



The good shepherd

Mark Fishwick reports on a heartwarming tale of camaraderie and seamanship from the 2009 Atlantic Rally for Cruisers, which finished in St Lucia, as more than 200 boats made safe landfall

You often hear sailors casually using the phrase 'crossing the pond' to describe a transatlantic passage. But even an ocean crossing with 200 other boats in a rally is a serious undertaking – as demonstrated each year by the Maydays, rig failures and yachts abandoned in the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC).

The 24th edition of this classic 2,700-mile passage to St Lucia in the Caribbean was no different. Two yachts from the fleet were abandoned within days of casting off from Las Palmas in the Canaries – one with rudder failure, another with serious rig problems. A nine-year-old boy was flipped overboard by a lifting spinnaker sheet on another boat, and one crew had some serious jury rigging to tackle when an entire chainplate broke away from a through-deck fitting. Then there was the unpredictable weather – electric storms and squalls with winds in excess of 45 knots.

Most boats enjoyed a steady 20-25 knots of breeze as healthy Trade Winds kicked in soon after the ARC start in November, but at times it was a lot more boisterous. Yachts in the cruising division arrived more quickly than expected. A French 34-footer, *MiniMaxi*, averaged more

than 170 miles a day, finishing in 15 days and 20 hours.

Last year, the crews of just 29 boats arrived in time to join in the fun at the St Lucia Tourist Board's traditional welcoming beach party in Rodney Bay. This time 130 boats arrived in time for the party and the entire fleet was in by



Mother duck and duckling: Silver Bear and Starfire the morning after their arrival

PHOTO: MARK FISHWICK

PHOTO: RAY LAWRY



Mid-ocean lifeline: Silver Bear skipper Ray Lawry transfers beer and food via a line to the crew of Starfire

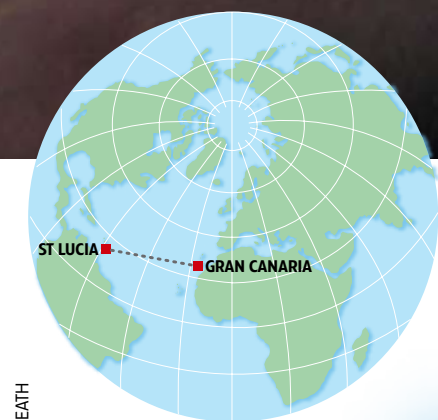
the finish deadline, apart from one yacht which left the Canaries late.

The lively conditions certainly took their toll on gear and sails for a number of boats. The most heartwarming story of ARC 2009 perfectly illustrated the strong sense of camaraderie among sailors in the fleet and won the crew of *Silver Bear*, a Najad 361, the coveted 'Spirit of the ARC' trophy, for coming to the rescue of a non-ARC boat. *Starfire*, a 1981 fin keel Sadler 25, lost her rudder some 1,850 miles from Lucia. She had been unable to enter the event because her 25ft overall length was below the minimum size limit of 27ft (8.2m).

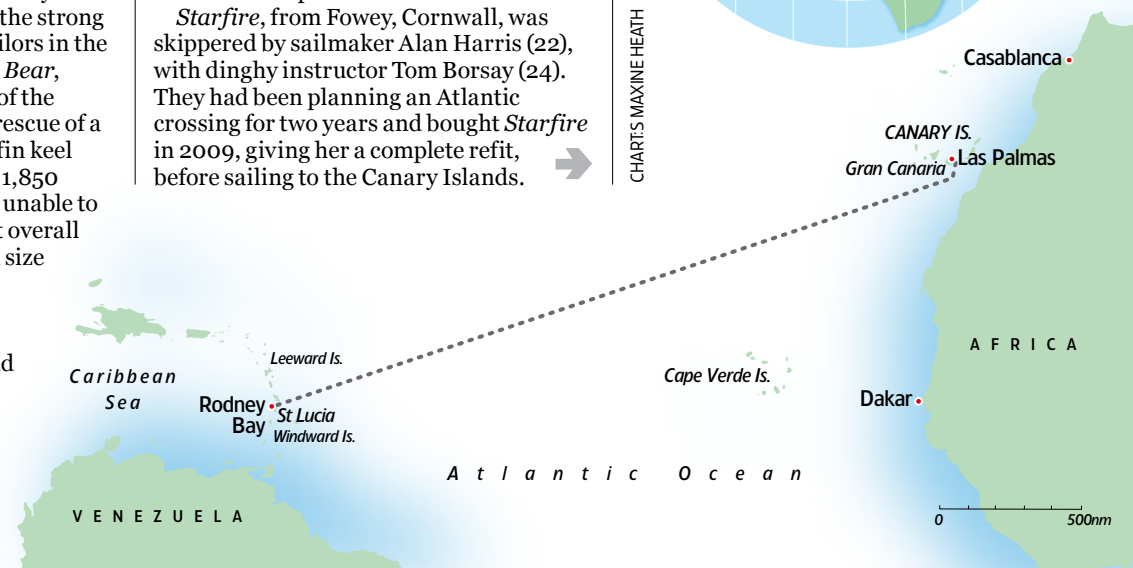
The crew of these two West Country yachts epitomised the best qualities of seamanship and self-sufficiency. *Silver Bear*, from Plymouth, Devon, was skippered by retired detective

