



MANCHESTER CRUISING ASSOCIATION

The 2003 ARC

11 November 2004 John Roe

John told a full house about his differently-challenging ARC. Having sailed since he was a child – for many years as part of a Moody 39 syndicate in the Med – John realised at 60+ that the time had come to address an ambition: a transatlantic.. An opportunity came up: to skipper a 58 foot Formosa in the 2003 ARC with a hand-picked crew for an owner he knew. We'd best agree to call the owner, who was coming along, "The Owner".

There were some initial hitches, the first being the hand-picked crew. John decided that, with six mouths to feed, a professional cook was needed. He found someone. He also recruited two crew with Transatlantic experience from the MCA. Unfortunately, The Owner had already offered the cooking job to two Scandinavian girls he had met in Greece and he certainly didn't want anyone aboard with Transatlantic experience: it would tarnish the venture. So the cook and the MCA folk were ditched.

The boat was in Las Palmas and when inspected the second hitch emerged: in spite of her size there wasn't really enough sleeping room for 8 people. The third hitch: disagreements about watch-keeping routines. The fourth: the quality of some of the running rigging. The fifth: concerns about the newly-installed wind generator (i.e. would it work). But basically a fine, sea-worthy boat.

There was plenty of work to do but they were ready for the off on time. Unfortunately, at the last moment, they found that the boat was not insured to sail beyond Las Palmas so they waved off the rest of the fleet (near 200 boats) from the quayside. They left next day. A couple of days beating and they picked up the Trade Winds for a fine (if rather slow) passage. They hoped.

Sadly during the night The Owner, insisting on a solitary watch in the dark, had rigged a preventer to the teak guard rail. An accidental gybe ripped the rail off. It was decided to head for the Cape Verde Islands for repairs and to have someone look at the wind generator which didn't seem to be working. This was significant because there was so much electrical equipment on board that the starboard engine (the port one wasn't working) had to be kept running most of the time. The diesel generator wasn't enough on its own.

Repairs complete (John painted a sympathetic picture of the poverty-stricken islands) they headed west with a working wind generator (a switch had been left in the wrong position). The spinnaker halyard parted twice (see hitch four above re running rigging) dumping the sail in the sea and, to his great credit, The Owner climbed the mast to re-reeve the halyard and dived to unwind the spinnaker from the prop. Oh yes, one of the Scandinavian girls concussed herself.

Becalmed for a while as they neared St Lucia, they motored and ran the fuel tanks dry (they were not metered). While they had a few gallons in a jerry-can, The Engineer (The Owner) was unable to bleed the system. So, no motor and they had to sail and anchor off while the engine was fixed. They just missed the splendid end-of-ARC celebrations. Everyone had gone home.

John had a 67th birthday party mid-Atlantic. He described what might have been a nightmare trip with great style and he obviously wouldn't have missed it for the world. It certainly didn't seem to have done him much harm. The Owner remains a good friend.

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