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THE ESSENCE OF AZAB 2023

(mailasail Azores and Back Race)

Organising Authority - RCYC Sailing Ltd

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Enjoy the RCYC

Formed in 1871, the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club (RCYC) provides friendly Cornish hospitality at a stunning waterfront location in Falmouth, South West England, with its own slipway, beach and dinghy park, accessing the best sailing waters in the UK.



The town has long been a venue for major regattas, such as the historic J Class in the 30s, and the RCYC has been and continues to be at the heart of racing and cruising activity. Last year it hosted the new and very prestigious Richard Mille Trophy for classic yachts, building on its experience of running racing for classic classes such as the Dragons and International Fourteens.

The Club welcomes sailors, boat-owners and those who just love to sit and watch the water to enjoy its bar and catering facilities, either as members or guests. Membership provides many benefits, such as regular racing, a private launch service to your boat, the chance for non boat-owners to go sailing, social activities, and reciprocal membership of yacht clubs worldwide.



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Introduction

On 3rd June 2023, thirty-seven yachts crossed the starting line at Pendennis Point, Falmouth, taking part in the thirteenth Azores and Back (AZAB) race, mostly with single or double-handed crews. For one competitor it was his ninth AZAB, for others it was not only their first AZAB but also their first long-distance race.

Wind direction and strength resulted in previous records being broken for the fastest passage on both legs – 4 days, 21 hours, 17 minutes, 48 seconds on the way out and 4 days, 11 hours, 33 minutes, 38 seconds for the return leg, both achieved by Will Claxton and Craig Brown in Superbigou, a Custom Imoca 60 (below).



The following pages provide a unique insight into the experiences on board nearly half the boats in the fleet, as they raced the 1200 miles to Ponta Delgada and, after a period ashore to recover and restock, the return leg to Falmouth.

Some are comprehensive, some succinct, some technical, some emotional and some impressively written in the writer's second language. Whichever, I hope their words provide wise encouragement and advice to those who may do the race in the future, a vicarious thrill to those who don't race offshore, and some vivid memories for all AZAB participants, past and present.

I have deliberately not edited the longer reports, as they may contain something vital for a future participant and I hope these recollections will inspire more to join the fleet in 2027.















My thanks to the contributors and to Angela Rice, an author and a competitor's mother, who thought up the idea of 'Essences'. And of course, to all the competitors, to the Race sponsors, particularly MailASail, Mainbrace and St Austell Brewery, to the Race Director Keith Tullett, and everyone at the Clube Naval, Ponta Delgada, and at the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club, who worked so hard and enthusiastically to enable the race to happen and be such a success.

It is great to read in the reports that so many want to do it again and that, long after the race, the What's App group is still going strong!

Sarah Hancock

Commodore, Royal Cornwall Yacht Club

CONTRIBUTORS

BOAT NAME	DESIGN	SAIL NO	CONTRIBUTOR	PAGE(S)	FLAG
Amigos	Archambault A35	GBR1246L	Jonathan and Edward Myers	9 - 13 13 - 15	
Andrillot II	Rustler 37	GBR3701N	Tim Stevenson Rob Stevenson	37 - 39 40	
Arethusa of Yealm	Bowman 40	GBR6049T	Mervyn Wheatley	16	
Bare Necessities	Dazcat 1150	GBR725M	Bruce Sutherland	17 - 19	
Bliss	Winner Winner 9.50	NED8218	Madelon Kuiper	20 - 22	
Chimaera of Falmouth	Rustler 36	GBR7222X	Graham Rice Mike Denton	5 - 6 6 - 7	
Confusion	Contessa 32	GBR3132	James Murray	23 - 25	
Frida	JPK 11.8	GER 8282	Tim Behrendt & Andreas Buchheim	26 - 27	
Graciosa	RP Sun Fast 3200	FRA36897	Josè Medeiros	28	
Haven KJ Enigma	MG 346	4365T	Ian Braham Peter Eyre	32 - 34	
Polished Manx	Beneteau First 40.7	IOM 7003	Kuba Szymanski	35	
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Sundance	Sigma 36	GBR 3907	Alistair Cooke	29 - 31	
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CHIMAERA OF FALMOUTH – Graham Rice

"Roll on the next AZAB!"

I would like to thank all those involved from the RCYC for making the AZAB 2023 such a wonderful experience.

From the moment we made contact with the yacht club, throughout the preparation, the pre-race socials, bar staff, scrutineering, registration, briefings, buddy system, even a launch to get to the club, socials in Ponta Delgada and the organisation throughout the whole event, at every single point it has been a great pleasure to be involved in such a prestigious event. Not many things in life these days seem to be approached with such positivity and you and all at the club can be very proud. Thank you!

I have long since held a romantic notion to compete in the AZAB, having first read about it as a teenager and having, over the years, followed iterations of the Whitbread, Volvo Ocean and various other ocean sailing races including the more recent GGR, one wonders, what if we did the AZAB?!



Lo and behold about 5 or 6 years ago I met my life long best friend and sailing buddy Mike in a pub in the Cotswolds. I was armed with a chart of the North Atlantic. Several pints later, having found the Azores, we were - obviously - definitely 'up for it', totally oblivious to what may actually be involved. It wasn't until I called Mike about two years ago with a somewhat misjudged budget and vague plan that we actually put plans in place, with 'right, we need a boat then' remark, off we went.

Having spent a lifetime reading the classified ads and yachting press choosing my dream boat, when I heard of the 2005 Rustler 36 Chimaera of Falmouth coming up for sale, we didn't hesitate. We bought her without actually having seen her in November 2021 and arranged with Rustler to fit a Hydrovane, add a life raft, co-ordinate the standing and running rigging to be replaced etc etc. We ordered new sails and a spinnaker from Penrose and turned up in Falmouth in late March 2022 with a huge smile on our faces and off we set. We did lots of sailing and drank plenty of beer contemplating what else we needed to do. We successfully undertook our qualification passage to Ireland, a story in its own right - having set a waypoint at Great Sole Bank and promptly sailed into a massive fishing fleet we realised perhaps there was a clue in the name Great Sole Bank!

Roll on 2023 and having read the OSR category 1 requirements embarked on more serious preparation. I took three months off work (and since my work is based in Malaysia, it is not so easy to organise being in Falmouth!), gave my wife a big kiss and off I went. Mike picked me up from Heathrow at 6am and we drove down to Falmouth with that familiar huge grin of excitement, launched the boat that same afternoon and re-acquainted ourselves with The Chain Locker. So much fun to be back in Falmouth with a boat on hand.

The days and weeks of preparation flew by, we did our sea survival and first aid training, continued our steep learning curve of Cat 1 requirements and when the day came, we passed our inspection. No turning back now then. This is it. We were in the final run down and as we started to meet and chat with fellow competitors the AZAB vibe began in full. It was great. Friends and family came to watch the start and we had quite a gang in the pub and on the water for the start. I was super happy that both my Dad and Mike's Dad could be there, as well as many others.

The race itself was full of adventure. Having had a reasonable start and got to the Manacles within sight of the leaders we promptly fluffed our first spinnaker hoist and watched as Sundance and others passed us as we flapped around. Eventually we were sorted with spinnaker up and off we flew. That was to be the story of much of the first leg. How brave are you carrying the spinnaker? We discovered we are racers by day, cruisers by night. Indeed, we next saw Sundance as we were dropping our spinnaker one grey windy evening watching this solo figure in yellow oilskins running up and down the foredeck trying to tame his spinnaker wrapped around the forestay. We were later thrilled to welcome Alastair into Ponta Delgada and taking his lines brought a huge sense of 'well done mate, that's amazing'.

We had a wonderful time in Ponta Delgada, together with fellow sailors, visiting family and friends, our new saviours Peter and Wendy from the yacht Henry who helped us endlessly with boat repairs. There were many stories along the way, but the overriding sense of camaraderie was the single most wonderful thing.

That sense of camaraderie will stay with us for a long time, and I would like to take this moment to thank everyone involved for putting on the AZAB and I sincerely hope it goes from strength to strength in the years to come.

Roll on the next AZAB!

CHIMAERA OF FALMOUTH – Mike Denton

"our learning curve was enormous"

In the end, it took us around 8 days to sail Chimaera of Falmouth on each leg of the Azores and Back race in 2023.

But our journey for this adventure started decades earlier and ramped up properly over the preceding two years as what started as a "one-day" dream became a "do you think we could?" and ultimately a "let's go for it!" and it then became an adventure which neither myself nor my life-long buddy Graham will ever forget.

The time spent sailing in the race was magical, and I am sure this collection will cover off in detail some of the specific tales from our fellow entrants. As two 56-year-old mates we set off on our journey with a mantra of "Safety – Friendship – Compete" and this maxim helped guide us in our decisions on race preparation and strategy.

Of course, we have our sailing tales to tell, but the essence of AZAB is not, for me at least, in the actual sailing. Going offshore, or I imagine any adventure off grid and out of range of all the things we normally take for granted is a huge undertaking. The last time we sailed offshore the internet was not invented, so our learning curve was enormous, and never ending.

To go on this journey an often-remote expat friendship (Graham lives in Malaysia) became one of regular contact, shared research, and weekly calls. Initially to choose and buy a suitable boat for AZAB 2023, but then to understand the regulations that surround such an event. I believe 48 boats were entered a week prior to the start, and 10 did not manage to make the start line, some pulling out heart-breakingly late through no fault of their own. It is VERY easy to understand why. If you are not used to offshore sailing then there is a huge amount of things to learn and obstacles to overcome, and we quickly learned that you can't do this alone.

