

THE ATLANTIC CROSSING GUIDE – revised by Jane Russell for the RCC Pilotage Foundation (seventh edition). Published in hardback by Adlard Coles Nautical [www.adlardcoles.com] at £50 / \$75 (£45 through Amazon and £35.40 for the Kindle edition). 292 A4-size pages in full colour throughout. ISBN 978-1-4729-4766-6

I reviewed the third edition of this modern classic in *Flying Fish* 1992/2 and my goodness, what a lot has changed! The interweb thingy was invented, GPS and electronic charts came along, marinas have been built inside marinas, and now we are all passengers on our yachts while wi-fi takes care of all the boring stuff (including navigation – see more on that below). It also seems that I may have become a grumpy old man.

That third edition's cover had a single photograph of *Wrestler of Leigh*, the redoubtable Rustler 31, burying her nose into the back of a stormy-looking wave under a threatening, leaden sky – and clearly thriving in her element of the wild, untamed ocean. This seventh edition's cover tells an entirely different story. It shows the bow of a teak-decked 40-something footer cresting a tradewind wave in glorious sunshine with an enticing blue horizon ahead. The message has changed from: 'So you want to cross the Atlantic? Here's what you need to know' to 'Yes, it's every bit as good as you hope, here are lots of photos to prove it, here are plenty of things to think about while planning and preparing, and here are some descriptions of lovely places to leave from and arrive at'.

I exaggerate to get the shift of point of view across, but I don't denigrate the book because of that shift. I believe that its layout, structure and its text (with the exception of its pilotage notes and chartlets) are pitched perfectly at the modern first-time Atlantic crosser. Ocean sailing has become both widely aspirational and achievable in a way it used not to be. Boats have grown and their systems have become comprehensive, integrated and reliable. The balance has shifted from achievement through managing, to achievement through enjoyment.

So what about the detail? The first part, Preparations, is well-written, comprehensive and very well-illustrated. I set it some 'what about?' challenges (eg. total electrical failure, steering failure, anchoring choices etc) and it passed them all. It's surprising how much very sensible advice is packed in. We all have our pet do's and don'ts, and we'd all disagree with some of the things it says. However, it lays out all the choices, options and 'things to think about' really very well. The sections on 'creating a home from home' and 'a happy ship' are good examples of a more modern cruising approach.

The second part, Passage Planning, is much more of a curate's egg – good in parts. Its descriptions of routes and weather systems are very good, but are let down by the fact that its routing chart extracts have rather odd wind arrows and, hard as I looked, I couldn't find a key for them. So you're left wondering exactly which way they're pointing and whether each feather is 5 knots or the equivalent force in the Beaufort scale.

Its coverage extends up into the higher latitudes, recognising the increasing popularity of sailing in the ice. It also stretches across to the Panama Canal and down to Senegal and The Gambia. Again, we could all find fault with some of its harbour inclusions and exclusions – I regret that it misses the Algarve and, on the way to Panama, perhaps Cartagena would have been useful.

We then come to the real problem area, which is the harbours themselves. The pictures and text are captivating and informative, and I appreciated all of those for the harbours with which I'm familiar. Details like those of banks, post offices and gas supplies are gone, but its coverage of marinas, moorings and anchorages is fine and Google Earth can provide the rest. The chartlets, however, are very largely useless in this edition, being screenshots of Navionics electronic charts. They are far too cluttered to actually be used for pilotage, and they lack details such as light characteristics, which are only accessible in the 'live' chart version by drilling down.

Then, I am forced to say, my confidence in the pilotage notes took a knock. That is a dreadful thing to write, so let me explain. I looked hard at the chartlet and the notes for Falmouth, my home port. The chartlet correctly shows a red can marking the west side of the deep water channel into Carrick Roads (it shows the fact that it is lit, too, but not its light characteristics). It also shows that Black Rock, close to the west of that can, is now also lit as the isolated danger it has always been. The pilotage notes, however, remain unchanged from the sixth edition. At that time, the pilotage text and the chartlet were at least consistent with each other, but in fact neither reflected the fact that the lighting and buoyage had by that time already changed (Black Rock was lit for the first time in 169 years in 2006 – wrecking traditions die hard!).

My concern is that this may not be a single oversight, but may possibly be a result of ‘outsourcing’ the chartlet production to Navionics, which has metaphorically ‘distanced’ them from the writing of the pilotage notes. It also demonstrates the fact that the chartlets are so hard to use that at no stage in the checking process did anyone notice the disconnect between words and picture. I only managed to because I am familiar with the history of the marking of Black Rock. It probably also says something more fundamental about electronic aids to navigation which can encourage you to look without seeing – but that would just be me being old and grumpy.

The publisher’s price is high, but Amazon’s feels much better, starting as it does with a ‘4’. For the amount of really good information it contains and the truly beautiful photography, it’s perfectly good value. However, because of the chartlet problem in this 7th edition, and my doubts over whether the pilotage notes have been fully updated, I really could not recommend buying it unless you were prepared to heed entirely the warning on the fly page from Navionics that their charts are ‘not to be used for navigation’.

TJB