

Jester Azores Challenge 2021

Start off western end of Plymouth Breakwater, 1200 Monday 21st June 2021.

Finish on a line between the north and south moles, Praia da Vitoria Harbour, Terceira, Azores.

Sitrep 6, 11.07.2021

All yachts are now accounted for, with *Arelia*, John Apps, finishing yesterday, precise time yet to be determined.

At about 1100H BST this morning, *Minke* and *Good Report* crossed the finishing line at Praia da Vitoria and thus brought to its happy conclusion a nine and a half day saga of epic seamanship and undaunted determination. No praise is high enough for the two skippers concerned – Duncan Lougee, *Minke*, and George Arnison, *Good Report*. They endured everything from Force 9 winds to flat calms but never gave up. Duncan had his rudder irreparably damaged about 400 nautical miles from Praia da Vitoria. He fabricated a jury steering oar but that soon snapped. *Minke* began sailing herself with no steering system whatsoever, in company with standby vessel *Good Report*.

The data will be picked over later, but in broad terms the two yachts sailed in excess of 500 miles to reach Praia da Vitoria. *Minke* probably sailed herself for over half of that distance. For the rest, when the winds were too light or from an unsailable direction, or when extra speed was required, *Good Report* towed *Minke*, under sail. It was the quintessential expression of the Jester spirit and a truly astonishing feat: a classic wooden sloop towing a disabled Folkboat, under sail alone, for hundreds of miles in mid-Atlantic. It also required the highest levels of seamanship to manage the tow, with tow lines being passed and unpassed as required, and to manage *Good Report's* sail balance so that she could continue under self-steering despite having to pull several tons of yacht astern. A big thankyou is due to Captain da Silva, the Praia da Vitoria Port Captain, who was a tower of strength throughout, and also to MRCC Delgada, who kept a close eye on progress and ensured that any shipping was kept clear.

Sitrep 5, 7.07.2021

It's been a busy couple of days. Five yachts have now finished, with only a day or two between them. Huge congratulations to Christian Gallot and *Kalevala*, Graeme Shimwell and *Panacea*, John Willis and *Pippin*, Justin Butler and *Roquetta*, along with Donald Heath and *Guppy Unchained*. All home and now almost dry after exemplary voyages. The general theme on arrival was the need for a bit more extended sleep.

The Praia da Vitoria Health Authorities have very kindly waived the need for skippers to stay isolated at anchor for Covid testing, as long as they have been vaccinated, and so skippers have been called into the marina earlier than anticipated and are already sharing a beer (or maybe two).

Out at sea the dramas are still unfolding. *Arelia*, John Apps, has been keeping his position under wraps. It would be no surprise to see him arrive very soon.

Out to the east of Terceira, the other three yachts still at sea are lining themselves up for the final run in. Currently *Minke*, Duncan Lougee, and *Good Report*, George Arnison are almost literally joined at the hip, with *Good Report* towing the rudderless *Minke* due west at a good speed. One day soon there will be a huge story to tell there, but for the moment it's still noses to the grindstone to get Duncan and *Minke* into port safe and well. A little to their south, and 70 miles or so closer to Praia da Vitoria, *Sylvia* and Brian Judd are racing landwards. Hopefully it won't be too long before the whole fleet is reconnected at Terceira.

Sitrep 4, 3.07.2021

The event is now approaching the endgame, with yachts having to force their way through the last few hundred miles. It's not been easy of late, with rapidly changing conditions and strong west and south-west winds keeping Praia da Vitoria elusively to windward. Men and boats are being well-tested in this final leg.

At the moment *Panacea*, Graeme Shimwell, looks well-placed to finish soon, with less than 100 miles to go. Further east and south-east *Guppy Unchained*, Donald Heath, *Roquette*, Justin Butler, *Pippin*, John Willis and *Sylvia*, Brian Judd, are closing in but still have work to do against the westerlies and the Azores current.

A little further back *Minke*, Duncan Lougee, closely accompanied by *Good Report*, George Arnison, is demonstrating that with the right boat, the right skipper and the right conditions, a rudder is not an absolutely necessary accoutrement for a yacht. *Minke* is currently sailing herself to windward at about 4 knots with no steering gear whatsoever. Managing without a rudder is not new to Jesters – Nick Bridges in *Dolphin* achieved the same feat returning from the 2008 Jester Azores Challenge. Duncan is aiming to get himself as close as possible to Terceira by sailing rudderless, before a final tow in. This will take skill and patience, but Duncan, a veteran Jester, is cheerfully up for the challenge. That leaves *Arelia*, John Apps, coming in steadily from the north-east, and the dark horse – *Kalevala*, Christian Gallot, whereabouts unknown, but likely to be finishing soon. The next few days should provide a fascinating finale.

