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CARIBBEAN REGATTA GUIDE





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CARIBBEAN REGATTA GUIDE

The Caribbean season is about to kick off, with a host of events providing fun for racers, cruisers and holidaymakers...

From the end of January until April the Caribbean International Regatta Circuit pits the cream of the Islands' sailing communities against an array of travelling professional and amateur crews from all over the world. Some of the competition is intense but it's never long to wait for the next party or fun-on-the-beach day.

Fun, fun, fun

From Barbados to Puerto Rico, the racing includes handicap and charter fleets, classic boats and superyachts, multihulls, beach cats and monohulls sailing windward-leeward, offshore (Caribbean 600) and round-the-island courses. All this and the perfect mix of sun, scenery and lively nightlife – what's not to like?

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A growing race, we share an inside view

PHOTO: DANIEL FOSTER/ROLEX*



COVER PHOTO: Sailing in the BVIs (Carlo Bourlenghi/Rolex)

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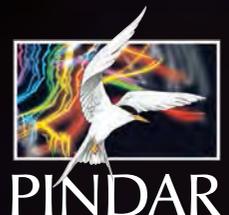




PHOTO: ONNE VAN DER WAL/GRENADA SAILING WEEK

Charter and holiday options

For those not booked on the first flight home, the end of racing at any of the International regattas means cruising on to the next event, chartering locally or just enjoying a break on a beach somewhere nearby. Exploring the Caribbean afloat is by far the most attractive way to enjoy the scenery, especially somewhere with as many islands as the BVI. The Moorings and Sunsail have a wide variety of boats to choose from.

And if beach clubs are more your scene, the beach cats, windsurfers and kayaks at somewhere like the St James Club in Antigua might tempt you into staying put after Antigua Week. Barbados, Puerto Rico and St Barths have plenty of similar options too.

But if chartering sounds a bit sedate for your tastes and you haven't got the time to go walking the docks for a ride on a raceboat, then the sailing (and socialising) packages from companies like OnDeck, or through individual boat owners, could be for you. Different levels of luxury are reflected in the prices but in general, no experience is necessary.

CARIBBEAN REGATTA DIARY

CARIBBEAN INTERNATIONAL REGATTA CIRCUIT 2013

| Event | Date | Website |
|---|--------------|--|
| Triskell Cup, Guadeloupe | Nov 1-4 | www.triskellcup.com |
| St Barths Cata Cup | Nov 14-18 | www.stbarthscatacup.com |
| Course de L'Alliance, St Maarten | Nov 23-25 | www.coursedelalliance.com |
| Mount Gay Round Barbados Race | Jan 21 | www.mountgayroundbarbadosrace.com |
| Super Yacht Challenge, Antigua | Jan 25-27 | www.thesuperyachtchallenge.com |
| Grenada Sailing Festival | Feb 1 | www.grenadasailingfestival.com |
| San Juan International Regatta, Puerto Rico | Feb 1-3 | www.nauticodesanjuan.com |
| Pineapple Cup - Montego Bay Race, Jamaica | Feb 8 | www.montegobayrace.com |
| Jolly Harbour Valentine's Regatta, Antigua | Feb 7-10 | www.jhycantigua.com |
| Puerto Rico Heineken Intl Regatta | Feb 16-18 | www.prheinekenregatta.com |
| RORC Caribbean 600 | Feb 18 | www.caribbean600.rorc.org |
| St Maarten Heineken Regatta | Mar 1-3 | www.heinekenregatta.com |
| Caribbean Super Yacht Regatta, Virgin Gorda | Mar 20-23 | www.superyachtregattaandrendevous.com |
| St Thomas International Rolex Regatta | Mar 22-24 | www.rolexcupregatta.com/index2.php |
| BVI Spring Regatta and Sailing Festival | Mar 25-31 | www.bvispringregatta.org/bvi/ |
| St Barts Bucket Regatta | Mar 28-31 | www.bucketregattas.com/stbarths/index.html |
| St Maarten Classic Yacht Regatta | Mar 29 | www.classicregatta.com |
| Les Voiles de Saint Barth | Apr 8-13 | www.lesvoilesdesaintbarth.com |
| Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta | Apr 18-23 | www.antiguaclassics.com |
| Antigua Sailing Week | Apr 28-May 3 | www.sailingweek.com |

