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SOUTH COAST LATE SUMMER RALLY 2ND 3RD SEPTEMBER 2017

Jon Spencer

It was just four boats that gathered at this outpost of the Royal Southampton Yacht Club, on the Beaulieu River, at Gins Farm. With reduced boat numbers, we were all able to berth on their Club pontoon to enjoy our pre-supper drinks on board WIDGEON and the alongside pontoon. Due to other commitments Richard Saunders, our South Coast Organiser, was unable to join us but it was good to have some new faces around the dining table later in the Club House.

Boats in attendance were Victoria 30 WIDGEON, Tim and Dee Clarke; Victoria 34 RUBY STAR, Guy Warner with his crew, son-in-law Simon and grandson Adam; Frances 34 ALBERTINE, Jon and Lynda Spencer, and Victoria 30 GRACIOUS LADY, Nick and Bridget Hiller. We were joined by Andrew Gleadle, the winner of the Victoria Cup for 2017, in his very smart tender from PANACHE his Frances 26 sloop that he keeps moored in the river just a little further upstream. We were also joined by Peter and Jenny Cosker, and Sue Doyle who all arrived by road.

We all had plenty of stories to exchange from Sue with her cruise to the Scilly Isles, from Guy with his trip to South Brittany via Jersey, from Jon and Lynda and Nick and Bridget with their experiences of the Limehouse Rally, and from Andrew with his memories of the Round the Island Race. Guy Warner's crew

of Simon and Adam, who have sailed with him on most of his previous boats, obviously enjoyed their trip on RUBY STAR via Newtown Creek, and Simon rated her sea motion as excellent and had really enjoyed “getting her in the groove” on their trip up from Portsmouth. Adam was just relieved to have received some good GCSE results which propel him onto his “A” level course which starts shortly.

When Lynda and Jon visit the Beaulieu River they usually pick up a visitor’s buoy (all of which are marked with a small yellow wooden tag with a “V”) close to the Beaulieu River Sailing Club to watch the activities of the occasional kingfisher, a marsh harrier, the odd seal, and a wealth of other sea and wading birds. However, rafted up on the Club pontoon they were not expecting a visit from a red legged partridge which had to be moved from its perch when Guy and RUBY STAR arrived.



On the Sunday morning, most of us were heading home: Tim and Dee to Marchwood, Guy to Port Solent, and Jon and Lynda back to the Hamble. For Nick and Bridget, it was the beginning of a cruise to Dartmouth and the West Country about which we will hear in due course. As usual for this time of the year the British weather provided us with bright sunshine and light winds on Saturday, and a fresh southerly and rain for the trip to our home ports.

New Members - please welcome the following new members.

James Sumberg with Frances 26 Cutter LOUISE based in Newhaven, Charlie Grossie with Victoria 34 Cutter ANITRA based in Portrush Harbour, John Angell with Victoria 26 BONNY FLIGHTY based in Lytham, Richard and Patricia Milnthorpe with Frances 26 Sloop CALVA based in Emsworth Yacht Harbour and William Whyman who is still looking for a Victoria Yacht to sail on the East and South Coasts.

Limehouse Shadows by James and Heather Melville

Editor: After the article about the Limehouse Rally in the previous Newsletter, which only showed moored boats in the basin, James and Heather were kind enough to send a link to give access to their photographs, over 50 of them! We will show just a few of them here. One other thing, there are no titles so you have to guess where they were taken.



TUI's Jester Azores Challenge (2016) by Colin Reid

It all got off to such a promising start. The Jester boats tacking around in the sparkling sunshine trying to get in position for the start near the Plymouth breakwater; the spectator boat zooming around seeking out loved ones and shouting good luck wishes, taking last photos. Ewen Southby Tailyour's gaffer anchored to the west, and then the bang and puff of smoke and from his rifle, and we were off. A fresh south-westerly breeze, the yachts leaned into the wind and set off. The fleet of 24 yachts quickly started to disperse; most tacked and headed west. I had an idea the wind was going to gradually veer northwest and kept on the starboard tack, heading out into the Channel with only one other yacht keeping me company.