superintendent Ray Lawry (55), sailing with his wife Alison (49), son David (26) and former colleague, Andy Munday, still a serving detective inspector with Devon and Cornwall police.

Starfire, from Fowey, Cornwall, was skippered by sailmaker Alan Harris (22), with dinghy instructor Tom Borsay (24). They had been planning an Atlantic crossing for two years and bought *Starfire* in 2009, giving her a complete refit, before sailing to the Canary Islands. ➔



CHARTS MAXINE HEATH





Left: An emotional moment as Starfire reaches St Lucia with jury rudder number three!
 Above: Granny's shelves and two bunk bases - all you need for a good rudder.
 Below left: Fresh fruit from a welcoming local boat, a familiar sight in Rodney Bay.
 Below right: St Lucia never stints on celebration parties

PHOTO: TIM WRIGHT/PHOTOACTION.COM



PHOTOS: MARK FISHWICK



Above: The jury rudder on Starfire struggled to stand up to the considerable ocean swell



Above: Silver Bear arrives on the scene.
 Below: United at last, the two crews celebrate on arrival in St Lucia. Alan and Tom (right)



PHOTO: BOB HARRIS

Alan and Tom got to know many ARC crews, not least when they found themselves in the spotlight as victims of an oil spill in Las Palmas, which left their topsides, inflatable dinghy and mooring warps hideously soaked in heavy oil, requiring a lift out to clean up the mess.

Starfire left Las Palmas at the same time as the ARC fleet, keeping up with many much larger boats, until Day 9 when, at noon, and almost 1,000 miles into the crossing, the rudder blade snapped off just below the waterline. The Plastimo windvane rudder also disappeared as Alan was steering in a lively sea. He noted in the log: 'Hit debris at 8 knots. Rudder broke in half. This is hell!'

Alan had been in regular email contact by satellite phone with Ray, Silver Bear's skipper, and sent him a cryptic message: 'Got a little problem! Are you about?'

Ray soon altered course to Starfire, now lying ahull some 110 miles to the south as Alan and Tom assessed the damage and set about rigging a jury steering system. The incident was reported to ARC control, who notified Falmouth MRCC.

Four hours later, Ray received a satphone call from Falmouth MRCC telling him Starfire had rigged a jury rudder and was sailing again at 6 knots and no longer required assistance.

While other yachts in this, and previous editions of the ARC, have been abandoned – and even deliberately scuttled by their crew – following rudder failure, Starfire was well prepared and had a text book plan for self-rescue, as well as the initiative to jury rig several rudder configurations to complete their voyage.

First they used a padsaw to cut off the jagged remains of the existing rudder blade, hoping to scarf a new blade to the upper half. In the violent conditions, the precision of the cut achieved by Tom was remarkable. Plan B involved using two

5ft x 15in, 1in-thick hardwood shelves which Alan had shipped aboard in the UK after clearing out his grandmother's house!

'You never know when a few pieces of spare timber might come in

useful,' he had been told by his father, Bob Harris (52), an Admiralty Ship's Pilot and volunteer coxswain on Fowey Lifeboat.

Within four hours, in spite of violent conditions, Alan and Tom had dismantled the broken rudder, removed the gudgeons (miraculously without losing any nuts, bolts or fittings over the side) and fabricated a replacement. It consisted of granny's shelves and two plywood bunk bases, bolted together to form a new rudder blade.

Worryingly, water was still seeping in through hull cracks near the rudder skeg.

