

## Phil and Gillie Hutchinson in *FENELLA*

### Pictures requested, to follow

#### The Dream

My love affair with sailing and the sea, started, when as a boy, I bought my first boat, a Cadet for £30. "As I grew older, I was captivated by the adventure stories of Chichester, Hiscock, Alec Rose and Knox Johnson and yearned for the day when I would set sail off in my own boat.

By the time I was in my early twenties I had bought my first cruiser, a clapped out pine planked sloop that swung on its mooring in Cowes Harbour whilst I tried to work out the next move? Luck was on my side, I had fallen in love with a beautiful brown-eyed girl and managed to persuade her to pack in her job and sail around the world with me

Alas all good plans are subject to change, my Dads' terminal illness and the need to get a job meant that the yacht had to be sold and it was thirty six years and four kids later that we found ourselves back at the London Boat Show buying *Fenella*, our new Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 45, our chosen vessel for entering the Blue Water Rally., Although better known as a Mediterranean cruiser it also had a good reputation as a decent sailing yacht. with a large cockpit and the ability to sail over 6Kts in light airs

The gear on the boat was impressive, with a Sparcraft Mast and rigging, Yanmar 75HP Engine and Harken winches. The hull had been strengthened with Kevlar inlay, bonded to the fibreglass hull. We installed an electric Anderson winch on the coach roof and solar panels on an "A Frame "together with an additional Mastervolt alternator. We added a Spectra Watermaker that enabled us to have showers on alternative days. We enlarged the capacity of the freezer and invested in a good cooker but dumped the microwave. We also had a carbon spinnaker pole for ease of handling for downwind sailing and bought a "Zoom "Zodiac Dinghy with 8HP Yamaha ,enabling us to plane for long distances. For the sake of simplicity we chose not to have a generator, relying on the solar panels and additional Mastervolt alternator but did invest in a battery monitoring system. As extra back-up we also carried a "tow generator "in case all else failed.

The fully battened Mainsail on a Harken track system provided excellent shape to the main and simplified reefing. The poled out Genoa was easily reefed through the carbon pole by using the furler with the electric winch and we had the usual Storm Jib and carried a Gennaker and two spinnakers. We carried spares for most eventualities and hid money and fake Rolex watches around the boat in case of being boarded.

#### THE BLUE WATER RALLY

The Rally starts in Gibraltar and has thirty stopovers and lasts for eighteen months, taking in the Caribbean Islands, Panama, French Polynesia, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, Australia, Eastern Timor, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Djibouti, Egypt, Greece and back to Gibraltar-32000miles in all. By joining the Rally we took advantage of all the organised stopovers with social events and excursions being well planned. More importantly all the bureaucracy was taken care of.

In our Rally there were twenty eight yachts, ranging in size from 36ft to 64ft - Oysters, Swans, Discovery 55, Halberg Rasseys and Cats and generally all the boats performed well although some of the heavier boats would have to motor in light winds.

## BOAT HANDLING AND LIFE AT SEA

We decided early on that we would both have distinct roles and quickly adapted to handling the boat by ourselves to such a point that we would instinctively anticipate each other's movements whilst sailing and manoeuvring the boat. Gillie did all the navigation, docking, finance, customs and paperwork and I was in charge of sails, deck work, engineering, rigging, cooking, water making and power generation.

At sea we had a four hour watch system, that could be modified depending on weather conditions. We learnt early on that we would only need one good meal a day, which was generally taken at 4.00pm before sunset. We had a tradition of having Happy Hour after the evening Radio Schedule. This would consist of nibbles and one alcoholic drink, giving us the opportunity to discuss the day's events and plan for the night sail. Life was far from boring, we had a never ending jobs list, general marine maintenance, oil changes, rig checks and sail trimming. We would play our favourite music on our iPods and have regular movie nights along with celebrating passage milestones by having a curry night or the occasional birthday party. We both enjoyed our reading and had an excellent library augmented by using listening books if the sea became rough. One day would merge into another as we crossed the ocean and the soporific motion of the boat engulfed us in some kind of "suspension time capsule", the days sped by and we lost the sense of time, although everything appeared to speed up as we progressed to our next destination.

We would always celebrate the end of a passage at whatever time, by breaking open a bottle of Champagne accompanied with smoked salmon on brown bread. We always felt great satisfaction and sense of achievement on those occasions.

## THE HIGHLIGHTS

Experiencing our first Moon Rise was somewhat surreal and being buzzed at night by phosphorus torpedoes in the form of dolphins in pitch darkness was truly exciting. Lying alongside a humpback whale in the middle of the night, with its distinctive smell of rotting ocean was unnerving and awesome, especially as it was bigger than us. We were captivated by the amazing night skies and always enjoyed sailing under a full moon but the thrill of hurtling down waves in pitch darkness was right on the edge and always gave me a sense of wonderment. I personally loved the Tradewind experience of the Atlantic and arriving in the crystal blue waters off Antigua was memorable.