Example Itinerary

OnDeck round trip Antigua-Barbados delivery-and-round-the-island-race package - £670 not including flights or transfers. www.ondeckoceanracing.com

Wed 18 January

AM Depart Antigua for Barbados

Thu 19 January

19:00 Mount Gay 'Red Cap' Party at Barbados Cruising Club

Fri 20 January

10:00 Training day
17:00 Mount Gay Rum Tour and Party at The Mount Gay Rum visitor center

Sat 21 January

TBC Race start
1600 Post-race party at Barbados Cruising Club

Sun 22 January

1900 Regatta Dinner (tickets purchased separately)
2100 Grand Prizegiving, dance and party

Mon 23 January

AM Depart for Antigua arriving Tue 24 PM

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BVIS NATURE'S

Louay Habib shares his experience of the Spring Regatta and the fabulous natural sailor's playground that is the British Virgin Islands

Imagine a tropical paradise, offering safety, seclusion and fantastic blue water sailing... well it exists and it's called the British Virgin Islands. There are over 40 islands in the BVI, some no more than rocky outcrops, but 16 are inhabited with the majority of the population living on Tortola. The archipelago provides a sheltered sailing area called The Sir Francis Drake Channel. Protected by Tortola to the north and a chain of Islands to the east, flat blue water, amazing scenery and warm trade

winds are almost guaranteed from November right through until May. The BVI are a little more difficult to get to from Europe but it is well worth the extra effort.

There are local sailing regattas right through the year but the BVI Spring Regatta and Sailing Festival, which takes place from March 25-31, 2013, is most definitely the highlight of the BVI sailing calendar. Based out of Nanny Cay Marina, Tortola, the week-long occasion actually incorporates three separate events.



PHOTO: TODD VANSCHELE 2012 BVI SPRING REGATTA

LITTLE SECRET

Festival and Match Racing

The three-day sailing festival kicks off with a welcome party at Peg Leg's Restaurant at Nanny Cay. The sailing festival attracts a wide variety of yachts and there is a relaxed, chilled-out atmosphere, suitable for all the family. The 2013 edition has a change to the usual programme. Previously the first race was to Virgin Gorda, however next year the Round Tortola Race is the replacement.

Starting from Nanny Cay, the fleet will pass through The Cut, a narrow

gap between Tortola and St. John before turning north, laying a course for Jost Van Dyke. As the yachts pass Soper's Hole, the breeze can begin to pipe up; but exiting the channel the scenery becomes absolutely gobsmacking. The north coast of Tortola is just as awe-inspiring; the shoreline is sparsely populated and there are a number of excellent beaches. Behind the shoreline the land rapidly rises to Tortola's highest point, Sage Mountain, 1,716ft above sea level. There is virtually no heavy

industry for hundreds of miles and the aquamarine sea is crystal clear; it is an area of astounding natural beauty.

The second day of the festival is also the start of the Gill BVI National Match Racing Championship, comprising two days of windward-leeward racing in IC24s, right in front of the beach. Last year the event was a Grade 3 ISAF status competition, and as such it attracted some top class sailors.

The sailing festival fleet will also be racing. The chain of islands to



PHOTO: TODD VANSICKLE/2012 BVI SPRING REGATTA

the south-east provides a number of racecourse opportunities that are tactically challenging and enchantingly beautiful. The fleet should be back in time to enjoy a sundowner at Nanny Cay while watching the final rounds of the match racing and enjoying a BBQ on the beach.

The last day of the festival is a lay day, in case of any postponements, however, the day is scheduled to be all about fun ashore and on Nanny Cay beach. This includes stand-up paddle

food vendors set up an alfresco dining area, and while the atmosphere is still suitable for children, the evening entertainment gets turned up to full volume with live music and hundreds of people partying into the night.

Racing starts on Friday and concludes Sunday and attracts some of the best local sailors, as well as international competition from other islands, USA and Europe. Up to two races a day are scheduled for classes racing under CSA handicap, and last year the yachts

“Enjoy a sundowner at Nanny Cay while watching the final rounds of the match racing and enjoying a BBQ on the beach...”

varied from an STP 65 and a Farr 400 to light-displacement day boats. Race management is first class and the course area is probably one of the best racetracks that Mother Nature has created.

