

# CROSSING AN OCEAN: AN ACHIEVABLE DREAM!



*Heading west...  
The route is easy:  
follow the sun!*

Ever since man began sailing, he has always wanted to sail to the other side of the oceans to see if the grass was greener. Ever since the swashbucklers of the sixteenth century, right through to today's ocean racers, all the crossings have been done. However, the fascination with crossing the oceans has not diminished for many of us.

**W**hether it's an Atlantic, Mediterranean or Pacific crossing, going across an ocean is an exceptional moment in a sailor's life. It's a key moment, the realization of a long-held dream. It is also sometimes an opportunity to take stock of one's life during the two weeks or so alone, or with family or friends in the middle of the ocean. The only horizon is the blue of the sea and you are striving to live the dream that your teenage reading had elevated to a mythical level. To ensure that the reality matches the dream, here are a few pieces of advice to help you prepare and to make the most of the experience.

### **THE IDEAL CREW**

The archetypal transatlantic crossing starts at the Canary Islands, finishing in the West Indies (although there are alternatives-see later). A trans Pacific usually starts from Panama or the West Coast of the USA, heading for Polynesia or Hawaii. These journeys usually last from two to four weeks, although this depends upon the route that you take, the sea conditions, the wind, your boat and of

course the crew... A successful crossing has to be shared with a like-minded crew, who want to experience the same things as you. So before setting off, thinking about the make-up of the crew is crucial.

A family crossing is usually borne out of a father's wish to live out his teenage dreams and to share an intense event with his wife and children. If the family takes up the challenge willingly, then it can be a wonderful time. But you must ask yourself the questions as to whether your children will really appreciate the crossing. It usually turns out fine. However, for children that are too young to get involved in any of the maneuvering, the time can drag on, and it's highly likely that they don't really get the "mystical" challenge of taking on thousands of waves...

The way around this is to set off with a group of friends. Again, everyone needs to buy into and fully understand the program. There's nothing worse than a budding racer who wants to mess around with the sails every half an hour (first the spinnaker, then the gennaker,



### **DON'T FORGET**

For a successful crossing you definitely mustn't forget:

- Fishing gear to add a little something extra
- Lots of books: at sea one reads a lot and more quickly...
- DVDs to help pass the evenings
- Music: again, lots of it, and especially lots of different styles. On board, music is almost always omnipresent, and an artist who is a favorite when you set off, can become hated after 15 days of non-stop airplay...
- A good pair of headphones to get away from it all. It's a good way to "disappear" when you feel the need to be alone.
- A few nice bottles and sufficient supplies to keep the troops' moral high...



followed by some risky weather-related maneuver...) if the rest of the crew are just looking to make the most of this period of plenitude, and to enjoy the break which the journey represents, or to have another go at the complete works of Proust, or the adventures of Harry Potter (delete the incorrect suggestion!). And then there's the option of striking out on your own... This is just for hardened sailors. It is the ideal way to live out the dream, but obviously the experience cannot be shared!

**THE RIGHT BOAT AND THE RIGHT TIMING**

Even though there are examples of crossings in smaller boats (the first Transat crossing in a sports catamaran was in 1986, and Alessandro di Benedetto is still the only person to have crossed the Pacific solo in a sports catamaran), the choice of boat is still very important. More than the size of the boat, it's the preparation of both the boat and the crew which are extremely important. A good overhaul of the security equipment and some well-chosen spare parts should ensure a happy crossing...(see box). The one thing to get right with an ocean crossing, is the departure date. That means not leaving too early or too late in relation to the hurricane or cyclone seasons. For a Transat, it's worth waiting for the Trade Winds to set in, so that you can make the most of a good downwind sail, which is a much more pleasant experience... The worst thing is having to set out with the aim of arriving on the other side on a particular date. Modern communications mean that reliable weather information can be accessed at any time, and so help to choose the best route. And on that subject, if you're not totally confident understanding the maps, why not use a route planner?

