

# ALDEBARAN

## Trinidad to Margarita, Venezuela (19th report)

On returning to Trinidad on 22<sup>nd</sup> September after our six hectic, enjoyable and exhausting weeks at home, we were pleased to see ALDEBARAN as we left her, none the worse for our absence. Our visit home was filled with mostly joyous occasions but unfortunately we had some sad moments namely the four funerals we attended and the memorial services for Riocard O'Tiarnaigh and Kevin Byrne. The highlights were, meeting our family including our grandson Caolan, our son Padraic's wedding to Niamh O'Reilly followed a week later by the wedding of Ciara O'Tiarnaigh to Dave Mulhall and of course meeting all our friends. We were also pleased to be able to share the first part of our adventure at a number of clubs with a talk and slide show. That's enough about our visit home, lets get on with the sailing report.

**It's not all pleasure:** For two weeks after our return we worked very hard on the boat. The main job was, sanding the hull, applying two coats of Primocon anti-fouling barrier paint and then two coats of Micron 44 anti-fouling. We are hoping the Micron 44 will work better in the warm waters than the Micron CSC that we applied prior to departing Ireland. Trinidad with its wet humid climate is not the best conditions for working in. On the 18<sup>th</sup> October we re-launched ALDEBARAN having spent the last ten days completing small jobs including designing and having security grills made for all our hatches. It is reported on the various radio nets that our next country to visit Venezuela has major security problems. Chaguaramus, where we were in Trinidad, is excellent for having all kinds of work done and for obtaining spare parts etc. Parts for boats in transit can be imported duty free. The cost of hauling and re-launching our 42 ft boat at Peake's Yard was US\$200 including five days storage, additional days cost US\$8 per day with free water, electricity and excellent facilities. **WE DID WORK VERY HARD THERE.**

**Hurricane Joyce** threatened Trinidad and Tobago on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October. Everybody took the hurricane threat very seriously. Yesterday, while having lunch in the restaurant they were nailing up sheets of plywood on all the windows and doors, we took all our awnings down and removed all loose items from the deck. In addition we all stocked up with extra food and drinking water. Tropical storm "JOYCE" (she was downgraded from a hurricane earlier yesterday but could easily be upgraded again) was expected to be centred about 20 miles north of us, giving lots of rain, thunder and lightening and winds in excess of 40 knots.

Boats scurried to sheltered bays, setting extra anchors and lines to the shore where possible. Everybody was really taking it serious. Being on the hard (shore) and stored very close to each other our main concern was that a boat might be blown over and start a domino effect knocking us all over. The air was very heavy with not a breath of wind and the clouds pre-ceding the storm could be seen approaching from about 1700 hrs yesterday accompanied with the occasional lightening. It was an eerie feeling.

After all the preparations we went to bed at 2200 hrs exhausted and woke at 0845 hrs, our latest ever, to be still in the same eerie scenario. During the night we had three heavy showers and nothing else. The storm has now moved north and is expected to increase again to a hurricane. We are expecting some wind and lots of rain later to day but the danger has passed. ALDEBARAN is lucky again.

**A large oil spill** from Port-of-Spain on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> September caused havoc to boats at anchor at the Trinidad and Tobago Sailing Association (TTSA). This is where we were anchored for a month before lifting out and where we would have been if we were back in the water. There is a big clean up operation going on and boats looking for compensation which, I think will be impossible to obtain. I heard a person say his three-week-old dinghy is destroyed and looking like a ten year old. ALDEBARAN is lucky again.

### **A terrifying 60 seconds;**

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> Oct. with the boat still on the hard we experienced our second earthquake in Trinidad. It began when Olivia was inside the boat and I was in the cockpit, suddenly the whole boat began shaking a little and Olivia shouted to me “what are you doing up there” to which I replied “nothing”. But then the shaking became very strong and I shouted down to her that it was an earthquake and to get off the boat quickly. We clambered down the ladder faster than ever before and ran into an open space to be joined by crews from neighbouring boats. With the boats packed tightly together and each being supported by five metal supports it would only have taken one support to collapse to create a domino effect. The shaking was so severe that the tops of masts were almost touching. After about 60 seconds everything returned to normal, without, we are glad to report any damage in our yard. However a neighbouring yard had a boat fall over and in many stores goods were thrown off the shelves while in the capital Port of Spain a building cracked and other structural damage was reported. It read 6 on the Richter scale. This was our second earthquake in Trinidad, the first being back on 3<sup>rd</sup> August and detailed in an earlier report.