BVI Spring Regatta

Most of the yachts competing at the festival stay on for the BVI Spring Regatta. The regatta is also based at Nanny Cay but the beachfront lawn undergoes something of a transformation. A number of local

The north-easterly Trade Winds usually blow straight down the Sir Francis Drake Channel. With no depth issues, there is usually a mixture of short windward-leeward races around laid marks and cracking races around Ginger, Salt and Dead Chest Island. Last year there were nine CSA classes, two Bareboat Classes and racing for IC24s and Multihulls.

The Spring Regatta has class trophies awarded at the final prizegiving but without doubt, regatta partner Sunsail donates the most valuable prize. The International Yacht Club Challenge (IYCC) is a competition between all yachts chartered from Sunsail for the regatta. The winner is awarded a free charter for the British Virgin Islands.

Exploring

The BVI Sailing Festival doesn't go to Virgin Gorda next year but it is well worth exploring. Virgin Gorda is located in the North Sound and home to The Bitter End YC and the newly built clubhouse for the Yacht Club Costa Smeralda. The Bitter End has been established for over 25 years and is open to the public. There are moorings right outside The Crawl Pub and there is a restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner at reasonable prices. There is also a great restaurant on the Saba Rock Island with a free ferry service from the Bitter End YC.

One of the most remarkable features of Virgin Gorda is 'The Baths' located on the southern end of the island; these unusual geologic formations echo the island's volcanic origins. Huge granite boulders lie in piles on the beach, forming scenic grottoes that are open to the sea.

Closer to Tortola, Cooper Island has a great beach bar and café and mooring buoys that can be used over night. And if you fancy visiting one of the BVIs' most outrageous bars then Willy T's on Norman Island is the spot for you.

There are no direct transatlantic flights to Tortola – travel involves either going through USA or flying to another Caribbean island. Probably the best route from the UK is with British Airways to Puerto Rico and then a local carrier. Travelling via Antigua is another option.

Although the BVI is still officially a British Overseas Territory, the US Dollar is used everywhere and restaurants and bars have American themes and customs, including tipping. Thankfully, the fast-food companies have yet to overrun the islands and due to its travel complications the BVI do not have mass tourism, however there is a possibility that Tortola may extend the runway at Beef Island to accommodate direct flights, which would substantially alter the way of life in Tortola. My advice is get to the BVI and the Spring Regatta as soon as you can. ■

2013 RORC CARIBBEAN 600

Monday 18th February 2013



"It's freezing cold back home and my sailing buddies should be doing this race. The sailing conditions are just gorgeous and last night on deck in shorts and t-shirt under a carpet of stars a Humpback whale came right up to the boat. Watching the sun go down with the spinnaker up and surf under the hull is a great experience."

Brock Callen - crewman on J122 'Catapult'



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ST MAARTEN WITH PETER ISLER

For two-times America's Cup winner **Peter Isler** a trip to St Maarten means both match racing and coastal courses to navigate, **Neal Pawson** took a chance to jump on board behind him...



Having seen him in action on the match racing circuit, I was keen to get out on the water with Peter Isler when I was offered the chance at last year's Heineken St Maarten Regatta. His ride for the week was the bright red-bowed custom Caribbean racer 'Titan XV', the 75-footer designed by Reichel Pugh and launched by New England Boats in 2009. I decided to 'wing it', jumping into a support boat and chasing 'Titan' my hail provoked discussion and with the prospect of lots of reaching in a decent breeze it was felt that my weight would be of benefit.

'You're not from the National Enquirer are you?' questioned boat captain Scottie Bradford from the wheel, writing for Y&Y rather than an American tabloid got the thumbs up from the back of the boat and I jumped aboard for the final race that would bring the fleet back to Simpson Bay. As we motored round for the start the forecast rain saw everyone not left holding something scattered below. Sails were shifted aft with the breeze up, kites are stopped whilst owners Tom and Dotty Hill caught up on some sleep and Peter Isler and the navigator Artie Means discussed the day's strategy at the central nav station. 



PHOTO: NEAL RAWSON

ABOVE Pre-race crew briefing.

ABOVE RIGHT The rail stacked with full crew plus guests for maximum benefit on the reaching course.

