly anticipating the next race. The Race Officer made the very sensible decision to set the faster classes off first and the Family Class (ours) off last.

By this time the wind was really blowing. We saw 45 knots on the instruments – but were not fazed. We decided that more reefing was needed. Off we set again on race two and carefully ignored all the broaching, broken masts and many retirements being reported on the radio. “This is Insanity, This IS Insanity, This is INSANITY...” one boat, aptly named, calling the OOD to retire!

We had gybing down to a fine art and made up a few places as other boats tacked round the downwind marks. Local knowledge of the area certainly helped with our tactics. It was truly a wet and wild ride but thoroughly exhilarating!

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We finished! And made our way back to the marina resembling drowned rats but feeling extremely pleased with our tremendous performance. We enjoyed a jolly evening at the Royal Southern YC (the hosts of this year's International X Yachts Gold Cup) and listened to all the tales that sailors tell of their experiences – and there were plenty of those!

And so to day two – a little less wind I am glad to say – only 27-30 knots! We sailed two races again with the Race Officer, prompted by Jackie, setting us off last with a slightly shorter course than the racing machines. We were starting to get into our stride as a crack crew by now and completed both races without incident. Whenever we did have anything that resembled a slight problem we all looked round anxiously to see if [Anna Louise's owner] Roger, racing on another boat, was nearby!

Back to the club for a moules and muscadet evening. By now there were lots of comments about our crew shirts, which proudly announced ‘GIRLSCREW’ on the back (with a slight printing ‘error’ putting a small space in between the ‘L’ and the ‘S’!) I think they all thought we would be younger but we reckoned that, not only were we all girls, but also probably qualified as one of the oldest crews!

This crack crew consisted of Jackie Morris, captain and tactician, Di Wallace on the foredeck, Wiz Leslie on the mainsail, Sue Dearden on sail trimming, Jo Dearden as navigator and Marian Ware as helm. And boy, did we enjoy ourselves!

Sue and I left the crew on the third day (to go to the wedding of the year – Bill and Den Cartlidge's son Ted finally getting hitched to the wonderful Tilly. But that's another story.) Roger Morris and Anthony Dearden (Sue's brother, Jo's husband) joined them for the final race. Jackie, I understand, helmed beautifully and they deservedly got a gun at the finish.

It was a wonderful event and we all came away feeling that we had achieved a huge amount. An enormous ‘thank you’ to Jackie and Roger for giving us the opportunity of racing their lovely boat and having so much fun. Can we do it again, please?

Slow, slow, Fastnet go

by Graham Nixon (Leo Lady)

Leo Lady, a Sigma 362, finished fifth in Class 3 and won a bronze medal in the 2003 Fastnet race – her second attempt at this ocean racing classic.

It was a bit different this time. In fact it was diametrically opposite in every respect, bar one. To say we had a few problems in our first Fastnet race in 2001 would be an understatement – heavy weather, failure of our electrical supply, short of fresh water, blocked head. Surviving on pot noodles was the final straw – I haven't touched any since! Our team was almost the same again, Bob Ange, Sally Cantello, Nick Bear, Nick Brown, Marcello Davanzo, Richard Boreham (the only new crew member) and me.

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As Sunday 10 August drew closer, the whole team started to get edgy, expecting the SW force 7 in which we started last time. But no. The days remained hot and sunny and heat stroke was our problem, rather than motion sickness. The day dawned just as hot, just as cloudless, and just as windless. Big problem with Sally, who had been sick all night and was prostrate in her bunk. Do we put her ashore immediately or take a chance that she'll get over it during the day and be fit for the remainder of the race? After much agonising we decide to take the risk but with the proviso that we will put her ashore if she isn't able to drink water within the day. In the event, she got steadily better and was back in action within 24 hours.

At 10.50 we started with the rest of Class 3 on the Royal Yacht Squadron line in a light easterly, flying our biggest spinnaker, and wearing shorts and T-shirts. A far cry from the SW 35 knots of wind, three reefs, and number 3 genoa of 2001. For a time off Newtown Creek we were leading and rapidly catching the Class 2 yachts, which had started 10 minutes earlier, but as the wind died we were left drifting with the tide through Hurst Narrows.

Frustratingly, the boats on the Island side seemed to catch the SW sea breeze before us and they crept steadily ahead. This was to prove a winning tactic as it set them up for the tide change at Portland Bill, giving them a five hour advantage in the first 24 hours of the race. Still, the sea breeze got us going again and we made steady progress towards the Bill. But at 18.50 the wind died completely and left us at the mercy of a turning tide, still 10 miles short.

