

## ALDEBARAN

### TRINIDAD (18<sup>th</sup> Report)

**Monday July 3<sup>rd</sup>** saw us having our farewell Grenadian Happy Hour and meal with the crews of Karma, Muna and Tutella. The following day we visited St Georges for the last time, collected two cases of duty free wines and at 1730 hrs set about lifting our two anchors in preparation for our overnight passage from GRENADA to TRINIDAD. We had set our second anchor a week earlier following a bad wind forecast. In a depth of six metres our main delta anchor was set with over forty metres of chain and our second anchor, a 25lb danforth, with a combination of forty metres of chain and warp. On lifting them we were only able to retrieve about ten metres of each due to them being snagged on something. Richard from Tutella with whom we were making the passage to Trinidad with came over and dived on our anchors and found they were snagged on an old mooring. By easing both anchor lines he was able to free them easily. The delay meant we had to negotiate the outward passage through the coral reefs in fading light at 1800hrs.

**A BAD PASSAGE:** With a forecast of around 20 knots we opted for one reef in the main and a staysail, leaving the main headsail furled. This later proved a bad combination. Three other boats, Tutella (British), Picasso (Canadian) and The W C Fields (American) left with us. Our course was south with an east south east wind and very lumpy confused sea. Such conditions are not so bad during daylight hours, at least you can see the big waves preparing to attack you, but at night, especially on a dark night they suddenly creep up on you and hit you for six.. The guardrail netting we have on ALDEBARAN gives a much greater feeling of security and it's on nights like this that you appreciate it. At about 2200 hrs the wind had increased to 24/25 knots with a corresponding increase in wave height and by midnight we were registering 30 knots with the occasional gust to 34 knots. With waves changing from black to white, when their crests broke, they attacked and tried to consume us. It was our worst night passage since crossing the English Channel from Plymouth to France way back in August 1999. ALDEBARAN fought each attacking wave and successfully fought off most of them. Very few managed to penetrate her defences and enter the cockpit. At one stage early in the night Olivia and I shared sides getting sick, this again was our first sea sickness since the Channel crossing. We are both lucky in that we do not get bad seasickness and can always function immediately after disgourging our last few meals to King Neptune. Going back to our choice of rig, I believe we would have been better with the headsail partly unrolled to give us more power through the seas. We both took turns at trying to sleep in the cockpit which proved nigh on impossible. However we have found that on a passage of one night it is difficult to get into a routine, a passage of three to four nights is required before you settle into a sleep pattern. Three large tankers crossed our path during the night, one of which I tried to call on the VHF without success. We had been watching him for some time on the radar and calculated we were on a collision course. Although the rules of the sea dictate that power gives way to sail in open waters we based our decision to alter course and pass astern of him on the saying that "might is right". As dawn broke, the wind eased and seas became less confused. A bad night was at last behind us.

#### **TRINIDAD:**

There are three islands just off Trinidad's north west coast with narrow channels between them. The first one is Monos about 100 metres off the mainland. On approaching the channel called Boca de Monos it looked like a solid wall of white water. It was such a spectacular sight I wanted Olivia to witness it, she had gone down earlier for a rest, but no matter how loud I called she would not waken, I judged that her sleep was more important and I reckoned we would be through in a short while. How wrong I was. There must have been about a 6 knot tide against us and even with the wind aft and engine revs up at 2,500 it took us about an hour to travel the two mile passage. The increased engine revs woke Olivia and she got

ample time to witness the drama. We had not experienced such tides since the Raz de Sein in northern France in August last year.

**On clearing the channel** we had only another two miles before reaching CHAGUARMUS where we tied up at the Custom's dock and cleared into Trinidad & Tobago via immigration and customs. After the formalities we motored round the headland to the Trinidad & Tobago Sailing Association (TTSA) in Carenage Bay where we anchored off the Coast Guard Station. We registered with the TTSA which cost approx. IR£82 (US\$95) per week, this allowed us use their dinghy dock, showers, bar, open air TV lounge, laundry, bike storage racks and club house. It was about a five minute cycle on a good road or 30p Maxi Taxi ride to Chaguarmus.

**Chaguarmus** is a mega centre for yachts and without doubt the biggest we have come across in the Caribbean. There are marine stores, workshops, storage yards, boat builders, repairers, etc.. Also, foreign boats are allowed to import boat parts duty free. I believe there are at present over 1,000 yachts in the area either in the water or on the hard.

**TRINIDAD** is the cheapest Caribbean island we have visited. We can have a meal with lots of beer for under IR£6 (US\$7) and, that is at the Marinas, when we go to Port of Spain the capital its even cheaper. The local mode of transport is Maxi Taxies. These are Hi-Ace vans with seating for about 14, and they run every few minutes to Port of Spain, 35 minutes away, for a fare of 60p.

**Shopping in Trini** is excellent with many modern shopping malls both in Port of Spain and the outlying suburbs. On the main streets every second shop sells materials. They are huge and carry a magnificent selection of cloths from all over the world. There are very few shops selling complete garments as people tend to buy the material and make their own cloths or get one of the very many tailors or seamstresses to make them. Needless to say we purchased some and had items made including some for our grandson Caolan.

