

The Return from the Phoenix

(5 grumpy old men-in-a-boat)

Marmaris to Vodice, 7th – 15th February 2014



In February 2013 we reported on the transfer of Yacht First Class, an Elan 47.7, with a report called The Odyssey: <http://www.ayc.at/en/specials/vod-mar.html> .

The boat was delivered from the AYC GmbH base in Vodice, Croatia to spend the season at the base of Phoenix Yachting in Marmaris, Turkey. This year, First Class is needed back in Croatia, so once again, a crew were assigned the task of a winter passage of about 900 sea miles to bring the boat back home.

The Crew and the Accommodation



Captain¹ First Class **Frank Honan**, Manager Adria Yacht Center GmbH

First classmate **John Plumb**, free-lance yachtsman

First equal classmate **Jools Brooks**, Sales Manager for Oracle (as in BMW) and experienced Coastal Skipper

I-nother First classmate **Joep Winkels**, I-T Manager for the I-AEA who would use his i-pad and i-phone to i-navigate us from Turk-i to Croat-i through the South Ae-gean, the I-onian Sea, I-talian waters and Monte-Negr-i. By the way, Joep does not eat Apples.

First class Cabin Boy **Mike Jones**. First Class has four cabins for Mike to service. Last year, Frank and his classmates established their territory by claiming one cabin each. This meant that Michael (to use his Sunday name) had to bunk up with whoever he could. In practice he would sleep in the forward port cabin on top of John, except when the boat was on port tack and he fell out of his bunk, then he would climb on top of Jools in the starboard front cabin. Frank had the rear starboard Captain's suite with Joep eyeing the rear port side.



The Adventure

Day 0

Thursday 6th February 1230hrs

Our adventure begins outside Gate 1 of the Vienna International Centre. Frank, John and Joep meet up for a lift to the airport. Flights have been booked (twice, just to make sure) with Pegasus Airlines for the Vienna based classmates to fly to Istanbul and on to Dalaman. Frank was late, which made Joep slightly i-rate. OK, that's the last of the iJokes, in case I offend him.

¹ The title Captain is used, because in one country or another, all 5 crew members are qualified to call themselves a Skipper.



At check-in at Vienna International Airport, Terminal 1A, there is just a little tension. Baggage limits are 20kg check-in and 10kg carry-on. John likes to carry on so he had a large bag full of black Marks and Spencer thermal underwear. Frank had a lot of the yachty safety gear such as the E-PIRB, hand held VHF, his automatic life jacket (more about this later) and wet weather gear for Mike. Both Joep and John had been assigned to plunder the UN Commissary before departure to ensure we had sufficient luxury items like port, whisky and soft toilet rolls. In the end, Frank's bag was the only one overweight but the nice lady on the desk let him off. We then hook-up with Jools after passport control in Terminal D and fly towards the winter sun on Pegasus.

Mostly uneventful passage through Istanbul airport to catch a domestic flight to Dalaman, except that the team splits for Jools and Joep to check that the bags don't accidentally find their way onto the conveyor belt, (they didn't) while John and Frank rush ahead to see if Mike, who was flying in from Frankfurt ahead of us, had already left the Turkish capital. He had.

On landing in Dalaman, the international passengers (us) were segregated from the domestiques and shepherded onto a bus. Have you seen Midnight Express? I have not so this comment was lost on me. We were taken across the airport to the International Terminal. Apparently, our bags were clever enough to know that they too had to be segregated and had gone over there by themselves. Bags safely collected, outside the baggage hall was one of those men you see with a white sign. It said 'Honan'. It was our taxi driver with minibus. We then had to direct him back to Dalaman Airport domestic terminal where we would find Mike. When he had arrived on an earlier flight, he too had been sent on the airport tour, but as soon as he collected his bag they closed International and switched the lights off, he had gone to domestic to keep warm. Anyway, the intrepid adventurers arrive at Marmaris Marina about 2300hrs Turkey time and were directed by the taxi driver to the Phoenix pontoon D where First Class was waiting for us. Hello old friend, how have you been for the last year since we left you?