Obviously, you do what you can through research and reading, but quite quickly you come to rely on new people in your lives, people I am sure I will keep in touch with for ever. If this was an Oscars speech, I am sure I would name them all but there are simply too many. But in every area to get prepared, boat maintenance, electronics (I will thank Peter for all his help there) sails and safety/ comms equipment we came to rely on a network of people happy to provide support and their time.

As the entrants started to arrive in our home port of Falmouth, we quickly met some fabulous people and some very accomplished sailors. The AZAB is a race, but it's one like no other I have ever done. Everyone, and I mean everyone is happy to help where they can as all recognise that getting to the start line of such an event is hard enough on its own, and finishing is even harder! It's quickly obvious who has done it before and whose boats are better prepped. But everyone is still happy to share their experience, knowledge and often equipment to help the newbies. This camaraderie extended to the bars, restaurants, and events in the run up to the start day and is a time of great laughs and fun, mixed with stress, hard work, and hope.

But it's also your family and friends that provide the essential support. While we were off galivanting across oceans, my wife Tor was at home juggling the responsibilities of family life, my sister Suzi did the same with our business, our parents contributed in many ways, in particular Graham's folks helping with introductions to previous AZAB competitors and provisioning, my dad was charged with manufacturing an emergency tiller with two days' notice.

So, what started as a dream for two mates became a collective focus for our family, our parents, and our extended circle of friends, both old and new. It brought us all together with a common purpose, in a way that I had not anticipated and nothing else ever seems to have done.

I started by saying this is an adventure Graham I will never forget, but I believe everyone who joined in our experience feels the same, and that is the essence of AZAB.



VENTURA - David Faucher

"participants.. became friends within days"

As promised, a few words to give you my impressions of, and feelings about the adventure that was the AZAB race.



First of all, I must say that the return to normal life is a bit difficult for me, with a mixture of pleasure at being reunited with my family and my work colleagues, but a regret at resuming a 'normal' life. I had become accustomed to living on my boat, to meeting people who are passionate about sailing, to living in another country...

I have thought about and prepared for this race for more than four years. Night and day, every day. In addition to my work.

The (good) surprise for me, that I had not anticipated, was meeting up before the race with participants who became friends within days. I think particularly of Graham - we had a strong and sincere friendship; he was the first to welcome me, we helped each other to prepare, he introduced me to Angela, to John his father, his

family. I would never forget him. But I also think of Mike, Jan Erik, Tim, James, Bill and so many others....

The race was hard, beautiful. I learnt a lot about myself, on my boat. There were moments when I felt discouraged, when I felt very alone amongst elements which were strong and impressive.

This developed confidence in myself and in my boat, which I love even more now.

I do hope to see Graham and all my friends again and I shall prepare myself even better for the next one in four years' time.



AMIGOS - Jon and Ed Myers

"I had to grow my own crew!"



Preparation

I have been thinking of entering the AZAB for a long time. I first got a copy of the NOR (Notice of Race) about 20 years ago but at that time had no yacht! Ever since completing the British Steel Challenge round the world race in 1993 I had wanted to do another ocean race. The thought of doing it as skipper was an added incentive and the AZAB is the most achievable way of doing it.

Preparation took a long time. First, I had to grow my own crew! Edward, my youngest child (of 3), was the one who caught the sailing bug as badly as me. We started to seriously talk about the AZAB in 2017 when we crewed together on the J109 Ju Kyu in the Fastnet race. That was also when I realised that his claim to have surpassed me as a sailor was clearly correct.

We viewed Amigos, a 2007 Archambault A35, a few days after the end of the 2020 lockdown and bought her early 2021. We had a very clear focus on preparing her for the race, renewing standing rigging, upgrading running rigging with a strong focus on the hardest wearing technical options, adding AIS, solar panels, all the required safety equipment and a near complete new set of sails. We had several discussions with Jon Pegg at Ullman to select a suit of sails that was up to the prolonged challenge of the AZAB and would give us good coverage of all likely conditions.

We were very pleased with our boat preparation. The strength and chafe resistance of using Dynema core in Technora sheath and plenty of chafe cover was worth the added expense and we had no running rigging problems through the race. We were generous with chafe patches on the mainsail, reinforcing where the spreaders rubbed at full hoist, 1 and 2 reefs. The 2 small solar panels provided nearly all the energy we needed. On the return leg we only charged for a total of about 3 hours.

The one area we knew was a weakness was the autopilot which was a very old and basic unit. However, we decided replacing this with a top end modern unit was beyond the budget. This was our biggest mistake in a way, but we were aware of the issue and the budget simply wasn't there to replace it. We also knew we'd hold up better with twin rudders which was an option in the A35 but again to change from our existing single rudder configuration was outside our budget.

Preparing for a race like this involves more than just preparing boat and crew. Life and commitments have to be adjusted. Clearly, I owe a huge thankyou to my wife, Sarah, who supported

me in this adventure. I left her with 5 weeks of 5.30 am dog walks for a start! Not to mention the money and time I lavished on the boat. Working as an NHS consultant proved surprisingly little of a barrier. My colleagues were very supportive and able to cover my work. I shifted my more onerous ward-based weeks to outside the AZAB period and carried forward leave from 2020-21 which worked well as respiratory medicine was somewhat busy in that earlier period due to coronavirus.

Ed and I had done little 2 handed racing before. Our qualifying passage was an eyeopener. We did a just over 300 nm triangle from Falmouth, around Eddystone then Ushant TSS and south Scilly TSS then home to Falmouth. It was our first long sail double handed and the first time we tried the autopilot in earnest. It was clear that it couldn't cope with more than about 17 knots of wind under spinnaker. We were very tired by the end and realised we would have to take great care of ourselves and each other especially around sleep, fluid intake and food. But we are both determined individuals and once set on a target likely to achieve it. There was a recognition that at times it would not be fun but no question of pulling out.

The race itself

We went into this race not really knowing how we would do. The only boat we had raced against in the event was Jackdaw in class 2. We hoped for a podium on at least 1 leg.

The start was a highlight. We loved seeing the spectator fleet, recognising friends, and being waved off by Sarah. We started well at the front of IRC3 and soon began to catch the slower IRC2 boats. In our prerace prolife we said we planned to push hard for a good result and a breezy downwind first night gave us the opportunity to do so. The big kite and the new spinnaker staysail came into their own. We weren't able to get much info on positions of the rest of the fleet on leg 1 but knew we were doing OK when we crossed ahead of a number of IRC2 boats on the 2nd and 3rd days. Realizing from a chance comment in a text that we were 1st or 2nd in class to Graciosa was a huge fillip.

Photo thanks to Paul Gibbins Photography



Tues 6th – Day 4 – was a big scare and a low point. We noticed a nasty and increasing graunching noise coming from the steering. On investigating we found the cap at the top of the newly fitted rudder stock tube had come off. This allowed movement of the rudder shaft and we were very concerned that the steering might fail. We were halfway there with no easy port of refuge and concerned about how we could progress. The sat phone was a godsend as we were able to call someone Ed had worked for in the marine industry who gave some useful advice. We were also very well equipped with materials for repair. We dropped the sails and used plexus to epoxy the cap back in place and backed it up with a large jubilee clip on the rudder shaft just above the cap. Initially we sailed conservatively but as the noise had disappeared, after 24 hours we were pushing hard again.

The persistent fresh downwind breeze made for fast but demanding sailing. Big seas and dark nights made steering challenging and the autopilot could not cope. We hit a new boat speed record of 16.7 knots surfing down a wave. Ed and I hand steered for all but the last 24 hours catching 1- to 2- hour sleeps in turn. There were times when we were exhausted and honestly not enjoying the experience. We damaged the new J3.5 on hoisting it on for the first time. That meant we kept the J2 up above its limits on a breezy night reach and used the J4 poled out when we might have used the 3.5. Having a well-considered sail plan featuring sails with overlapping wind ranges allowed us to maintain near optimum boat speed despite these problems.

The last 48 hours were challenging in another way. We had one of the darkest and windiest nights of the race, dropping to double reefed main and poled out J4 to make things manageable. We probably would have broken the boat speed record again if the poled out J4 hadn't acted as an air brake and slowed us during a surf! The next morning, we had the challenge of negotiating the low-pressure system north of Sao Miguel and the light wind transition coming out. We knew we were neck and neck with Graciosa and with the potential of a class win but had no idea where they were.

The last night was a pleasant jib reach and finally the autopilot could earn its keep. At dawn we were alarmed to see a sail coming up behind. Was it Graciosa, who we needed to beat by 5 hours on the water to win the class? As she rapidly came up from behind, we recognised the mainsail shape of the large catamaran, Suenos, soon confirmed on AIS. As we closed on the island and got phone signal, we were delighted to see Graciosa was well to leeward and heading for the opposite (Eastern) end of the island with a longer distance to the finish. Rounding the western end, bearing away, and hoisting the kite, a delightful broad reach in 20 knots under full main, S4 and spinnaker staysail took us almost to Ponta Delgada. A last kite drop and our only tack of the leg round the breakwater took us over the finish line and into the port.

A much-needed beer, meal, and sleep in the nearest hotel just what we needed! As we sat at our evening meal, we could see our class win for leg 1 was safe – icing on the cake.

Leg 2

The decision of which end of the island to go for after the start weighed heavily on our minds in the days leading up to the restart. Particularly for Ed who was the one looking at weather forecasts and routing. It seemed clear that west was best under almost every circumstance, and we agreed we would need a very strong incentive to go east. Then the night before the start of leg 2 forecasts seemed to show a huge wind hole to the NW of the island and better winds from SE for the first 36 hours out east. We felt we could not ignore that information but decided to keep our options open until we saw how boats in class 2 went and how those in our class lined up. On the day, it looked as though the majority of the fleet was heading east and we stuck with the plan. Notably our class rival, Graciosa, was an exception.

