

May / June 2007

Good Day my Friend,

TOUGH and TRUST are the right words.

Mahina and myself are in Horta, the main town on the island of Faial in the archipelago of the Acores, rafted to another yacht which is rafted to a Catamaran berthed alongside the dock. You may think that at present I am safe and ok but I assure you it is not the case

Even after 2491nm out in the ocean, almost 3 weeks alone, I am still having no rest due to troubles both on Mahina and personally. It is presently blowing 25knts and constantly raining, expecting a Gale, 35+knots wind, in the next 2 days. Mahina feels very damp inside and living conditions are actually worse then ever as she is constantly pulling on the dock lines expecting some hardware to give up. Even got the companion way doors shut to avoid rain coming inside. Nice yeah!! Personally I feel like shit as I am so tired that I can not sleep at all. Tried stuffing myself with food and beer but has had no effect on me yet. The daily routine that I got use to is still in me.

So about to write what I have been up too during the last few weeks. Got a feeling it is gonna be a long letter so if you get bored just trash the papers, I will not get offended.

FOR SURE, this trip, first leg, has been a personal proof of endurance. From the start to the end I had the worst conditions possible, including power issues since it was cloudy/overcast almost every day, so not much help from solar energy, sailing up wind in 27knts, very little wind (which can get frustrating), running in a Gale and huge following sea, beating the last 50nm to Horta in 25knts and upon approaching the island, thick fog that I could not see jack shit more then 100 meters away. This excludes hardware failure and fishing net wrapped around the prop and more

LET ME start with the main topic ... Food. Food was excellent until the last week when I ran out of fresh produce and started fishing. I made nice bread, soups, pasta and all that. Fridge was shut off pretty quickly as I had lack of power. Infact, for statistics, ran the engine for 65hrs in total and most of it was just to charge the batteries. Fishing was a total flop as I did not catch any, apart from a plastic bag and a Seagull. Tried hard, with 2 lines out, different lures, different scope ... still NADA. Fortunately I was not that desperate, for that seagull could have easily been a recipe, but decide to cut the line instead. I am very disappointed in my fishing skills, tough I heard ashore that almost no yacht caught any!

Daily routine: Days actual flew by. My main key was to keep the boat tidy as much as possible, no matter the sailing conditions as it is my home after all and that extra effort in cleaning and organizing makes life on board much better. Normally start the day with breakfast followed by fixing/maintain whatever had to, chilling out, mainly in reading as the conditions and power again did not permit me using the computer much, listening to Herb (Weather router) on the SSB at 2000hrs GMT, followed by a massive Dinner. Actually there was very little of those favorite Siestas. Normally slept around 2200hrs, and be wide awake at 0600hrs, waking up every 2 hours to check that everything is ok, otherwise I had to react to whatever the situation or alarm was. Mentioning the alarms ... the main once where, wind strength, where say if I am sailing a constant 20knts of breeze, I

will set the alarm set to 24knts. So if it picks up to that setting it start beeping. The radar or "outside eyes" on guard so if a ship or a squall was within 12 miles circumference, again an audible alarm is set off. This took place when I was offshore. As I approached land sleep was none, not because I could not have risked sleeping for 30 minutes at a time, but the excitement of landfall was rushing through my brain avoiding it to switch off.

As a whole, the trip was done in overcast, cloudy skies. Did not see much of those sunrises, sunsets, moon and starry nights as I and anyone would have imagined to in 3 weeks. As sea state was concerned I had all the sorts, from flattish to 5m at least or more. (I find it very hard to be precise on wave heights). The only people I communicated with were a couple of ships and 3 sailing yachts in total. Dolphins, together with the occasional bird, kept me company sometimes but I taught they were all Camera shy.

Wind was light to start with. At least gave me some time to reflect what I was about to do. My first waypoint was 400nm east of Bermuda. Crossing the Atlantic on a small sailing yacht requires going north first as a big high pressure, known as the Acores high, lying mainly to the south of the Acores, were winds are light. With no wind a sailing yacht does not make progress and fuel range is very limited. It wasn't until the evening of day 2 that the weather turned dull and wind picked up to Force 5 from the east. I was seeing lightening ahead of me so kept me busy all night trying to get away from it. By the morning, the wind was constant at 27knts and I was pretty much beating into, under reduced canvas, as I was trying to keep course, heading North east. Mahina, although healing over and constant spray, was fine.

