

The Passagemaker Newsletter

January 2018

Crossing the Atlantic Single Handed



Last month I was heading for Gibraltar to take on a couple more tons of duty free diesel which should see me across the Atlantic to Trinidad. Gibraltar is a great fuel stop. Not only is the fuel the cheapest in the Mediterranean, but you don't even have to clear in and out when you go there. Just fill and go. Indeed, you can cruise quite freely and legally between Portugal, Spain, France and Italy without going to a single immigration or customs office. What a contrast. In Trinidad they want you to clear out of Chaguaramas even if you are only going to Tobago. There you have to clear in again. Imagine if everyone who flew or took the ferry to Tobago from Trinidad had to go through immigration and customs. Why do they pick on cruisers? It's little things like this that make them feel unwelcome. Anyway, enough of that.

On leaving Gibraltar I had to cross the Straights of Gibraltar, probably the busiest international waterway in the world. *Passagemaker*, making all of 2 knots against the current, had to try and weave between dozens of container ships and tankers, all doing 20 knots or more. Nerve racking. Twice I had to turn 180 degrees to get out of the way of some behemoth threatening to run over *Passagemaker*. Once across the Straits it was relatively plain motoring. It was just under 500 nM heading down the coast of Morocco to reach the port of Agadir, to escape some bad weather heading my

way. Now you will have to make the most of these photos as they are the very last ones I have of the Mediterranean.

These are taken of the purpose-built marina in Agadir, compete with apartments, shops and restaurants.



There were women dressed in traditional Muslim gear walking side by side with girls in tight jeans and T shirts.



Check out the posters advertising traditional Arab dancing. Agadir was made famous in modern times by the group Boney M. [Click here for their song.](#)

While hiding from the weather, two very nice German hitch hikers asked if they could get a ride to the Canary Islands, my final stop on the eastern side of the Atlantic. Here they are on day one (before they became seasick!)



Due to the challenge of showing strangers how everything works, where stuff lives, and how to function on a boat, I finally made up my mind up to cross the rest of the Atlantic solo. Yes that's right, single handed. No crew for 3,000 miles.

But first I must tell you about another aspect of our Mediterranean trip. We took a large amount of marketing materials to the Mediterranean to promote Chaguaramas as a cruising destination. Here are some of our observations following countless meetings with cruisers planning to cross to the Caribbean.

- 1: They were very pleased to receive materials, especially the TDC brochures in French and Spanish.
- 2: Most of them had already left their home ports for some months, and were therefore not receiving regular sailing periodicals that might contain information about the Caribbean.
- 3: As far as I could ascertain, we were the first Caribbean country to actually reach cruisers at their departure port with material relevant to their needs.
- 4: At marinas which had a facility for cruisers to leave "Treasures of the Bilge", such as Cartagena, the brochures I left on the table were nearly always gone by the next day. I even had cruisers coming to Passagemaker asking for material.

I had no idea this effort would be so successful. I was overwhelmed by the thirst for information about the Caribbean, indicating a window of opportunity. I always made a point about how Chaguaramas is from hurricanes, and have added a page regarding this to the YSATT web site www.ysatt.com

OK ... back to The Crossing.

On Saturday 13th January 2018, *Passagemaker* cast off her lines at the marina at Gran Canaria, the same thousand-berth marina from which the ARC leaves every November. For the first week the seas were pretty rough due to a high pressure system passing to the north. Then I was able to hand over the job to the Furuno GPS which plotted a great circle route straight to Trinidad.

It was pretty smooth motoring with odd incidents like the engine mounted fuel pump dying, or the alternator adjusting bracket shearing in two with old age. Luckily there are spares for just about everything on board so it didn't take long to do the repair. The only tricky part was working on a seriously hot engine.



Being on your own for nearly 3 weeks is very hard for a gregarious charter like yours truly. But thanks to an amazing smartphone-sized satellite communications device I was allowed to send unlimited texts (all for around US \$300, including the cost of the Garmin InReach unit itself).

So I became just like one of today's kids, always checking to see if I had any texts, writing to friends and family asking what the headlines were in their country on that day. Great fun.

From a practical standpoint, Louise was able to look at the weather that I would meet over the next few days and summarise it for me. Very, very useful. Let me also pay thanks to the keep-an-eye-on-Peter team of Keith, Ian and Ken, as well as all the friends and family that kept in touch. It seemed the moment I stopped to effect some repair, they were texting me to find out if everything was OK. I shall use a word I save for special occasions ... "brilliant"!

Food wise, Louise had made sure I wouldn't starve with lots of frozen meals. Plus, Kalina and Sevdalin, who run the lovely Momentos restaurant in Los Alcazares in Spain, gave me tons of delicious meals. Apart from the odd hiccup it was a smooth crossing. It did seem a little strange going for ten days at one point without seeing another ship. Best not to think about things like that.

The real drama came at the end of the 19 day crossing. Just when had only a few hundred miles to go, I suddenly discovered that ALL the remaining diesel fuel from ALL the tanks had leaked out via a valve that connects the four tanks. It was probably 500 gallons in all, and the bilge pumps had dutifully pumped it all overboard ... All I had left was 16 gallons in the day tank which actually feeds the engine, plus about 25 galls in jerrycans stored on deck. And this I discovered at 2 am in the morning! With sea all around, and no sight of land. So I immediately set a course for Tobago which was the nearest land - if I did run out of diesel, *Passagemaker* would not be so far from assistance.

I slowed the engine right down to the most economical speed. Mother nature lent a helping hand with a current of 2 knots from behind. Frantic calculations showed I might just make it to Trinidad, with maybe 5 gallons left, after a journey of 3,000 miles. Now came the nerve racking part ... checking the fuel consumption against miles covered every hour, and updating calculations accordingly.

Well it's a matter of record now that I did make it to Chaguaramas with just four gallons of fuel left on board out of 1,250 gallons initaly loaded. Guess which valve I will be checking first in future passages!

So, it's over. We made it to the Mediterranean and back. *Passagemaker's* 7th Atlantic crossing, Louise's second ocean crossing and my second crossing, and completing one leg solo. Would I go across in *Passagemaker* again? Hmmm ... Let me have a few rums before I answer that!



Here are a couple of photos of the little impromptu party Louise organised to welcome me home.

[Click here re the article in our Local newspaper \(also attached\)](#)

Once again, a giant thankyou to you and everyone who has supported us both on this project to spread the word about Trinidad & Tobago as the premier Caribbean yachting destination and our previous projects such as taking unwanted school books from T&T to less fortunate students in other Caribbean countries.

Peter

(PS. Don't forget! If you have missed any of our newsletters, you can download any of them by going to www.passagemaker.org and clicking on Voyages.)

Our voyages have been helped enormously by our sponsors and we are proud to mention them here.

