

Sunny Spray Report, July 18, 2015

Dear friends,

We left Oliva on the 8th of July and in the meantime have arrived at the laguna of Sancti Petri, just south of Cadiz. It is a lovely idyllic spot, with quite a tidal difference, so one moment we are looking out over a flat expanse of water, and a couple of hours later we are looking at mudflats covered with feeding birds. In the background the silhouette of Cadiz. It is quiet, peaceful, a nature reserve. If we turn around and look the other way, towards the sea, we see a broad, mile long ribbon of hundreds of sailing and motorboats, all anchored up, and many obviously abandoned for many years by their owners. At the very end is a tiny marina, and hundreds of tourists lining beautiful beaches of this nature reserve. We are definitely sharing this planet with 8 billion people, but fortunately, if you look hard for it, you can still find unspoilt spots where it is very nice to be, and therefore we chose this spot to rest a bit, to make repairs, to get things to work properly.



Because quite a few things did not work properly when we left. Of course, we should have stayed longer in Oliva, do proper sea trials until all was honky dory, but that would have taken us weeks and weeks, and if anything, we were ready to go.

We had found out that the wind vane self steering device does not work properly. That is to say, the thing works fine on its own, all parts move and shake, but once it is connected to the rudder (and the hydraulic steering bypassed away from the rudder), it cannot exert enough force to push the rudder against the remaining oil pressure of the hydraulics. We had various experts in, they all said the same: do not change the hydraulics system, that is looking good, it is the proper size for your boat (after all, we weigh in at 20 tonnes), so if changes need to be made, do it at the wind vane level. The obvious choice would be to install more pulleys, but there are already running many lines and since the system runs under the bed, we do not have that much freedom to experiment. This is obviously a big disappointment, and not something that can be solved in an afternoon. We have to think really hard and long and experiment a bit before solving this one.

The alternative is steering by electronic automatic pilot. We had Sunny Spray installed with a RayMarine system in Holland in 2012. It never worked properly, by us ascribed to the fact it had never been properly calibrated. So prior to leaving we tried to calibrate it, with no result. After waiting 10 (!!!) days for some Raymarine experts to arrive, it was found that a faulty connection was causing all the problems. Thank you Holland! Fortunately the now well connected autopilot works fine, albeit it consumes a lot of electricity and makes an irritating clicking noise. Thus, when we are sailing, we also have to run the engine, so in fact we are motorsailing!



Another unresolved issue concerns the electronics, how the different systems connect together in the multiplexer and are all shown on Bob's big computer screen. The last answer we got from the guy who has made this (custom made) multiplexer is ye yeh yeh, this can happen, turn the device on and off and on and off and then it might start to work, there are still some bugs in the system (or software, or whatever). Anyway, for the time being Bob has given up getting it running, maybe we'll find some experts in the Canary islands, in the meantime we'll do with stand alone systems or, even better, we go without the electronics.

Well, not completely without: we are using a GPS (great, we still use our old Furuno GPS we had on the Fint); we have installed an AIS system (great great, now everyone with a computer or tablet can follow where we are, we can follow ourselves on a tablet as well, and if the multiplexer ever starts working we could follow ourselves and other ships on the computer screen); and we are using Navionics charts on a tablet (also super, because the inbuilt GPS gives us an exact position on the chart).

And to complement all this, we use old-fashioned (and heavily outdated) paper charts, and equally outdated pilot books (although I have recently acquired the 2011 Atlantic Island Pilot, so that one will be the first to be reasonably up to date). The combination of paper and electronic information is what we feel comfortable with and which, we find, actually works quite fine.

There were other bits and ends that were not working, but gradually we are getting on top of things, and most things that gave us trouble have now been sorted out: the refrigerator is working after a new I/R control unit arrived; the shower is finally working, and best of all, the washing machine works perfectly (although I am only allowed to run it on Cold programmes, the moment I program it to run on i.e. 30 degrees, the fuses blow, apparently the water heater kicks in when the temperature is set to anything above cold).

So, taking all that in consideration, we left on the 8th of July, engine running. We decided to use the Levante winds to the full, forget about Ibiza and head West and South. We did that for the next 36 hours, and we made very good progress indeed. The most important finding was how incredibly comfortable Sunny Spray sails: even when the going is rough, with a lot of waves and speeds above 6 knots, she keeps running very smoothly. While sailing, I can easily sit at the pilot house table, typing away on my computer, making something to eat without being thrown around the galley, doing household chores, shortening Bob's pants into shorts on the sewing machine, etc etc. It is a miracle, even better than we had hoped for.

And also better than we had hoped for: she is fast!!! We had braced ourselves for the reality that 20 tonnes of steel ship would, at best, maybe go 4,5 to 5,5 knots. But we are regularly doing 7 knots, no problem at all, and some days ago, after negotiating the Strait of Gibraltar, we were doing 8 knots and plus!!! (we quickly put in two reefs at that speed though).