Day 1

0800 Friday 7th

John and Mike head off into town to find our ship mates some breakfast. The only provisions we have brought with us are port, whiskey, whisky, (Irish and Scotch) Christmas cake, nuts and chocolate and that is not a good way for growing boys to start the day is it? After breakfast Frank heads off to see if the Phoenix Yachting people are prepared to hand the boat over, but not before he crawls over every inch of the ship to check what has been maintained and what has not while First Class has had her 12 month holiday in Asia. Joep assists him with the pre-departure checklist while John, Mike and Jools are given the boat provisioning checklist to take a taxi to the supermarket.

1300

Three trolley loads later and a lot of points on the taxi driver's supermarket card see the mates arrive back with enough plastic bags to completely fill your under-sink kitchen cupboard. 1100 Turkish Lira lighter has provided enough food to at least keep us going as far as Rhodes. We did not forget the cheese, Gromit! Or the yoghurt, or the fruit juice, or the water. (A substantial portion of these items are now lying in a skip in Vodice)

1550

We are off! Or are we? The first step on the voyage is to clear Turkish Customs. We have an appointment on the Customs quay at 1600 hrs. and we may have then to stay there or leave Turkish waters immediately, unless we find 'a technical problem'. So we actually cast off from Pontoon D not knowing whether this is the start of our voyage or not. John is at the helm, for a change, for the short trip round the marina wall.

1600

Classmates all in a line while Mr Turkey Customs checks and stamps passports. Slight question mark why 4 British grumpy old men are taking a handsome Dutchman with them. (Mike is also Canadian but of Welsh descent, it's not his fault).

Passage 1

1640

WE REALLY ARE OFF!!

Displaying a decision making process that was to continue for the whole trip; (decisive, indecisive, divided, but retrospectively always correct); the crew have decided that with one hour left until sunset, we will have a test drive across Marmaris Bay and if all is well as dusk descends, we will start the voyage with a night sail. The wind is forecast to be light tonight, the moon has waxed into the second quarter (which is why we came this week!) so we are not expecting total darkness and we will be 12 hours ahead of schedule by morning!

The GPS plotter is programmed with a passage to somewhere east of Piraeus, (to be decided), John completes the first line of the logbook with engine hours, log reading and barometric pressure, notes the weather forecast: South Aegean S/SW, 7-14kts, 15kts later, sea calm, visibility good. Captain Frank has taken the helm and makes a much better job of departing this particular Customs quay than he did twelve months ago. The tyres stay on the wall and the fenders stay on the boat.

1700

Course 170° engine 2500rpm, no sails, boat speed 6.3 knots

1825

One hour after sunset, Jools at the helm in darkness and the crew are trying to get some night vision. No navigation lights seen but what is that shape moving across the water, fast, towards us? A very powerful boat making a deep rumbling sound takes a wide sweep behind us and starts to close up behind our stern. Then, to reprise one of many traditions from last year, we get a bright blue flashing light shown to us. This is not a recognised navigation signal. Captain, please report on deck! We slow the boat as a searchlight on the bow of the boat behind floods us with light, destroying all that night vision we had been trying to get. Then he turns away and powers off towards Marmaris. Coastguard checking if thieves were stealing a boat out of Turkey, but a quick check on the radio back to Customs will have told him that we were a legitimate, if foolish crew to be sailing into the night at this time of year.



Day 2

0348 Saturday 8th

When I worked in a Nuclear Reprocessing Plant, a frequent activity to test our trainees was to perform emergency exercises, such as total power failure. So it was at 0348 this morning. Mike the First Class Cabin Boy was on navigation watch with Jools at the helm. Mike decided he would plug his iPhone into the charger at the nav desk. As he did so, the boat veered to port, there was a huge shriek from the cockpit and the engine was stopped.

What happened? Mike had accidentally knocked one or two of the switches on the power board, the ones marked 'instruments' and 'lights'. Jools had been running on auto-pilot, so the boat decided it would decide which way to go. All information on speed and depth was lost and so were the navigation lights for good measure. The trainee had not been on the 'power board functions' course so he didn't know what was wrong. Navigator and helm swapped places and the Captain, not amused, was dragged from his bunk (unhappy Cappy). The new helm tried to orientate us back onto our proper course using the stars and friendly moon; you can see the plotter output on the picture.

0740

One hour after first light and 107nm behind us. Sails are up, engine is off, Plan A was to just be leaving Marmaris about now but we have already done 10% of the task. Is it all going too well?

