

**ALDEBARAN**  
**8<sup>th</sup> report**  
**The ATLANTIC CROSSING**

At last the promised report of our Atlantic crossing. You might think we are having a great time on this arduous adventure. Well you try socialising like we are “forced” to, and you will appreciate the difficulty we have in finding time to compile reports. Long may it last.

Our last report concluded on 21<sup>st</sup> Nov. just hours before the start of the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC). With 247 starters it is the biggest ever Ocean crossing rally and thus should as a result find an entry in the Guinness Book of Records. At 1130 hours we cast off from the marina in Las Palmas with John Cotter and Mickey McCaldin as additional crew. The atmosphere was electric with hooters, foghorns and all kinds of noise making implements being used. We started at the leeward end with two other boats while the majority of the fleet vied for the favourably windward end start. The committee boat stationed at the windward end was a naval vessel. Had it been a serious race our start at the unfavourable leeward end would be judged as a bad start. But with 2,754 miles to go and bearing in mind the possibility of damage I was happy with our tactics, as it happened three boats were damaged and had to return to Las Palmas. After all their preparations this must have been devastating for them.

Wind for the 1300 hrs start was from the east at 20 knots. We put a reef in the mainsail and had a great sail down the east coast of Grand Canaria clearing the island prior to darkness covering 73 miles by midnight i.e. an average of 6.6 knots. After 24 hours we had covered 147 miles and were looking forward to a fast crossing of about 20 days. Alas you can never rely on Mother Nature, as we were soon to find out.

Having taken sea sick tablets the night before the start, the morning of the start and again the following day we quickly found our sea legs with only one person getting sick on the complete crossing and that was only for a very short time.

With Olivia cooking the rest of us took the shifts as follows; between 1800 and 0600 hours, the hours of darkness, we did two hours on and four off and during the day from 0600 to 1800 hours three hours on and six off. When conditions were right Olivia would do the 2000 to 2200 hour shift thus giving that person a longer rest period. We are convinced Olivia got the worse deal as trying to cook at times was next to impossible. For days at times, the seas would hit us from all angles and Olivia was to be heard on many occasions expressing her feelings with unprintable sayings.

A very late hurricane called LENNY moving from west to east instead of the normal hurricane path of east to west caused days of anxiety as at one stage it threatened to encompass the fleet. However, our nightly weather forecasts over the SSB radio suggested we head south as fast as possible to avoid it. Subsequently LENNY did not cause any damage to the fleet but on the contrary produced unseasonable wind patterns. We had four days of very little wind and at one stage it was thought that a large number of boats would not finish within the time limit of 18<sup>th</sup> December. All along the western coast of the Caribbean Islands it was a different story, Lenny caused enormous damage with boats being sunk, piers and beaches washed away, as we were later to witness.

During our crossing rainsqualls with winds gusting over 50 knots caused minor damage to some yachts. These were the boats that took a more northerly course. We kept more South and our strongest squall had just over 30 knots in it. It got to the stage that instead of trying to avoid squalls we went after them looking for wind. Our radar was excellent for spotting rainsqualls, especially at night. With it we could track their course and speed. The total damage we incurred for the Atlantic crossing was, a small snatch block that disintegrated, it was too small for the job, and a bulb in the saloon, not bad was it?

As we moved west it was desirable to adjust our clocks so as when we reached St. Lucia we would be on their local time, they are four hours behind Western Europe. We did this at the  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  way stages with the last adjustment being made the day prior to arriving. The actual time of putting our watches back at 1800 hours (6.00 pm) on those days was crucial. Why, you might ask? Well every day at 1730 hours (5.30 pm) we had a little drink and thus when it came to the appointed time on those days, our watches went back to 1700 hrs and, yes, you guessed it, we had another little drink at the new 1730 hours.

Our Single Side Band radio, (SSB) for long distance communication is one of the best pieces of equipment we have. Every morning about twenty of us would chat on an agreed frequency at an appointed time and swap stories and jokes. Some of the “wind ups” were superb including when I told them our bananas were still green after two weeks because we packed them in Irish peat moss, they all wanted to know where we got the moss, of course our bananas like everybody else’s were in mush in less than ten days. More of these details in future articles and talks. Also, every day we had to report our position to the ARC headquarters in Cowes. The positions were then posted on their web and available to the competitors very many relations and friends back home. ALDEBARAN was one of the boats collecting this information.

It was the SSB that ensured in mid Atlantic the rescue after 16 hours in the water of the Norwegian Skipper of a boat that the ARC Committee would not accept as an entry because it did not meet their safety standards. It seems that during the night while coming on deck he was struck by the boom and thrown overboard. The boat was using a hand held GPS for navigation and by the time they switched it on and it found it’s position some time went by resulting in them being unable to relay the exact position of the incident. The few boats in the vicinity answered their “MAYDAY”. They naturally altered course to assist in the search. A search and rescue aircraft also joined in. All during the day they searched without success and the aircraft indicated that the chances of the person surviving so long in the water was very slim. Just before sunset as Arve Johansson, also a Norwegian, in his 42ft Jeanneau “HILDRING” was about to abandon the search his crew noticed something bright in the water. It was the missing man waving his brightly coloured Hawaiian shirt.