So, despite the disappointment of the wind vane and the not-working electronics, we are extremely pleased with how she sails and behaves in the water. Also nice is that she is attracting a lot of attention: whenever we are in a marina or on an anchorage, people will detour, stop to make some comments etc. Even children comment on her (probably because of her bright colours, after all, most children's toys are made in bright red, blue and yellow!).

So, where did we go?

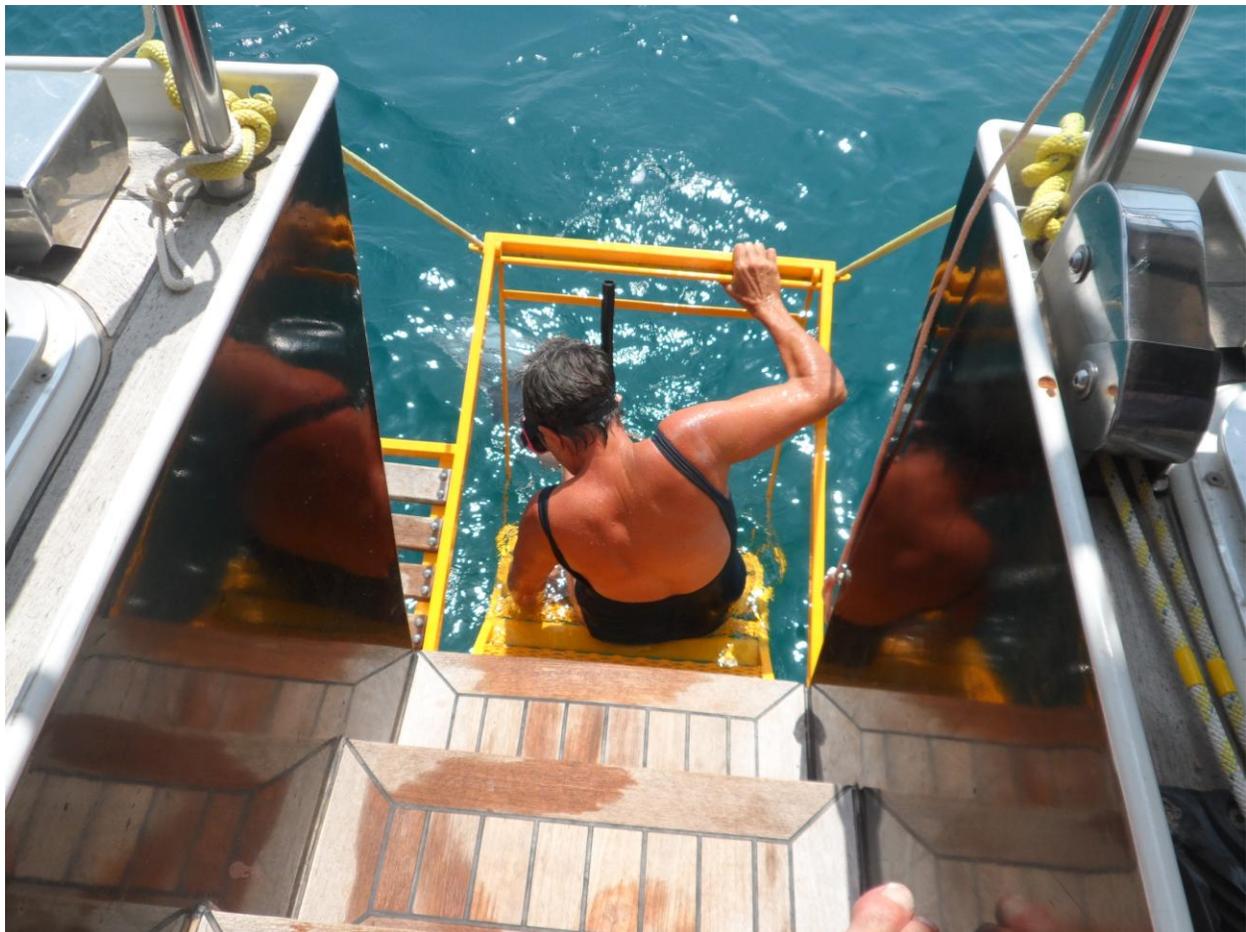
Basically south, in first instance towards Cabo de Gata. That is a difficult cape, with lots of currents, turbulent waters and heavy winds. It is also very deep, with high cliffs. While about 10 nm away, we all of a sudden saw very high fins going through the water, waterspouts and big dark shapes. Some of these rose vertically out of the water and splashed back: we were in the company of a group of large whales, a true Moby Dick experience! It was a magnificent sight, and later research on the Internet suggests that this were pilot whales, animals approx 7-8 m long. The vertical jumps are called spyjumps, which makes sense, they certainly had a good look around once above! Fantastic to encounter them on only the second day out!



