

Cruinneag III – Extracts from the ships logs 2011

Preparing a vintage yacht for her first Atlantic Crossing

I've skimmed the froth off the top of the melted butter, now the hard part, fold it into the mixture with the egg yolk and don't let it curdle!

This may seem an unlikely preparation for taking a vintage sailing vessel across the Atlantic, but so much of life is made up of unlikely or unknowing preparation.

In actual fact I might say I have been preparing for taking Cruinneag across the Atlantic for more than 20 years, since my first crossing in 1989 with the ARC on a well used, wooden, ex-admiral cup racing yacht 'Hippocampus'.

Today however we are at the Monaco Classic Yacht Regatta, 'La Belle Classe' and in 25 minutes we will have six judges aboard expecting to have a meal prepared and served to them as part of the regatta.

No problem! They arrive at 10.45 we untie for the race at 11.30, there are 15 crew sandwiches that have to be prepared by Karen and Sandra in the same small galley I have now destroyed with egg shells, tarragon bits and wine. The crew are flying about running ropes and 'wooling' the spinnakers, Andrew and Jono still have two winches to polish and buff into a glorious shine, the morning condensation is being 'chamoised' from the varnish and Dandy our 'classic hound' lays unimpressed at the helm hopefully awaiting a second walk or meal. This is a typical morning on the Mediterranean Classic Yacht Circuit, of which we have been part of for the last 5 months.



(Dandy at Rowdy's Helm, Cruinneag at home in Tarbert)

Cruinneag III is a vintage auxiliary sailing ketch built in Tarbert, Scotland in 1936. She has been in my family for most of her years, "always loved and never in the mud", I tell the concourse jury the day before, made up of yacht club aficionados and Sir Robin Knox Johnson, a true gentleman, enthusiast and personal legend, who seems strangely uneasy within this influential jury. Of the group he genuinely seems impressed with Cruinneag's amazing story, her library with photos of myself and the family spanning a half century and of course the obvious love and hard work which is being invested daily. Cruinneag shines amongst the other classic yacht as one of a handful that have 'never been restored' and everyone knows that this is rather special.

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It has been a long but very happy and successful summer. We have 11 more days of racing and guests ahead and I am looking forward to returning to cruising. It all started a year ago when I met up with an old school friend who's father also owned a classic yacht. Rowdy is a 1916 Herreshoff and her story could fill several volumes.

Graham Walker is a lovely, gentle giant of a man now in his 70's and with a career in sailing as impressive as Sir Knox Johnson's. We met up again after many years on the circuit last year and following a successful end of season regatta together at St Tropez, Graham and his skipper Jono offered me the ultimate complement. "Why don't you come race with us all full-time next season!" I quickly replied that I would love to but explained about obligations to my own yacht and my crew of two, Karen and Dandy the dog!

Karen and Dandy were given Rowdy shirts, Cruinneag was enlisted as 'mother vessel' to Rowdy for the regatta circuit 2011 and everyone was a winner, how much winners we had no idea!



(Cruinneag racing in 2011, Mahon Bay with Moonbeam IV, Cambria, Rowdy, Cruinneag III and Hallowe'en)

Rowdy has been the overall winner on the classic circuit for three years in a row, her crew may look wholly unimpressive at first glance but you could never have been so wrong, and after three years, 124 wins everyone wanted to know more, tourist, press, judges and event organizers were beginning to realize it was not just the boat that was special. Maybe there was something in the crew.

23rd to 29th May, Cruinneag and Rowdy start the new season at the Regates Imperials in Ajaccio, Corsica. An early start and many of the boats arrive with unfinished projects, blue tape still on their bulwarks, duct-tape holding things shut and in our case no sails! A serious blow to the start of our season and a costly one also, in terms of fuel, Cruinneag's new wardrobe, ordered and paid for in December are delayed until July. More irritating still is the fact that the old sails have been recycled and cannot be used either!