The spectator boat saying goodbye to loved ones

I had been preparing for the Jester Azores Challenge for months. Attracted by the spirit of the Jesters; no rules, no money, not a race; just a group of intrepid sailors with boats up to 30' taking on a challenging voyage for the personal satisfaction and camaraderie of the thing. Tui was ready, all systems working. A recent survey showed her to be in good shape and I had invested in an Iridium Go so I could get up to date weather and be in email contact with family and other Jesters.

As well as getting Tui ready I had been trying to get myself into shape for the trip, going to the gym regularly and brushing up on astro nav.

We'd had a great weekend as guests of the friendly Tamar River Sailing Club where the majority of the fleet gathered, doing last minute preparations and shopping. It was my first Jester event and I was intrigued to meet this singular group of sailors. Many are extremely experienced but wear their

achievements lightly. And there was a friendliness, supportiveness and humour that I liked.

I liked the boats too. Many are 1970's classics; Twister, Achilles, Albin Vega, a junk rigged Kingfisher 26, Vancouver 27, Francis 26 and Tui, Victoria 30. All have vane steering and many have special chainplates on the quarters for rigging a series drogue.



Guy Willing on Frances 26 BLUEGRASS, before the start.
He retired with a broken forestay.

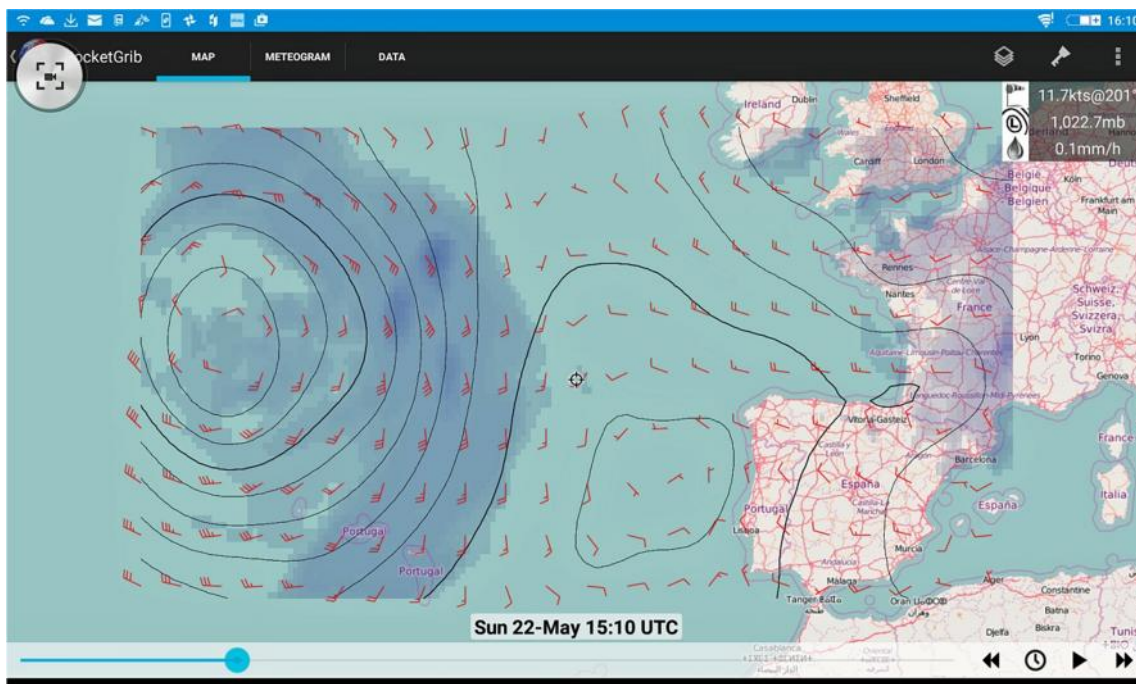
The thing that was niggling me was the bespoke forecast I had received from Weatherweb.com just before I set off down the river for the start. It warned of an unstable situation with strong southwesterlies for at least the next week. Not what I wanted to hear when I had a 1200nm passage to the southwest ahead of me. I generally never set off on a passage on a pre-determined date; I wait until I am happy with the weather and then set off. Well, I could hardly fail to turn up at the start line so I put it aside.