After the whales we continued, had a fantastic sail (averaging 7 knot with winds from behind) and arrived and stayed in Almerimar (a pleasant marina, with shops and restaurants and apartments built around the pontoons, but sadly hardly anyone staying or living in the apartments (apart from pigeons), so the place feels at the point of collapse). But as a stop for a sailing boat it was quiet pleasant and not

expensive at all. And it gave me the chance to catch up with my Pilates exercises, although by now I do them out on the deck, sailing or moored, it makes no difference any more!

After Almerimar the coast becomes quite boring, so we made good mileage, spent the night in a quiet and beautiful bay (Cala Herradura), passed by Malaga and headed for Benalmadena, while around us the fog became thicker and thicker. Benalmadena has twice been elected “Best Marina in the World”, so our expectations were quiet high. Unfortunately, the marina is ok, but the area surrounding it, although very nicely layed out around the marina and still packed with tourists, bears the signs of decay – a lot of closed shop fronts, empty apartments on top locations, 10 euros menus at waterfront restaurants, dirty and cracked pavements. A real pity, because the layout is very attractive. Nevertheless, I hope the tourists enjoyed it and they certainly got a lot for their money! For us the marina was quite expensive, but fortunately they had drinking water of good quality on the quays, so we topped up our watertanks and left the next morning, in thick fog.





Fog seems to be a feature of that area, and normally it clears around 11 in the morning. But it makes for scary sailing, in particular without radar (we have one, but it does not function properly yet). Our tactic is to reduce speed to about 3 knots, keep watch with the two of us and increase speed in those spots where the fogbanks lift a bit. Another tactic is to stay really close along the coast, where often visibility is slightly better. You cannot trust that all boats have AIS (small fishing boats certainly don't have it!), and consequently we had some close encounters with fishing boats, but in general we made good progress, passing Marbella and Estepona. After Marbella the coast is getting more beautiful, so we spent the night in Cala Sardina, described as “a delightful anchorage”, but I don't know what the writer of that description had been drinking, it was ok but certainly not “delightful”. We left the next morning at 08.00h, ready for the Strait of Gibraltar.

For us it was the third time we were to pass through the Strait of Gibraltar, and never before did we sail that close to The Rock! We had to, because once again it was very foggy, and close to the coast visibility was slightly better. The wind was favourable, so we made good speed, and put our trust in our own eyes and the AIS and radar ping (Sunny Spray is of steel!) we are emitting. Nevertheless, we needed all our concentration while crossing the Bay of Gibraltar, with loads of commercial shipping to negotiate.



Just when we were being passed by a very fast ferry coming from the African side (where did that thing come from!!!!), I saw, again, fins in the water who headed our way. I grabbed the camera, ran up front, and saw at least 6 rather small dolphins swimming alongside and then in front of the bow. The entire visit lasted maybe 30 seconds, but it was cheerful enough. It seems like this trip is taking on the dimensions of a whale watching trip!!



At 09.39 h we received an SMS from my sister Ineke: congratulations with crossing the Bay of Gibraltar, well done with all that shipping around!, and at such good speed! By now we were sailing at 7.2 knots, and the fog was lifting a bit. It was a lovely feeling to know that someone had been watching our progress in real time!

The trip through the Straits was easy after that. The fog disappeared, we could see the commercial shipping but they stayed in their own shipping lanes, the wind increased and so did the wave heights and our speed. It was nothing we could not handle though, and although at one point we made 8.6 knots, on average we cruised at 6.5 to 7 knots, sailing with two reefs and reduced engine. Sunny Spray behaved wonderful, even in those seas and with those speeds still cruising very comfortable.

The coast lining the Strait of Gibraltar is high rocks, gradually reducing in height, and little vegetation. Tarifa is wind-swept and barren, a typical sea port, so we passed that as well and set course for Cape Trafalgar (where the British won the sea battle but admiral Nelson lost his life). At first an empty and barren coastline, but past Cape Trafalgar there comes an absolutely beautiful stretch of coast, with large, white beaches in a foothill setting, and hardly a soul to be seen, and this being July! Much advised to all of you who like to travel by car or camper van in Spain!

The only harbour along this stretch of coast is port Barbate, and the pilot book warns against a 5 mile long tuna net stretching across the harbour entrance, with numerous yachts having damaged their bottoms. Wanting to keep ours safe, we decided to push on towards Cadiz. Fortunately the wind died down a bit towards evening, enabling us to pick up the outer buoys of a truly delightful lagoon just south of Cadiz, called Puerto de Sancti Petri. A nature reserve, an abandoned fishing village (the Atunera de Sancti Petri), a small marina, no shops (we are seriously running out of wine and short on fresh food by now), and pre-industrial prices (1 Euro for a cana).



And that's where we are now, enjoying the scenery in front of us, doing smaller and larger jobs (the latter including fixing the mast, it had come loose, and rigging a hoisting system for the dinghy). It seems there is always something to do on a sailing boat!

But we are enjoying ourselves, and we hope you too.

Love to you all, have a very nice summer and keep cool

Helma en Bob

July 18, 2015, Sancti Petri (Cadiz)

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