**RALLIES**

For those of you who are a little wary of setting out alone, there is another, reassuring way to go about it: a rally crossing or a cruising race. For the last 30 years, the ARC has crossed the Atlantic with over 200 boats each year. There are of course other organizations too (Atlantic Odyssey, Rallye des Iles du Soleil...), and it's always the same principal: to give you the chance to do your Transat with the security of having other boats around you in case of a problem at sea, and then spending some memorable moments together at the stopovers. The routes vary depending upon the organizers. This way of travelling has several advantages: you don't need to organize the stopovers or find a place for your boat in the marinas and most importantly, by setting out in a group, your VHF means that you are sure to have a fellow boat within striking distance should there be a problem, or if things start

to get on top of you. Some rallies are actually races which are highly prized by many skippers. This is a great way to travel properly "alone", secure in the knowledge that help is at hand. The downsides of the rallies are the cost of joining in, and also the fact that they have fixed departure dates. So if the weather isn't great, you've still got to set off...

**RIGHT, SHALL WE GO?**

So what's holding you back? All those who have done it dream of one thing: doing it again! Each crossing is unique, and offers a multitude of memories and many intense and wonderful moments. It a fabulous thing to do as a family, with friends or solo, and then to have the pleasure of being able to say: "I did it!"

**PREPARING THE BOAT**

Before setting off you should think about getting your boat prepared: as well as the supplies and the onboard organization, your boat needs to be in perfect order. Motors, rigging, sheets and halyards should be expertly serviced, and any parts which you aren't sure about should be changed. There are certain spare parts which are indispensable (oil and diesel filters; belts; pump impellers; pump filters, some blocks and a good few shackles and a full set of ropes and whatever is needed to change the halyards), not to mention plumbing and electrical equipment... It's amazing how you become a real Jack of all trades, able to deal with all the various disciplines after just a few days...

**SUPPLIES**

Get the crew together and make a list of the recipes that they know how to make. Then list the ingredients needed and the quantity needed per person based on the expected length of the journey and the possibility of restocking along the way. Then draw up a list of menus starting with the most perishable goods and ending with the longest lasting. At each meal, plan to have some fruit and vegetables, especially citrus fruits for the vitamin C and dairy products for the calcium! To help your crew get their sea legs, try to avoid any foods which are too fatty, spicy or out of the ordinary during the first few days. Once you've done your shopping, it needs to be stored on board. Before taking the supplies on board, get rid of as much of the packaging as is possible: these are ideal haunts for cockroaches. This also includes cartons of juice, milk and other products, as the "ears" of these packs are also attractive to unwelcome guests... Don't forget: our bodies need 1ml of water to digest 1 calorie, so drink at least 1.5l/day.

- 1- During a crossing, preparing meals and fishing are the main occupations...
- 2 - No wind? It's time to experience the unique, amazing sensation of swimming with 3000 meters of sea beneath your feet!
- 3 - Would you dare do it? Spending several weeks with only the waves as your horizon?

# 4 WEEKS AT SEA

## BETWEEN AFRICA AND BRAZIL...

Arnaud had been dreaming about it... Putting to sea for several weeks, crossing an ocean and taking the time to appreciate life at sea. That's all. And also taking along the family sextant for its first transat! Here he recounts a crossing which will stay in his memory for ever.

**Text and photos: Arnaud Savignat**

"Crossing the Atlantic is a dream I have had since I very first went sailing. Over time, the plan has evolved a little. It's no longer a question of learning all the technical aspects (although why not?), but knowing how I am going to react to the three weeks or so at sea which lie ahead of me. In a sense, I'm looking at another route: it's not the Transat which is important, but the time spent at sea. Without being either mystical or religious, I think the best analogy would be retiring to a monastery or going on a pilgrimage. You are leaving the world behind, to try and find yourself in your dreams, yours books... But now there's going to be more than just the pleasure of sailing. This time there will be the pleasure of sailing for a long time, as I always find my sailing vacations are too short. How will it be this time?"

### DECEMBER 12TH 2014

The big day. I am leaving the office for the first leg of my journey, which will take me to Cape Town in South Africa, via London. The long flights and time spent waiting at airports is going to allow me to reflect on this project that I have held so dear for so long now. But how will I find it, after twenty days (minimum) at sea, whereas up to now I have never spent more than two or three nights on open water? And the most number of days I've spent cruising? Fifteen, and now I'm setting off for three weeks! And how are we going to organize the watches? The flight from London to Cape Town was pretty comfortable, with completely clear skies. I think I was more comfortable than the guy sitting next to me, who was 6'5" and 260 lbs. At least there was a good film to watch before going to sleep, The Expendables 3...

### DECEMBER 13TH 2014

We arrived in Cape Town after an eleven hour flight. It was beautiful sunshine, and there were boats racing. Mike, the skipper, warmly



welcomed me on board and we joked about the 17 days he was predicting for our trans-Atlantic crossing towards Brazil.