The only choice was to anchor – in 38 metres of water! Both anchor warps and half our mooring lines were needed to reach the bottom and hold us. The log soon told us we were doing a steady 3.2 knots. Unfortunately we were standing still – it was the tide going in the opposite direction. It gave us the opportunity to have an excellent dinner in peace and tranquillity, courtesy of our resident Italian chef Marcello. We even had the chance to chat to the boats anchored all round us. At 22.00 the tide turned and

someone switched the fan on – in the east again – which was fine, except it took five of us to pull up the anchor line. By the time we had it all back on board and stored away we were totally knackered.

Monday saw exactly the same pattern, with light easterlies overnight, dropping to nothing around midday. It was 21.00 before we rounded the Lizard, still with lots of other yachts around us, including Sigress – a really quick Sigma 33, which we had problems shaking off for the rest of the day. In 2001 we saw only four other boats for the whole time after leaving the Needles.

Tuesday morning saw the wind go round to the north and pipe up to 20 – 25 knots. So down to the number 3, occasionally with a reef as well, and we made rapid progress on a fine reach past Land's End and out into the Irish Sea.

If you've never ventured past Falmouth you've missed one of the most moving yachting experiences in British waters. The water is amazingly clean in the Irish Sea. Porpoises are guaranteed to play around the boat and are wonderful to watch. The floescence is twenty times as much as in the Channel. As if this weren't enough, we had magnificent sunsets and sunrises, with colours which were quite breathtaking.

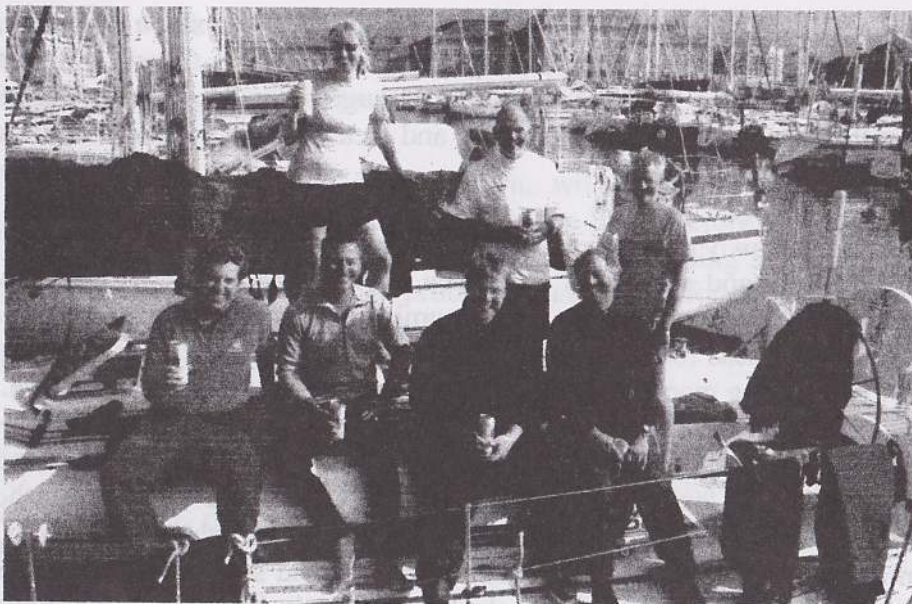
But we needed all of these to take our minds off the fickle breeze, still from the north, but lacking any real power; all caused by the anti-cyclone sitting over Ireland and just refusing to move on. As we got closer, the wind dropped still further. Early Wednesday morning we found ourselves 10 miles off the Rock and heard the first boat in Class 3 go round – Longue Pierre, one of the yachts which had managed to escape the Solent ahead of the rest of the pack. "We are only two hours behind them, which means we have caught up three hours", commented Bob, our navigator. The wind immediately died and we spent eight hours completing those last 10 miles. In the slow motion tacking duel which followed, who should we cross tacks with but Sigress again! These Sigma 33s just don't know their place.

We rounded Fastnet eventually in mid-afternoon with Mefisto, a Sigma 38, whose crew must have been thinking the same thoughts about us as we were about Sigress. There was barely enough wind to make progress against the tide, which gets quite strong and creates a wake behind the rock which is quite pronounced.

As we pulled slowly away from Ireland, the wind got steadily stronger, still from the north, and gave us a fast reach towards the Scillies. Thursday morning had us changing down to the number 3 as the wind went over 20 knots, with big seas rolling down from the north. Down below it felt like being in a washing machine as the boat seemed to leap from wave to wave.

Approaching Bishops Rock lighthouse late on Thursday afternoon, we had the most magical experience of the trip. All the crew were on the windward rail, trying to make the most of the fast reaching conditions, when a family of porpoises approached from behind swimming down our wake. At one point all four breached the water in line and in complete unison – just magic. No photos I'm afraid, but we were all watching and all registered a sight we will carry with us for years. Then horror – what is that boat catching us up so quickly? It's Sigress again! They shook us out of our complacency and got us racing again.