1915

Arrive Naxos. Maximum speed on the crossing was over 10 knots and the crew have decided to re-visit a port used on the way out. The yacht is parked in exactly the same place as last year. 187nm completed at an average speed 7 knots. Passage 1 complete.

We eat poached sea bream from the Turkish supermarket fishmonger then head into town for some ouzo.

Day 3 Passage 2

0625 Sunday 9th

John has been banging around the galley making tea very noisily since 5 am to rouse his lethargic classmates. One or two have appeared and now we cast off once again to begin Passage 2. The target is to at least get beyond the canal to the Gulf of Corinth, even if we cannot reverse the equivalent leg from 2013 and reach Ithaca across the Ionian Sea. F/c S/SW 17-32 kts, course mostly WNW, so it should be an entertaining day!

Day 4

0030 Monday 10th

It was! The waves coming somewhere from the direction of Crete made the reach across the South Aegean quite exciting. We had started with one reef in the main and gradually increased to full genoa but after we had recorded what was to be a voyage maximum of 12.3 kts on the GPS plotter we reefed down to the second on the mainsail. The bouncing of the bow on the waves caused John to ask Cappy what the banging noise was; he went forward to investigate.... The anchor had snapped its tether and decided to engrave its initials in the freshly repaired gel coat on the bow. This meant Frank had to reach over the bow to recover

the anchor, just as we fell off another wave. When part of a boat goes under water, anything loose tends to float off it, unless you are Robert Redford making a film. This is what happened and Frank later reported feeling the tension on his harness strap holding him down. He came back down to the deck where he had left. THAT IS WHY YOU MUST ALWAYS CLIP ON WHEN YOU LEAVE THE COCKPIT.

We have crossed the Saronic Gulf in the early evening and now tie alongside the Isthmian quayside to pay the Corinth Canal fee of €255 for a 47.7' boat.

0045

No time to stop for another PG Tips, the guys of the canal authority have two pilot boats to traverse the canal so they decide to escort us fore and aft. The little convoy sets off with Jools as helm. We are now 313 nm into our journey and it is only Monday morning. We reckon we are half way through our 270 litres of fuel so a stop will be needed during the coming day.

0120

Exit the Corinth Canal and almost without changing course, start a 50 nm leg on 290° again into the Gulf. On the eastern side there had been no wind, once outside the harbour wall there was a steady breeze on the nose and the slap, slap, slap of waves coming towards. A restless night for all except for John who was pleased to be on night shift again and relieved to get away from the 3-4 meter waves of the S Aegean.

1615

Arrive Patras. Shall we go to this pontoon? no this one, no that one, OK, back to the first one. The usual First Class decision making process had kicked in until we finally selected where to park, at which point Joep spectacularly demonstrated why it was called a tripping line. He stayed dr-i though.

A number was acquired from the local Tourist Information office to get some fuel delivered. John said at 5 litres/hr for 42 hours we would need 210 litres. We filled up with 208. Dinner tonight was chicken curry, followed by more shore leave for ouzo.

Day 5 Passage 3

0525 Tuesday 11th

More early morning crashing and banging while pretending to wash up. Passage plan has several options: Corfu 150nm, Paxos 110nm, Fiskardo 60nm. We were to select none of the above after getting a weather forecast for the open Ionian Sea of SW force 5-6 gusting 7.

1630

Arrive Levkas Marina 70nm. Wind inside the islands had been mainly SE 8-16 knots. In accordance with 2013 tradition we had completed our mandatory one hour showing how good we were not at hoisting, flying and retrieving our €3000 spinnaker. Frank also had repaired our port navigation light using a bulb from under the lamp shade in the saloon. This was clearly an important place to keep spares on a French designed boat. After the red lens fell off into the sea, Joep also



Crew of First Class watching the spinnaker, Ionian Sea, February 2014

improved the repair with the aid of our now redundant red Turkish flag and a Ziploc bag. 466nm miles completed, we were just a little past the halfway point.

Chicken curry tonight then shore leave again for Wifi and just a very small ouzo.