'From here on, it would be hand steering for both boats all the way'

They used a thick layer of Sikaflex to minimise this, but wondered what underwater damage had been caused by the UFO (unidentified floating object) that had demolished the rudder.

Despite Falmouth MRCC's reassurance, Ray decided to continue towards a rendezvous with Starfire. Silver Bear pounded south, hard on the wind for 24 hours, cursing as their autopilot suddenly gave up the ghost. From here on, it would be hand-steering for both boats all the way to St Lucia.

Ray finally made contact with Starfire at 1700 on Day 11. The following morning they set up a line between the boats and transferred a morale-boosting six cold beers from Silver Bear's fridge! Next day they sent over a couple of iPods and some treats. Alison was amused when she asked if Alan needed fresh fruit or vegetables and was told they had run out on 22 November – in other words, they had left the Canaries without any!

The two yachts stayed in close company for the next few days, but even under reduced sail, it was inevitable that the bigger yacht, Silver Bear, would creep ahead. She was forced to heave-to in the rough and tumble of the trade wind swell, both in daylight and at night, as she waited for Starfire to catch up.

On Day 19 the blade of Starfire's first jury rudder disintegrated and a second was improvised. This lasted 24 hours before failing in worsening weather. This time Silver Bear battled back into

PHOTO: BOB HARRIS

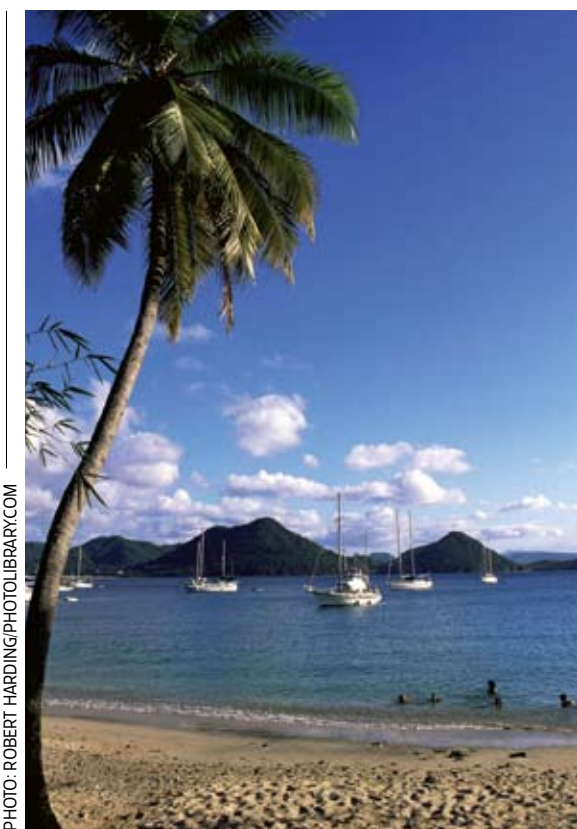
PHOTO: ROBERT HARDING/PHOTOLIBRARY.COM

32 knots of wind and driving rain to play 'the good shepherd'. The following day, in easing conditions, they made another transfer of bread, tinned tuna and more treats.

Rudder number three held out for the remaining three days and at 2300, after sailing nearly 2,000 miles in company, Silver Bear and Starfire arrived in Rodney Bay, to a rapturous welcome. Amazingly, they completed the crossing in just 21 days, 11 hours, ahead of several bigger yachts.

For Alan there was an even bigger surprise. His father, Bob, had flown out from the UK to greet him. By coincidence, his father had previously met Ray, Alan's 'rescuer', on an RYA Ocean Yachtmaster refresher course last year. Learning that Ray was planning to cross the Atlantic, he wryly remarked that Alan and Tom might be in Las Palmas, too, and asked him to keep 'a fatherly eye' on the lads!

The pontoon party for the two crews continued for most of the night. Next day, Starfire was lifted ashore for damage assessment and, surprisingly, there was just a small hairline crack where the skeg is attached to the hull moulding. Thanks to Alan's insurers, Bishop Skinner, a new rudder was en route to St Lucia.



At anchor off Pigeon Island, Rodney Bay, St Lucia, with time to ponder their achievement

Boy overboard!

