

## *Pemandia's Portuguese parties*

From the UK to Madeira

Peter Fabricus



Our plans for the 2023 season initially focussed not on sailing, but on arrangements to celebrate my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, on land, and often. In the end, I lost count of just how many parties there were!

Fortunately, the May half term dates for our four grandchildren coincided so we booked accommodation for all the family at a resort in Portugal. Airlines were still in post pandemic chaos at the time we booked, so I threw in a one-

line joke that it might be better to sail to Portugal. My wife, Emily responded by agreeing that it was time to have some more warm weather sailing! And the joke became a plan, and our sailing intentions grew after the Irish Cruising Club (ICC) invited RCC members to join their Meet in Madeira, celebrating the centenary of Conor O'Brien (RCC) starting his three year circumnavigation.

Simple plans work best so we kept things uncomplicated. I would sail single handed to Lisbon early in May and Emily would join me for the onward trip to Lagos. Here we would go ashore for a week with children and grandchildren, then fly home for a couple of weeks, returning late in June for the 460 mile passage to Madeira and the ICC Meet. Along the way we would decide on further plans.

*Pemandia*, our Malo 40 remains the perfect boat for our sort of sailing and over the last 15 years we have described her, and various improvements, in the *Journal*. As ever with boats, the list never stops and work usually takes



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longer than expected. The autopilot and some of the other electronics had started to become unreliable and partial replacement was becoming difficult because of integration problems between different generations of equipment. After much discussion we asked Matt Owen from PR Systems in Plymouth to replace all the Raymarine equipment with B&G. Matt was thoughtful with his advice and his work extremely neat. We have added a second plotter in the cockpit and we were able to keep a couple of Raymarine repeaters as well as the autopilot drive unit. Matt is a B&G expert but told us that he considers our old Raymarine drive unit to be among the best. The new system has taken a bit of effort to learn but the autopilot steers much better, especially to wind and the upgrade to digital radar is staggering. Indeed rather than struggling to use it in fog, we now have it on most of the time and so obey Rule 7 (using all available means to keep a look out). In anticipation of a possible Atlantic crossing, but also as a general safety upgrade, we upgraded our limited satellite communication. Unplanned but necessary work included replacing the Harken headsail furler and when the mast was out for new wiring, we found the gooseneck fitting was very worn. Maddeningly, Selden have changed the boom extrusion and a replacement of gooseneck alone was not available, so we had to have a whole new boom.

As sailing dates were governed as much by my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations as by weather and tide, by the time the work was finished I had no chance to get used to all the new equipment before departing from Plymouth on 11 May. I usually like to have a day sail at the start of a passage but a northerly forecast was too good to waste. However, after leaving our berth I found that the log impellor was fouled, so anchored in Cawsand to clear it. By the time I set off again it was raining. I was pleased to see HMS *Diamond* appear in the mist because my City Livery Company, the Barbers, has an affiliation with her. As Master Barber I had met her captain in London and previously enjoyed hospitality in the Barbers bar in the wardroom. It was not so convivial now as the VHF told me of the danger area for her live firing

The Barbers Company Bar in the Wardroom of HMS *Diamond*



exercise. At 1700, just before the mobile signal died, I phoned Emily and by nightfall I was reaching, in fast, if rather grey and bumpy conditions with a reef in the mainsail.

I have previously tried to describe the routine of single handed passage making - sailing, navigating, sleeping, cooking, reading and above all, sometimes the simple pleasure of just being. I had anticipated spending time on this passage learning all the ins and outs of the new B&G electronics but it was a bumpy passage and sea sickness was often a little too close for comfort; cooking and reading were less in evidence. Although the wind was favourable, it was variable in both strength and direction. So, I spent more time than usual taking in and shaking out reefs, rigging and then downing our big reaching sail. This sets on a mini bowsprit, and when running, needs poling out. For a few hours on the third afternoon I motored, but much of the time the mainsail was reefed. On the penultimate day it blew F7 for about six hours. This added to the party games; first I had failed to notice that the new headsail furler needed the reefing line moving to avoid chafing. Fortunately there was sufficient spare for this not to cause too much difficulty when it parted. Then, the car of the mainsail outhaul disintegrated. A temporary lashing with some dyneema fixed that. On the final evening I was surrounded by fishing boats and really appreciated the ease with which I could monitor potential collision courses with the new equipment. At 0615 on 16 May, after five days and 18 hours I came alongside in Cascais, 845 miles from Plymouth averaging 6.1 knots. Pleasingly this was almost 24 hours quicker than the same passage in 2018.