There were to be four of us for this trip: Captain: Mike, in his fifties, is self-employed, but works exclusively for TUI Marine. He has delivered all models of Leopard, including several 48s, like ours.

First Mate: Edouard, in his early thirties, has not been sailing very long (5-6 years). He did his first delivery trip with Mike, and has continued on other boats, including Leopards from time to time.

When not at sea, he works as a head chef. Crew: Helène, celebrating her 29th birthday today. She's not South African, like the other two, but Dutch. She is also Edouard's girlfriend, and seems to not have so much experience. She has come along to learn...

### DECEMBER 14TH. PREPARATION

We start early, in the cool, around 8am. Housework, settling-in, finding my bearings on the boat. I need to go do a bit of shopping: a sheet, a pillow and most importantly some candy, which will be essential for maintaining my good humor!

For this transat the boat is not in cruising

1 - A transat. Arnaud had been dreaming about it... and then he did it!

2 - After a few days waiting for the green light, we're finally off: set a course for Brazil!

3 - Life on the open sea can be damp... especially in heavier conditions!

4 - The first few days it was cold, and we had to dress accordingly...





**WE'RE OFF:  
SET A COURSE FOR BRAZIL!**

mode, but in delivery mode. Everything delicate is protected: upholstery, stove-top (custom grill and aluminum foil for protection), all the screws and stainless fittings have a coating of Vaseline. Even the A-frame forward is heavily padded to prevent chafe on the genoa. All the tables and countertops are protected, as is the rest of the furniture. In effect the boat has to appear as new when we arrive. Finally, we are ready. Well, almost, because as on every delivery, we are waiting for some parts to arrive before we can set off. But not insignificant stuff... the liferaft and spare fuel! It seems as though there are lots of problems with fuel in South Africa. The nuclear power stations can't produce enough power and even break down at times. When this happens, the authorities rely on diesel generators, requisitioning all the fuel. So there is none at the gas stations!!!

So we have to wait two long days before we can eventually set off, with the raft aboard and all the paperwork signed. But we could use those two days two to take the chance to visit the Leopard factory (currently home to 1,100 workers) and check out the new 40 footer. Even if it's frustrating to have not set off yet, I'm not too upset, as there are 30-35 knots of wind blowing outside, and that wouldn't be an ideal start for my stomach...

For tomorrow they are forecasting twenty knots, which sounds much more acceptable.

One last piece of good news before casting off: we have managed to get hold of another spinnaker for the delivery, which seems to be bigger than the one already on board. And also I went to buy a bigger mug, so I can enjoy my tea in the morning. At last I am ready, as is the rest of the cat's crew for this great adventure which lies ahead of us.

Last shower, last laundry. We fill up all the tanks and water jugs, and head over to Customs.

Noon: At last we set off with a good 20 knots apparent, 2 reefs in the main and the genoa partly furled. Everyone is wearing a big smile. We're flying. For the watches, we split into three, with Hélène shadowing the rest of us. Being the least experienced, she can't take a watch on her own. At least not at the beginning of the voyage. Everyone is happy and in good shape. But surprisingly the whole crew (except for yours truly) are happy to put their faith in the GPS and don't want to play with the sextant for now. But for me, it's one of my dreams!

To help us to acclimatize to the sea, we have decided that for lunch and dinner tonight, it's going to be snacks: nobody's going to be in the galley to start with... My watch finishes at 1400 hours, after a dolphin salute, and I come on again at 2100. The wind has picked up, and we now have 25 knots apparent at 110°. We're going along at 7-8 knots. I meet my first freighter, and... by the end of the watch, three of us are on deck (at midnight) to get the main down. The wind has built to 30 knots (35 in the gusts). It's fun - I've enjoyed surfing at 13 knots, with my record being 14.8!!! But now it's time to shorten sail...