As we passed south of the Scillies we had a forecast predicting the wind would go round to the east and blow force 6 - exactly the same as last time. We couldn't believe it. Bob kept muttering something about there being only a 5% probability of easterlies in the Channel during August. We hurriedly made a meal – yes, those pot noodles – and started to get the boat ready for a blow. And blow it did, right on the nose for every one of the 40 miles to the Lizard, with a big swell to boot. By the time we reached the finishing line at Plymouth at 16.00 on Friday we were soaked through and well shaken up.



Boat and crew on arrival at Plymouth, (from left) Nick Brown, Sally Cantello, Bob Ange, Richard Boreham, Nick Bear, Graham Nixon, and Marcello Davanzo.

Still, we finished with fresh water in the tanks, no major breakages, no injuries and, best of all, fifth in class, 6% behind the winner and a bronze medal – a performance which we felt merited a champagne, steak & chips celebration that evening. Much better than fifteenth in class and 15% behind the winner in 2001.

PS Sigress finished 20 minutes ahead of us. It seems we should have stood off at the Lizard and stayed in mid-Channel, despite the wind and waves, instead of tacking up into Falmouth Bay. Apparently that is much quicker, but they didn't explain how to quell a mutinous crew!

Hurricane strikes the Oysters

by Sue Dearden

The UBS Oyster Regatta, Palma, Mallorca, 4 – 7 September

Little did I know when I accepted an invitation from my brother Anthony and sister-in-law Jo to join them on their Oyster 435, First Oboe, in Palma della Mallorca for the Oyster Regatta what the weather had in store for us. "Changeable" and "unpredictable" are two descriptions that spring to mind.

Having come from a rather breezy X Yachts Gold Cup (see Marian's report, p 20) the month before, Jo and I were used to a bit of a blow...but certainly not a 67 knot hurricane! We had just left the marina and were motoring into Palma's outer commercial harbour for the second day's racing. Over the radio one of our Dutch competitors asked the Race Officer if he had seen the big black cloud over his left shoulder. The next moment the squall hit us accompanied by a deluge of blinding, torrential rain – the boat was out of control, well heeled even though we were bare headed, in zero visibility. We knew there were three other Oysters close to us but the main worry was a tanker moored in the harbour becoming dangerously close as we were being blown on to it. Anthony slammed the boat astern and gained control and then did 360s whilst desperately trying to make some visual contact with the yachts in the vicinity. After about 15 minutes visibility returned, the wind abated and we made our way out of the harbour into the bay. It certainly provided many tales in the bar that evening.

Twenty-four Oysters had gathered in Palma for the UBS sponsored regatta. They ranged from an Oyster 406 to an Oyster 68. We were split into two classes – Class 1 for 55ft and over; Class 2 for under 55ft. As Osteryga, the Oyster 406 was not racing (just enjoying the wonderful social

programme), First Oboe was the smallest in the racing fleet. The majority were British owned followed by Dutch, Irish and one American. A couple were en route for the ARC. Others, like Anthony and Jo, were retired and cruising around the Med. The fourth member of First Oboe's crew was a friend of Anthony and Jo from Huddersfield, Andrew Ackroyd – "Ackers" for short - who sails his Sonata on Lake Windermere, so he was getting his first taste of "big boat" racing.

The itinerary was outlined at the skippers' briefing on Wednesday afternoon which was then followed by a short course in racing rules. The rules stated: *"Owners and skippers are asked to note that generally Oysters are large yachts not equipped for quick tacking or manoeuvres that might be expected of an experienced racing crew. Protests are discouraged. Don't hit – Rule 14"*. To highlight the various pertinent rules, diagrams were handed out to all the skippers! Another little gem of advice given to the skippers was to let the main out if you want to bear away.....!

The welcome reception was held on the terrace of the exclusive Real Club Nautico, which was hosting the Regatta. A colourful display of flamenco dancing was followed by a delicious buffet.

Every morning, prior to each race, a roll call was made around the fleet, during which each yacht had to state their sail preference for the day's racing – i.e. white sails or spinnaker. Having discovered that using a spinny added an extra 6% on our handicap it was sometimes a difficult decision to make.

The first race was set around buoys in the bay of Palma. Class 2 started first and true to form, Anthony made a cracking start and sailed a great race finishing well up with the leaders.



Anthony, Jo, Sue and "Ackers"

That evening we were guests of the Government of the Balearic Islands and we had an informative tour of the Parliament building followed by a magnificent gourmet dinner in their restaurant. The rioja certainly flowed, particularly when it was confirmed we had won the first race.

The following day we had been due to race to the island of Cabrera (a maritime national park) but unfortunately the morning's brief storm had unnerved one or two competitors and Richard Matthews (Chairman and founder of Oyster Marine who was competing in Oystercatcher), although disappointed, decided that it was probably best to cancel the 35 mile race. So another course was laid in the bay. However, by the time of the start the wind had gone from one extreme to the other and there was hardly a zephyr. A race was started and after an agonising two hours we slowly drifted towards the first mark. Fortunately the excellent race officer

decided a result was required and shortened the course. Being second to finish – it was another win in the bag for us.