Initially we went well in unexpected light northerlies along the SE coast. We caught Asgard and Fryd – the class 2 flyers – and only Jackdaw seemed clear ahead. Then it started to go wrong. We were becalmed off the eastern end of the island. We saw the remainder of the fleet closing up from behind having stayed further offshore.

Even as we started to move again our mood matched the grey, drizzling weather. Ed was particularly down feeling responsible for the decision and that he'd thrown away our lead from leg 1 in a "bad" decision. I reminded him that it was a joint decision and the best we could make on the information available. We knew it carried risk. And it was still 1000 miles to the finish. Things looked little better the next morning when we saw on YB that the boats that had gone west had not slowed, and Graciosa was now about 30 miles ahead. That's when things could have fallen apart, but I am proud to say we picked ourselves up. There was no blaming or criticism. We knuckled down and drove the boat.

Day 3 saw another setback when the cringle for the 1st reef tore out. Luckily the structure of the sail was not compromised but we could not see a fix that we could do at sea that would be strong enough. From then on it was full main or 2 reefs.

As the days went on, we continued to work hard. We went a little west of rum lime but in a non-planing boat saw little benefit in seeking the stronger winds that were further west still. Having YB position information this time, we could see ourselves pulling away from the rest of class 3 and gradually reeling in Graciosa. The forecast consistently promised us easier sailing in 12-15 knots. The wind gods consistently delivered 18-20 knots. We overtook Graciosa in distance to the finish and felt we were in a better position being less far out to the west. But could we get the 5-hour margin we needed? Approaching Mount's Bay, we ran into light winds. Then a 25-knot squall that carried us to Lizard point. It dropped as we rounded Lizard and we finished with a delightful light wind tight spinnaker reach into Falmouth, crossing the line at 00.39 on Monday 26th.

We were delighted to be greeted first by our friends Rich and Margie who braved the night to come out in their rib and then by the RCYC launch with beers. Sarah met us at Mylor and took us home to much needed showers and bed.

Graciosa finished about 3 hours behind us. Close enough to secure a well-deserved class win for leg 2 but not enough to snatch the aggregate 1st place from us.

I have sailed with other father and son teams and there has often been tension and lack of mutual respect. I am so please that Ed and I were able to enjoy this adventure together. He tolerated my rustiness and lack of pace round the boat without complaint. We had never a cross word and that feels like the greatest achievement of the whole adventure. I will remember this event with pride and fondness.

Obtaining weather information and making strategic decisions?

Ed did this and was faultless. We used Expedition software and downloaded data from EFS via the sat phone. In both legs, which end of the island to round was a key decision. For leg 1 routings were vastly different from day 1 depending on which end of the island you aimed for. On leg 2 we did get it wrong. Over beers in the RCYC after the race the crew of Graciosa, José Medeiros - who is the sailing instructor at Ponta Delgada - was kind enough to let us know that in a southeasterly there will always be light and contrary winds with a hole off the Eastern corner of the island. I can't blame him for keeping that to himself!

Issues with gear and sails?

Apart from the rudder stock problem and the sail damage mentioned above we had very few issues. When we dropped the S4 after 4 days continuous use on leg 2 we found 2 small areas of damage. These were readily repaired with spinnaker repair tape.

We snapped the spork on leg 1!

The saddest loss was the bean bag. The big waterproof bean bag was a key item of equipment for helping comfort and napping. It was lost overboard in a broach toward the end of leg 2. Ed was especially sad.

Managing food and sleep?

We struggled with sleep due to the need to hand steer almost continuously. We were limited to a couple of hours sleep at a time and in the darkest nights to 1 hour as that was all the helm could manage before losing concentration. We both hallucinated a lot as we tired. The quiet noises of the boat became whispered words. Waves became islands, whales or even (in my case) a swimming polar bear! We ate less than we should in the mornings as we were so tired and needed to sleep. We relied almost entirely on freeze dried and packet meals which were surprisingly good.

Doing the AZAB was an amazing experience and to do it with one of my children made it particularly special. The race itself was "Type 2 fun" a lot of the time. Like running a marathon, much of the pleasure is in retrospect. The A35 is a great boat but not ideal for 2-handed offshore as she broaches too easily. I wouldn't do it again in this boat without twin rudders and a state-of-the-art autopilot. The class win put it in a different light making all the hard work and exhaustion worthwhile.

Additional comments from Ed Myers -

What were the main challenges in boat preparation?

We started the boat prep in the winter of 2021 after the first season of owning the boat. We knew it was going to be a long process so started by sitting down with the OSR Cat1 regs and making a list of everything we were going to need. The boat itself had only ever been used for inshore racing so it was going to need a lot of work.

There were relatively few gremlins hiding as we worked through the list. The one major scare being as we got the rudder inspection done a few cracks were found around the stock. Luckily these were only on the surface and could be ground out and re-glassed.

The running rigging was old when we bought the boat so we knew this was going to need to be fully replaced before the AZAB. In a race where you may be on the same sail configuration for days on end, we opted for solutions that would minimise chafe in all areas we were worried about. New halyards all had Dyneema chafe cover tips at the working end and for all high load ropes (e.g., primary halyards, tackline, Spinnaker guys) we used Technora covers to aid gripping in clutches and on winches.

The main challenge with preparation was always going to be time. With me living in Southampton and Dad working the week before the start, the jobs list never seemed to be getting shorter. By the day before the start, we were confident in the boat's preparation but maybe a little less in our own. The only double-handed sail we had done up to this point was the 300nm qualifier and an inshore race.

Highs and lows during the race:

The obvious first highlight of the race was the start. The anxiety had been building in the months prior with my head in boat prep mode 24/7. The final week was hectic but successful and we docked off feeling good. The plan was to stay away from Black Rock and the other competitors on our start and make sure we got away cleanly. In the end we had a great start off the Pendennis end of the line and led our class to the Manacles. Lots of smiles as we peeled to the big spinnaker and staysail and started to really get going. The high continued for the first 48 hours as we continued to be surrounded by Class 1 boats, crossing in front of a couple just a few 100m behind.

The first low was a few days in about 700nm to the finish. We noticed a creaking and cracking noise coming from the rudder. An inspection in the lazarette found the top bush of the GRP tube that the rudder stock sits in had come out, leaving room for the rudder stock to move. We dropped the S4 and the main and stopped the boat to unload the rudder. After a few minutes I managed to glue the bush back in with a structural glue I had in the repairs bag and limit the damage. The top bearing had been damaged during this time and we were unsure whether it meant the end of the race but decided to continue with reduced sail for a period to limit any issues. 24 hrs later we were in 30 knots with the big kite up, breaking boat speed records! This gave us all the confidence we needed to carry on pushing.

The next few days were the toughest of the whole leg. The lack of sleep was catching up on us, we had little idea of how we were going against the competition, everything was going OK but finding the motivation to keep pushing the boat was hard. We felt like we had broken the back of the leg but realised we still had a long few days ahead of us. This was highlighted when I took a fall from the nav station landing mainly with my collar bone on a bulkhead. All was ok but it was a stark reminder that we had a long way to go still.

On the final morning we could just about make out Sao Miguel and a black sail coming up fast from leeward. Once we were in phone signal range, we could look at the position report and see we had made some serious gains on boats in our fleet which felt like a relief, not having to push too close to the island to make up seconds. The final run from the corner of Sao Miguel to Ponta Delgada was downwind in 20knts in glorious sunshine followed by our first tack of the race, around the end of the breakwater, for the finish.

Leg 2:

The start of Leg 2 was much trickier than the start of Leg 1. It immediately posed a question of which way around the island you go. We knew the decision would dictate the first few days of the leg and it would be hard to make up ground if you chose poorly. The plan for this start became clearer on the morning of the start with the strategy being to go east.

Most of the other boats do too. We chose the eastern option with the majority of class1 and 2, the aim being to avoid a potential wind hole on the NW edge of the island. We sailed well against the other boats, but in a light northerly breeze in mist which did not bode well, as this wasn't in any forecast I had seen. As we got to the eastern tip of the island, we found a large wind hole which took 3 hours to push through. This was my lowest point as a navigator seeing that a few boats in our class which had taken the western option had been unimpeded and were happily sailing off at 6knts. In my head I thought this was the leg over in terms of overall results. By the time we were back in good pressure they had about 20 miles on us (at least 4 hours sailing on average). The next few days were windy downwind with very dark nights but with every position report we were seeing small gains back on the class leaders.

Obtaining Weather Information and making strategic decisions:

For weather data we were limited by budget. We went through the race sponsors Mailasail, and they provided an Iridium 9555 with a Redbox to run as a virtual network. This limited us to only downloading GFS with a 50km resolution. It allowed a good picture of what was happening but lacked the accuracy I was craving while trying to navigate around the low-pressure system during the first leg. I put the weather data into Expedition on a boat laptop which also had the boat's data running through it. This was helpful in running routings and choosing strategic options. On leg 1 we didn't have position reports so we were really running the race as a time trial, second guessing the competition's plans. In leg 2 we had position reports which I was downloading from the YB tracker every 6 hours or so. The strategy was slightly different on the way home as with position reports we could try and position ourselves relative to other boats to try and cut corners on shifts. After the halfway point we could see that going far north like the faster boats wasn't an option for us but trying to set ourselves up for the lighter winds predicted for the channel became more important.

Issues with gear and sails?