Day 6 Passage 4

0625 Wednesday 12th

Depart Levkas marina

0700 Levkas swing bridge

0710 Levkas beach

We had invoked another 2013 tradition and run aground. The boat had three pilots and one helmsman. First Class decision making protocol dictated that they all had different opinions. Joep on the bow said leave the red buoys to port, Jools on the GPS said leave the buoys to starboard. Frank kept reciting the notes he had read on the internet about how to come in the other way and was making no sense. In respect to the ongoing Winter Olympics and being a resident of Austria, the helmsman ended up doing slalom through the buoys. Wrong decision, with 2.5knots of current pushing the boat along there was the grinding crunch of the keel ploughing a furrow in the sand before the boat stopped. Oops.

With his customary coolness, displayed throughout the voyage, John just put the engine into reverse with a little power. Then some more power, then some more. Eventually the stern started to move backwards and the boat itself decided where the channel was. The rear of the boat swung gently to port, swinging round in the current and the correct channel, we gracefully departed Levkas harbour going backwards! The plotter screenshot shows our track, but it also shows that there is about a 100m plotter error to the west. We had not passed the yellow land where the depth shows 2.7m when we did our little reversing act. Have a look on Google maps for this channel; we were about where the second boat is:

<https://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&t=h&oe=UTF8&msa=0&msid=111190253465314006995.00048e17b716cdcbc86fd&dg=feature>

This was an inauspicious start to what was to become the longest passage of the voyage. With an eye on the weather, contingency plans had been made. A daylight sail to Corfu 60nm, 24hrs would take us 129nm to Otranto on the very tip of the heel of Italy. For the really hardy, it was 271nm and probably 48 hours to Cavtat or Dubrovnik in our home country. If at all possible, we did not wish to jeopardise our luck by transgressing into Albanian waters but somewhere on the Montenegro coast was also a possibility.



A 'selfie' of First Class captain and his crew

Day 7

2115 Thursday 13th

Arrive at the fuel quay in Bar, Montenegro.

Max speed recorded 11.5 knots, probably just after we left Levkas sailing NW in a SW force 6-7. First decision was whether we passed Corfu on the sheltered east side or stayed on the shorter overall course out to sea. One helmsman would climb to the west to gain ground to windward before the predicted wind shift to NW; the next helm would bear away for more speed. Fortunately the erratic track on the GPS had expired before it could be downloaded and recorded for posterity, similarly for the track of our tour around Levkas harbour.

Joep had a well-conceived plan for his navigation into Bar. He had meticulously plotted the approach on his i-pad which he would use as an i-pilot to guide himself in. Unfortunately, he had not reckoned with the i-mutineers in the crew. As we entered Bar Marina, instead of cooperating with his plan to moor on the first or second pontoon, the crew had spotted that the lights were on at the fuel station and there may be a possibility for an early re-stocking of our Red Bull supplies. Also, the fuel quay would be a shorter walk to the i-spyed pizza restaurant. So we docked on the fuel quay, which was closed. We also discovered that we could not reach the water or electric points with our hose and cable. So we swung the boat round and moored off the marina. Then a very friendly security guard came with a longer cable, lets us steal some water and allowed us a free berth, if we went back on the fuel quay. So we swung the boat back again to the fuel quay. We pushed our luck by asking him to get the fuel attendant boy out of bed, it was 10pm by now, but we pacified him with a 6-pack (that's 8 beers from Turkey) and he agreed to get us fuel by 0700hrs.



The fuel quay and First Class at Bar, 10pm, could it still be open?

We had completed 247nm in 38hours. Each contingency destination had fallen away as the wind moderated en-route. Jools had advised us to keep away from the downstream current along the Italian coast, we had stayed at least 12 miles away from Albania and been swept into the eastern side of the South Adriatic by the incoming current, assisted by the spring tide that coincides with the now almost full moon. Unusually, no-one had over-ruled him, maybe because it was approaching Valentine's Day and after seven days at sea our sailors were beginning to bond with each other in more ways than just being class ship-mates.

A night out in Bar with 2 beers each and more pizza than you can eat costs €38 for four, total. (Old British men are easily satisfied, handsome Dutch men stay on the boat and have soup). We did then attack the on-board port and whisky supplies which were beginning to look as if they would out-survive the crew.

Day 8 Passage 5

0715 Friday 14th

Depart Bar, Sibenik 183.1 nm away, about 30 hours at 6 knots. Initial course, 290°, again.

The young lad who sold fuel came early as promised 18 minutes after sunrise. John had to have a lie-in because he was not allowed to initiate one of his middle of the night departures. 116 litres of diesel at €1.27/litre, 1.25 litres of Red Bull at €10/litre. Next time Frank will make his crew drink diesel.