It was perfect weather for the first day and night; a good sailing breeze and calm sea. It was my first proper sail of the year and I had to get used to the motion and the routines of being at sea for a long period. It was a lovely night with the moon shining and making good progress. Tunny stew for dinner, made in advance. The wind did gradually veer so I could hope to pass outside the Ushant TSS on this tack and even point to the Azores. All I needed was for it to carry on like that for the next two weeks.

Some hope. As forecast the wind eventually dropped off to flat calm for a while. I had been sailing near another yacht all night. I could see on my AIS receiver that he was a Jester so I called him up, Lokum, a Jeanneau. We chatted on the VHF and stayed in touch for the next day or two.

Spending the night dodging fishing boats off Ushant TSS was tiring but eventually we were away from it and heading west in a freshening south-westerly. It increased all day to force 6 gusting 7. Eventually I was down to three reefs in the main and the No 3 jib hanked onto the emergency forestay. The sea was getting rough but progress was steady. Lizzie-G, another Jester gradually overhauled me to my annoyance, but it was nice to be sailing in company. My sailing is mostly rather solitary. When we couldn't see each other we were keeping in contact on VHF with the yachts in range.

I believe in eating proper food at sea and I made smoked salmon pasta that evening, a tradition when I sail with my daughter. It's easy, smoked salmon, mushrooms, crème fraîche. Yum. Nothing keeps the morale up like good food. I avoid alcohol though; it's hard enough keeping awake without that.



The grips showing the low building round the Azores.
It stayed put for about three weeks.

Late that night the wind had veered a bit and I thought I would try the other tack. And that is when it all started to fall apart.

The sea was rough, the wind force 6 to 7 and I was tired. I tacked the boat but somehow I couldn't get her to sail on the other tack. She stalled. This was the first time I had properly used the No. 3 jib so I wasn't used to it. I had no steerage way, the helm was floppy and I was baffled. I could get her going by bearing away but then I was too far off the wind. So I decided to go back to the other tack which had been fine. But she wouldn't tack; I simply couldn't

get the bow through the wind. I bore away, picked up speed, went about but the waves stopped her before she went through the wind and then the strong wind blew her off again. This was driving me crazy. Eventually I decided to take the No. 3 jib down and let out some genoa to get a bit more sail up and more power in the rig. The motion was wild and foredeck was not a nice place to be in the dark. This was seriously not fun. I was clipped on the whole time but still felt very vulnerable with the violent motion and waves sweeping the deck. Eventually I got the sail off and bundled it below. I left the emergency forestay in place as I didn't expect to be tacking, or maybe because I didn't want to wrestle with it in the dark. I let out some genoa and we were off again on the right tack. Relief.

I was tired and wanted to heave-to to get some rest. There was a fishing boat a couple of miles downwind so I needed to get past him before heaving-to. I wanted to be drifting away from him, not towards him. He was ablaze with working lights and I couldn't see his navigation lights, but I was pretty confident he was steaming north, towards me. I set off sailing fast to leave him to starboard. Big mistake, I shouldn't have assumed anything but carefully checked with the binoculars and on the AIS to be sure which way he was heading. As I got close it suddenly dawned on me that he was heading east and I was sailing right across his bows. I pushed down the helm to go about and Tui responded, but the emergency forestay was still up and the genoa got fouled on it. I was effectively hove-to, dead in the water and with no steerage way. With the trawler closing steadily I called him on the VHF and said I had no steerage way and couldn't get out of his way. He responded that he couldn't change course, he had a trawl out and if he changed course he would foul a wreck. I had to get the engine started. Because of the big seas I had shut off the seacocks on the exhaust and the engine intake. To get to the exhaust I had to rapidly get stuff out of the lazarette, remove the loose floor panels and grope around in the dark trying to find the seacock. I found it, opened it and the intake and hit the engine start. It fired up- relief. I turned away from him at the last moment, got some sea room and sorted out the genoa.

That was the closest I have come to losing Tui, on that wild dark night in the South West Approaches. I have a feeling that fishermen sometimes have some unflattering things to say about yachts and whatever this fisherman had to say about me was totally justified; I really blew it that night.

I motored well away from him, got Tui hove-to and went below. The peace being hove-to was extraordinary. Despite the wild scene on deck with big seas

and strong wind, the cabin was an oasis of calm. The intense driving motion and sound when sailing hard to windward were replaced by relative quiet and a gentle motion. I was shaking with tension and tiredness. I got off my waterproofs for the first time in a couple of days, lay down with a blanket over me and got some blessed sleep. Not for long of course and I still had to keep watch every now and again. But sleep I did.