Apart from the rudder issue on leg 1 we were relatively unscathed during the race. We suffered a lost tackline, a rip on the bolt rope of the J3.5, tore out the reef 1 tack point on the main, and had a couple of small holes in the new S4, which was new at the start of the race and now probably has about 1500nm on it. Ultimately, we were happy with how the new Ullman sails had performed.

Managing food and sleep?

For the first few days of both legs, we took fresh/pre-cooked food to make sure that even if we were busy or tired or even feeling a little seasick, we would be able to eat. From then on, we had provisioned 3 freeze dried meals per person per day plus some pot noodles and plenty of snacks. We rarely managed to eat all 3 packets a day but by the end of leg 2, as the conditions calmed, I did my best to catch up.

With sleep, we ran a loose 2hr on 2hr off system, trying to get as much sleep during the day knowing that it would be harder to helm at night. I think it was rare to get a full 2 hours off without feeling the boat going into a broach and running up on deck to ease sails or need to be woken for a sail change or wind shift. I think having the structure in place meant we got more sleep than we would have if we tried to freestyle it, as it's very easy not to take a nap during the day and deeply regret it later.

Skipper Crew Relationship

Well, the skipper was my dad, so we definitely had a close relationship to start with. We fell into our own roles well with me looking after the nav and boat speed/sail plan side and dad making sure we stayed safe and making sure I ate properly. All the decisions we made were discussed with a risk/reward process. The hardest part was knowing how hard to push the boat, when to keep the S4 up in 20+knts on a very dark night and when to pole out the jib instead. Keeping the spinnaker up was definitely quicker but only until you have one too many broaches and blow it up. So, knowing our own limits, helming- and tiredness-wise, was a big part of making those calls.

Although I may have become a little grumpy when tired and hungry, I'm pleased to say we worked well as a team and will still sail together.

ARETHUSA OF YEALM – Mervyn Wheatley

The first AZAB in 1975 was also my first



Mervyn, half-way through his ninth AZAB, giving a masterclass on anti-spinnaker-wrap methodology

However, I realised that, for a frail old pensioner, my erstwhile pleasure in setting a spinnaker has now become a bit of a trial and even more so when I had left it up too long and was attempting to hand it at 0300! Apart from that, it was a most enjoyable sail both ways with no breakages or traumas. As always, the real pleasure in this race is meeting the other competitors, particularly in the welcoming environment of Ponta Delgada. Although this race confirmed my decision to make it my last, I shall miss the generosity and kindness of the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club and my fellow competitors.

The first AZAB in 1975 was also my first singlehanded oceanic sailing race. Peter Brett, the designer of the Rival yachts, very kindly lent me his Rival 34 which was an ideal boat in which to do it and I enjoyed the race immensely. I have since competed in seven more AZABs, five RB&Is, five OSTARs and skippered in the Clipper RTW race.

I am now in my eightieth year and decided that having started with an AZAB, it would be satisfactory to end with one, so I entered for my ninth. Apart from the Rival 34, I have also sailed a Rival 38, a Formosa 42 and a Bowman 40, the boat I also entered for this race. No speed machines there but we did manage to collect a few prizes over the years. I am happy to say that this race was all down wind, and I was never becalmed - very rare on an AZAB!



BARE NECESSITIES – Bruce Sutherland



Photo thanks to Hugh Hastings

Preparation

What prompted you to enter?

We usually do "something different" each year with the boat as well as cruise and local races; we have done Fastnet several times, Round Ireland, raced in France, Three Peaks, and this was something different.

Did you have second (or third) thoughts beforehand?

Yes, just before we set off for Falmouth after the emails about washboards which created last minute talks with the boat manufacture about compliance. (We are a category A coded boat and therefore we should not have been worrying about these technical details.)

The race itself

Highs and Lows during the Race?

Low - sailing out at 15 knots knowing that the faster you went the more likely you were going to ARRIVE IN the storm or its aftermath in the Azores!

High - crossing the finish lines and that nothing broke at all, and we had some excellent sunny downwind sailing and seeing a whale and being in the Azores.

Your greatest achievements?

Completing the race without breaking anything.

Lessons learnt?

Handling the boat in yet more sea and weather conditions with new sail configurations. The Azores is a long way from anywhere.

Emotions at different stages?

Day 1 starting in the sunshine was a high – Day 2 whizzing to a storm was in trepidation.

Then the standard problem of being offshore which is that you can't turn the weather and the sea off when they are not what you want. 48 hours of the Azores really needed a reset button as we were fed up with big side seas.

Obtaining weather information and making strategic decisions?

Weather information was very easy. We fitted an Iridium Go Executive. Fitting the aerial was a chore as we did it on the water. We used to have an Iridium Go and sold it as we thought that there would be something better coming soon, and we had no plans to go offshore! It basically did what it said on the tin. The shop we bought it from gave us some free sat airtime to play with. The online tutorials and data management software were superb for weather and for yellow brick positions.

Making decisions was not that hard. We route using Expedition and like just about everyone else also use Predict Wind as well when on land. That gives you an idea of what you are likely to do at the start. So, on the way down we knew there was something nasty coming into the Azores and we went W so that we could come in with the wind hopefully deeper that 110 to avoid a long windy reach, which is not a particularly safe point of sail in a two-handed cat. We had a horrible time actually arriving which may have been from a poor decision. We watched the two boats in front of us come in at roughly the same time and the one that came in from the W took 6 or 7 hours. So, we went E and took 9 hours!!! But as no one came in from the W at the same time we will never know.

On the way home, contrary to what other people were saying, our routing said go W. And we had the reinforcement from Will on Superbigou of "go back to basics and get your head off the computer....." - the weather is coming from the W so GO W!

Issues with gear and sails?

NONE..... Obviously, our maintenance work over the winter paid off!

Managing food and sleep?

Food was easy. We did not use freeze-dried / boil in the bag. We simply cooked as we went along after the two prepared meals were eaten. Sleep – we have a flexible watch system, both up when needed and short or long sleeps depending on conditions and need.

Being on your own / Skipper and crew relationship?

Common enemy: the weather and the sea - so minimum time for fighting.

What would you do differently another time?

Consider water ballast to make the boat heavier when it is windy, fit a top line to the head of the main to pull it down with and look at an inner forestay - to have a heavy weather jib permanently available rather than having to hank it on.

Ashore

Your interaction with other competitors?

Slow start, as we have two hulls, but got better as the event went on. The WhatsApp group was the best thing.

Preparations for Leg 2?

We ate, drunk and made merry as we had no breakages to repair. . .

Your feelings about the race being over?

Bit sad – all that effort and time and then it's gone.

COMPETITORS:

*- prize giving at the
National Oceanography
Centre, Southampton*

*- on a tour of the
island of São Miguel*



BLISS – Madelon Kuiper

"Nothing was going to stop me from sailing AZAB"

Preparation

1979 I heard a friend of my father tell one of his daughters: "Once you are old enough, we will sail that race together." He had just been reading Yachting Monthly about AZAB. I was super jealous. I wanted that as well. Years later, when I heard about the race again, I realised that was the one, and I set my mind to sailing it. I started with my then boyfriend on his boat in 2015, but we had to abandon because of a broken auto pilot. Having broken up with him I set my mind to going it alone. Nothing was going to stop me from sailing AZAB from start to finish at least once in my life. I love that the race still has this Corinthian Spirit, which is slowly disappearing nowadays. And I totally loved the camaraderie amongst participants.

The main challenges while preparing my boat were the ISAF and NOR regulations, and the slightly different interpretation that the RCYC safety committee seems to give to the ISAF Cat 1 rules at times. At some point I was told by the organising committee that despite being Cat A CE certified, my boat did not fulfil the stability requirements for the race. This was after spending 1.5 years of time and money on preparations. And then after a few days I was told that the boat was in fact compliant with the requirements. But by then I had had multiple frantic days of phoning and e-mailing designers, certifying bodies, class club, etc and I had asked a yacht designer to recalculate the parameters for my boat, which also cost me some money. Then during the safety inspection before the race, I was not even asked to show that I could stow all heavy items securely against the bottom of the boat, while this is one of the most important factors in righting capacity when capsizing.

All the time during preparation I kept being scared about storms during the race. I have been brought up as a cruiser. With my parents we never went out with wind over Force 6. I have stretched this myself to 7 if the direction is fine but would never think of purposely looking for stronger winds. Before I left the Netherlands for Falmouth, there was a point when I was so scared, I almost did not go. Only in Falmouth, when I spoke to the other participants and realised that I was probably better prepared than some of them, I relaxed and got more comfortable. Having sailed the race I have realised that there is so much more to play with weather-wise out on the ocean, compared to when sailing close to shore, so I now would feel more comfortable with strong winds out there than on the North Sea.

The race itself

The first leg I was feeling "in the flow" from start to finish. It seemed that everything that I had ever learned about sailing was at my fingertips. I wish I could feel like that more often for 8 days in a row! On the way back it was hard to hold on to that feeling. I knew that I was first placed in the rankings and was more focused on the result than on the first leg. Although it did not result in big mistakes it definitely didn't feel so good as it did on the first leg. I learned and experienced how helpful it is to focus on the process and stay in the current moment. I knew that in theory, but this race helped me to experience it so clearly that I'll always remember it.



My biggest achievement was probably to manage my fears effectively. From the fears before the start of not passing the safety inspection and of getting caught in stormy weather, to thoughts during the race about being rather far away from land and of not being able to get the wrapped spinnaker down.

I was very happy on my own out at sea and loved the days cocooning, just reading, sleeping, listening to the sounds of the boat, and trimming or sail changing when needed. On both legs the first 24 hours were a bit more difficult getting used to the movement, but I did not encounter any real sea sickness.

