

Good day my friend,

Five books, 4800nm and a zillion cups of coffee later, on Thursday 5th June, in my might sailing vessel Mahina, I arrived safely to my home island of Malta from St. Martin in the Caribbean. The dream is accomplished and is all history already.

It took me 9 and a half days, 1174nm, from Horta (Acores) to Barbate, a small fishing port on the west coast of Spain. I tried to make it straight to Gibraltar but heavy easterly winds forced me to alter course and port.

Again I had a wicked trip, sailed all the way, mostly downwind. This leg, I must say, was the hardest because although much shorter distance, the wind, anything from West, North West, Southwest and at the end from the north, from Force 2 to Force 6 and very gusty, involved a lot of sail changes; Main and storm jib up and down, Jib in and out, pole to keep the jib out on one side then the other. Basically, a lot of work, resulting in constant exhaustion.

The worst time, and most probably worst of my entire life, was the last 48 hours as apart from heavy wind and seas from the beam, I did not sleep a single minute. The traffic was unreal. Here I'm not talking about the occasional yacht or ship but hundreds of massive cargo ships passing through. I knew that I was gonna expect this but not this quantity. Due to my course, from the west heading east, I had to cross the major shipping routes of those coming from north to the Mediterranean or straight south to the Canary Islands or vice versa. On the radar screen a ship looks like a fat line. My screen was full of these, everywhere, that I started to call these super floating structures mosquitoes!! Why? Because they are in quantity, everywhere, fast and they don't give way ... that's right steel mosquitoes.

Mahina performance again was brilliant. I had one accident were Taurus crash gybed and broke my vang fitting on the boom. Taurus, the self steering mechanism by the way, was not too well in the beginning as I had a lot of vibrations in the main shaft after the accident in Horta. But a strap sorted that out and again he was my man!! There was a cracking noise in the rig that made me paranoid for a whole afternoon as I could not go up and do a rig check but nothing happened. My fishing improved, catching a tuna one evening, big enough for 2 massive dinners. YEEEEH.

So I arrived in Barbate Port at 4am in the morning. Pretty challenging task as I had no book about the place. Actually I did, but that was from 1975 and things are not the same from then plus no one to guide me in as the whole place is deserted at that time. I even had to berth Mahina along side a waiting dock myself and I taught I did a good job at it. Was happy that I am finally tied up and I could sleep. So I did but not for long, woke up at ten, went to town to phone my parents, moved the boat to a proper spot and cleaned her. After an amazing shower and a beard trim, I rented a car and drove for 2 hours down to Gibraltar to pick up my father from the airport. Then another 2 hours drive back, dinner and before you know it is one am before hitting the long dreamt off sleep. Did you

ever experience that feeling of having like sand in your eyes from tiredness? That was me all day and the more coffee I drank the more shakes I was had.

The following day it was still blowing hard from the east through Gibraltar which makes it almost impossible to make to the Med, especially on a small yacht. So we carried out some minor repairs and checks. The next morning my father had his first ever sail of his life at the age of 69, down the west coast of Spain, through the straits into Gibraltar Bay. It was indeed perfect as the conditions were perfect. Fuel topped up and provisioned for a 10 day voyage to Malta, we set off on Tuesday morning in Force 4 westerly breeze towards Morocco.

Sailing with Papa! I mean I thank him a lot for coming as I slept a lot because for the rest I sailed the boat myself. At first he was more concerned about shipping traffic and was happy standing a watch, learning the lights and collision situations. But he was definitely not interested in learning how to sail. Driving was soon given up, apart from the tricky downwind sailing, I found it hard to teach him where was upwind and downwind. Then he told me that he wasn't bothered in learning as he is too old for that shit. But I still insisted and at the end he actually knew what was going on especially from the navigation side.

And what a sailing adventure it ended up to be, especially for an old man that never stepped on a sailing yacht before. That westerly breeze soon died off and after a whole day of motoring the wind blew from the east, right where I need to go. So for over a week I tacked all the way along the Algerian coast to Tunisia. I was still doing my average of 130nm a day but due to the tacking I was only advancing 80nm a day. Many a times the wind was not light either, sailing mostly between 15 to 25knts and choppy sea. Mahina was fully powered, heeling over on its sides and due to my pinching, even the occasional slam on the bow. For me, guess I'm use to it, but my father taught differently. The worst he found is holding on, whether inside or in the cockpit for he was ordered not to leave anywhere else. Everything became a bit of a mission for him, putting clothes on, eating and even going for a leak. But being strong he still managed. I think it was more me that I was worried that he might get hurt and despite my constant yelling to stay put in one place he still disobeyed me often.

One night during a beat, I ripped my headsail. Quickly I took it down and inside, engine on and storm jib up to keep the boat moving. Two meters of the stitching on the luff half way came apart and then ripped the stitching about a meter in on one of the panel. Papa helped me shaping the sail again for an hour then another 2 hours in first light hours sewing it strong back together. By mid morning we were sailing again.

Then the thunder storm at midnight. I had one reef in the main and motoring in very light winds. Papa was on watch. The radar alarm went off. Curious that he did not wake me up as usual if a ship was too close, I was shocked to see the whole radar screen covered with rain and notice lightening of our stern. In a matter of minutes the wind picked up to 30knts. Quickly I turned the engine off and put another reef in the main but I was still going fast and breeze still increasing in pitch darkness, lightening and heavy rain. Then I

dropped the main completely and under bare poles I was still doing 4knts running with it. Saw maximum 46.3knts!!! This lasted only an hour and a half then the winds went light again.

Off the Tunisian border the wind finally turned westerly again and although the constant pole gybing, conditions on board improved. Papa also experienced my fishing skills. Yes this time big, with an average size tuna in the beginning, then a massive, my guess is 20kg, towards the end. We ate tuna all trip almost. Since my father does not cook I always asked him "Guess what we have for lunch?", "Tuna" he replies. Then I go again "Guess what we have for dinner?" "Tuna"!!! This was repeated many days in a row.

Of course having company after all that time alone was not easy for me. First of all papa is quite talkative whilst I am totally opposite. So often there was me again ordering him to shut up and enjoy the spiritual feeling and environment of sailing. I even forced him to read books in order to leave me alone. Anyways ce la vie I guess.

One last thing about this 69 year old man on board my vessel. I am totally surprised how cosmopolitan my father became with the use or addiction of his mobile. Every time we approach the coast he gets that thing out, ignores all ships, land and sailing and gets focused on this text messaging. I could not believe it especially from a person that used to walk for hours to go to school during his young days. Where is this world taking us?

Anyways my father was more of a passenger than crew on board my ship. He was fed, taught and relaxed and he himself says that he was on "Holidays". At the end of the trip he kept on repeating that my life is tough in what I do, impressed how a yacht moves with only wind and the quietness of it all, impressed with himself that he did not get seasick and that it was an experience of a lifetime.

One would wonder that life on a sailing yacht is pure pleasure and relaxing. I assure you that is not the case especially single handed. It is true that the sailing gives you pleasure and relaxation but the work involved to achieve that, the weather you need to go through, the problems in gear failure, the constant sail changes, the constant thinking and actions, never stops. I admit it is a hard life but the adventure is rewarding in every situation, it being in calm pleasant sailing conditions to sailing in furious winds and seas. This is where my heart is happiest the most. MAHINA is the best.

At present I am working on Open Season, the same Wally I worked on last summer. I plan to get Mahina out of the water sometime before winter and continue my refit while still freelancing.

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