At 6am the following morning I come on watch, under a grey sky. Nothing special - we are under genoa only. The sun breaks through toward the end of my watch. After doing the dishes, a second cup of plastic-tasting tea, and a brief wash (we need to save as much water

**MY WATCH FINISHES  
AT 1400 HOURS, AFTER  
A DOLPHIN SALUTE**

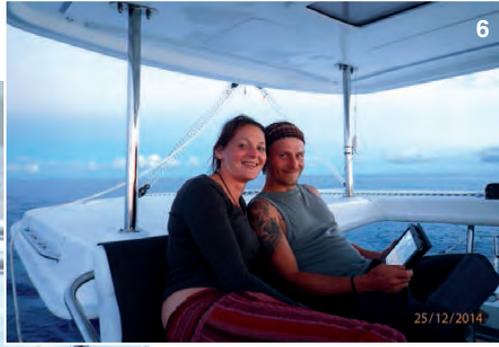
as possible, and really only our hands and our teeth really need to be clean...), I go for a little siesta. Five hours isn't enough sleep for me, especially on vacation, and also I'm not back on watch until 6pm.

I forgot to mention that it's cold, very cold even, and long pants and a fleece are essential all day long. And also shoes and socks as soon as the sun goes in. At night, full kit is required, including a hat, so as not to freeze to death... It's 18/19°C during the day, but in the shade and with the wind, still around 18-20 knots apparent, it really isn't warm, in fact you could say it is chilly... Seemingly it's going to be like this for a week, according to the old hands.

The days roll by peacefully, between watches and duties. The wind remains settled at around 15 knots under a cloudy sky, but as the days go by, it's becoming a bit less cold. During the day, we trail fishing lines and make sure the anti-chafe protection is ok. And then we get the gennaker ready, but the wind still isn't far enough aft yet for us to use it.

When the wind dies, we use the motor a little to keep us moving. But on board, the watchword is looking after the boat. We are permanently sailing with one reef in the main, to avoid any chafe on the spreaders. Even with one reef and at 90° to the apparent, the boat is making 7 knots in 10 knots of wind and





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*ACCORDING TO MY SEXTANT POSITION, WE WERE HEADING UP A RIVER IN THE CONGO. WATCH OUT FOR ALLIGATORS!*

it really is great fun. After a few days, H el ene is fully operational, and can take her own watch, which frees up some time for everybody. I note that since we set off, everyone is following the same routine: we read for 20 minutes, chat for 10, work for 15 minutes... then chat some more. ....

**DECEMBER 19TH**

It only took me three nights before I started talking to the boat (which had been named Bessie by Edouard), but only to ask her if she could pick the wind up a bit, as it keeps on dropping away... But she's not listening, and we're under motor by the end of the watch. After my watch I go to bed, and emerge from my cabin around 10am to see our first catch: a 30kg tuna!!!! (measured with electronics scales, not by an exaggerating eye!) It's a record for both me and the captain at the same time. Impressive. So there's sushi on the menu for today, and the rest is cut

into steaks and frozen. The lines are put away - what would we do with another tuna? Today was also another special day for me: I had brought along the family sextant on its first transat. Having got my sea-legs, I made the most of this beautiful day by taking my first sights, but I must have missed a couple of steps, because my calculations had us some 300 miles off the coast of Angola! I'd better go back to the drawing board and do a meridian altitude at noon tomorrow. The rest of crew were laughing at me, joking that my position had us going up the Congo River. Better watch out for alligators! The following day, there was wind again, and we were going along between 7 and 8 knots. With this new wind out of the south, we hoisted full sail, and flew the delivery asymmetric kite: more comfortable, the sails not flogging with every wave. The whole watch I was thinking: that was never a 30kg tuna... it was 30lbs - the scales were set on the wrong units!

The wind died during the day, and by the end of the night we were under motor again. What was surprising was that since we had set off, nothing had changed the mood of the crew. Is this usual at sea, offshore? A situation which could change (it's only four days since we set off)? We spent our days laughing when we chat. Is it because we are far from normal worldly day to day problems (bills, problems at work, the rubbish on the TV or in the papers...)? Here there is none of that, and we are simply making the most of it! .....

**DECEMBER 21ST**

My watch ends at 1000. By 3pm the first muffins made by H el ene are coming out of the oven. Excellent! After a snooze, I help Mike and Edouard change the gearbox oils... they've already done their first 25 hours. As far as the weather is concerned, we are on the edge of an anticyclone, which



we are going to try and circumvent, but the further up we go, the further up it goes... We need to make it as far as St.Helena before "hanging a left" in order to avoid it. However, this wouldn't get us there any quicker, as we'd have to cover much more distance. So we decided to take the direct route, and cover 270nm under motor, as there was no wind forecast for the coming days, although there was some hope for the end of the week... Today I'm working on improving my sextant sights, which is something I've not been able to do over the past few days, due to the lack of sun. I realize that I haven't been accurate enough with my sights, nor with my timekeeping. I'll try to focus on these two things, leaving my iPad to do the math. When I achieve a reasonable position, I'll set about doing the calculations myself.