We both enjoyed the Panama Canal and as we passed under the Bridge of America's we realised that there was no going back - The Pacific beckons!

The Galapagos were stunning. We swam with turtles and sharks, met up with Lonesome George the giant tortoise before leaving our mail in the barrel at Post Box Bay. The Tuamotus Islands are a unique group of islands created by sunken volcanoes, here the water is crystal blue and the lagoons were magical, full of black pearls!

Remarkably we could see the mountain peaks of Tahiti some 50 miles out and as we approached land we experienced that musky spicy smell of land that is so distinctive. Following Captain Bligh's footsteps we sailed into Matavai Bay at night and as dawn broke we experienced the beautiful site of two Polynesian girls strolling down the beach, no wonder his crew mutinied! The hospitality and friendship encountered in the Pacific islands was exceptional. We loved our sail in flat water inside

the Barrier Reef up the coast of Australia. We were humbled by the Orangutans in Borneo and frightened by the ferocity of the Komodo Dragons in Eastern Timor.

The complete shock of nine foot Wahoo landing in your cockpit, halfway through an oil change whilst at anchor was unexpected and a pleasant surprise, providing for a delicious supper for over thirty grateful people that night at the local restaurant.

## THE DRAMAS

Halfway across the Atlantic we nearly had a serious fire when we connected the Tow Gen to a wrongly wired plug, thanks to help of Hamble Yacht Services -through his quick action, my son Jolyon saved the day!

We experienced our first scary seas in the southern Caribbean with the storm force winds off the Andes causing our first knockdown, in seas, similar to that I'd experienced in the 1979 Fastnet Race. My brave wife Gillie courageously emerged from the aft cabin to relieve a very exhausted husband, it wasn't long for her to adapt to surfing down the waves in steep seas, singing her head off to her favourite rock music.

We very nearly blew up the engine in Tonga when jelly fish blocked our water intake as we were recharging the batteries whilst attending a leaving party ashore. The boat was full of water and had suffered smoke damage but remarkably the engine cylinder head held out!

We very nearly lost the boat in a force Eleven as we sailed between Vanuatu and Australia, when the structural cross beam that held the stern post in place started to crack away from the bulkhead. By hammering in supportive timber we managed to stabilise the situation, despite doing ten knots under bare poles.

Undoubtedly our lives were saved by our good friends, Anne and Julien Whitlock when they rescued us from an armed piracy attack off the coast of Yemen. The attack took place at dusk, close to disused Military Island, in fairly rough weather. The armed pirates had tried to board us but were put off by the difficult seas, Gillie helmed the boat in such a way that it made it hard for them to board - I was waiting in anticipation with winch handle in hand. Julian and Anne gallantly came to our rescue with a determined intent of ramming the pirate vessel mid ships, the pirates had second thoughts and backed off, allowing us to escape into the dusk with our hearts in our throats!

## ANALYSIS OF GEAR

Our Anderson electric winch was so useful, it not only hauled up the sails but did all the reefing and hoisted the dinghy aboard. The solar panels were amazing and kept the freezer going, the Spectra Water maker was trouble free and enabled us to have regular showers and the carbon pole helped with the downwind sailing. We also carried a large Handy Billy, which secured the boom at that point of sail. We carried over 100m of anchor chain for the Pacific and our Lofrans windless was totally reliable throughout the whole trip giving us great confidence in our anchoring. Having a planing dinghy is a great advantage whilst anchoring in remote harbours, the 8HP Yamaha never let us down.

Finally you need a reliable AutoHelm, having ours serviced in St Lucia and Darwin ensured its reliability- it had taken a fair amount of abuse in the storms.

## LESSONS LEARNT

I learnt very early on that to have a happy wife, I should always shorten sail in good time. Always put a reef in at night if you are short-handed. Keep things as simple as possible and sail within your physical limitations, let the boat look after you. During the Atlantic crossing we used our radar to pick up approaching squalls, allowing us to reef in plenty of time. We never rushed our deck work and always talked through our plans before activating them. As a rule we never left the cockpit at night and would only venture forward if there were two of us on deck- we always clipped on. Sadly we learnt you

should never leave your boat with the engine running and if you ever check the water filters we learnt to leave the ignition keys on the lever of the water intake valve.

The joy of sailing over the world's oceans which represents 70% of the world's surface and meeting such a variety of people and cultures was a great privilege. It was a unique experience to sail in these faraway places in our own home - having the boat as our base was akin to sailing round the world in your living room! We soon realised that ninety nine percent of the people in the world are friendly and honest and it's only the very few that cause all the problems - of all the achievements and experiences in my life, this was right up there and gave us a better understanding of the fragile world we are luckily enough to inhabit.

Apart from meeting my wife and raising a family I regard this experience as one of the highlights of my life providing endless stories to captivate the grandchildren.