Co-incidentally it was “HILDRING” that picked up the stowaway off Gran Canaria who had been thrown overboard. See our previous report for the details.

A big disappointment was the very few species of marine life we saw. A pod of whales and two schools of dolphin were all we encountered. Some boats saw sharks and had uncomfortable encounters with whales. While swimming round the boat one day in mid ocean to clean the waterline of marine growth I was very aware of the possible presence of some undesirable hungry underwater creature.

The normal NE trade winds were non-existent until 500 miles from St Lucia. We had very light winds from all directions including from the SW, i.e. on the nose. Our GPS was showing an arrival time in St Lucia of 30<sup>th</sup> December, 12 days after the official finish of the rally. For the slower boats wanting to finish within the time limit this meant a lot of motoring resulting in a shortage of fuel for many including ALDEBARAN. Then 800 miles from St Lucia, Santa Claus came early to us in the form of 100 litres of fuel from Duchess another ARC boat. During the transfer via cans and our inflatable dinghy we were drifting on a mirror like ocean and I went swimming and cleaned all the growth from the waterline.

After crossing the finishing line at 0245hours after 23 days, and on the advice of the committee on the finishing boat, we anchored in the bay to await daylight before negotiating the narrow entrance to Rodney Bay Marina. A boat ahead of us had run aground blocking half the entrance. I was totally exhausted and went into a very deep sleep, so deep that when dawn broke they were unable to waken me, even with music blaring. I had got very little sleep over the last 48 hours. The most tiring and anxious time, especially for the Skipper, on such a long passage are the few days before you are due to make landfall.

The reception on arrival in Rodney Bay, St Lucia for each yacht irrespective of whether it was in daylight or darkness was electric. Each arrival was greeted with hooters, a bottle of rum, a basket of fruit, and rum punches for each crewmember. I still do not know who took John’s rum punch, he does not drink alcohol, it was either Olivia or Micky.

Prize giving on 18<sup>th</sup> December was a big occasion and was divided into two halves with the minor prizes being distributed in the first and after a musical interval the major prizes were presented by various dignitaries from the St Lucian Authorities. When the overall winner on handicap was awarded his prize, we thought the ceremony was over. However, the major “**SPIRIT OF THE ARC**” award was still to be announced. This was for the person/s who did most to encompass the meaning the rally.

When Olivia and I were named as the recipients for our work on the SSB from the 1<sup>st</sup> August and also for our bringing together of so many nationalities during a number of functions we were involved in organising, the whole audience seemed to erupt. It was very emotional and believe it or not I was stuck for words and found it

very difficult, while trying unsuccessfully to hold back tears of joy, to make even a very short emotional speech. We afterwards learned that the whole audience were just as emotional and that many had also shed tears of joy for us.

Our Christmas day consisted of the crews from 12 boats getting together, on five boats that we rafted off Pigeon Island, from 1030 hours until after sunset at 1800 hours. We moved from boat to boat, drinking and eating with swims in between. I, as usual on Christmas morning, swam and raised money for the CLONTARF branch of the Royal National Lifeboat Institute. I kept thinking of my fellow Christmas morning swimmers braving the harsh winter elements for their swim back home.

We also celebrated the new Millennium in St Lucia amidst many newly found friends including John and Angela Marrow and family from Malahide who had chartered a boat for this very special event.

Of course we are looking forward to family and friends coming out on 9<sup>th</sup> January and more on 30<sup>th</sup> January. Our big day will be the 15<sup>th</sup> January when our son Fintan marries Linda here in the Cathedral in Castries.

Our plans from mid February are to cruise south to Grenada, Trinidad and then to Venezuela and hopefully the Orinoco River. We will fly home for the month of August for our son Padraic's wedding. On return to the Caribbean and after the hurricane season we will travel north again, eventually to Cuba and Jamaica and then across to Honduras and Costa Rica before reaching the Panama Canal in March 2001.

Finally to all who sent us congratulation, seasons greetings by e-mail, Christmas cards, Christmas puddings, cakes and presents by various means, we thank you very much and wish everybody a Happy New Year.

**Pat & Olivia Murphy, s/y ALDEBARAN  
St Lucia, West Indies,  
January 2000**

Late news; we have just heard on the SSB that on 24<sup>th</sup> December a Danish couple Niels and Rikke Blixenkroner-Moller with their son Rasmus were rescued from their 28ft Bandholm yacht called NUTS about a week out of the Canaries. We first met them in Howth the day prior to our departure. They were with Richard and Brigid McCaffrey on "CHRISTINA". The McCaffreys had met them in Scotland and cruised back to Howth with them. We later met them in Kilmore Quay and again on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> October in Graciosa, Lanzarote. They gave Olivia a present on her birthday on 23<sup>rd</sup> October and signed our visitor's book the same day. I remember in Howth he told me that he spent last winter putting all his waypoints in. Well at least they are safe aboard the rescue ship on its way to Angola.