Even motoring, it's a real joy to be at sea. It's a very simple life: you look after the boat, eat well, sleep well, read, read some more (I'll be finishing my fifth and final book today) and finally... dream. Compared to the first few days at sea, the pace of life has slowed considerably. There is less excitement, and everything happens more slowly. We are taking the time to live by the rhythm of the watches. We are no longer in a hurry like when we are on land, and there is nothing urgent, no important meetings to go to, no checking your watch or shopping to do!

After an oil change, we stop for a swim. The water is at least 20°C: not bad for Christmas Eve.

#### **DECEMBER 25TH, SLIPPING ALONG UNDER SAIL**

For Christmas I try to call the family. Yesterday for some reason, emails and text messages were getting through, but not calls... the joys of technology! During my watch we saw a really impressive pod of dolphins. They were jumping, going in every direction, but never banging into each other. What a sight!

The fishing line went back in the water, and after just two hours, we had a dorado on board. We'll keep the fillets for tomorrow, because we have meat planned for Christmas...

#### **DECEMBER 28TH**

We had a fairly rough night, but eventually I got to sleep. The wind was all over the place, but it ended up in the right direction. We covered 34 miles during my four-hour watch, which isn't bad... We are at 110/120° to the apparent, with 15 to 20 knots of wind, but there wasn't much surfing to be had in the cross seas. I don't know if I'm going to see the beautiful long Atlantic swells they talk about in all the books...

#### **DECEMBER 31ST**

We're all a bit grumpy for this final day of the year, as we're now hard on the wind, and going in the wrong direction... Even though the boat is going along nicely, it's difficult to enjoy it.

Fortunately Edouard has made some donuts to cheer us all up. The seas are a bit too big for me to do any sextant work, so I prefer to sit and read Dava Sobel's "Longitude," a passionate tale about the search for a method of determining longitude.

The weather forecast isn't good, but as the conditions are very changeable, there's no point in getting too worked up about it...

The following day we celebrated the New Year in a dying wind. We were making a better course, even if we weren't quite back on track: we had to skirt round another depression... With the return of

more manageable weather, we got back into a few other activities, and with hindsight you realize how your actions become limited when it starts to get uncomfortable.

#### **JANUARY 3RD**

Awake at midnight. At last, there is wind, and from the right direction. Well, upwind, close-hauled. Downwind will have to wait for the next transat. With 20-22 knots we're really moving, sailing at between 7.5 and 9 knots. Watch out Brazil, here we come!

#### **JANUARY 6TH**

Two days we've been under spinnaker. Excellent!!! The forecast is updated and in theory we will be sailing all the way to Santos.

That's exactly three weeks we've been at sea. The time passes really quickly, the days all seem alike, yet we never get bored. A peaceful life, free of stress, doing simple little things: I am beginning to understand why some people are never able to re-acclimatize to life ashore after they've been on a long trip...

The only negative thing during this final week is that I've got to start preparing for going home. Plane tickets, transfer from Santos to Rio... I would willingly carry on to Tahiti with the rest of the crew.

#### **JANUARY 8TH**

I'm on watch from 3 to 6 and the wind is continuing full-on. We've got 20-22 knots, one reef in the main and some genoa. The seas are big, and I'm storming along at 10 knots, surfing at 14 at times!

When I come back up at 10 o'clock, after a snooze, it's a different world: reaching in 30 knots, with two reefs and the jib partially rolled up. We're not surfing at 14 knots now, but at 17! Yippee....!

At this rate we'll be there tomorrow morning. The local Leopard agent is on standby, waiting for us to arrive - he has an open viewing on Saturday... So we spend the evening starting to strip the boat of all the delivery protection. Tomorrow is going to be a busy day: housework; customs; immigration and at last... the first beer ashore.

5 - The fishing was good, but the scales were a little optimistic about the weight of our catch...

6 - Arnaud left the boat in Brazil, but the Leopard 48 and its crew continued on to French Polynesia.

7 - The land starting to appear on the horizon. The last watch, and the last moments of solitude before returning to shore.

8 - A nice dip right in the middle of the Atlantic for Christmas Day. The best possible present!

9 : This time it's official: the cat is in Brazil, and Arnaud has completed his first transat..