At different stages during the race, I got unsolicited e-mails from people onshore that were commenting on the race and the way I was sailing. I noticed that this really pulled me out of my concentration. Cheering me on worked fine, but my sister e-mailing several times that I was wrong to think that RKJ Enigma would overtake me soon (which they did), or a friend e-mailing that I should work harder and be able to achieve 7.2 knots on average the next 24 hours, was off the mark. Next time I think I will only distribute my e-mail address to a really select group.

I practised getting weather information and routing on another race the year before. That worked well. Being able to see the position of other boats through YB e-mails and YB display in Predict Wind Offshore helped in tactical decisions.

I ate a lot less than expected. I still have half of the freeze-dried food left. Good for days when I am too tired to go to the supermarket!

Very frustrating that my foldable solar panel did not work. I had contacted the shop where I bought it before to discuss this, but they told me the readings were fine. From one of the other participants, who is a marine electrics expert, I learned that the readings should also be taken under load. Doing so highlighted that the panel did not provide the required current under load. Unfortunately, I only found out after the race. During the race I had to run the engine 6 hours out of every 24 to keep the battery charged.

I guess I had not sailed downwind for such a long stretch before. The snap shackles of the spinnaker sheets started eating into the spinnaker boom, and then the sharp edges of the dents in the spinnaker boom started eating into the spinnaker sheets. I had to splice twice on the way and spend a few hours polishing the dents out while in Ponta Delgada, and again on the way back. I'm still working on a more permanent solution right now.

Ashore

I loved the time in the Azores with the other crews (photo - page 19). Some of the double-handed crews put real effort into making sure the solo sailors were invited for the nights out. It was generally a great crowd. Out on the water we also made sure we spoke to each other on VHF at dinner time if in AIS view. That was always a good laugh.

I had quite some work to do on the boat in the Azores, just like everybody, I guess. But it was rather frustrating to be half as slow as double-handed crews were. I wanted to go out and play (rent a car, go for a diving trip) as well, but am inclined to do the important work first so put my mind to that. Luckily, we had more days than expected in the Azores, so there was enough time to go on the bus and a whale watching trip after the work was finished. If I had known in time that the second bus trip would be cancelled, I would have planned the work differently and hired a car anyway. It feels a bit like I have not seen much of the island.

I struggled with the berthing situation in Ponta Delgada, with the boat constantly pulling on the lines really badly. I hired an apartment because of it for 4 days, but that made it harder to join in the ad hoc social events.

I miss the race. It was a wonderful experience and I miss the crowd. I will certainly consider sailing AZAB 2027. Luckily there is lots of maintenance on the boat to be done, so I can continue to work through to do lists. No change there!

CONFUSION – James Murray

"hugging my pillow like it was a teddy-bear"

Leg 1 - "THE SPARE ROD"

"I was shipwrecked coming back from the Azores" said Mike, a wise old seadog moored next to me in Falmouth. Mike, in his 80s, has sailed the world. In 1999, caught in a terrible storm, he ran aground on the Western Rocks off The Scillies. He recounted his horror at losing his Portuguese cigarettes, a case of Pico wine and the 'push-rod' on his self-steering gear. Whilst the cigarettes and wine perished, Peter Förthmann, owner of Windpilot, came to Mike's rescue and immediately shipped him a push rod all the way from Germany.

"You might want to take my spare rod on your trip" Mike continued, noting the Windpilot on the stern of Confusion, my Contessa 32. Mike had kept the uninstalled rod above his bunk for many years. Coincidentally, ahead of AZAB 2023 I had contacted Peter Förthmann asking him what spares I needed to take to the Azores, "maybe a push-rod" was the cautious answer, but it didn't seem likely to break, and so I failed to act.

The preparation for the boat inspection is exhaustive and exhausting. You think of a scenario that might happen at sea and not buying the necessary kit and spares seems a certain way to jinx events. To avoid regrets, you endlessly open your wallet as race day approaches.

Confusion passed the robust safety inspection, and I could have hugged the inspector when she said, "it's an achievement just getting to the start line". Preparation included everything from buying the boat and finding a crew to precautionary dentistry. One skipper from Norway dropped out when his co-skipper developed an abscess just days before Leg 1. It's an expensive and risky business and a total relief to finally be sailing, out of reach of a chandlery.

The day before the start of the race I still had 20 things to do on my list. Lost in the detail, I failed to set-up the spinnaker which would add 300 miles to our race. I also failed to pack my sleeping bag so my co-skipper Mark kindly shared his, a decision he would later regret. However, I did remember to accept Mike's offer of the spare rod.

On Sunday 11th June we were 400 miles from the Azores. The log records 25 knots of breeze. The fraying line on the Windpilot (we should have replaced it sooner) snapped. Ashen-faced Mark peered into the cabin and announced the demise of 'Windston', our third and hardest working crew member. The forces had caused the push-rod to break. Already exhausted by beating into the wind, the last thing either of us needed was 4 days of hand-steering.

What joy to emerge from 'the stores' and see Mark's face change as I presented him with the spare push rod. Mark had Windston back in action within minutes. This act of self-sufficiency, being able to cope at sea, gave us a massive lift. It also restored some of my credibility! On arrival, we ordered Pico wine and toasted Mike, a perfect exemplar of the generosity of fellow seafarers. And Mike was chuffed to receive a postcard from Sao Miguel with news that after 24 years of preparedness, his spare rod had finally come in handy.



(Leg 2) "Mel and the Dragon"

Mel, a veteran of AZAB 2019 agreed to co-skipper with me on the return leg of AZAB, 2023. I was lucky because when Mel flew in to join the boat in Sao Miguel, I had to tell him that I had dislocated my left shoulder in an accident on the pontoon 2 days earlier. Would the dream be over? Mel is a former Royal Marine who could probably handle the trip alone under aerial bombardment, and in a relaxed voice he told me we would at least cross the start line, and 'see how it goes'. We did and 4 days into the race misfortune struck again...

Logbook: "Friday 23rd June, distance 394 miles, wind 14 knots...saw turtle, then dolphins, flying kite, ruptured bicep ligament".

The retrieval line for the windvane blade was in the water so I bent over the transom to lift the blade by hand. Bad idea. My arm was at full stretch as a wave suddenly loaded the pressure on the blade. And because my ear was pressed against my arm, I heard the sound of a zip-wire followed by a 'snap' and in an instant I developed a 'pop-eye' arm. This time it was the right arm, so my immediate reaction was to apologise to Mel who was already having to do all the heavy lifting on the bow. Mel's unemotional response was oddly reassuring "well, there's no bus coming this way so we will need to press on".

Logbook: "Sunday 25/6, distance 627 miles, wind 23knots...discovered new facial muscles from spinnaker angst".

Mel is a racer not a cruiser, so we had the spinnaker up at every opportunity. He managed the foredeck. With the combination of adrenalin and hefty painkillers prescribed for the dislocation, I could still helm and handle lines in the cockpit. Each 1-hour watch at the helm was a nail-biting tight rope act, with the risk of a broach on one side and a spinnaker wrap on the other.

Logbook: "Monday 26/6, distance 798 miles, wind 22 gusting 28knots...whales x 2. Kite-wrap and rip x 1. Lost 1.5 hours. Gained hairy experience. Retrieved Kite. Now goosewinging"

The combination of Atlantic rollers, strong winds and tiredness led to a terminal spinnaker wrap. Not so much 'wine glass' as a 'conch shell' shaped sail remained. Despite Mel's numerous attempts the kite would not unwrap. We dropped the main and motored around but the wind simply powered up the remnants of the kite making the wrapped lines tighter. The lines from the snuffer had made things worse and we would have to carefully remove all lines to have any chance of dropping the spinnaker. The next thing was snap shackle malfunction! Free of both guy and sheet lines, the kite was now flying from the masthead like a demented dragon. Not a good look for entering Falmouth Harbour!

Mel's dance with this devilish presence continued. Eventually the main was re-hoisted and the dragon brought to heel in its lee. Mel slumped against the guard-rail after spending the length of an entire rugby match tackling the problem.

Logbook: "Tuesday 27/6, 02:27am distance 837 miles. Made baked potato and beans for dinner. Radioed Marshall Island ship. Mel accused me of hugging my pillow like it was a teddy-bear".

"Hugging the pillow eases my shoulder pain" I told him, but I am not sure he believed me, and after the events of that day he was probably right!

FRIDA – Tim Behrendt and Andreas Buchheim

"Assigning each participant a Boat Buddy was a brilliant idea. "

Here's our essence out of the AZAB 2023:

After successfully sailing the Transquadra with our trusty JPK 10.80 "Frida" in 2017/18 and having squeezed every last story out of this adventure, we figured it was high time to embark on another epic offshore regatta. The AZAB Race seemed like the perfect choice, taking us to places like Cornwall and the Azores where we either hadn't sailed before or hadn't sailed often. The idea to join the AZAB Race popped up about 2 years ago, giving us plenty of time to prepare both professionally and personally. Of course, sacrifices had to be made ...

Preparing our boat mainly involved making it ocean-ready and fixing the inevitable quirks that come with a 1.5-year-old vessel. The JPK 11.80 is designed for these kinds of regattas, so meeting the basic requirements wasn't too much of a hassle. We just had to get our gear in order.



To keep an eye on the weather, we got daily updates via Squid Sailing and fed them into Adrena, the software we used for routing. Downloading larger files via Iridium (which means anything bigger than 30 kB!) was a real challenge and took forever. Sometimes, we settled for a "daily GRIB" with higher resolution for the next 250 nm and a rough GRIB for the rest of the course if the long-term forecasts were stable.