Once the rain abated there was a quick briefing in the cockpit, although the team had already wrapped up the regatta win the aim was to pick off another win, explained Isler. With the wind round to the north giving a power reaching course after we have passed a turning mark off the island of Tintamarre on the north-east corner there is every chance. The boat has a jerky motion as the carbon drum gets bounced around by the waves, only to be dragged back by the large lead torpedo 4.8m below the surface of the water. Scotty calls the hoist of the main as Isler does a bit of old school maths to check his course angles on a set of wet notes before clambering up on to the 'podium' to take the helm. Twin wheels transfer his chosen direction through twin rudders tucked under the back of the boat. Headsail up then bear away and we jump straight up to 10 knots, then BANG! Eyes shoot skywards as the headsail starts descending to the deck, the halyard strop has parted and there is a rush forward to catch the sail. Isler hands over the helm to Tom Hill and walks forward amongst the troops. Problem fixed, Isler keeps Tom on the helm, preferring to stand at his shoulder, the



PHOTO: TIM ZINN/HEINEKEN REGATTA

start is very much seat of the pants from Isler. We run out of distance down the line and end up in the dirt of 'Highland Fling' and 'Rambler' and tack off inshore as the beat takes us up to the head of the island.

'Titan' rounds the mark hard on the heels of the two bigger boats that are engaged in a tussle and 'turn and burn!' 'This is what we came to do!' exclaims a crewmember, peeling to jib-top and staysail and with the rail stacked we start to pull back the longer duo. 'Rambler' tries a bigger sail and drops blow the rhumbline to the mark, then suddenly we are sailing blind as first the Deckman dies in the persistent driving rain then the laptop downstairs fries. Luckily we still have 'Highland Fling' just ahead to confirm our dead reckoning as Jim Allsopp, one of Lowell Norths' original 'Tigers' takes over the helm to give Tom a break.

The right choice

At the mark off Anguilla they gybe set and go for a straight hoist to hold the headed gybe, Isler rubs his hands and grins. We truck at a constant 17-18 knots, and both boats gybe to a close bearing and we're still in touch while 'Rambler', the highest

rated boat, looks a bit dejected just behind. We gybe to split again as 'Highland Fling' spins onto our line and BANG, for the second time today racing is interrupted! The A5 explodes and there is the momentary pause of shock before the guys forward rush to gather the pieces. Shoulders drop in resignation at the back of the boat as 'Highland Fling' seemingly zooms off and 'Rambler' rumbles past.

'What sail?' is the question from the front: A3 is the immediate response from Isler, the debris is cleared and the A3 heads skyward, it seems like an age but in reality there was probably only minutes in it. The A3 is an inspired call, a heavier and flatter sail, it proved to be their lucky penny the previous day and once again as soon as it's up and drawing we leap forward and immediately start reeling back in 'Rambler' and 'Highland Fling'. The grey cloud lifts from the back of the boat and grins return all round.

As we round the passing mark at Basse Terre, the western corner of the island, we head up 15 degrees. Three-sail reaching we storm past 'Rambler' as they have to drop to their headsail and then hold a low course through 'Highland Fling's' lee, who have also changed down. The boat is buzzing as we punch up to 20.5 knots. Tom Hill exclaims: 'It's like God's looking down and saying "you don't want that sail up" and blew it out!' With the rail stacked aft, mainsail fully dumped in the gusts, the island gives Titan a helping hand by offering a wind bend to the penultimate mark. 'Highland Fling' are firmly in our wake. We drop the A3 for the grandstand leg into the finish in Simpson Bay, with 'Rambler' a distant third on the water as we take the gun to whoops and cheers, handshakes and back slaps all round. A fantastic way for the 'Titan XV' crew to finish an outstanding week of racing. ■



PHOTO: TIM WRIGHT/HEINEKEN REGATTA

RIGHT 'Titan XV' chasing 'Highland Fling'.



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ANTIGUA FUN

The Caribbean season concludes with Antigua Race Week...

Antigua Race Week is the largest of the Caribbean regattas and never fails to deliver top level racing. The 2012 event was no exception...

In CSA 1A, there was a nail-biting finale to Antigua Sailing Week. Geoff Hill's Santa Cruz 72, 'Antipodes' won the last race of the day to take the division. Peter Harrison's Farr 115 'Sojana' could only manage a final-day third, which put them on equal points with 'Antipodes'. 'Sojana' could only count three first places to 'Antipodes' four and lost on countback, it was that close. Jan Rupert's Tripp 75, 'Blackbird' finished the regatta with a second place in the last race to secure third.

