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Rally Portugal The First Boat arrives in Bayona

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The first boat of the Rally Portugal fleet arrived safely in Bayona this afternoon, following a good passage from Plymouth across the Bay of Biscay. **First across the finish line was the Beneteau Oceanis 473 *Blue Chip of Cowes*, owned and skippered by Jeremy and Swee Symonds, who arrived at 2030 local time (1830 UTC).**



Blue Chip of Cowes, first to arrive in a beautifully sunny Bayona this afternoon. The fleet as a whole have enjoyed favourable conditions during their passage across the Bay of Biscay, with mainly westerly, and some north-westerly winds of up to force six. The weather has also been kind, with a few showers and a

little fog. Whilst Blue Chip of Cowes were first to arrive, the remainder of the fleet are close behind. Pearl Fisher, and Oyster 56 owned and skippered by Phil Seymour, arrived only an hour behind Blue Chip.

The rest of the fleet are expected to arrive over the next 48 hours, with the last boat hopefully in and alongside by Friday afternoon.

The Rally also welcomed Riviera Magic, a 10.5m Westerly Riviera, to the Rally today. Riviera Magic, owned and skippered by Brad and Diane Tomkinson, had taken advantage of favourable wind conditions in May to cross the Bay of Biscay, and have been enjoying the spanish coast of Galicia over the past couple of weeks, arriving in Bayona a few days ago. Mike and Susan Kerr will also be joining Rally Portugal in Bayona with their Oyster 53 *Sula* in the next few days, making the total number of boats taking part this year up to 21.



Day 1. Sunday 30th May. Our plan for the whole passage, but particularly for the start was to avoid breaking anything and avoid any collisions. Three of the crew had never sailed together and never sailed on Blue Chip until this morning. We made a safe but unspectacular start in the middle of the fleet and then headed to the windward side of the boats in front of us, trying to get clear air, which worked well. We had enough breeze to keep the boat going but not enough for her to stretch her legs and open up a lead on our fellow rallyers (It's not a race!). The skipper discovered from new crew that bananas were supposed to bring bad luck on a yacht so after our lunch of soup and sandwiches we were forced to eat loads of them that had been baked in the oven with butter and coconut and then served with squirty cream. It's a hard life. The wind died for us in the early evening and we resorted to using the iron spinnaker until the breeze picked up around midnight. We also had our first taste of fog and were very grateful for AIS, although targets kept dropping out and then re-appearing which made us think we had a fault with the system.

Day 2. (31st) Wind picks up and we are able to crack on at over 8 knots for quite a while. Amazed how noisy the boat is down below when crashing through waves at speed. Great fun unless you want to sleep. No one sea sick although most on Stugeron. We had a ritual of Devon clotted cream with scones and jam each afternoon. Too good to chuck up! We went just outside Traffic Sep Scheme. Highlights of the day: first sighting of dolphins, Chilli for dinner and steam pudding with hot custard, followed by wet shave for skipper.

Day 3.(1st) We had picked up weather forecasts on Navtex which gave us the confidence to head straight for Cabo Villano rather than trying to go further west. Left over Chilli for lunch, more cream teas and then Tikka Masala with extra heat for dinner. Oh joy! No wonder the wind picked up again. More dolphins. Apparently we also spotted a flying fish, but I blinked and missed it!

Day 4 (2nd) Had a spell of reaching in 22 knots at 9 to 10 knots and managed to surf at 13.9 for a couple of seconds. Very impressed with how the boat handles in these conditions. Once the northerlies started we goose winged with our pole bought specially for this occasion which delivered great boat speed, and was much better arrangement than cruising chute which we had tried earlier. AIS still dropping out, paranoia sets in..... was a certain Oyster in "stealth mode"? Once we were within mobile phone range we started getting texts from friends ashore who spent the last day glued to the RP website! When we finally drifted across the finish line there was a slight sense of disappointment the King of Spain had not turned out to mark such a momentous occasion, but then I guess he would have wanted it to be called Rally Spain. Overall a great experience.

Jeremy Symonds