As we were meant to have been in Cabrera that evening, a hastily organised drinks party was given once again on the terrace of the RCN with most people afterwards going their separate ways for dinner at local restaurants. The owners of the two Lightwaves (Chant Pagan and Boysterous of Lymington) kindly invited us to join them at an impromptu dinner party on the dock, which was great fun. Tales of the morning's squall certainly abounded. A fellow competitor, Christabella, was caught whilst in the bay and laid almost flat; unfortunately their main was totally ripped apart. After they recovered, the crew went to the aid of a Spanish fisherman who was in desperate need of help. Fortunately, apart from the odd bimini being lost, damage was limited as most of the boats had not left their moorings. We also heard that there had been a mini tidal wave a couple of miles down the coast at Puerto Portals and quite a bit of structural damage had occurred. (We subsequently heard two guys chatting on the radio a couple of days later telling the story of a chap who had opened the door of his apartment and the wind had picked him up and deposited him on the beach some way away, stripping him naked at the same time!)

The next day, Friday, we raced to Puerto Andraitx. We declared a spinnaker during the roll call as it was going to be a long downwind leg. It was glorious running down along the coastline, then out six miles to the race officer, whose boat acted as an offshore turning mark. We were second around the mark and everything looked hunky dory, but of course sailing can be deeply frustrating and so it turned out that when we were a mile or so away from the finishing line the wind totally died and the whole fleet concertinaed. Against all the odds, the yachts which had tucked themselves under the cliffs managed to get a snifter of a breeze first and we ended up crossing the line amongst the back markers. Such are the joys of sailing. To ease our frustration as we made our way into the delightful port we cut the engine, threw a large fender overboard on a long line and all jumped in for a most welcome swim. Utter bliss!

Puerto Andraitx YC made us most welcome and provided a delicious dinner and disco. Just before midnight the disco had to be curtailed because yet another lightning storm was brewing and the DJ was fearful for his equipment.

Saturday brought another splendid day and the start line was laid off the mouth of the entrance, under the lighthouse. It was a close hauled start and having decided our tactics and six minutes before the start of our class, the race officer postponed the start as the helicopter bringing the film crew had yet to arrive! Fortunately it arrived moments later and First Oboe's cracking start was recorded for posterity. At one point we could hear the chopper but couldn't see it until the rotor blades appeared eerily around our genny only a few feet away! We had a superb 10-mile beat down to Isolete El Toro, just managing to creep around the headland. We then poled out the genny and reached back down the coast to the breakwater near Torre de Pelaires for the finish. Another wonderful day's racing.

As on every day we plunged into the inviting swimming pool back at the RCN where everyone gathered for tales of the day's events.

The final dinner and prizegiving was held at the RCN. Richard Matthews introduced the Minister of Sport, Senor Pepotte Ballester (an Olympic Gold Medallist in the Tornado Class at Savannah) who presented the prizes. I am thrilled to say our table was soon groaning with prizes – a mounted brass Lewmar winch, magnums of champagne, various items of clothing. Class 1's winner was Starry Night – a locally owned 68 which had competed in all three Caribbean regattas and both Med events. Class 2's overall winner was First Oboe! Anthony and Jo were presented with a magnificent silver trophy – this was soon filled with champagne and we circulated around the tables of our newly made friends. I must admit to wondering how Richard Matthews truly felt about a 15-year-old Oyster 435 beating all the larger, newer designs!

The following morning brought a number of departures – some sailed away (with a few hangovers), some flew home. We headed towards a tiny rocky island for a day of swimming and relaxing. In the evening we

sampled the tackiness of Palma Nova – not to be recommended but an experience all the same! Rowing back to the boat at 23.30 hrs, Jo and I commented on the hazy moon – not a good omen....and sure enough at 02.30 hrs the wind and rain hit us! We pulled the anchor up and headed slowly across the bay to Puerto Portals to seek shelter for the remainder of the night. Even at that time of morning we could see a number of crews on mega yachts in the marina anxiously putting out extra mooring lines. The next day's forecast was not good so we hastily headed back to Palma where we found a warm welcome from a couple of the Oysters which were still there. After a quick dip in the pool, Ackers and I headed for the airport, leaving Anthony and Jo planning their next day's trip to Porto Colom, then Menorca, followed by Sardinia, Corsica and beyond. What a lovely life!

Round Ireland without a fridge by Hugh Caldwell (Mons Meg)

The first of two articles on Hugh Caldwell's singled-handed circumnavigation of Ireland in his Contessa 32, Mons Meg.