The first problem that I had was the death of my beloved car stereo. Salt water managed to get in the conduit wiring system making, dripping on the electrics and inside my stereo. Frustrated, I opened it apart and cleaned it but was too late as some of the components and printed circuit board were corroded badly. My attempt of soldering was unsuccessful. This is where my SSB/FM receiver came in handy. With the help of a small fm transmitter hooked up to the Ipod, I could listen to music via the Receiver. Although the sound quality wasn't the greatest, I had music!! This system is still up and running even at present whilst writing. I also made a simple antenna, taping it to my backstay and to my complete surprise I could listen to Herb on SSB frequency, who is a weather router. Yachts call in with their positions and he suggests to them were to go to avoid bad weather. Although I could not speak to him since I can only receive, it still helped me as their where yachts not far away from me. I even knew of the Gale coming up from way before. With the ssb working, on Day 8 I even managed to download my first weather fax. I felt king that I made all this work, as that was my only means of receiving weather.

By day 5, the wind decrease to force 2/3. After all those day of heavy beating, this decrease of wind was a blessing and now started to see the new moon too. It stayed like so until Day 8, then back to the force 5, now more from the southeast which was favorable as now I started heading more east. That day too, at 2030hrs, I discovered water in the front cabin bilge. Quickly I drained the water and realized that a small stream coming in through the anchor locker. Most probably, although obviously a leak between the partition, water is not draining fast enough in there as the bow is constantly wet. I had to pump water out every so often depending on my sailing conditions. A job for Horta as I could do nothing then. The previous electrical problem was still causing trouble so then I wrapped the fuse box in plastic.

For the following days I had the same conditions. By day 12 and 1571Nm later, the wind, although down to force 4, veered more to the south so now was reaching and living conditions improved dramatically. My speed and course were excellent and that day I made my best run ... 164 nm in a day. If I continued like that in perfect conditions I'd be in Horta by Day 18, but Herb pointed out that a gale is due to pass through there that time so slowed down. Even headed south to get away from the passing Gale.

Finally on day 15 after a front passed through, there was a break in the clouds, the sun was out and wind down to 10 knts, so I kicked back and enjoyed that "calmness" and caught up with sleep especially those siestas. During those 2 days, I took the opportunity to check all the hardware, more repairs, making sure everything was in order. Downloading a weather fax, I now could clearly see the gale. Herb was right, even in timing. But it was closer than expected with SW winds. If I am on the edge of I could run with it. And so it was.

Day 17 I was in force 6, rough sea and thick cloud weather, but Mahina performed beautifully, especially Taurus my self steering mechanism. Night was approaching and in doing my routine checks, I found out that I was dragging a line. Not sure what it was, I submerged the camcorder, showing me a fishing net wrapped around the prop. Shit! Guess I need to keep sailing; Horta was 300nm away and see what I would have figured out upon arrival. Straight after, a spring snapped on Taurus but I replaced that fairly quickly. Night was dark. Mahina was sailing fast downwind in 5+m waves and 35knts, with only 2 reefs in the main doing 7knts.

The breeze was gusting to 40 now. Taurus was doing the job but was working hard that I thought it was gonna break in pieces. I decided to steer myself. I steered in complete darkness, alone on this tiny boat, in the middle of the ocean in those conditions. I must admit I did enjoy it until after 5 hours I got so tired that I decided to hoist my storm jib and heave too. That was the best decision I ever made in my life as Mahina sat there calmly sliding down the waves. I went to sleep. 8 hours later I woke up with the constant rocking. The storm had passed and the breeze was down to 5knts but of course the sea was still huge. Being daylight, I looked over my stern to check that fishing net, but did not see it so I submerged the camcorder again. MIRACLE, the net was gone. To my disbelief I replayed the video a couple of times before accepting the fact. I did thank GOD.

On day 20 at 0700hrs, I was only 50nm away from Horta. The previous night was quite, peaceful and starry. Thought I was home safe but was not the case as a front approached and the breeze picked up to 25 knts from the east, dead on my course. It was then that my jib furling line snapped.

In Horta, I spent the first 3 days in gale force winds, trying to keep Mahina in one piece. It was then and thus my apologies for the delay in sending this letter, that a French catamaran ran into me, causing damage on my rubbing strake, push pit and worst of all bent my self steering mechanism. It took me 2 whole days of paperwork in order to get insurance involved and another 2 fixing all the mishaps and ready to leave.

My final destination is still uncertain as was thinking of sailing straight to Malta. For sure Mahina needs a rest and get fixed and myself require an income. Weather does not look to great out there right now. Hopefully will leave on Wednesday. My heart needs to be out alone at sea, away from land,

Good Day my Friend,

people and bars and forget my last troubles this week.

Take care

Sahha

Eleandro

SY Mahina

Horta - Faial

Acores