Sitrep 3, 29.06.2021

Arelia, skippered by Jester Challenge veteran John Apps, sent in a noon position yesterday, and so for the first time we had fixes on eight of the nine yachts still heading for Terceira. *Arelia*, a Van der Stadt Invicta Mark 1, is very much a folkboat-type design, and it was interesting to see that she is pretty much neck and neck with *Minke*, Duncan Lougee's Folkboat, with *Arelia* just out very slightly to the west. *Jester* herself was of course a converted Folkboat.

The fleet is still spread in an almost perfect arc, with the boats all more or less equidistant from the finishing line. The light northerlies have persisted but that is likely to change as the fleet closes in on Terceira. Headwinds are imminent, most likely from south to south-west, so skippers will have a little more work to do in terms of their tactics.

Only one yacht, *Kalevala*, Christian Gallot, has been unable to send in any positions so far. Christian, a Frenchman and the only foreign skipper in this year's challenges (the rest had to withdraw because of Covid regulations), is clearly an enterprising and determined character. He joined the fleet at the starting line having sailed over from France and anchored off

Plymouth to wait for the start. *Kalevala*, a 31' aluminium *Brise de Mer* from the great Finot shipyard, is at the least very likely to be level-pegging with the fleet and could well be ahead. The Jester Challenge is of course not a race – every skipper is taking up a personal sea-going challenge to test and develop his or her skill and seamanship. It is great to see so many diverse yachts converging on the Azores with, so far, so little real divergence between them. Pretty much two thirds of the distance to Terceira has been covered within a week, by all participants, probably the quickest overall performance in a Jester Azores Challenge to date. The remaining third of the route will be fascinating to follow.

Sitrep 2, 26.6.2021

The tactical battle is on! The fleet, which a couple of days ago was relatively tightly bunched, has now spread wide as skippers adopt different tactics to cope with the conditions. As was mentioned in Sitrep 1, sailing with a following wind is not ideal – speed is reduced, wind vanes are less effective as there is insufficient apparent wind, the risk of an accidental gybe is increased. The skipper therefore has a choice: either to stick to the ideal course and manage these problems, or else to come a little higher onto the wind to sail faster and more efficiently, but not necessarily in the optimum direction.

Yesterday's noon positions show the full gamut of tactical decisions. On the west side of the fleet, *Minke*, Duncan Lougee, has stuck doggedly to the rhumb line. At the other extreme, *Guppy Unchained*, Donald Heath, has sought speed with a long leg to the south-south-east, and now needs to recover some westing. *Panacea*, Graeme Shimwell, has also sailed a more easterly course and is going well, with the rest of the fleet bunched between *Panacea* and *Minke*.

Good Report, George Arnison, started 20 hours late but is catching the main group of *Pippin*, John Willis, *Sylvia*, Brian Judd and *Roquetta*, Justin Butler. The success or otherwise of different tactics depends largely on what follows in the way of wind shifts. At the moment the surface pressure charts suggest a continuing flow of light northerly air, but with the fleet so widely spread, there will be multiple small variations within that. Who will benefit? Who might find the going tough? Watch this space!

Sitrep 1, 23.06.2021

Only a few weeks ago we thought it would never happen. The idea of being able to send a fleet to Terceira in the Azores seemed unthinkable. But things can change quickly and now ten yachts in total are winging, or in this case, goose-winging, their way to Praia da Vitoria. Eight yachts started on time, with *Good Report*, George Arnison, and *Helix*, Steve Moorey, setting out a day or so later.

The fleet has got off to a rollicking start, driven on by a fresh north-easterly. The wind is almost too good – for a singlehander using windvane self-steering, a wind from dead astern is tricky to cope with. Nonetheless, some impressive first day distances have been covered. For example, by midday yesterday *Sylvia*, Brian Judd, had recorded 125 miles in her first 24 hours, while *Roquetta*, Justin Butler, had logged on impressive 155 miles.

With a following wind, the fleet is still fairly closely packed and is now likely to be off the continental shelf and into true pelagic waters. Two out of the ten yachts, *Areli*a, John Apps,

and *Kalevala*, Christian Gallot, may not be able to send tracking information, so their progress will remain a mystery until they arrive at Terceira.

So, a cracking start, and the potential for some fast times to the Azores, although the wind and the sea, as always, will be the ultimate arbiters.