Mons Meg, in all respects provisioned and ready for sea, left Northney Marina at 06.40 hours on Thursday 26 June 2003 with only her usual skipper, foredeck hand, engineer and cook on board, i.e. solo.

A light easterly breeze met us as I made sail in the Sweare Deep. This quickly freshened as we headed down the Emsworth Channel, reaching 23 knots at one point, the strongest wind of the day. It was not to last.

I headed out from West Pole to pass south of the Wight, and by the time we had reached Bembridge Ledge, the engine was running. It was off, and on again, before we reached St Catherine's Point, where the genoa was furled in a light, now heading, wind. By this time the rather grey morning had given way to sunshine. Lunch was taken, and in the early afternoon I

took advantage of the calm conditions to top up the fuel tank. The day continued with intermittent use of the furling genoa to assist the engine.

During the afternoon I motor-sailed over what appeared to be a rather large dead octopus. The first indication was a scrunching noise under the keel. Then I could see, weltering in my wake, a mass of yellow and black tentacles extending to a diameter of 10 or 12 feet. Possibly it had been trawled up and discarded by some fishing boat. I was thankful that my new feathering prop appeared to be undamaged.

By five the wind had veered to NW three to four, and the engine could mercifully be shut down for a while. The evening forecast included a strong wind warning for the coast between Start Point and Land's End – unlikely to concern me for a while. The roast beef went into the oven at half-past six, and dinner was duly served at eight.

The wind by that time had come due west, three to four, and I was hard on it, heading 310 degrees magnetic. As the evening darkened into night, it dwindled, and at one in the morning of Saturday I had to restart the engine – this despite a forecast of south-west veering north-west, four to five, occasionally six. I was able to stop the engine at half-past two, and remained on port tack with a modest breeze for the rest of the night.

In the small hours, I was annoyed by a very brightly-lit object dead on the bow. At first, I took it for a fishing boat with working lights (there were others around), but it remained on the bow for about an hour, seeming to get no closer. Eventually, I did come up with it; but I had to pass within two hundred metres, shielding my eyes from the dazzling glare of dozens of amber and blue lights, to make out that it was a heavy lift vessel (high fo'c'sle, high poop, low well-deck between). Possibly it was the ship used to bring home the holed naval destroyer from Australia. Anyway, there it was, anchored (I presume) miles out in Lyme Bay, making sure nobody ran it down. There really was no justification for such a grotesque display of candlepower – it was impossible to see if any anchor or navigation lights were set.

It was time to decide on my immediate destination. Dartmouth would have meant a tack south against a foul tide. The Torbay ports would have been a possibility, and it would have been just about light by the time I reached any of them; but I did not really fancy the hassle of finding a marina berth at that hour, particularly as all I needed was a few hours' sleep. Reference to Reeds suggested Babbacombe Bay among other possible anchorages – easy access, no nasties, and shelter from south to north-west (the wind was still south-west). So in we went, stowing sails and readying the anchor.

It looked a very pleasant little place as I motored gently into the flat calm of the bay. I could remember visiting Babbacombe with my mother more than 50 years previously. There is a short funicular railway to take holidaymakers from the beach to the village above. The latter boasts three churches (two spires, one tower, all good seamarks). There was plenty of room to anchor, clear of a few small-boat moorings, and I dropped my hook in about eight metres, allowing for three metres fall of tide, just before six in the morning. Having dug it well in and hoisted a ball, I crashed into oblivion until 09.30 hours.

I awoke, surprisingly refreshed, to the sounds of a party of small schoolchildren exploring the beach a couple of hundred metres away. It had rained heavily as I slept, but by the time I had breakfasted and weighed anchor, the day was turning sunny. Wind had been promised in the morning forecast, W or SW increasing to five or six at times, but as I sailed south past Torbay, Berry Head and Start Bay (outside the Skerries) it was easy sailing in the lee of the land. There were gusts, funnelling through the gaps in the hills, but the sea was smooth.

Approaching Start Point, I took a precautionary reef in the main, and donned full wet gear, although it was still difficult to believe that the wind could be that much stronger at the headland. But my instincts proved correct. As we headed out past the lighthouse, the breeze came up and up, ultimately to 25 – 26 knots. With a little of the west-going tide still running, the seas were quite impressive, too. I have to say that Mons Meg performed very creditably, riding the seas hard on the wind and going fast – 5 ½ knots.

The wind freed as we came round the headland, so that we seemed to have the lighthouse on the beam for a long time. We had more or less cleared the worst of the tide-race when it finally dawned on me that with the wind now a “dead noser” for Plymouth, and the tide now (15.00 hours) about to turn foul, I had no hope of reaching that port before midnight at the earliest. With only three hours' sleep in the past 30, this did not seem a sensible undertaking. So, helm over, surf back through the overfalls, and head for the Dart!