In CSA 1B, Stefan Lehnert's Tripp 56, 'Passion 4C' won the last race by a handsome margin to secure the division title. Antigua Sailing Week did not start well for Lehnert when his son went overboard in the first race but the German Admiral's Cup winner has had a great week, as Lehnert explains: 'When Richard Matthews and "Zig Zag" picked up Phillip, I was so relieved, I thanked him by giving them a crate of champagne and it has been champagne sailing since then.'

The winner of CSA 2 was already decided before the final race. Ulrich Rohde's Swan 53, 'Dragon Fly Plus' had an unassailable lead but that didn't stop Ross Appleby's Oyster 48, 'Scarlet Oyster' from going for it. The

vintage Oyster took a corrected time win by just 25 seconds from Christian Reynolds, Swan 51, 'Northern Child', posting their best result of the regatta. Andy Middleton's First 47.7 came third. Chris Brand's Swan 53, 'Merel Four' could only manage a sixth but the team from the Royal Thames YC maintained their position as third overall.

In CSA 3, Richard's Wesslund's J/120, 'El Ocaso' made it a perfect seven with their final race win. Boat captain Mike Caldwell said: 'It may look like we ran away with the victory but many of the races were won by a few seconds.' Second in the class went to Nick Burn's First 40, 'Lancelot II', whose Royal Hong Kong YC



PHOTO: PALL WITTEH

team battled all week with Mauricio Martinez's Brazilian team racing First 40, 'Smile and Wave'.

In CSA 4, Calvin Reed's First 40.7, 'Elandra' won the last race of the series by a significant margin to win class for the second year in a row. Sir Hugh Bailey's Beneteau 456, 'Hugo B' was second in the final race. The team from Falmouth, Antigua have shown incredible consistency. 'Hugo B' has only been off the podium on one occasion and that was a fourth. However, 'Elandra' has been unstoppable. Jonty Layfield's J/39, 'Sleeper' was third overall.

In CSA 5, Geoffrey Pidduck's Six Metre, 'Biwi Magic' came out on top in the last race of the series to win the

class. Steve Carson, owner of runner up 'High Tide' was in good spirits despite losing out on the last race. In CSA 6, 'Resting Goose' were already secure of the class win before the final day's race. Owner David Chatterton said: 'We are just a bunch of boys from the east coast of England, here to have some fun and all of the yachts in our class have been a delight to sail against and party with. It has been a very special week...'

In the Bareboat Class, three yachts from KH+P had a tremendous battle. Alexander Pfeiffer's 'L'Oiseau des Iles' won the final day race putting pressure on class leader, Horst Schultze's 'Sea You Later'. However 'Sea You Later' corrected out to take second place in

the last race by a solitary second from Andreas Kadelbach's 'Cayenne'. After a six-race series, 'Sea You Later' won the class by the narrowest of margins.

In Bareboat 2, KH+P 'Sapphire Dancer' took victory. In second place was Stewart Reed's 'Dilligaff'. The Swiss 'Team Carondimonio' racing 'Balaou' were third.

The legendary Antigua Sailing Week final awards party took place in the historic setting of Nelson's Dockyard. Richard Wesslund's J/120 'El Ocaso' was awarded the Lord Nelson Trophy for the best overall performance of the week. 'El Ocaso' had a fantastic Caribbean season, winning regattas in St. Martin, St. Thomas, BVI and finally Antigua. ■



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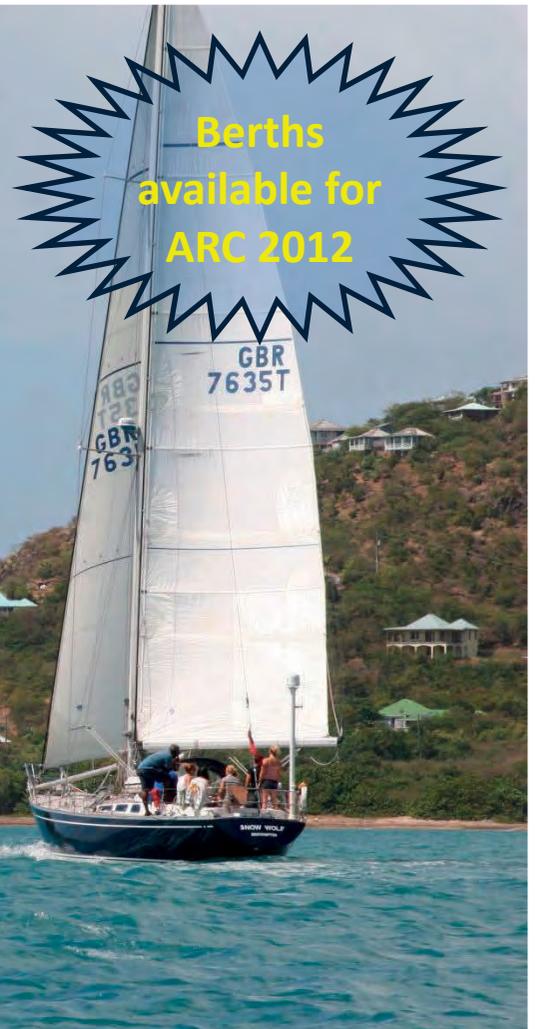