Drama of a very different kind happened aboard the Bavaria 46, *Nika*, sailed by the Dransfield family from Sydney, Australia. Running under spinnaker, Jesse (9) the eldest of the three children aboard, stepped out of the cockpit and was flipped over the guardrail and safety netting by a lifting spinnaker sheet before he had time to clip on. His mother Helen (40) watched every sailing parent's nightmare come to life right in front on her.

Within seconds, a man overboard drill, which the family had agreed before the crossing, swung into action. Skipper John (47) and his father Pete (81), plus Dean (45),



Jesse (right) doing his daily homework with his younger brother and sister Tyle and Zoe aboard *Nika*

disengaged the autopilot and started the engine, rapidly dumping the spinnaker. Fortunately, Jesse's lifejacket inflated instantly, he didn't panic and he kept himself as visible as possible by holding an arm high above his head. Motoring back upwind they deployed their man overboard sling and made a slow pass. Jesse caught the line, pulled himself into the harness, and was safely back on board 15 minutes after the drama began. It was a textbook rescue.

The Dransfields crossed the Atlantic in an impressive 15 days and 20 hours, including a noon to noon run of 198 miles, with no damage to sails or gear failure, except their radar which packed up two days out. They managed two mid-ocean 'barbies' and suffered one amusing, albeit expensive, interlude when they made a satphone link up with the kids' school back in Australia.

Anticipating that the class would have the phone relayed through a speaker, they listened with horror as the bill racked up while each classmate embarked on a one-to-one chat, mostly asking: 'Have you seen many pirates?'

Chafe thwarts record hopes

The skipper of the Contessa 32 *Pentanemos*, Jon McLean (28), was hoping to beat the existing crossing record of 16 days 9 hours by another Contessa 32, but he was thwarted by chafing spinnaker guys and autopilot failure on Day 9. Thereafter, it was hand-steering all the way for him and his crew, Will Davidson (21) and Neil Kefford (58).

In boisterous, rolling conditions, with swell between 5 and 7m, the spinnaker was a handful and they all suffered sleep deprivation. In seven days, Jon's longest sleep was just 2 hours. Caught in a severe electrical storm, and fearing for the electronics, Jon put everything in the oven, hoping that the steel box



Skipper Jon McLean (right) and Will Davidson were on for a record crossing on *Pentanemos* (below) before chafe problems

would shield them in the event of a direct hit! In spite of all their problems, they made the crossing in just 18 days and 22 hours – third place in class, behind the Swan 40 *Marinara* and Koopmans 40 *Momo*.



Pentanemos, a Contessa 32, crossed in 18 days and 22 hours

A celebration of life

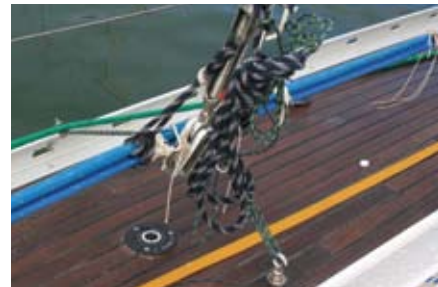
Six years ago, Graham Whitehead was diagnosed with cancer and he and his partner, Siun Cranny, decided to fulfill a long-time dream – to buy a boat and go sailing. They found their Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 46, *Liberty*, in Croatia and took leave from their jobs – ironically, they worked for a national cancer charity. Just weeks before the start of the ARC, Graham got the final all-clear following a second round of chemotherapy.

The first problem encountered by this plucky Dublin family was failure of their headsail furling gear – the foil parting company with the drum in the boisterous trade wind seas. Jury repairs were made, but they had to furl the sail laboriously by hand. With 1,500 miles to go, Graham discovered the starboard forward lower shroud swinging in the breeze. The entire chainplate had broken away from the through-deck fitting. With nothing to secure it to, crewman Paul Carter, an experienced ex-charter skipper in the Med, rigged a rope span fore and aft between two deck cleats (see picture right), which was used to secure and tension the shroud with Dynema, 'a magic no-stretch super rope' which they bought before leaving Las Palmas, having attended an ARC seminar on jury rigging by Jerry Henwood.

To minimise the strain on the rig, they remained on port tack for as long as possible, but hours after the incident they were forced to run under bare poles for six hours as a



Liberty's crew: (l-r) Paul Carter, Sharon Poulter, Graham Whitehead, Siun Cranny, Benjamin Cranny (10)



Here's a seamanlike solution that worked when a chainplate broke mid-ocean

squall arrived, with winds gusting to 50 knots and driving rain.

