



Islander April 2009 Technology Update

Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta – high tech or low tech that is the question

Sadly, I am having a really tough time writing this in a garden cottage looking over Galleon beach at the entrance to English Harbour in Antigua with a row of white sails dotting the horizon, all competing in the last day of the Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta.

It is a four day regatta and I have sailed on two very different yachts over the first three days. I am sadly missing the final day on the water. Tropical Antigua's crystal-clear aqua seas and cloudless skies never fail to provide idyllic Caribbean sailing and it has been true again for this event.

I have been struggling to motivate myself to write this editorial on technology over the last week with, day by day, a lot less interest in technology and an ever increasing interest in rum punch until yesterday whilst sailing on the magnificent 139' ketch Rebecca, built in Pendennis in 1996, which is packed to the brim with advanced sailing systems, I suddenly had some inspiration. Rebecca was in total contrast to the first yacht I sailed on in the first two days of the regatta. This was Petrana, Paul Deeth's lovely 50' Robert Alden designed ketch, built in 1965 which was very low tech.

Rebecca was awesome. Yesterday, Race 3, is known as "The Cannon". For all yachts it starts off with four, full speed, reaches north to south, to a mark 6 miles towards Gaudeloupe. We were in the Spirit of Tradition Class A, racing against Velsheda, Ranger and Windrose. We had a great start and then thundered off on a close reach for 6 miles at about 14 knots. At the first mark we had left the two J's in our wake. At the end of the fourth reach, after 24 miles, Velsheda was over 4 minutes behind on the water. On handicap we had to give Velsheda two minutes per hour, so we were only just marginally ahead. Then we had to beat upwind and the J's are masters at upwind sailing. Very soon our advantage had been eaten away. After corrected time we ended up third.

However at the very end of this race we lost the hydraulics which makes any change of course impossible. As compared to Petrana the yacht only has winch handles for opening deck lockers. Everything else is hydraulic. The hydraulic power back stopped 5 minutes short of the finish line and if Stan Pearson, the helmsman, had not made such a good call, we would have had to tack and we couldn't. As a result we crossed the line, without hitting the mark, but were heading towards the cliffs with only the ability to gybe, also without a main engine.



In comparison on Petrana, our Antigua office manager John and I were the main winch grinders with proper winch handles and gave blood and sweat. Being office based, soft skinned, delicate chaps, we lost skin and blood for the cause. At the end of the second race there was so much enthusiasm and gusto on Petrana that some of the crew, who will remain nameless, winched so hard they snapped the boom at the gooseneck. That was the end of that race.

Petrana has winches rather than blocks and tackle as some of the very old classics do, but Rebecca uses hydraulics. The rig on most yachts is made of wood. On the Spirit of Tradition yachts the rigs are carbon, the rigs are PBO, the ropes and sheets are spectra and there are huge forces generated by the hydraulics and all at the touch of a button. The sailing handling technology varies enormously.

Electronic technology featured strongly on Rebecca with hi brightness colour screens at the wheel providing continuously updated information on the course and distance to the mark, our own performance, wind shifts, wind angle, in fact every internal and external element of information. Alarms went off when we lost the hydraulics just in case we hadn't noticed. However with 30 people on board, there were plenty of helpers.

On Petrana we switched the GPS on once and then off again. We had apparent wind speed and angle and eyeballs.

When we broke the boom on Petrana, as it was made of wood, it was able to be fixed over night. If it had been carbon fibre, unlikely, also it wouldn't have broken anyway, but we would have broken the winch, or the winch man.

So what was more fun? For sheer exhilaration, power and awesome scale you could not beat Rebecca. Watching the tell tales on the sails made your neck ache badly and you needed binoculars to see the top ones. The sound of power emanating from all the large yachts as they hardened up or slackened off is a yachting equivalent of a Formula 1 grunt.

However, when talking simply about fun, the small crew on the smaller boat was more fun. I suppose this is because it is more amateur as opposed to professional.

The Antigua Classic Regatta this year had 55 yachts on the water and is an event that anyone interested in yachting should witness at some time in their life. I would highly recommend it.

Was my oblique reference to technology inspired enough for a column about technology?



VSAT Operator Training course update

Last month I mentioned that we would be running a VSAT Operator Training course in early May. We have this already fully booked and have so much interest that we are looking at running another. If you were interested originally but you were put off by the date please come back to us.

Roger Horner of E3 Systems

For further information on any of the above, please contact us.
email on info@e3s.com and website www.e3s.com

Tel: +34 971 404208/400738/702975

HEAD OFFICE

Palma de Mallorca, Spain

TEL +34 971 404 208
www.e3s.com

FAX +34 971 404 431
info@e3s.com