Cascais is a delightful place apart from the eye-watering prices for a berth in the marina. However it is well situated, sheltered and as everywhere in Portugal, the staff are friendly and helpful. There is not much in the way of a chandlery there but a taxi took me to the excellent new branch of Sopramar in the Centro Nautico de Algas for a replacement genoa furling line. I had to visit two other chandlers before I had acquired enough Delrin balls to rebuild the mainsail outhaul car.

Emily arrived on the evening of 21 May and we headed out the following morning. It was a gentle downwind sail to Sesimba where we anchored, but two more problems emerged - the electric freshwater pump had failed (we have a manual backup) and the wind instrument had stopped working. Both would have to wait





*Pemandia a Malo 40*

until we reached Lagos. From Cascais it is only about 125NM to Lagos but we spent an easy four days getting there, anchoring each night, first at Sesimbra, then at Sines which looked attractive from the water and finally just around Cape St Vincent, off the beach at Sagres. Winds were light and we unashamedly motored quite a lot.

We were very happy to return to Lagos. Like everywhere on the Algarve it is a tourist hot spot, but the marina is secure and the town has managed to retain its charm. We dined twice at our favourite café, the Tasca da Lota in the old fish market area, away from the tourist rush. Sopramar, the yard and chandlery is a great asset in Lagos and I got them to replace the very awkwardly

placed fresh water pump and the wind transducer which was still under warranty.

Now it was time to think about the party season! So we packed up our shore clothes and made our way by taxi back to Sagres and the Martinhal holiday resort. Emily and I had never had this sort of holiday before and we loved it. Andrew and Joy had been there previously with the twins and explained that it was not a child friendly place but a holiday village for children where parents and grandparents are made very welcome! We had selected the top restaurant there for our arrival dinner. Thinking we would be first there, we found both boys and all their families already

Owen performing magic at my birthday dinner

at our table to welcome us. I cannot describe the joy of being surrounded by such a loving family. Throughout dinner, ten year old Owen, a member of the junior Magic Circle entertained us with some very clever tricks and the birthday cake that they had arranged for me rounded off the meal before winding up the evening with a walk on the beach.





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Three generations of Fabs afloat

As the grandchildren had expressed interest in seeing Grandad's yacht, Owen and Elliot (seven) voted for a day doing this while Anna and Jessica (both seven) did girly things with Granny. We borrowed children's life jackets from the resort, drove back to Lagos for an early lunch aboard before a short sail, anchoring for tea before returning to the marina. The seed has been sown!

After an action packed two weeks at home (including more parties!), we flew back to Portugal on 22 June and set off for Porto Santo and the ICC Meet the following day. We had been monitoring the movements of the orca whales that have caused so much destruction and were pleased to be away from the Portuguese coast before their migration north from around Cadiz. For the first couple of hours we had a gentle SE breeze and motored to cross the shipping lane around Cape St Vincent. Mist on the first evening appeared to have an almost yellow colour and only later did we realise that it was in fact a sandstorm. With it came northerly, later NE wind F5-6 with gusts up to 7 so we were well reefed throughout the fast passage. We heard a pan-pan call from a yacht with engine failure. I was surprised when I plotted its position to find we could hear it from 60nm away.

On the chart, the harbour at Porto Santo seems very small and noting the advice that tripping lines should be used, we did not want to arrive in darkness. There was no moon and even if we could see boats at anchor, the chance of fouling someone's trip line seemed too big a risk, so on our last night, we furled the genoa completely to try and slow down. Despite this we arrived at the anchorage just outside the harbour at 0600 by which time the wind was a steady 32 kts, so with more than 40m of chain in 7m of water, we kept anchor watch until it was light enough to enter the harbour. We had averaged 6.7 kts for the 463 mile passage with a record breaking 179.5 miles in 24 hours.

