

MEDITERRANEAN SPAIN: Gibraltar to the French Border – RCC Pilotage Foundation & Steve Pickard, 10th edition. Published in hard covers by Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson [www.imray.com] at £45.00. 408 A4 pages, in full colour throughout. ISBN 978-1-8462-3650-1

There was a time when, if you needed a pilot, you would either pay one to come along with you or, in more extreme circumstances, persuade one, possibly at the point of a sword. Later the process became more polite, with pilots racing out from scarily difficult entrances to win business from vessels whose skippers were anxious to protect their no claims bonus. Move on to global maritime trade and global gunboat diplomacy and pilots became books of sailing directions. Turning pages was so much easier than dealing with the grumpy, unhygienic, overpaid sort of pilot. I imagine, if it hasn't been done already, it won't be long before you click on a port on a GPS plotter to access pilotage, harbour information, images etc.

Meanwhile the latest addition to the book variety is a new pilot covering the coast of Spain from Gibraltar eastward to the French border, from the RCC Pilotage Foundation charity. This one volume supersedes the previous two volumes, one of which covered the Costas del Sol and Blanca, the other the Costas del Azahar, Dorada and Brava.

So first question: what's been left out to combine two into one? Well, this is no intellectual method to critique a pilot, but the simplest answer is this: the two volumes amount to 408 pages, including two lots of preamble like weather, history, culture, index etc. The now single volume is 400 pages. So there you are, one book instead of two, about the same size. There have been no short cuts of pictures, chartlets or information. This is a mere rationalisation. And a good thing too. These pilots have been indispensable since their inception, giving really invaluable insight into this coastline, and the authors and publishers have avoided any temptation to radically alter something that already works, and works well.

The region is a firm favourite with sailors the world over, but particularly with Brits. In the past fifty years facilities for visiting yachties have proliferated all along Spain's Mediterranean frontage, and are still being built. A new, massive, long- overdue marina will shortly be opening at Gibraltar, and at Adra the pontoons of a new marina will soon be vacated by seagulls (and the inevitable results of their presence) and occupied by cruisers.

Although at first glance the new edition seems very similar to its predecessors, a good deal of thoughtful tweaking has been done to hone an already user-friendly layout. There is more about Spanish import tax rules, which could easily trip up the unwary, although British-flagged owners will have alarm bells ringing anyway following recent democratic decisions.

To gauge the sorts of changes, let's look at a couple of ports chosen more or less

arbitrarily (Gib was excluded as being unfair since the new marina does not appear in the new edition). Estepona's entry has been revamped. Harbour charges appear in the first details list. The chartlet remains in the same glass-clear format, but now without the unnecessary entry waypoint. The entry advice has been completely revised and made more relevant, but the most helpful change is the provision of more and better images, both aerial and from sea level. They really are worth the thousand words that save skippers a new port-related nervous breakdown and a relapse into alcoholism. The next door port of José Banus also now sports three photos of the vital lumps, bumps and arrival pontoon, instead of just one.

Further up the coast is the port of Denia, deep in the British enclave there and a good setting-off point for the Balearics and the eastern Med. Here the basic information, especially about the different marinas, is much clearer and easier to read. There are three sea-level photos instead of one. The loss of the aerial view is a pity, but the chartlet remains a good size and simple to translate into what you see over the bow.

Altogether the amalgamation of the two pilots is an improvement on the two already comprehensive and highly thought-of pair. It is a surprisingly difficult trick to impart an enormous amount of information in a simple format. The changes in this pilot have been subtle yet effective in making it even more easily digestible to someone salt-caked, hungry, thirsty and tired.

Author and sailor Steve Pickard readily acknowledges that in this update he stands on the shoulders of those who have previously helped create these pilots.

MEP