A mobile phone call secured me a berth at Darthaven Marina, where I arrived just as the last steam train of the day was leaving for Paignton. The wind had funnelled ferociously out of the river mouth, but round the corner on the Kingswear side it was relatively peaceful. I had a shower, a salad supper, and was thankful to turn in early.

The morning of Saturday 28 July dawned bright, clear and calm, and the forecast spoke of variables, becoming SE four to five. The fuel tank was topped up from cans, and the water tank refilled. I was underway before nine, this time crossing Start Bay inside the Skerries Bank to take advantage of any south-going eddy. It was motoring all the way. The popple off Start Point was a pale shadow of the previous day's nastiness.

The tide was building under us, and we soon cleared Prawle Point, Salcombe entrance and Bolt Head and Tail. The wind was southerly, therefore free; but it was light and remained so all day. Both main and genoa were set, but to maintain a reasonable speed the engine was running at modest revolutions.

Our destination was now Falmouth, and our track took us south of the Eddystone lighthouse, which was surrounded by sea-angling motor boats. Plymouth Sound opened and closed again, far to the north. It was a pleasant but uneventful day's passage, and we made good time to St Anthony's Head without burning an excessive amount of fuel.



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There are three marinas in Falmouth, two adjacent to the old town and one half a mile further up the Penryn river. I chose the middle one, the Visitors Yacht Haven, where there are no finger pontoons: yachts raft up on the main pontoons. I managed to insert Mons Meg into a gap alongside the pontoon, with no more than a foot clearance each end. It being by now 20.30 hours, the marina office was closed, so there was no shower that evening.

Sunday was essentially a lay-day. Having taken that much-needed shower, I went shopping for food, and also topped up the talk-time on my mobile phone, ready for the wilds ahead. This mobile is a new one (its predecessor having succumbed to rainwater while I was cycling) and I'm rather taken with it. It seems to stay charged for a week at a time, works seven miles out at sea, and doubles as an alarm clock. It is also small enough to fit comfortably into a trouser pocket.

Falmouth has a new and much-acclaimed maritime museum. I wandered round to look at it in the afternoon, but it was within half an hour of closing time, so I deferred a full visit to a later date. It started to rain heavily as I headed back to the boat, where I got to work on a two-day shepherd's pie. The first instalment went down very well!

THE SCILLIES, AND WESTWARD

I was up early on Monday 30 June and leaving the Yacht Haven at 06.15 I motored up the Penryn River to Falmouth Marina where, I had been assured, diesel was available "24/7", as they say in America. I filled everything, topped up the engine oil, and headed back out of Falmouth Harbour under power, setting the main as I went.

Off the Manacles, I was able to set the genoa, and stop the engine. The Lizard was reached by 10.30, and thence it was an easy fetch, with a southerly breeze and a fair tide, to the Spanish Ledges buoy, 40 miles distant. By the time I reached it, at 17.40 hours, the westering sun was making it difficult to pick out the seamarks, and the now foul tide was

kicking up some chop. But there was no great problem in rounding the southern end of St. Mary's, and motoring up into the anchorage off Hugh Town.

There are said to be 35 visitors' mooring buoys there, and I was pretty disgusted to find that they were all apparently occupied. The harbourmaster had gone home for the night, so I was forced back on to my own resources, i.e. the anchor. I dropped it about a cable WSW of Newford Island, well out from the shore and closer to the rocks than I would have liked, but with other craft anchored to the south I had no choice. St Mary's Pool has a dubious reputation as an anchorage – the holding is said to be poor in the sand – but I was lucky in that it turned out a quiet night. I was ready for the second instalment of my shepherd's pie, and I slept pretty well despite some rolling.

I was up at dawn to a near calm, ready for the big hop to Ireland. I was quite content to have little wind as I motored out of the Scillies by the NW passage. With the heavy Atlantic swell rolling in to a shoaling bottom, this could be a pretty unpleasant spot in anything above a four, I fancy.

The forecast was for light and variable, followed by NW four to five, dead on the nose for Crookhaven, my intended landfall. And that is what transpired. The north-wester set in about half past ten, and for the rest of the day it was pure sailing to windward in wind strengths of three to five – 23 knots apparent was the highest I can remember. The seas were what you would expect, about 50 metres between crests and about two metres in height. I rolled the jib in and out, and took a reef in the main at one point, resolving to keep it in overnight as a matter of prudence. But by 18.00 hours the wind eased off, the reef was shaken out, and by seven I had started the engine and furled the genoa.

I made a number of motor-tacks as the wind shifted, and by 23.00 I was on starboard, heading 320 degrees compass, and could make sail and stop the engine. There was another short spell of motoring around three in the morning, by which time I had made good half the distance from the Scillies to Crookhaven, which is 140 miles.