Wind and weather didn't throw us any major curveballs on both legs. On Leg 1, we had to navigate around a low-pressure system, which we managed pretty well. On Leg 2, we could practically pick our desired wind strength. An eastern route got us closer to the high-pressure ridge with lighter winds, while going west meant stronger winds. We went for the sweet spot with 18-22 kn winds... a truly comfy weather system!

It took us a couple of days on Leg 1 to get into the groove. Our usual watch changes happened every 3 hours, but we could adjust them if needed. It worked like a charm and gave us the flexibility we needed. Having sailed together in shorthanded regattas for years, our routines kicked back in after a short while. We always do manoeuvres in the same positions, regardless of the watch rhythm. It's proven itself to us: it minimises the chances of errors at night or in challenging conditions... at least we believe it does ;-)

Overall, we're pretty chuffed with the boat and our performance. Our two biggest blunders were around São Miguel: we picked the "wrong side" while approaching Leg 1 and also made a wrong call at the start of Leg 2.

On Leg 1, we had a strict wind limit set for our mighty A2 Gennaker. We knew we'd rely on it and need it until the last day. However, on Leg 2, our excitement got the better of us, and we kept pushing the wind limit higher and higher, until that last day before reaching Falmouth, where a sudden violent 27-knot gust with a 30-degree wind shift left our beloved kite in tatters. Lesson learned: Stick to your own rules!

Food-wise, we usually cooked and ate together, opting for "real" meals rather than just freeze-dried stuff. We made the main meal the daily highlight to boost morale on board. Good-quality nutrition is a crucial element for us on longer sailing trips.

What would we do differently? Well, we'd certainly round São Miguel from the "right" side... both on approach and when leaving the island. ;-)

The AZAB Race was quite the event for us! It not only gave us a taste of real offshore action again but was also a remarkably well-organized event. The warmth and friendliness we received as participants from the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club from day one were touching and made our stay in Falmouth delightful. Assigning each participant a Boat Buddy was a brilliant idea. Clearing up many uncertainties with Gilly before our arrival was a breeze. We could ask anything, and the answers came flying back at us. Gilly was a lifesaver in Falmouth, whether it was shopping, advice, or even a little adventure in the vicinity – she made it all happen.

Undoubtedly, the AZAB Race has become another milestone in our sailing life. We've had a steep learning curve aboard our ship, sailed well, and gathered plenty of memories from Cornwall and the Azores. We wholeheartedly encourage the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club to keep the AZAB Race in this fantastic quality. We'll be drumming up some promotion for it back here in Germany.

Here's to more salty adventures on the horizon!

GRACIOSA - (Pierre Garoche and) José Medeiros

For an Azorean it is not easy to do it, both legs. Only one crew made the full race, Paulo Menezes, and Carlos Pato aboard Supercha, quite some years ago.

For me it was possible with the gentle and great invitation from my friend from Port la Foret in France who wanted to do the race also. Anyway, with a bit of logistics it is possible. So, now retired I had the time to join him aboard "Graciosa" to do my "own" ocean race. Yes, it is the only race who comes to Ponta Delgada and the only one that a COMMON SAILOR can do.

Well, the race went well but to do a good time we had to fight, because it is a race.



SUNDANCE – Alistair Cooke

"The Bags for Life that saved my (AZAB) Life!"

Oh no, Seamonster is catching me!! It's the start of the 2023 AZAB and having crossed the line more or less at the back of my class - and at the back of the whole fleet, I am steadily gaining places. Now the wind is starting to come off the nose, various downwind sails are appearing. Seamonster is a gorgeous Najad 361 owned by an irrepressible Lufthansa pilot called Erik, another single-hander, and he has let loose his beautiful Code Zero. So now I am faced with that decision! A decision which had been gnawing away at me ever since I decided to attempt AZAB single-handed, my first solo Ocean Passage - Will I or won't I??? That is, use my only downwind sail, the symmetrical spinnaker, and being solo, how to do so without a catastrophe? Surely it's not worth it; my goal is to finish.



As we rounded the Manacles buoy 2 hours in, the wind came aft of the beam. Symmetricals began appearing throughout the fleet. Boats I had overtaken such as Sea Monster and Colemere, a tip top Contessa 32 with black sails and trim to match, began to get closer and closer. Hubris and the heat of the moment prevailed and up it went.

Putting it up didn't really worry me too much. That procedure, although complex, was relatively risk-free. All I had to do was to carefully make all the attachments and then even more carefully check they were in order and not fouling anything on the foredeck - or any of the myriad lines forward of the mast. Then return to the cockpit and pull like hell on the halyard. Once I had, adjusted the sheet and guy all would be well.

So, the question was now answered in the first couple of hours of a 1150-mile

passage. There I was doing quite well and heading off south west in 10 – 13 knots of apparent wind, maximising my speed. But in reality, not so well, as nagging away was the 'what if?'..... What if the wind suddenly picks up to over 15 knots apparent? What if I need to gybe due to a necessary

course alteration? i.e., another vessel. I am in the English Channel and there are loads of ships!

Through my first night I sailed more or less on the same course, the wind speed remaining constant, and the sea state slight, all good. At 6 am in the morning I realised that I was heading too much to the east for my liking. I needed to go west but with the main on the port side this was not possible. Time to face the first big test and gybe... Gulp! I have done it before - I had a rough system - just think it through and do it!!! Should be fine..... Gulp (again). 10 minutes later my worst fears were realised and the whole damn devil-posessed kite was horribly wrapped from top to bottom with pathetically billowing pockets up and down the entire forestay. AAARRGGHHH NO!! NO!!!! I fought and wrestled with it at the pulpit, trying to coax it off, but to no avail. The twists and folds just tightened and tightened, like some kind of demented multicolored boa constrictor. The more I pulled at it, the tighter the wraps seemed to get.

Total B.....s!!!! Day 2 and it had all gone wrong. Thoughts of either arriving in Ponta Delgada under only main and staysail with the tattered remains of the spinny still on the forestay after 30 days at sea ran through my mind. Or having to put on the engine and return, tail between my legs.

Colemere and then Chimaera, a Rustler 36 owned by Graham and Mike, two lifelong friends who were the life and soul of the event, appeared astern and then overtook and disappeared over the horizon. What to do? By now it was mid-morning, the sail had been flogging away for hours and I am feeling desperate. Another couple of hours of maneuvering the boat to fill the pockets on different sides and very careful pulling, teasing and tugging - and eventually I got the bottom wraps off and lashed them in the lee of the main, so no more wrapping was possible. That left about 2.5 meters of wraps at the top of the forestay, with pockets billowing above my reach. It was only too clear I could not budge these or remove the wraps as they were.

There were two solutions to this. Go up the mast, take off the halyard and unwrap it from up there, not a pleasant prospect. Even putting aside all the other issues of going up the mast at sea on my own, what would happen once I unwrapped it detached from the halyard?? More visions of new disasters flashed through my mind. No, at least where I was, I was safe.

Alternatively, unwrap it manually from the bottom of the forestay passing it around and around until it was free? But the billowing pockets made this impossible because there was far too much power in it, even in its collapsed state for me to control. So - what to do???

Thoroughly exhausted and disgusted with myself I retreated below to lick my wounds, think and think. If only I had a snuffer!!! But I didn't.

Come on, think!! I realised that if I could find a way of snuffing the billowing pockets, I would be able to unwrap it. But how to do that?? I needed a soft flexible tube I could run up to the point it was wrapped. What did I have that could do that?? First thought, a T-shirt is a kind of tube!! Maybe all my T-shirts joined together? Hmm, lots of sewing and the necks would have to be cut off, and attaching a line to haul them up would be tricky.

Then I remembered my wife pushing four or five Waitrose Bags-for-Life into my hands just as I was leaving Southampton. 'You might need these' she said. At the time I felt the last thing I needed was more stuff - or the distraction from the list of a million things that I needed to concentrate on, so that I didn't forget anything vital. 'Ok, ok' I snapped and stuffed them in a locker in the forepeak, out of sight out of mind. Hmm... they were really strong, they had handles... maybe I could use them???

Next moment I had retrieved them from the locker and was trying to think it through. They had a panel in the bottom kind of welded in place, so cutting that out would leave me with a very strong small tube with a very good-sized diameter. I had four of them. Maybe I could join them together at

one-meter intervals and haul them up the spinnaker to snuff the billowing areas thus dousing it just enough to unwrap it???

OK, how to get them up the kite? All halyards were either being used or out of action. But I had lazy jacks, and the line ran all the way from the cockpit to a point on the mast above the forestay, I could use the cockpit end of the lazy jack line.

Let's try! So, I cut the bottoms out and strung them together and off I went to the foredeck to try it. One hour later the lazy jacks were in total disarray and the entire flag halyard running to the underside of the port spreader was in my hand having got hopelessly tangled in my contraption, so had to be removed.

Don't give up! What else can I use???

This still might work, ok, no halyards, what else do I have? The topping lift!!! I can take it round the mast and use that. 20 mins later it was all set and with a deep breath I started to haul. Miraculously slowly, with some judicious jerking and helping the bags one by one to get over the twists and wraps at the bottom, up it went, up and - lo and behold! - each bag was dousing an element of those damn billows. It was working!!! Once up, I took the twisted mess that was my spinnaker from the toe rail and tried to take it forward. It was doable!!!! 20 minutes later the whole lot was safely below and the forestay with its furled genoa back in action. Thank God - I was back in business!!!! I was overjoyed my odyssey could continue, but wow, was I tired. By this time, it was nearly 10 pm, I went below and collapsed pretty much until daylight the next day. So pretty much 24 hours lost, but I was still in the game.

