

“South Until the Butter Melts, then turn right”

Five years to build a dream, and then have the balls to do the Atlantic circuit.

A Van der Stadt 34, built in steel with a bit extra in the keel. Very keenly built with superb attention to detail, very nicely finished. Take a bit of the house away to fit it into the back garden, there goes a few brownie points. A £30 secondhand working jib in 11oz cloth, with little battens in the leech, a superb all rounder, it took us to windward in a 40 knot squall with three reefs in the main. Much of this boat was secondhand bits, the sails and the Monitor Windvane for example. It was a true project, with not a day going by without thought or a little added.

Fairtrade does not even have a fitted bilge pump, but with spiders living in the bilges next to the beer who needs one. The only water I have seen come into Fairtrade was clinging to the oilies. It does have course have two solar panels and a mains inverter, I wonder who's idea was that !! There is a rumour that one cabin boy always had to have a button to press. To go on a boat without 3g internet access and a laptop could not be imagined, well you could always use it as a fender if the need arose.

This was overall a fairly challenging trip, with 660 miles turning into 1000 miles, the expected 6-7 days turning into 10 days, 12 hours of dark although warm, and varied winds and weather. In addition we caught a big puffer fish and brought it aboard into a bucket, which caused one member of the crew to twitch slightly, They expand with funny little short spines: Ref BBC web site, The skin of some puffer fish is poisonous (gram for gram, it is 10,000 times more toxic than cyanide). In Japan, where they are called *fugu*, they are prized as a delicacy after the poison has been removed. Nevertheless, the death of about 100 diners is recorded each year. We cut the line.

In order to shorten this piece a little, which I know you will be pleased about, the names of the various parties have been shortened. Duncan Thompson “Skipper” SKIP, Brian Harrison a Maths Teacher, “Chief Catering Officer” CCO, and Alan Cooper “Cabin Boy” CB. Also the Monitor WindVane, now known as Charlotte CC.

Fairtrade left from Erith around the xx September, on route to St Lucia in the Caribbean, to do what is known as the Atlantic circuit. We had a little presentation on the clubship, and a burgee was handed over.

SKIP and Robert Harle left Erith for the Solent via Queenborough. Approached Looe Channel but a lot of wind on the nose caused them to run back to Brighton. Then a change of crew, Mike Chapman and they sailed on to the Solent and Cherbourg. Strong winds during the day so they sailed at night to Guernsey. Guernsey to L'Aberwrack also at night, arriving at dawn. L'Aberwrack to through Channel de four inside Ushant to Cameret. Loaded boat, 3 crates of coke for Mike, across Biscay to Grejon, North Spain. Mike left and Duncan collected Sophie by car, all continued by port hopping to L'Acorana, Sophie left and kids continued. Little wind, big swell to Sines in Portugal. Fairtrade left in Sines, kids glad to go home, they did well.

Duncan went back early to Sines and Fairtrade, CCO and CB joined Duncan at Lisbon Airport where he collected us by hire car. Sines is lovely, three meals and lots of drinks in a little place 30 Euros !

We started off from Sines but this turned into quite a challenging sail with 12 hours of darkness and little wind at the beginning, and from aft. I kept waking up having a nightmare that I was in the middle of the Atlantic with no wind. No wind is worse than 30 knots out here, pubs too far away. Duncans Monitor windwane “Charlotte” was very good but not effective in light downwinds of

course, and could not be used when motoring. We did not have an Autohelm which I have a fair amount of experience of but of course needs power. But we could not use the engine much and had to sail downwind with little wind at night, quite difficult.

At Sines the forecast was light, the worst days run at the beginning was 57 miles including four hours motoring, not very good. We started on Saturday but by Tuesday still 453m to go to Tenerife, wind NE 1-2.

Wed 26th Oct 1800 Hrs, storm jib and 3 reefs in main, hove to for 12 hours, gusting 8. Making SE at 3 knots. Just like being in Anchor Bay, considering playing cards. In the cockpit hanked on. Dunc did a superb job of changing down and reefing. CCO cheated but I won at cards.

Managed to get forecast from a ship SW 5-7, now dropped to a 4, always on the nose now Thursday 27th, making south of west.

Thurs 27th Oct, violent rainsqualls in the afternoon, horrible sky covering the horizon. 60 knot squall, all sails off running downwind towing warps. Left CB in cockpit while they chatted below, you could be forgiven for thinking of your mother for 10 minutes. Serious power. Always hanked on. Surprisingly easy sailing with correctly rigged boat, i.e bare poles !!

Put up working jib and 3 reefs, continued on. Another two squalls followed, 40 knots. Sailed into it, I have never been so fast to windward, blew out lee cloth.

Friday 28th Oct, we could be there by now with a fast trip but still 276m to go, 1500 hrs wind dropped.

Friday 28th Oct, 2100 hrs, becalmed, 260m from Tenerife. There aint nothing going on but the rent !!

Nice tea cooked by SKIP, Sardines, egg and potatoe, followed by pinaeapple and cream. Pressure 1018, now in centre of high.

Saturday 29th 1100 hrs, SW 2-3 on nose as usual, going well, Charlotte loves it. Need to go south more.

Sunday 0900 hrs, still SW noser 4, on way to Lanzarote to drop off CCO, Brian needs to get home to his teaching job. He will lose his flight from Tenerife. Always SW, should be NE.

Duncan said, the wind must change from the SW, pigs might fly.

1400, sighted Lanzarote, decided to go here as closest to drop off Brian, still SW.
1800 Lanzarote coming up, had Cat Breath pie, sardines and potatoe.

Mon 1000, left Lanzarote for Tenerife, wind good, NW4.

Tues 1300, arrived Tenerife, made good time overnight, only motored at the end.

In this part of the N Atlantic 1000 boats waiting to cross to the Caribbean on a rally known as the ARK. In December the weather is stable with the NE Trades blowing 15-20 knots continous, but it is 2700m, about 28 days. It is known as the Atlantic circle route via Azores on the return early in the following year.

Fairtrade performed well, fast, stiff boat. Reefs have to be put in and shaken out frequently.

One very good night tool was a 3 led headlight lamp, worn on the head of course.

Sophie is coming out to Tenerife mid November for a visit and Fairtrade will continue to St Lucia early December. A satellite phone was useful for keeping in touch with families. Also the laptop with a 3g connection whilst in port allowed emails and a view of the club CCTV, what horrible weather ! The solar panels working well, highly recommended.

Tenerife is a strange landscape, it looks as if the hills have just been dumped. Perfect temperature in the winter. Many apartments, and a four lane motorway to the airport. So much traffic for a 30m long island, what do they do here ? Some houses and roads built of pumice stone.

Something I learnt, the moss grows only on the north side, who needs gps !!

Duncan said there are those at the club who questioned the cuddy that he built on, suggest they sail this route and make their observations !! Keeps you dry and comfy, something to hide behind, well we are wimps !

Quite something to build a boat like this, pack in your job and sail away ! Not to mention taking a bit of the house away to build it. Well there is Sophie to keep things going while Duncan's away !

But who are the real stars in this project, Sophie and the kids of course !

Alan C