The story of the later forenoon (Wednesday 2 July) was of progressive heading on starboard tack. About 10.30 hours, I tacked on to port and started the engine. Shortly after noon, when still 25 miles off the Irish coast and about 40 from Crookhaven, I decided to redirect to Castlehaven, one of a number of ports suggested by Reeds. It was a pleasant afternoon's sail in.

The whole of the Celtic Sea had been remarkably free of shipping – one yacht on the first day, and later, three fishing vessels, were all I saw.



Mons Meg anchored at Castlehaven. Photo: Hugh Caldwell

I reached the entrance to Castlehaven at four in the afternoon. The entry is straightforward, and the Colonel's Rock on the starboard side was clearly visible. I brought up about half past four, under sail only, on the Castletownshend (west) side of the estuary, to avoid the thick bed of weed which is said to cover the ground in mid-channel. (A large British yacht, entering later, gathered a thick crop and failed to find a hold.)

I had contacted Maggie by mobile when seven miles offshore, to inform her of my impending arrival. This was fortunate, because my anchorage was a "dead" spot telephonically. In every other respect it was delightful, a small village with a stone-built church above (an Anglican one, oddly enough), a single shop, four pubs and a rowing-club down by the waterfront. The lads (and lasses) were out for their evening training in coxed-four skiffs, rather more robust craft than those seen usually in British waters. This sport appears to be very popular in Ireland – I was to see similar boats in most of the other ports and anchorages I visited.

I concentrated on cooking myself a celebratory tinned haggis and clapshot (potato and swede mashed together), and turned in at nine.

The following morning, I inflated my Avon dinghy and rowed ashore. (I don't carry an outboard on these longer solo trips, partly to save weight, but mainly to avoid having petrol on board.) I had a quick look round, filled a couple of water containers from a tap on the key, disposed of my rubbish, and bought some food. While looking round the church, I exchanged a few words with an American couple, whose deeper-draught yacht lay further down the harbour. They had sailed over from Halifax, Nova Scotia, and were working their way east along the southern Irish coast.

Returning to Mons Meg, I lashed my dinghy half-inflated on deck, and got my anchor up at about two in the afternoon, stowing it in the bow fairlead as planned. I set off west, making a detour through Baltimore Harbour. I passed to the west of the Lousy Rocks, a reef encumbering the centre of that roadstead, and left it by the slightly tricky northern passage into Long Island Bay. Passing between Hare Island and Sherkin Island, and then south of the three Calf Islands, we tacked north and west by turns to reach the entrance of Crookhaven. The Alderman Rocks, marked by a north cardinal beacon, were left safely to port as I tacked in.

Crookhaven is essentially a sea lough protected from the north by the Mizen Head peninsula itself, and from the south and west by a smaller peninsula, extending ENE from the main peninsula. A still smaller

peninsula, Rock Island, partially protects the entrance from easterly winds, and has a surprisingly substantial lighthouse on it. The lough is about two miles long by half-a-mile wide, with treeless rocky shores rising to about 160 metres on the north side and 50 metres on the south. Crookhaven village with its pier is on the south side of the lough, and despite being one of the remotest settlements on the Irish mainland, is a much more lively place than Castletownshend, at least during the summer season. It has two or three pubs, two restaurants, a sailing club and a small shop.

So much so, that although there were about 18 visitors' mooring buoys, all were occupied when I arrived at eight in the evening. So I anchored in about six metres, dug the hook well in under power, and cooked my dinner.

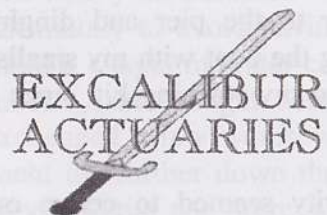
I decided to make Friday a lay-day for replenishment. First, I got my anchor, and picked up one of the large visitors' buoys, which had been vacated that morning. This was much closer to the pier and dinghy pontoon. Then I had a dhobi session, festooning the boat with my smalls. Finally, ashore in the dinghy, with cans and also my washing kit, since I reasoned that a sailing club must mean showers.

Much of the local economic and social activity seemed to centre on O'Sullivan's Bar. There I paid €5 for my mooring, had my diesel cans filled, and also obtained a shower token for the sailing club. At €4.00 for five minutes, this was to be my most expensive shower ever, but I saved it for later in the day. O'Sullivan also ran the shop next door, where I bought a few stores.

I had a pre-lunch pint in the bar, and, as often happens in Ireland, got talking to another customer. Interestingly, he turned out to be a member of the Quoile River Sailing Club in Strangford Lough (opposite corner of Ireland), where I had spent a day or two during my trip round Britain in 1996. We had one or two acquaintances in common. His name was David Moore, and on this occasion he had left his 36-foot yacht back home and was caravanning with his family.

Before my shower, I took a walk out towards the headland, and watched the Laser 2 Irish Nationals (12 boats in all) sailing out in the main bay. Crookhaven Sailing Club was hosting the event, so I made sure of getting back for my shower before the rush started!