As is quite usual in my world, my wife had effectively saved the day, I should have learned long ago I ignore her at my peril!!! Now where has that Seamonster got to?



HAVEN KJ ENIGMA – Ian Braham and Peter Ayre

"... it was worth it!"

Preparation....

What prompted you to enter?

Having skippered yachts racing inshore for about 35 years, with two Fastnets being as far offshore as I had ventured, it was time for a bigger challenge. The AZAB seemed like an achievable ocean race, compared to a trans-Atlantic.



What were the main challenges in your boat preparation?

The main challenge in terms of preparation was the amount, rather than specific items. This included:

- Fitting a solar system and upgraded batteries.
- Fitting an Iridium-Go for weather data.
- Fitting a Wi-Fi system to connect everything.
- Extending the NMEA network to connect separate electronics.
- Fitting new water tanks / plumbing.
- Having a companionway sprayhood made.
- Buying additional safety gear to comply with Cat 2.
- Having the sails serviced and strengthened in some areas.
- Hiring a liferaft (probably the biggest, heaviest 4 man in the world!).
- Completing the qualifying passage, which we did in August last year.
- Arranging rig and keel inspections.
- Provisioning.
- General boat maintenance, either brought forward or overdue! For example, I did an engine top-end rebuild in the spring and fitted a new alternator.
- Most important and perhaps most difficult . . . preparation needed to put normal life on hold for over 4 weeks.

Etc, etc . . .

What family, financial or work challenges did you face by participating?

Family support for doing the race was key and we are both very grateful to our wives for this. We both have children; Pete's are aged 3 and 5 and my youngest is 11, so of course lots of extra work with us away.

I am a self-employed yacht surveyor, so it was fairly straightforward for me to get away. Peter is employed in the marine industry and happily the company he works for were supportive of him taking an extended period off work. Obviously, there was a financial cost in terms of lost income (plus the cost of competing), for both of us, but we were happy that the experience would be worth this cost. I don't plan to work out how much the event cost overall however much it was, it was worth it!

Did you have second (or third) thoughts beforehand?

We had the usual apprehension about doing something which we haven't done before, noting all the offshore racing we had done before the AZAB had been fully crewed. Also, we both suffer from seasickness on occasions, including on the qualifier. Our approach was to take seasickness pills for the first couple of days until we had got into the rhythm of the race, and this worked really well.

The Race Itself....

Highs and Lows during the Race?

Without question the biggest high was arriving in Ponta Delgada, with our own calculations indicating we had won the leg overall. Given that we have one of the smaller boats in the race, which was designed 37 years ago, we didn't expect to be able to keep up with the faster, more modern boats on corrected time.

Throughout the race there were numerous highs, including surfing down ocean rollers hitting some impressive speeds and seeing huge numbers of dolphins, virtually all of which came over to the boat to play.

The low point was probably on leg 2, when we shredded our medium-weight spinnaker. Although we had 2 other kites (a full size 0.5 oz and a smaller 1.5oz), we knew at that point that we wouldn't be able to sail the boat to its full potential for the rest of the leg. Other low points . . . getting out of a nice warm bunk at 2 in the morning!

Your greatest achievements and biggest mistakes?

Winning leg 1 overall was the biggest achievement, which was really unexpected.

Our autopilot was not really up to the job, meaning we had to hand-steer virtually all the time. In retrospect, fitting a better autopilot would have been a good decision / investment.

Lessons learnt?

Preparation is key.

Obtaining weather information and making strategic decisions?

Pete set up and managed our satellite communications for downloading GRIB files and the weather routing software. This is not at all straightforward, but Pete managed to get the whole system working really well, which meant we had weather routing updates several times a day. The accuracy of the weather data was generally very good. The routing needs to be taken for what it is, a prediction based on weather data which will inevitably change. As an example, on the outward leg, the routing wanted us to go further west initially, but this was based on what was predicted for 4 or 5 days' time. Our decision was to go only to the west edge of most of our competitors.

Pete also managed to arrange the fleet position files and import these onto the digital chart, so that we could see where everyone was every 4 hours.

Issues with gear and sails?

We shredded the medium weight spinnaker, broke a spinnaker halyard, broke a guy in spite of it having chafe protection. We also realised about halfway through the second leg that the machine

screws holding the spinnaker pole track to the mast had worked loose and the track was close to breaking away. With so much of the race under spinnaker, all of the spinnaker gear was subject to extreme wear in two weeks of racing, perhaps the equivalent of 2 years of inshore racing.

Managing food and sleep?

Food for us was quite basic. Dinner was either freeze-dried or boil-in-the-bag, normally involving pasta. This was fine and we ate well enough. Initially, sleep for me was a problem. I'm not sure I slept very much at all in the first 48 hours of leg 1. Then I managed to get a couple of hours and felt a lot better for it. After this, I was able to sleep fairly well when off-watch. As we were hand steering, we kept watches overnight very short, normally about 1.5 hours. We kept the watch system going until lunchtime, stretching out the times as needed, to allow both of us to catch up on sleep.

Being on your own / Skipper and crew relationship?

Pete and I have sailed together for over 12 years and know each other very well. Even so, I'd say we know each other even better now. We would both have our grumpy moments, but even so, we worked really well as a team, with both of us having the same determination to race as hard as possible. Having complete trust in your co-skipper is essential.

What would you do differently another time?

Not much, other than fitting a better autopilot.

Ashore...

Your interaction with other competitors?

This was one of the highlights of the race. Having competed in fully crewed races from the Solent and with RORC, where some of the competitors are, how shall I put it, very full of themselves! It was so refreshing to spend time with such a diverse group, who were all really friendly, helpful and sociable. Great fun.

Both the RCYC and the Clube Navale in Ponta Delgada were extremely welcoming, the latter providing drinks receptions, a coach trip around the island, lunch, and the farewell dinner. All were really enjoyable and greatly appreciated.

The race team and members / staff at the RCYC were also amazingly helpful and welcoming. I can't think of any other race where each boat is allocated a "boat buddy", who is there to help with anything competitors need, from transport in Falmouth to helping with repairs.

Preparations for Leg 2?

This included minor sail repairs, running a new spinnaker halyard, and trying to fix the NMEA interface from the Tack tick wind instruments, which was not possible. Most of the time was spent enjoying the island!

Your feelings about the race being over?

The AZAB is an amazing experience! I would completely recommend it to anyone with suitable experience. It is unique, friendly, challenging, fun and extremely rewarding. The only problem is adjusting back to normal life afterwards!

POLISHED MANX – Kuba Szymanski

"What a great idea"

Sorry we were not first to respond to your call, but we were immediately involved in series of other races.

I would say that we live around races such as AZAB.

Why ?

Because:

- we love sailing longer distances
- we love challenge
- when I was a teenager, I read Jerzy Rakowicz books about his AZAB. (Jerzy knows that I am sailing and "approves".)
- on the Isle of Man, we respect results of "Three Legs of Man" and Nick Keig is our national sailing hero.
- camaraderie is great
- it allows for super quality time with co-skipper. Very bonding, very refreshing, very rewarding.



This race is all about PPP which results in PPP :)

Thank you very, very much for organising it for us :)

STORNA HOGA – Brendan Tuer

What a wonderful experience AZAB 2023 was; Cath, the kids, Alec, Elliot and I, all thoroughly enjoyed it!

And thanks to you all at RCYC for making it happen and for your collective professionalism, support, and kindness. I can't think of a single party who hasn't had a positive word to say, and it is great that so many are planning on returning to re-live and race in AZAB 2027.

I can offer a story in terms of the camaraderie which the AZAB develops, where a young person (Elliot) who flew out to welcome his father, a skipper in the race, became so passionate about becoming directly involved in the race that he offered to sail back with me, having discovered that my crew mate may have cracked a rib on the journey over. I was touched by his desire and determination and welcomed him aboard, even though we could not officially race (as he had not prequalified).



We however had fun cruising back with the fleet – particularly as our boat had a higher mast than his father's boat, so we could spot him on AIS three nautical miles before he could "see" us. Over the proceeding days, whenever we saw his father's yacht approaching, we would call him up for a friendly chat and suss out his thoughts and plans before scrabbling up on deck as fast as we could to change our sail plan in an attempt to pull ahead or drop further out of his AIS range. Thereby we always kept slightly ahead, even having to resort to goosewinging with the heavy cruising jib on the inner forestay; after all, every square metre of sail counts.

Thanks once again for a very enjoyable event.

ANDRILLOT II – Tim Stevenson

"We had some true champagne sailing"

Outward leg with Bill Darley and Return leg with my son Robert Stevenson.

Why do the AZAB Race?

I had done the 2015 AZAB race, thoroughly enjoyed the experience of sailing long distance, two-handed, to an interesting location, amongst a combination of excellent racing yachts and true Corinthian spirit sailors. At one of the several excellent evenings at the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club (RCYC) Bill Darley and I were chatting with Colin Drummond and he stressed that being short-handed meant that the crews would mix much more both before, during and after the AZAB rather than separating out into relatively closed groups of crews. This undoubtedly happened this year, and the camaraderie and friendships made are memorable.



Tim Stevenson and Bill Darley in front of Andrillot II before the start

Preparation - Since I had a good idea of what is involved, I began preparing for the AZAB 2023 well over a year before the start. All boats must comply with the World Sailing Offshore Special Regulations (OSR) governing such races, and although this is a lengthy and complex list of rules some of which may not be relevant it is well worth going through each rule carefully.

