

Alan and Penny Spriggs in *PENNYPINCHER*



Just as I was nearing the completion of an 18-month assignment in Guernsey and was wondering “What next?” an article appeared in the yachting press about what was to become the first “circumnavigation in company for cruising yachts”, the Europa 92. We joined.

Penny and I decided that we needed something larger than our Beneteau 375 and soon our search led us to an Oyster 46, berthed in Majorca. We sailed back to Guernsey in early 1990 to prepare for the trip – *Pennypincher* was not VAT paid. By October the house in Lymington was let and we set off on a very windy passage to Gibraltar.

After Christmas we were joined by Jacqui and Bryan Hagon who had signed on until our return to the UK and Phil “Hutch” Hutchinson who was sailing with us until the Canaries. As the trade wind route is so well documented elsewhere I shall spare you the details of each sail or course change and restrict myself to a few unusual incidents.

In the Atlantic the inner forestay parted company with the mast and the in-mast furling jammed half rolled up; we were so relaxed that it took four days to decide on a gybe. We had developed a close rivalry with a Hallberg Rassy 46 and, in Panama, they beat us by thirty minutes, which they celebrated by driving through the wooden pier. The canal was great with *Pennypincher* being one of 15 yachts that shared locks together.

What can I say about the Galapagos? Fabulous is an understatement. But we were brought down with a bump a few days out for the Marquesas to hear a Pan Pan call on the SSB as a crew member on a friend's boat had been lost overboard in the dead of night. Although no yachts had been seen for days by dawn eight had arrived at the scene to be directed into search patterns for a day of fruitless searching.

We arrived in Hiva-Oa, Marquesas, to find everything closed as the flight from there to Nuku-Hiva had crashed into the sea killing half of the 22 people on board. The English skipper of a Swan of our fleet survived, saved many others and continued on home to get his spinnakers repaired, returning in Tahiti having recovered from his injuries.

We loved the Marquesas – particularly a wild pig hunt with some locals and their dogs. A local gentleman with impaired intelligence shot the lead dog with his shot gun. We removed some shattered teeth, went back to the boat, radioed a vet we knew was on his yacht 900 miles away and returned with instructions and drugs from our store. They tried to give us a puppy as thanks but we had to decline.



Just before leaving for Tahiti we smelt gas. How the safety training kicks in! Gas off; touch no light switches; hand pump the bilges etc.... An engineer friend was called over from another boat, he quickly found the leak with a lighted match and all was soon fixed. Phew!

We spent a few weeks cruising the islands of French Polynesia before leaving Bora Bora for the kingdom of Tonga on June 16th. Tonga was great fun. A Walter (sic) Weight boxing contest took place where the awards were given out before the final to ensure all stayed for prize giving. We had an audience with the king, sitting down as it is rude to stand taller than him and we swam through an underwater pass into a cave where the atmosphere changes from thick fog to crystal clarity in time with the passing ocean swells.

From Tonga we sailed to Fiji with little incident and thence to Vanuatu where we quickly picked up the local Pidgin English “yumi” means “us” and a “titibasket” is an article of ladies’ apparel. The yacht club was very welcoming until a local, maddened by drinking Kava, started hacking the furniture with his machete whilst shouting incomprehensible threats. After disarming him I handed him over to the police who informed me that he was the ex-Minister of Finance and Industry distraught at having lost his job.

We left Vila and the rally to sail Australia’s Great Barrier Reef later rejoining in Darwin. Bryan and I spent an energetic afternoon in Port Douglas extracting a yacht and terrified crew from a rocky lee shore. We had to hoist all sail to put it on its side after laying anchors to winch it off; the prop being out of the water did not help.

From Darwin we sailed to Bali where, anchored at night, we were almost run down by a ship dragging its anchor. We raised the alarm by taking to our dinghy and banging on their hull with the hammer we had thought to bring. Thus roused, the crew raised anchor and steam only to re-anchor a hundred yards up tide of us. Thanks!

The almost windless trip to Singapore was enlivened by a midnight Mayday call as we entered the Straits. A 700-tonne ship had run on the rocks at Pulau Mingping ripping a couple of holes in her engine room. We felt our way in amongst the rocks collecting an empty life-raft first then another with seven Vietnamese crew aboard. As we made for deeper water with two rafts in tow and crew aboard, we had another call from the ship asking for the return of one as they were worried that if the pumps failed they could need one and they only had had two. That accomplished we steamed for Singapore where the authorities told me, after I had landed my passengers, that I was not allowed to do so, that I should take them out to sea, return them to a life-raft and put out a distress call. Some chance. The next day I was pleased to see that the summit meeting between Bush and Gorbachev had been pushed off the top of the front page of The Straits Times by our little adventure.

A day and a half at sea took us to The Royal Selangor Yacht Club in Port Klang where we joined about sixty yachts for the Raja Muda International Regatta which ended up in Lankawi. Thereafter we sailed to Thailand where Jacqui and Bryan spent Christmas in hospital with dengue fever leaving Penny and me to careen *Pennypincher* for antifouling.

Leaving Thailand on January 5th, with Jacqui and Bryan still pretty weak, we were lucky to be joined by Richard and Barty Rouse, RLYM, who enjoyed a great sail, including our first and only 200nm day, to Galle, Sri Lanka. There we formed a team to play cricket against the local kids on the famous test match pitch and, although losing, a recovered Bryan won the "Top Batman" prize.

On to Djibouti with fabulous wind and fishing on the way and a welcome from the yacht club. The club put on a great dinner of huge steaks. We could not eat them all and my request for a bag to take them back to the boat was eventually understood to mean that I wanted the diminutive waiter to have them. We had corned beef sandwiches the next day.

To begin with, the Red Sea was benign but after a short stop in Port Sudan it was strong head winds all the way with our first gale since Biscay. The Suez Canal was disappointing and for the first time we became stormbound, a sand storm anchored in the Lake of Ismailia as far from the sea as we had been.

Deciding to abort our planned visit to Alexandria, we made Malta, our first Mediterranean stop, then direct to Gibraltar again joined for the trip by our first guest, Hutch. We had a slow cruise into increasingly cold head winds back to Guernsey in mid May where we celebrated tying the knot with a lunch in the GYC during which the club secretary approached our table. "It's Alan Spriggs isn't it?" I nodded, my head modestly lowered to accept the words of congratulation less modestly anticipated.

"You haven't paid your sub"