**THE RE-LAUNCH of ALDEBARAN** on 18<sup>th</sup> October went very smooth with every thing working. On motoring away from the crane we continued to Scotland Bay about five miles away where we anchored for two nights and just relaxed. The bay is horseshoe shaped, very deep with rain forests fringing the waters edge. With troops of monkeys descending to the shoreline and parrots flying overhead, it was a nice change from the weeks working on the boat. The water in the bay, while not near as bad as Chaguaramus, was not very inviting for swimming. After our rest in Scotland Bay we returned to Chaguaramus where we provisioned the boat for the next stage of our adventure to Venezuela with its many reported security problem.

**Olivia’s birthday** on 23<sup>rd</sup> October we thought was going to be a quite affair unlike last year in the Canaries. How wrong we were. On tuning into our regular radio net at 0700 hrs we were pleasantly surprised to hear that our good friends Malcolm, Helen and Laura on MUNA and Martin on RAGTIME had left Tobago the previous day in order to be with us for the birthday. They arrived early afternoon and the celebrations began. Well, if I say that October 24<sup>th</sup> was a non-event for some members of the group and not much better for the rest, further descriptions of the 23<sup>rd</sup> are not necessary.

**Chachacare the former Leper Colony** on an island five miles off Trinidad was our first stop on route to Venezuela, South America. The colony was abandoned about forty years ago after a cure for the deadly disease was found. In their rush to evacuate, all the medicines, equipment and hospital records were left behind. You can clearly read the patients names together with their symptoms e.g. lump on nose, lump on arm, lump on face etc. etc. It had been a complete self-

sufficient community with their own magnificent church, theatre, power plant and shops. It was a never to be forgotten very eerie visit to the former colony.

**Venezuela;** Our first landfall here was at Cabo San Francisco 15 miles from Trinidad (position 10 degrees 43 minutes North and 62 degrees West. In future I will give latitude and longitude positions as follows 10-43'N x 62-00'W). This dramatic anchorage is lined with towering jungle mountains dropping straight into the sea. Clouds hang continually over the mountains and rise like steam. Other than a stopping place for fishermen there is no permanent settlement here. We had a very refreshing fresh water shower in one of the many streams cascading down the mountains.

**Los Testigos (11-22'N x 63-07'W):** After a very exciting and fast overnight sail from Cabo San Francisco a distance of 80 miles, during which we recorded over 9 knots and had to hove to for two hours awaiting daylight before entering the islands we anchored off the village of Tamarindo. This is a delightful small group of islands 40 miles off the Venezuelan coast with about 150 inhabitants who live by fishing. With no ferry or air transport the only visitors they see are yachting people. After checking in with the local coastguards, which cost 3 beers, we snorkelled a nearby reef and were rewarded with some of our best snorkelling to date. We spent three days in the islands in various anchorages and only wished we could have stayed longer.

**Margarita (10-57'N x 63-50'W)** the largest of Venezuela's offshore islands was a lovely 50 mile motorsail from Los Testigos. Approaching the island we were most surprised to see the skyline adorned with skyscrapers. These were the first high rise buildings we had seen since the Canaries back in November 1999. Margarita is a major holiday destination with an international airport. One of its main attractions is its duty free status. Cork Dry gin cost IR£3, Larios gin £2.50, Irish and Scottish whiskeys £5, good wines £3 and beers £0.25 a can. Needless to say we stocked up with the essentials of life but in retrospect not enough. Following a request from Alex on his regular morning long range radio net we collected 40kg of Jasmine rice in Trinidad for a restaurant in Margarita and on delivery were rewarded with a beautiful free lunch. Since last April we had been talking daily to Alex on his net and were delighted to eventually meet him together with his wife in Margarita. Shopping here was well organised with a free bus to a major supermarket three days a week. Despite its affluent appearance we witnessed a lot of poverty, with children and adults searching rubbish skips and some appalling living conditions. It was here we experienced high security for the first time. However, I am glad to report we did not have any problems.

**Messengers from home** in the form of Francis and Orla Ennis flew to Margarita on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> November and joined us for two weeks cruising. Needless to say we burdened them with lots of goodies from home including a new anchor. Not having socialised with Francis and Orla in the past, except for club functions, we were apprehensive wondering if we would gel. However after 24 hours all fears were dispelled and it became obvious the close quarter living would work.

**Our next report** will detail our adventure while cruising with Francis and Orla including our trip to the Angel Falls reported to be the highest in the world. Also in the next report we will describe how we survived two electrical fires on board.

**Pat and Olivia, yacht ALDEBARAN**