8th to 12th June and its another long motor north to Voiles d'Antibes, France. One win under our belt and everyone is still feeling fresh and feeling even better that a decision has been made, not to attend the Argentario sailing week in Italy so we will have time to get the boats lifted and attempt more works!

After Antibes and with our 2nd win Rowdy stays in Cannes and Cruinneag heads south to Tarragona, Spain under motor! Our next regatta being the Regatta Puig Vela Classica in Barcelona in July. Tarragona has been a great find for us, we arrived the year before, tired and wet one night because we had some friends

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working on a yacht there and we wanted to say 'hello', we never left! It has unfortunately all changed now under new ownership but the final months before the exchange were some of our most happy and productive. If you have a chance, 'go' just to experience the town, a lost Roman empire. The walled town is filled with surprises at every corner, bars restaurants and the architecture which fuses the new into the old would never be allowed again by planners "anywhere" and is quite amazing as are the frequent festivals and fairs which seem to take place all throughout year!

Cruinneag is lifted out at the yard and we start ticking off jobs from the list ... well the book! New paint, antifouling, a feathering propeller, a water maker Chapter two is going well and the book is good, although at times it feels like its going to be a trilogy!

It is a week before the return of the fishing fleet and the yard is full of workboats preparing. We are the only private boat and creating a stir. We have 10 days and a chapter of jobs to complete, our hours are intensive and the fishermen, some with their whole families all helping out, are astounded at the progress two people and a sleeping dog are making. It is Wednesday and on Friday the fishing fleet are able to fish again, there will be a festival in the town starting Friday night and throughout the weekend, streets are being closed, bunting strung across the trees and stages for various performances are being erected. In the yard the mood is also good, it is about 35 degrees and a hot dry wind is blowing our paint and varnish dry. Seba the yard manager gets Jordy to collect all the scrap pallets of wood and a fire is lit in the middle of the yard?! It blazes amongst the mostly wooden fleet, meters away from any number of combustibles, but is carefully tended and contained until it is swept into a perfect pile and the large drum and pan are produced and set up over the burning embers, lunch is being prepared! We are invited and our hard work is recognized, the paella steams in the background and we swig cava from the bottle It is my most memorable yard day anywhere ever!



(Tarragona ship yard in Spain)

Back in the water and off again to the Puig Vella Classica in Barcelona and then out to Palma where we have a well earned 10 days before the next regatta. Everything seems to be going fine we have a lucky escape when a charter of 7 friends takes us away from Barcelona 12 hours before a freak, unpredicted storm sweeps through the town. 4pm the sky goes green with the mixture of sun, cloud and city smog. Winds of 60+ knots sweep through Port Vale in downtown Barcelona. For the next 15 minutes mooring lines snap and yachts smash into one another, classic yacht crews, onboard the various yachts left, fight to control the mayhem. Rowdy is quite seriously damaged as a Wally and a Moody attack her from both sides and she breaks free and rides up onto the pontoon. She will be out of action for several weeks for repairs.

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Cruinneag however has escaped we arrive in Palma blissfully unaware of the carnage behind us and collect our guests, nine and a dog in total for nine days a good test for any boat! Heading south towards Ibiza I sit on a quiet area of deck and listen to the sounds of my guests and my equipment straining to serve them: pumps blazing, tanks gurgling, doors slamming, fridge compressors buzzing, bottles chinking and light switches clicking if she makes it through the next nine days I've done a good job. We do make it and our circumnavigation of Ibiza over and Rowdy nearly race worthy again Cruinneag makes the next regatta on her own.

Our new sails have arrived and the Tarragona paint job and feathering prop all look the business. I have installed new running backstays and tuned up the other rigging all round. Cruinneag's spars are all original and we wish to keep them that way! No fear of that today however as winds die progressively throughout the day diminishing our fabulous start lead into hours of drifting and a 6th position, even the dog was getting bored on the rail!



(Fast start in Palma, Slow ending in Palma!)