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CARIBBEAN 600 TALES

‘Scarlet Logic’, a 25-year-old cruiser-racer, beat rivals with multi-million dollar campaigns to take an easy class win and fourth overall in RORC’s Caribbean 600 race. **Louay Habib** reports 

RIGHT ‘Scarlet Oyster’ racing as ‘Scarlet Logic’. Most of her crew spent the later stages of the race on deck, both night and day

This 2012 RORC Caribbean 600 saw a record entry of spectacular yachts, including the 215ft carbon fibre ketch ‘Hetairos’, which was destined to take line honours.

Niklas Zennström’s Mini Maxi ‘Rán’ was overall winner on time correction, but amazingly ‘Scarlet Logic’ was a main contender for the overall win.

Up against multi-million pound campaigns, the 25-year-old Oyster 48, crewed by students from the Sailing Logic race training school, came dramatically close to taking the overall title. In the end, ‘Scarlet Logic’ missed out on a sensational overall victory but comfortably won their class and as the best yacht under 50ft.



PHOTO: TIM WRIGHT/PHOTOACTION

“This was the most demanding leg for the helmsman and trimmers, who were working exceptionally hard”

We spoke to Tim Thubron, who co-skipped ‘Scarlet Logic’ alongside Ross. ‘My main prep was to look at the weather forecast and agree a sail plan in advance. The key goal was to optimise the IRC rating for the expected weather.

‘We didn’t have all the crew together until three days before the race. Much of our training focused on safety, which is very necessary for this type of race. Otherwise we extensively practised all the key manoeuvres, with everyone taking a key role.

‘Our intention was to have most

people on deck for major manoeuvres wherever possible to avoid any mistakes or extra time taken. Bearing in mind some of the crew had never raced – or even flown spinnakers – we were keen that everyone had as much experience of this as possible.’

Watches and strategy

‘For the race, we decided on a three-watch system, with both Ross and myself leading a watch each, and another experienced sailor, Ben Galloway, leading the third. Each watch was on for three hours, then on

standby for three and then off for three.

‘We felt this worked well for us, although the biggest issue was trying to get sleep, mostly because of the heat down below. Once we found out we were doing well in the race, we also spent much of our off watch on deck in an effort to keep weight on the rail.

‘We discussed overall race strategy in the build up to race, with most of the focus on weather and wind shadows. We were not using routing software but spoke with friends sailing on both ‘Rán’ and ‘Hetairos’ about their routing predictions, as well as others about weather and strategy. Many of the top guys are so willing to share ideas and give advice to others prior to the race, despite being so competitive once we are all on the water.

‘Once we were racing we focused on keeping close to the rhumb lines where possible, avoiding wind shadows and pushing the boat as hard as we could, while keeping a careful eye on the weather and other competitors.’

The start and first beat

‘On our way out to the start we had a 25-knot squall, making sail selection tricky. The winds were also quite shifty. In the end we opted for a slightly conservative start, close to the favoured pin end of the line, but clear of the bigger boats.

‘As one of the slowest boats in our class, our main goal was to stay with or even be ahead of many of the faster rated boats that we started with.’