Forecast for South Adriatic from Dubrovnik Radio, 0500UTC: Warnings: Gale in open sea of S Adriatic with gusts of 30-45 knots. Synopsis: SE and SW winds becoming NE then NW 12-26 knots. Waves 3 or 4 becoming 2, vis 10-20km, clearing and diminishing.

So, it's two reefs again. Wind all around the compass and so it was:

0915

We had been travelling 2 hours, so we were about 10-15 miles from Bar when John looked astern. This in itself is very unusual, given how he sits on the stern quarter and how inflexible his aged neck is. Heading from South to North, straight towards the coast we had left, was what looked like a typhoon! A waterspout. What would we have done if it had been closer? Captain Frank immediately went below for the 777 Pilot Book.

Apparently, waterspouts are not unknown in the North and Central Adriatic but they are rare. They almost always occur north of Split. They pick up many 10's of cubic meters of sea water and lift it up to 150m. Winds in excess of 100kts. Hmm, what would happen on a yacht? No problems for us, only gusts to 45kts are forecast.



Less than 10 minutes later, another waterspout appeared, heading straight for us! Distances at sea are hard to estimate, but with us travelling west and the 'spout travelling north, I reckon it passed no more than a mile behind us. You could see the sea apparently boiling as the wind whipped what looked like a 50m wide circle of terror. We had also seen schools of dolphins and remarkable rainbows on this trip, and fantastic sunrises and moonlit nights, but for me, 0925 on Day 8 was the most spectacular visual event of the whole journey.

1712

Sunset. The daylight hours of Valentine's Day had passed. We were now in Croatian waters so Skype and SMS had been busy conveying messages to and from loved ones at home. None of the sailors had been given the Black Spot, or even a red heart. The moon had risen just 10 minutes earlier to illuminate our, hopefully, final night on board.

Day 9

0559 Saturday 15th

An exhausted yellow moon slips below the western horizon to signify the end of a good night's sailing, to be followed 12 minutes later by another fresh, bright yellow globe peering over the edge of Hvar island to our east, flooding light into a fresh, new day. We were just west of Solta, approaching the Drveniks, very definitely in home waters and on the homeward stretch.



1050

Arrive Sibenik!

Now the 'where shall we moor?' bug struck again. Let's go to the fuel quay, we need some. Oh, it's closed with the power off for another hour. Beer comes out and our Captain jumps into Manager Mode after we were greeted by AYC Croatia director Ksenija Labor to guide him through the Customs formalities of re-importing First Class into Croatia. We were then moved to where the old customs quay pontoon was to wait. Message comes, move again. The Customs Authority has a brand new quay, so we had better go there and try it out for them. Another cast off/cast on and another beer in the sun and once again, the classmates are lined up on the shore for inspection and comparison with their passports. Once again, the Customs official wants to know why is a Dutchman sailing with four British? We are not bothered; we are on home soil (well, brand new tarmac). The yellow flag is taken down, no longer is First Class in transit, she just has a short domestic hop to her home port.

1300

Arrive Vodice.

898nm from Marmaris in 5 passages, 138 hours at sea, 99 engine hours, 416 litres of fuel in 7 days 21 hours since leaving Marmaris marina. All crew safe and well as was First Class, apart from a few scratches on the bow and possibly the keel. The return of the Phoenix yacht is complete.

Day 10 Passage 6?

0800 Sunday 16th

Depart Vodice marina with all 5 crew and their baggage loaded into Frank's car with what was left of the ship's fruit, cake, biscuits and chocolate. Captain at the helm, the crew in the back seats are playing with their gadgets.

1430

Our adventure ends where it began. After throwing Jools overboard on the A2 into Vienna, Frank pulls his car up outside Gate 1 of the Vienna International Centre (spelt the English way) and our trusty crew of Frank, John, Joep and Michael (his Sunday name) shake hands, man-hug and go their separate ways. A promise of a re-union is made, probably Tulln Boat Show, Saturday (or Sunday?) on the AYC stand, 12:00 hrs. What will they do for an encore? Keep a good lookout for our next adventure and safe sailing.



First Class arrives back into Vodice Marina

John Plumb

17th February 2014

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