Day by day, as their confidence returned, they increased the amount of sail, arriving in St Lucia after 19 days, still on port tack! The sting in the tail came 25 miles from landfall, when another squall wiped out the genoa and Graham took a tumble below decks, demolishing the saloon table! His injuries were not serious and throughout the excitement, their son, Benjamin, was busy watching DVDs.

Electric storms drama

Day 13 lived up to its unlucky number aboard *Brindabella*, a Hallberg-Rassy 40, owned by Simon Williams (47), a yacht broker from Northney Marina, in Chichester Harbour. He and his crew, Lini Lowman, endured a 'terrifying' and violent thunderstorm that lasted most of the night. On their penultimate day at sea the struggling autopilot suddenly locked hard over and in the resulting broach, the mainsail, held by a forward preventer, came aback with such force that two battens were shattered. The only way Simon could regain control was to disengage the pilot from the



Simon Williams, left, with crew Lini Lowman, was impressed by the Dynema soft shackles he used on his Hallberg-Rassy 40 *Brindabella*

quadrant, not an easy job in the lively conditions. His best performing bit of gear was Dynema soft shackles to secure the headsail snatch blocks to the booming out pole end.



The French 34-footer MiniMaxi averaged over 170 miles a day, finishing in 15 days and 20 hours! Skipped by Laurent Chapdelaine with his wife Guylaine, son Theo (11) and crewman Ronan, they won the ARC family prize



Above: (From left) Steve Gear, Dan Kewley and Margaret and Alan Atkinson on *Ocean Lady*

Ocean lady-like crossing

Alan Atkinson's home-completed Bowman 40, *Ocean Lady*, is a testament to his craftsmanship and the epitome of a 'proper' cruising yacht. The owner of a joinery business, Alan is a veteran of a previous Atlantic circuit with *Ocean Lady* in 1997. He had one objective: to arrive safely and in comfort. His downwind rig for the crossing was traditional twins: high-cut, heavyweight yankees, set up on a single foil, that could be rolled in or out easily. It could still be carried in up to 35 knots. There was no messing about with big, light-weather sails, or worries about a mainsail gybe. *Ocean Lady* ploughed on day and night, arriving in St Lucia in 18 days and 4 hours. Both she and her crew – Alan's wife Margaret, Steve Gear (46) and Dan Kewley (27) – looked as fresh as when they set out.

Two yachts abandoned

The home-built 53ft steel British yacht *Pelican*, a Bruce Roberts design, was the second yacht abandoned, 325 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands, on Day 10. Skipper Darryl Saxton cited 'unacceptable risk to his crew' after the loss of the yacht's inner forestay and a lower shroud, plus a disabled engine with a rope around the propeller. Following a Mayday call, the crew of five were rescued by a ship bound for Gibraltar.

A German racing yacht, *Auliana II*, also a 53-footer, lost her rudder on Day 2, just 70 miles south-west of Gran Canaria. The Spanish Maritime

Rescue Service responded to her request for a tow but in increasing wind and swell, cleats were pulled out of the lightweight deck. The deck-stepped mast made it impossible to attach a tow line. At dusk, the crew of seven were taken off by a Spanish lifeboat. Salvage experts later recovered the yacht, pumping her dry and towing her back to Gran Canaria.

Both incidents raised questions about how well-prepared the yachts and crew were for an ocean crossing. Some wondered why a jury rig could not have secured the mast on *Pelican*, which was still standing. W



The crew of *Pelican*, above, who abandoned ship after a catalogue of problems 325 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands

ARC 2010

For the 25th anniversary of the ARC, organiser World Cruising Club hopes to attract a record-breaking fleet of 250 boats.

When and where?
Start: Las Palmas, Sunday, 21 November. Finish: St Lucia, Friday, 17 December.

What are the size limits?
Cruising and racing monohulls and multihulls: from 8.2m (27ft) to 18.2m (59ft 11in) LOA

How much does it cost to enter?
£660 and £990, depending on the boat's overall length, with an additional crew fee of £70 for each person aboard, including the skipper. Children under 16 on 1 October, 2010 are exempt.

Safety equipment required?
Liferaft, VHF radio, long-range communications equipment capable of sending email position reports, EPIRB, radar reflector, flares, lifebuoys, manual bilge pump, navigation lights, harnesses and lifejackets for all crew.

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