Tight reach to Barbuda

‘Once in free air on the windward side of Antigua we flew our asymmetric spinnaker and started our watch’

PHOTO: TIM WRIGHT/PHOTOACTION



RIGHT George David’s Reichel Pugh 90 ‘Rambler’ was second overall on corrected time, just 35 minutes ahead of ‘Scarlet Oyster’

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ABOVE The 215ft carbon fibre ketch 'Hetairos' took line honours

system. Probably about three quarters of the fleet were ahead and we were able to watch with interest at the various courses sailed by the bigger boats. We gybed at Barbuda and as night was approaching peeled to an all-purpose spinnaker. This was one of about eight sail changes that followed over the next six to eight hours.'

Running to St Kitts

As night fell squalls started to come in, with the wind veering quite considerably. We couldn't hold the course with the spinnaker, so we peeled to the jib top and eventually back to

spot the new wind starting to fill in.

'Having headed to the left hand side of the course initially with most of the fleet, we then started to tack on some reasonable shifts as the wind became more unstable later in the morning. With the wind dropping right away, yet with quite big waves, it was not good for a heavy displacement yacht – it was challenging just trying to keep the boat moving.'

Rounding St Maarten

'The First 40 'Smile and Wave' caught right up with us here. We both chose an inshore route close to St Maarten, but

“All through the night we had a fantastic battle through the Anguilla Strait, it was extraordinary racing”

the spinnaker as the wind dropped. Our overall strategy was to maintain our best VMG. As we approached St Kitts this looked to have paid off – we sailed past the islands to take a position slightly offshore compared to the bulk of the fleet and could see that we were making further gains.'

Up to St Barths

'This was probably our most challenging leg tactically. The wind dropped right away and we could see competitors behind us starting to close in. We were not far behind the main pack of Class 40s at this stage and able to watch their progress as we tried to

they had good pace and were quicker through the tacks, eventually passing us just before nightfall. All through the night, we had a fantastic battle through the Anguilla Strait; it was extraordinary racing, battling hard until we came off the wind at Tintamarre.'

Rounding Guadeloupe

'Having fallen foul of the wind shadow here in this race last year, I agreed to stay well off. Initially we were perhaps a bit closer than we would have liked – about eight miles away – but as some squalls came in, we were able to bear away and make good progress south, keeping around 10 miles off.

'It was daylight when we rounded, so we monitored the yachts in front and behind. It was soon pretty clear the immediate group of boats in front of us had parked and that staying further offshore made more sense.

'Once south of the island we headed inshore in an effort to find flatter water and less adverse current. There were also a few good shifts, which we gladly took. At this stage we started to lose sight of the boats behind us, notably 'Smile and Wave', which gave us confidence, along with the fact that we were achieving target speed. As the night wore on though it became harder, particularly when we started tacking more regularly and the crew were now very tired.

'It was a relief to get round the top of Desirades, knowing we would be off the wind from there to Barbuda. I for one was certainly apprehensive when we called for the asymmetric to go up shortly after rounding. The wind was blowing hard and it was pitch black. Fortunately our training paid off and the kite went up without an issue.'

Reach to Barbuda

'We set off at great pace on a good course but this was probably the most demanding leg physically for the helmsman and trimmers, who were working exceptionally hard to keep the boat on track. It was also a windy tight reach, which kept all the crew on the rail.'

Beat to the finish

'Our initial strategy after rounding Redonda was to head north-west to get out of current and eventually find flatter water closer to Antigua. The wind had consistently been around 20 knots or more as we approached Redonda, but eased slightly and eventually dropped significantly for the beat home.

'Of course shortly after making a change to the biggest headsail, the wind picked back up, making more frequent tacks much harder – just typical!

'Eventually we could see a mass of red lights glowing from the superyachts in Falmouth Harbour.

'As we finished, it was more relief than celebration at first. We knew we had done well, probably better than most of our expectations. However, in doing so we had pushed ourselves to the limit.

'Of all the offshore races I have done – Fastnet, Round Ireland and Middle Sea – this was probably the most challenging, but equally rewarding.' ▣

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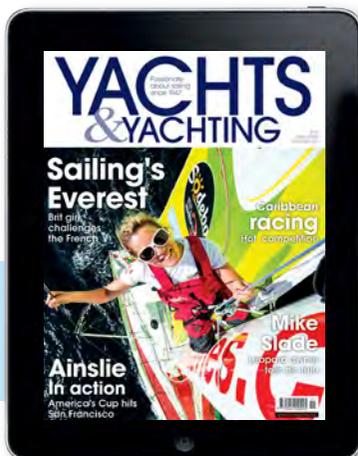
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