Socialising in Trini is never ending. What with film, quiz, music and bar-b-cue evenings, bridge sessions, horse racing, book and film exchanging, writers sessions and hiking you never want for something to do. I had two hikes and Olivia one with the local Hike Seekers. The first hike I went on, we the "yachties" nine of us, were collected by Maxi taxi at 0630hrs and together with over thirty locals hiked through the rain forest for four hours to a remote waterfall. There we had a swim fully clothed complete with boots, getting wet is not a problem as you soon dry off. We spent an hour at the falls and then had the four hour hike back to our transport where the enterprising Maxi Driver had beer on ice at 80p a bottle. He soon ran out. Olivia came on the second walk and with 22 yachties and about thirty locals, we hiked to a cave deep in the rain forest to see the rare Oil Birds. These nocturnal birds are very rare and live on fruit. Their name evolved from when the early settlers (invaders) used to burn them, especially the young, as torches because of their oily content. Wading through rivers and caves up to our waist in water was the norm when going through the Rain Forest being led by two or three guides with machetes hacking out a trail. At the end of the walk, surprise, surprise, our Maxi Drivers had an abundant supply of cool beers, while the local women cooked a fish chowder for us. Each of the hikes cost IR£13.30 (US\$15) each, broken down as; transport £6.60, guides £4 and permit for entering the estates £2.70. These were two very, very enjoyable outings.

### **OUR DOGGY STORY;**

After anchoring at TTSA we noticed the boat next to us had a dog aboard. We did not see anybody on the boat or visiting it at any time. On enquiring we learned that the owners had left two months ago and would not be returning for another month or more. They had arranged for two local boys to feed him, and had left plenty of food in two large sealed plastic boxes. However the dog would not let them aboard and a sailor from South Africa and a girl from the office agreed to take over and they visited him every few days. We were warned not to go near him as he was very vicious. The dog was continually barking and

we judged him to be very lonely. I decided to try and befriend him. On my first, very cautious, approach armed with biscuits I managed to hand feed him. The next day I boarded the boat and had no problems, he was very friendly. Olivia also then befriended him. It got to the stage that every time we left or returned to our boat he would bark until we went over and gave him some biscuits. One night while relaxing in the cockpit he began barking like mad, I decided to see if he would come over to us. I went over, opened the gate on the side and beckoned him into our dinghy. He immediately jumped in and made himself at home walking round the sides of the dinghy. On approaching ALDEBARAN he jumped aboard and made himself comfortable. Thus began a whole new canine relationship. Numerous times during the day we would collect him and on returning him he would quite happily jump back aboard his own boat. One night we had a party on ALDEBARAN and he would not stop barking, so I collected him and, oh boy, did he enjoy the fuss everybody made of him. Foreign dogs are not on any circumstances allowed ashore in Trinidad or indeed on a lot of the other islands. We would recommend to anybody contemplating a long voyage not to take ANY pet with them. Anyway we looked after the dog until his owners arrived back on 10<sup>th</sup> August. They received a very cool reception from everybody.

#### **A FRIGHTENING FIVE SECONDS:**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> August we hauled ALDEBARAN at Peake's Yard in Chaguaramus in preparation for our six weeks visit home. We also wanted to re anti foul it, as the Micron Plus we applied prior to leaving home was just not working in the warmer Caribbean waters. I was having to dive every couple of weeks to clean the bottom. We plan to apply Micron 44 which contains tin and is reported to be excellent in the warmer waters, time will tell. The yards 150 ton capacity travel hoist had us out of the water and hosed down in 30 minutes and then with a narrow fork like machine with independently adjustable arms we were moved to our allocated place in the yard and chocked up. The whole operation took less than an hour. Because of the narrow width of this machine they were able to position the boats very close together, (note very close together).

On Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> August at 0425 hrs. we were suddenly awakened by the whole boat shuddering violently. Our initial thought was that a boat had fallen over and we were about to fall like dominoes. I jumped up, looked out the hatch and saw nothing unusual, there was not even a breath of wind. Other live aboards appeared and it soon became evident that it had been an earth tremour of sort. The shuddering lasted about five seconds. Next morning we found out that it had been an earthquake centered about 100 miles north west of Trinidad and measured 4.7 on the Richter scale. It was indeed the most terrifying moment of our adventure to date.

**New covers and awnings:** As planned we have had an awning made in two sections to cover the boat from bow to mast and from mast to transom. Since leaving home we have gotten prices from a lot of suppliers on both sides of the Atlantic and here in Trinidad was the cheapest. It is working very well and helps keep the boat much cooler. We are also in the process of having our saloon and forecabin cushions re-covered.

#### **Fumigating:**

Our last few days before returning home were spent "spring cleaning". All the lockers were emptied and bilges cleaned in preparation for fumigating the boat prior to leaving in the hope of preventing any infestation of cockroaches etc. during our six weeks absence.

**HOME VISIT;** I am completing this report from home. Three hectic weeks have already gone by with three more to go. We return to Trinidad on 22<sup>nd</sup> September and our next deadline will be the entrance to the Panama Canal on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2001.

**Keep your e-mails coming.**

**Pat and Olivia**

**Dublin (on dry land)**