I rowed my stuff out to Mons Meg, did some planning for the next day, and changed into slightly posher gear before going for my first proper meal ashore since the start of the trip. O'Sullivan's were not into serious cooking, and had a power failure, so I went next door but one, to the Lazy Waves restaurant, where I had two excellent courses, really amazingly good cuisine for such a small and remote village. It wasn't cheap, but it was well worth it. After a nightcap back at the bar, I returned early on board, ready for a six o'clock start in the morning.



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THE SKELLIGS, VALENTIA, THE BLASKETS AND THE DINGLE PENINSULA.

I tried to slip my Crookhaven mooring under mainsail, but there was not enough wind. So motoring it was, and continued so for the best part of the day. The forenoon was chilly and overcast, but dry at least, and it brightened up after lunch. We were round Mizen Head by 07.30 hours, heading across Dunmanus and Bantry Bays towards Dursey Island. Both of these bays are cruising grounds in their own right, and I was sorry to miss out on places such as Glengariff and Bearhaven, but my time was limited and these bays go in a long way.

I now had to decide whether to go through the narrow but exciting Dursey Sound, with its overhead ropeway capable of transporting "two men and a cow", or round the headland. There was nothing in it for distance, but a strong adverse tide should have been meeting us in the narrows, and I decided to go outside, though I was not really aware of any foul tide during that day. We seemed always to have about a knot with us.

After Dursey, and lunch, a slight detour was made to the island of Skellig Michael, which is not often seen in such smooth, now sunny, weather or such good visibility. On the way, we had fly-pasts of quite large formations of gannets; these magnificent birds nest in huge numbers on Little Skellig, which is white with their droppings, and said to be the second largest gannetery in the world.

There were quite a few anglers' boats drifting around in the sunshine near Skellig Michael (far too deep for normal anchoring), and there was also a steady stream of launches bringing tourists out to the island and dropping them off at the pier. There seemed to be dozens on the island. I remembered making this same trip with my father and brothers in 1959 in a small open fishing smack with a single cylinder paraffin engine and a tan lugsail right aft for steadying, on a much less pleasant day.

Skellig Michael is spectacularly precipitous in appearance, and is also notable for its early (600 AD) monastic settlement of beehive huts and an oratory. These remains have survived well for 1,400 years. What it must have been like to live summer and winter on that storm-blasted rock is difficult to imagine. No doubt the monks kept a few goats, but there is almost no level space on which to grow anything. Keeping the community supplied must have been a job and a half!

Obviously, there was no question of my landing this time. I viewed three sides of the island, and then set a north-easterly course for the north coast of Valentia Island, nine miles distant. There are two ways into Valentia Harbour, the roadsteads sheltered by the island, apart from the Portmagee channel which involves a lifting bridge. The main entry, covered by a sectored light, passes to the west of Beginish (Little Island), while the other, via Doulus Bay, lies to the east of it. I chose the latter, since it was not much past low water, and the main entry would have involved the passage of a shallow bar (Caher Bar), at the mouth of the Valentia River. The navigation, though, was trickier by the chosen route, so I had plenty of waypoints loaded.

The scenery all the way along this stretch of coast is majestic. On the north side of Beginish there is a cliff of basalt columns like those on the west of the Trotternish peninsula of Skye, or at the Giants' Causeway in Antrim, which I hoped to see later in the trip.

The passage up the Valentia River, once past the very dangerous Passage Rock, was still tricky in the strong ebb, since the transit poles are anything but conspicuous, and there are many of them. There is a red port-hand beacon: once past that, it is probably best to keep to the centre of the river and ignore the transits.

The small new marina at Cahersiveen is on the starboard (southern) side, and the entry point is at the upstream end, not easy to spot as one approaches. The gap between the end of the outer pontoon and the rock berm is quite narrow and difficult to negotiate in the strong cross-stream.



Mons Meg entering Doulus Bay. Photo: Hugh Caldwell

I came in with some elan therefore, and partly because of this, and partly because of the shortness of the finger, I hit the main pontoon a bit sooner and harder than expected. But thankfully, only superficial paint damage.

Sunday dawned wet, with a strong SW wind warning, so I decided to stay put and do some planning. At this point in the voyage, I was faced with rounding the Dingle Peninsula via the Blasket Sound, and then a long hop to the Aran Islands off Galway Bay. There is shelter in the Shannon, once past the tide race, but many miles would be lost going in and coming out.

(To be continued)

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Please send this form to the Secretary: Pam Marrs, 42 Bracklesham Road, Hayling Island, Hants PO11 9SJ.

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Boats on the CCRC Spring Cruise 2003 motoring out of Honfleur harbour. From left, Mons Meg, Petra, Charisma, Sycorax and Green Pepper.

Photo: Jacky Black



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