15th August, with Rowdy back in action we start our campaign again with the Conde de Barcelona in Palma followed by the Copa del Ray in Mahon. The racing is going well and the jobs list is also shortening. Most of the equipment has preformed well or been quickly and quietly replaced. Karen has even managed to install what feels like a whole new galley somehow. Out with the old two ring, gas guzzling furnace, this new beauty will roast a chicken, boil a kettle and use a fraction of the gas!

There are now no more breaks between regattas until the finish in October so the stress of getting new equipment commissioned, dealing with suppliers while always on the move and the physical side of the two yachts, one racing and having to look its best and one cruising, providing support and also having to look its best is starting to build. Most of the crews now see an end to their season and are counting down the days, the parties and the decompression after days of owners and guests are also building. The crews are all now familiar, and we cruise together, plan anchorages and spend many of our free hours contemplating the winter approaching. I consider our winter and although very excited also slightly sad to be leaving a group who have become very close over the past two years. I think back three years to when I was contemplating purchasing back my family's old yacht which was sold in

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1997/98 and the thought of giving up my racing yacht and moving to what I perceived as a more mature slow way of life!!

Oh boy, I was wrong there is nothing slow or stuffy about the classic scene, the boats or the parties. I dusted off my images of quiet days sanding and varnishing, bearded men with chisels and sleepy yards, this is 2011 and anyone who is anyone wants to own or be part of the classic yachts. 80 or more of the most beautiful remaining wood vessels sailing as a fleet, with talk of countless more joining from around the world and even more being restored, saved or rebuilt altogether from original plans.



(The Cruinneag/Rowdy Crew 2011, A good dock party in Corsica!)

We sail for Sardinia for the Vela d'epoca in Porto Rotondo. It is now September and the summer is fast ending. I consider some of the guests and the 'anyone who is anyone' that have sailed with us this summer, countless business men and women, sailing legends, journalists, photographers, several millionaires, the first billionaire that I know of meeting, a politician and a miss World!

"Bone it!", "Get that meat on the rail!", "Come on tit's on the teak! ... Now!"

All titles stripped and smiles all round, we have a glorious week and another victorious campaign. We make new friends and discover Cruinneag has a sister ship, designed by the same architect and built at the same time, in a competition between two brothers. The legend tells of the two "Dickie" brothers who worked with William Fife III at his yard, in Fairlie, Scotland in the 1930's. Both were skillful apprentices with hopes of owning their own yards one day. On achieving their apprenticeships, Fife offered them a challenge based on their first yacht commissions. In time the two Dickie brothers setup two yards one in Tarbert, Scotland and the other in Bangor, Wales and at some point after that, two yacht commissions arrive and the challenge could begin. The winner would be given William Fife's personal seal of approval and the yacht would carry half of his famous 'dragon' trademark, the dragon's tail, a wheat-sheaf.

Vistona, is a beautiful yacht with a loving family history, the two 'gals' sail in company together again or maybe for the first time ever, out of Porto Rotondo, her home port, towards Monaco, Cruinneag's wheat-sheaf glinting in the evening sun.

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(Cruinneag in Porto Rotondo, Vistona at sunset.)

We move on from Monaco before the last race is even over, the autumn weather is moving in, the 'classic catamaran' as some have now come to call us, has done enough to triumph and leaves ahead of the storm towards Cannes and the Regates Royales. It is all to play for, this is the last Panerai regatta of the season, a win here would make Rowdy the series winner for the year.

After Cannes the fleet will move on to the Voiles de St Tropez and the finale to the Mediterranean sailing season. The 'classic catamaran' will separate and Cruinneag will look towards the ARC and next year's classic regattas in Antigua and North America.

My preparation for Cruinneag and taking a vintage sailing yacht across the Atlantic has been talking shape for many years and to be fair the only item which hadn't factored into my preparation and will have to be added for the ARC in the next few weeks will be access to email!



(Crinan Canal 1966!)

But lets face it, when I first got my 'little mitts' on Cruinneag's helm, they had only just put a man on the moon!

Good Luck everyone, have a great crossing and don't be strangers if we can help we will ! ☺