Before I turned in I sent a brief email to Weatherweb asking for their latest take on the situation. When I woke up I lay for a while considering the options. There was a reply saying that there would be strong to gale force southwesterlies for the next week or so. And more worryingly there was a major Atlantic low forming over the Azores that was expected to move to Biscay. This could bring storm force winds. Not a happy prospect. I was prepared for some bad weather and gales on the passage, but not storm force winds or having to beat into strong to gale force winds for 1200nm. I was doing this for the challenge of course but also for pleasure. This wasn't the sort of forecast I would normally set off with on a long passage. The obvious option was to head back to shelter and it would be a fast downwind sail to Falmouth. I lay there for a bit longer reluctant to act, then roused myself, got toggled up and went on deck. It was a bleak scene in the early morning light, big seas and strong wind. I looked in the direction of the Azores and I looked towards Falmouth and somehow the decision was made. All the months of preparation seemed to count for nothing in that moment. I got Tui sailing with three reefs in the main and a scrap of genoa and we were off! Sailing downwind for a change, tearing along on a course to Falmouth and shelter.

I started to write an email to my family telling them what I was doing. I hadn't been seasick or even queasy up to that point. But one look at the tablet did it. I scrambled into the cockpit and threw up repeatedly over the side. All that nice smoked salmon pasta was wasted. This was only the second time in my life that I have been seasick, the other time on an Atlantic crossing in a memorable gale off Newfoundland.

It continued to blow 25 to 35 knots and the sea really built up. It was a magnificent scene. The sun shone, the spray was blowing off the breaking tops of the waves. I was feeling pretty low, fed up at turning back, weak from tiredness and lack of any food inside me. I took lots of sips of water so as not to get dehydrated and spent a lot of time lying on the berth below, trying to remember what it is I actually like about sailing. Every 10 to 15 minutes I opened the hatch and had a look round. It was impossible to keep a good

watch. The waves were so big that I could only see as far as about the second or third wave away from me. The QE II could have been half a mile away and I wouldn't have seen her. I relied on AIS and radar to see what was about which was not a lot. The cockpit felt exposed with the big seas. I clipped on before going out of the cabin and kept the washboards in. The occasional breaking wave hit the boat but she felt solid and secure.

Time went by, another day and night. I started to nibble dry oatcakes and finally tackled some muesli. That was better. Eventually I was hungry and cheese on toast was heavenly. I was feeling better, the weather moderated a bit and the Lizard wasn't too far away. A few hours later I dropped the hook in Falmouth.



The only damage to Tui was the Jester Challenge sticker.

The low that Weatherweb had warned me about developed into a huge, deep depression that stayed around the Azores for 2-3 weeks with gales and storm force winds. Of the 24 yachts that set off in the initial group, 19 turned back due to weather and damage. I was bitterly disappointed but feel I made the right decision for myself in turning back. A hardy few battled on and I take my hat off to them. They are an inspiration.

Price reduction for SHEBECA but only for association members

Simon Fayers has decided to reduce the asking price for his Frances 26 Sloop, SHEBECA to just £17,500 but only for members of our association who deal with him directly; no brokers involved.

SHEBECA is based in the Helford River, Cornwall and Simon may be contacted by telephone: 01326 290644 or by e-mail: s.fayers1@btinternet.com.

Annual Luncheon and General Meeting

A reminder that the association's Annual Luncheon and General Meeting will be held on Sunday, 26th November in Linden House, home of the London Corinthian *Rowing and Sailing Club*. Linden House is about half a mile upstream of Hammersmith Bridge on the Middlesex shore of the River Thames.

Meet your fellow members in the first floor bar overlooking the river, sit down to a three-course meal in the Commodore's Room and finally deal with the business of the association in the Captain's Room.

Contact the Hon. Secretary, Jon Spencer by telephone: 01489 581622 or by e-mail: jon.fairwinds@btinternet.com.

Shadow Rally to Cookham



Shadow 26, COSWECAN



Shadow 26, JOLLY OLLY



Dining at the 'Ferry'



3 Shadows; COSWECAN departs leaving JOLLY OLLY and WINE DOWN TIME