Every boat must also complete a 300nm qualifier passage with each crew, or there is a list of races that also count as qualifiers. We completed ours in June and September 2022. This is a good opportunity not only to test the boat but also to understand the fatigue associated with short-handed sailing and the routine of food and sleep. The chances are that anyone doing a race such as this will have plenty of experience of long passages, but not necessarily on that boat and with that crew.

We used the Satellite phone primarily to download weather files via the MailASail website (www.mailasail.com). We sent a Diary blog quite a few times, and this was not only very easy to do, but kept those following our progress closely in touch. Mailasail were one of the main sponsors of the race and were exceedingly helpful with all aspects of communication from sat phone to the Red Box.

"the adrenalin from the spinnaker drop was still running"

Our Race - The best way to see the conditions, the tiredness and the thinking behind the routing is to look at the full version of our "diary" available on: www.blog.mailasail.com/andrillot2.

We were extraordinarily lucky in the conditions we had with mainly fair winds. The outward leg with Bill Darley took 7 days 23 hours, the return leg with my son Robert (more used to doing the Fastnet in something nimble like a J122) took 7 days 16 hours. We were 4th on corrected time in Class 4 on the outward leg, 6th on the return leg. We had some true "champagne sailing" conditions, and we had only 2 or 3 days where we did not manage at least 150nm in 24 hours (average speed 6.25kts).

My crew were superb – more than pulling their weight and skilfully adjusting sails and trim at all hours. It is more than that though – there is always the need to watch out that both of us were getting enough sleep, as well as sharing the navigation route planning, cooking and clearing up.

The following are some extracts from the Diary we posted most days and even several times a day (or night).

Day 2. Mon 5 Jun 2023 07:18 - Another beautiful day after a moonlit night with gentle breeze. We set the spinnaker again last night after lamb chops for supper as the wind had dropped to only about 14kts. Just as well we did as wind has been light all night and is now only about 10 – 12 kts from the NE which is right astern. We have hardened up slightly (10 degrees or so) to keep her moving better. We managed 169nm in the 24 hours to midnight which is terrific (average speed 7kts for 24hrs) and are generally managing over 6kts average speed just now. We are over the Continental Shelf since about 21.00 yesterday and the sea is just a long rolling swell with little fellas on top which push us off course from time to time. It is basically idyllic sailing – Champagne sailing or whatever you want to say! Just beautiful!

Day 4 Wednesday 7th June 2023 01.00 - Dropped the spinnaker at 22.00 as the wind had strengthened to gusts of 24kts and the sea was a bit confused. An hour later the wind eased again and went more east, so we gybed the Genoa which had been poled out and hardened up and were able to still do about 6.5 knots.

I am feeling very tired – I have not been able to sleep during my off watch as the adrenalin from the spinnaker drop was still running and we both were so hot after all the effort! Water temp now 17°C so it feels much warmer. Bill getting some well-earned rest now – he has worked so hard on weather and routing and boat speed!"

It was not all as easy and relaxed as those posts! Along with an intense low over the Azores which we needed to watch in case it moved north, we also had to watch the general weather developments.

Thu 8 Jun 2023 11:05 Day 5 - The rain or drizzle has stopped – but it is still very grey. We dropped the spinnaker about 19.00 last evening (we are longitude 19.4 now so it only gets light about 7am BST and dark about 22.00) in about 21 knots and it proved a challenge! Half way down the snuffer started on its way back up as the sheet / guy filled and very nearly ripped the snuffer line out of my hands. We managed to tame the beast in the end and I was relieved when we had it safely stuffed in its sock and posted through the fwd hatch."



ANDRILLOT II – Rob Stevenson

“how refreshing to have some chatter”

Firstly, I do quite a lot of racing and this AZAB was my first. I did the return leg with my father on Andrillot II and from the moment I walked onto the pontoon I was greeted by other competitors before I even knew where my dad was.

That was just the beginning, people were sharing tools, asking each other who had a spare cable tie, or a drill they could borrow - even people offering to help one another with the job itself. I couldn't believe it; this would never happen elsewhere - no one would share a spare sail patch!

Even the supper organised for all the competitors - or people organising amongst themselves to go for supper with other boats at local restaurants.

This spilled into the racing, a competitor ringing on VHF another competitor whilst racing - how refreshing to have some chatter, rather than the stunned silence you get even on smaller races within VHF distance - nothing. I also would like to add that to be greeted at all times of the night by the organising committee back in Falmouth was outstanding and a really nice touch after 1200nm.

I think a lot of people made a lot of new friends, supporting one another on and off the water. A great experience and a credit to you all.



Andrillot II approaching São Miguel

COLIN DRUMMOND, A FOUNDER OF THE AZAB – Hugh Kellett

"obvious.., but then great ideas often are"

REFLECTIONS ON A CONVERSATION WITH COLIN DRUMMOND, A FOUNDER OF THE AZAB

Prior to the 2019 AZAB, Club member Hugh Kellett had a pint with one of its founders in the RCYC bar, the relaxed and witty Colin Drummond, to learn more about the AZAB and try to identify the secrets of its success and lasting appeal. The following is taken from his fascinating write-up of that conversation.

The Azores! The official date of their discovery is 1427 by a Portuguese explorer, one Diogo de Silves. From an early age the islands' very name conjured up for me images of exotic mystery and swashbuckling adventure.

So, Reason 1 perhaps for the appeal of the race: the destination itself, The Azores! What's not to dream about?

I learn that the breezes around the Azores are often particularly light, and many an AZAB entrant has found him/herself frustratingly becalmed at a crucial point near the finish and in need of a bit of rowing practice. Colin himself had an oar at the ready in 1975 on Sleuth Hound's transom.

Back in the club we reflect on the early planning stages back in the early 70s. There had been talk in the yachting press of creating a single-handed ocean race that might constitute an alternative to the OSTAR, a little shorter than the latter with Corinthian competitors in mind, and "smaller" boats, in contrast to the well- sponsored and comparatively longer boats that increasingly made up the OSTAR.

Without wishing in any way to underestimate the seriousness, endeavour and sheer bravery of sailing half way across an ocean and back, I detected that the original idea for such a race might have had a certain touch of "those magnificent men in their flying machines" about it (and which I believe still exists today to an extent), an appeal to the gentleman/lady sailor who wished to pit their wits in a sporting challenge, and with an emphasis on lower rather than higher tech. The Corinthian spirit is a clear and enduring differentiator of the race: competitors, particularly those who have raced the AZAB before, openly offer help, tips and advice to newcomers, and help everyone "join in", surely an admirable trait all but lost to the professional world.

Colin met with Chris Smith, Spud Spedding and Andrew Bray, then Deputy Editor of Yachting Monthly, who sportingly sponsored the first event, and the course was decided for a race that wouldn't be much shorter than the OSTAR , but would start and finish in the same place, proposed as Falmouth, and Colin put the idea of hosting it to the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club.

Of course there was no suitable buoy to send the race round in the Atlantic, and I can almost imagine Colin and his associates, perhaps by candlelight, poring over a chart after a few drinks, with a pair of compasses set at about 1250 nautical miles, and discovering, just as Diogo de Silves had done 545 years previously, the islands in the blue. Bingo, the Azores! The finish line for the first leg of the race was agreed as Ponta Delgada on the island of Sao Miguel, as was the idea of building in a stopover on the beautiful islands. So Reasons 2, 3 and 4 become clear: the Corinthian appeal of the race, the fact that you end up where you started, and the opportunity for rest and recreation at the midway point. It all seems very obvious in retrospect, but then great ideas often are.

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MAIL A SAIL - Team MailASail

"Cherish your MailASail AZAB memories"

The 2023 edition of the MailASail Azores and Back (AZAB) race has, once again, run successfully and all competitors safely returned. The AZAB represents an amazing challenge; emphasising a Corinthian spirit, yet it's also a physical and spiritual challenge for many competitors. Many of the boats have completed more than one race, and the amazing camaraderie that develops between the competitors during the event often leads to new life-long friendships. It has been a pleasure to witness you all support each other so unconditionally, even though you are all competing against each other at the end of the day!

MailASail first became involved in the event in 2019 (although we had been cognisant of the race for decades and provided services to many participants during that period). Our first AZAB race was a real high and we felt privileged to be able to get so close to the race and join in with the spirit of the proceedings. Obviously the island of São Miguel is also a fantastic place to visit and visiting is part of the reward for involvement in the event!



Ed and Sue Wildgoose with the Mayor of Falmouth, Kirstie Edwards

Waiting 4 years for the next race to roll around felt like a long wait and of course COVID would arrive in the intervening years and cause the trouble and challenges that we are all familiar with. However, despite these challenges, the 2023 edition proved to be a well attended event and perhaps part of this was the desire to get out and start exploring again! Our congratulations to all who participated and very well done for overcoming both the challenges of starting and the race itself.

However, a special mention should go to the organisers of the event from the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club (RCYC). They do a magnificent job of both arranging the specifics of running a huge event and also keeping the participants safe and organising the extra entertainment which makes the event so much fun.

Ian Munday was the honorary Race Director for the 2023 event, but unfortunately he never saw the event run. We met Ian in the 2019 edition of the race and he was a super jolly fellow; he would surely have been proud to see how the 2023 race ran!

Thanks and congratulations to all the (many) members of the RCYC who are involved with making this event a success. There are too many to mention individually, so we hope we can thank you as a group and you will accept our thanks for organising another edition of this prestigious event.

Cherish your MailASail AZAB memories, as we will continue to cherish ours.

Sue, Ed and Helle - Team MailASail