Marina berths had all been booked for the VIP ICC members but we were more than happy to be anchored off, although very windy conditions required great care in dinghies and had most yachts swinging wildly around anchors. With plenty of fresh water, a generator and lithium batteries we were self sufficient and our anchor held firmly. Others seemed to have trouble and needed to re-lay several times.

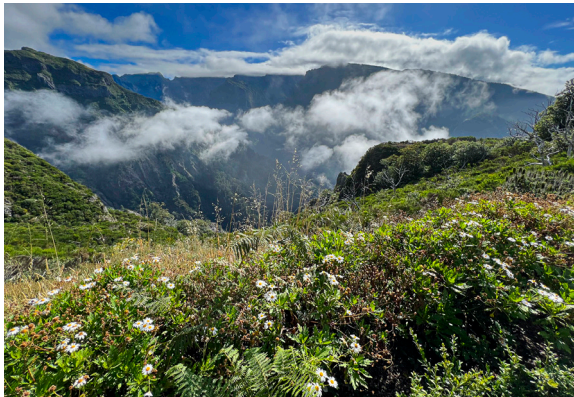
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As the fleet assembled, the next round of parties began with multiple smaller get-togethers within the main gathering. Lorne Byatt and his crew aboard *Freya* (RCC) anchored near us. This cemented one of our best RCC friendships which had begun on a wet windy day in Howth about six years ago. Drinks aboard *Pemandia* was followed by supper on *Freya* and although James Walker insisted it was just a one-pot supper, I suspect evidence from the washing up team disproved this. Over the next few days we toured the island on a bus, swam and walked as well as enjoying the first ‘official’ barbecue for the whole fleet. O Brien did not actually stop at Porto Santo, but perhaps rather unkindly compared it to ‘a kaolin dump overrun by the washings of a tin mine’. We disagree and loved the warm sea and uncrowded beach as well as the warmth of the local people.

Soon it was time to move on to Madeira, directly downwind from Porto Santo. O Brien spent three days there including a ‘shore venture which was the most dangerous of the voyage but which diplomatic reasons enjoin silence’. I wonder what he got up to.

Somehow our fleet managed to arrive at Funchal sufficiently on time and in the right order to form up for a parade of sail (actually under power) around the harbour. Our Portuguese hosts had arranged a large temporary pontoon to accommodate most of the yachts and helping hands afloat and ashore to help getting nearly 40 yachts moored up and their crews ashore for another party, of course.

The Meet celebrated the circumnavigation by RCC member Conor O Brien who was awarded the Challenge Cup three successive years for his circumnavigation in



*Saoirse* between 1923 and 25, later becoming the first honorary member of the ICC. Seamus O'Connor (Rear Commodore ICC) and his team, with their Portuguese opposite numbers, had worked extremely hard to arrange a tremendous gathering with lots of memorable supporting activities.

Wild flowers in Madeira



RCC Party for our ICC Hosts

My title for this log is about parties and of course, official and minor parties abounded. Our friends Huon and Marion Gray, old *Pemandia* hands, had joined us in Madeira and helped us to run a drinks party jointly with Lorne Byatt (RCC) and Ed Wheeler (RCC) for our Irish hosts as well as a return supper party for *Freyja's* crew – we were nine around the cabin table. As an extra party we dined at Madeira's only Michelin 2\* restaurant. In between, we toured the island by bus and taxi and we visited Blandy's famous Madeira cellars. When the Meet finished, the fleet dispersed in the best ICC and RCC tradition - in every direction. On *Pemandia* we had a short energetic sail east to Quinto do Lorde Marina where we left her to recover from all the parties. We will return to lay her up in October, then home until next season.

I could never have anticipated that turning 70 could bring such fun and happiness, with family and friends.

The final joke was by EasyJet. I had quipped that it was better to sail out to Portugal than to rely on airlines. On our way home our flight was delayed by 24 hours, but the airline put us up in such a nice hotel that I could not complain.



Quinto do Lorde