

An Atlantic adventure on *Magic*

Two handed from Newport, Rhode Island to Bermuda

Julian Berney

Awarded the Founder's Cup

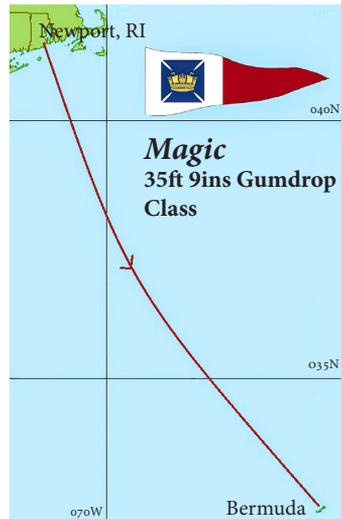


Magic beating across The Great Sound at Bermuda

Covid restrictions presented its own challenges. Residents of Bermuda, such as Hugo, could travel with negative tests to the US fairly easily allowing him to visit before finally deciding on the purchase and then for a test sail to make sure he was comfortable with her. UK residents, such as myself, had to be out of the UK for at least fourteen days before being admitted to the US. Fortunately, by the end of May I could fly to Bermuda, quarantine there for fourteen days (very pleasant), and then proceed to Newport via

The cruise was quite simply to sail *Magic* safely across the 650nm of ocean from Newport, RI to Bermuda during June 2021. The crew of two were Hugo Berney (skipper and son) and Julian Berney (crew and father).

The pros and cons of owning a classic wooden yacht were debated at home during last winter with our younger son, Hugo. The 'call' came to Hugo in April when he decided to proceed with the purchase of one; a different call came to me in early May asking if I could help sail the boat from Newport, Rhode Island to Bermuda. Semi-retirement does have its compensations.



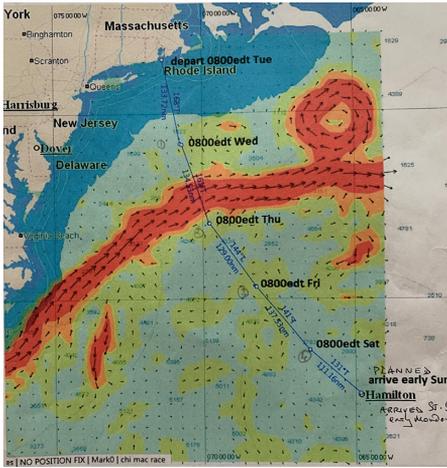
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Boston. Logistically everything fell into place and by 10 June we found ourselves searching the moorings for a fine looking yawl.

Much of the initial passage planning was undertaken with some Bermudian yachtsmen who are well versed on the passage and the likely conditions to expect. When I started offshore sailing in the early seventies the three best known yacht racing series were the Admiral's Cup with the Fastnet, the Southern Cross with the Sydney Hobart and the Onion Patch with the Bermuda race; having completed

three Fastnets I was intrigued to sail the same course as one of the other great races.

Oddly enough the only large scale chart we could find was a purpose designed 'chart' for the race, limited in scope to a broad lane funnelling down to Bermuda with little of the US coast shown to help orientate ourselves on progress. There is nothing to hit other than Bermuda except for a prowling US Coast Guard, a couple of ODAS weather station Lanby buoys and an occasional passing ship. The other chart was my old small scale North Atlantic chart which also had its own limitations.



The pre-departure Route Plan. Gulf Stream in red

On arrival we located *Magic's* slightly maverick, but experienced previous owner and moved her from a mooring to a Newport Yacht Club pontoon; they could not have been kinder or more helpful as we set about preparing the boat for sea.

Although having both a highly regarded designer (Knud Aage Nielsen) and builder (Paul Luke), *Magic* was 60 years old this year. She had undergone extensive re-planing in the stern and been in the water during Covid; however, since April she had had only a couple of days sailing. Therefore there was a lot to do to prepare, what to us was, an unproven boat for a relatively long passage in open water. However, her recent history and ownership gave us confidence that she was up to the task.

As we are unfamiliar with the Gulf Stream and the weather patterns in this part of the world, we engaged the services of Commanders' Weather. In order to be able to communicate with them at sea, I acquired a Garmin InReach SE+ with an Iridium contract to allow for satellite text communications, a tracker and SOS. Hugo had bought a Tillermate self-steering arm (which we fitted easily), two ACR PLBs and a life raft. The more specialist items like engine filters were more difficult to find at short notice but somehow it all came together. The previous owner kindly lent us lifejackets and a bosun's chair.

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The weather was organising a low about 75-80 miles SE of Cape Hatteras moving quickly to the NE and heading for Nova Scotia; this was later upgraded to a tropical depression. Initially it was thought this would not delay us but later we were advised to delay our departure by two days or face 40kt winds during the passage. Needless to say we decided to avoid that. We had planned for only two days to prepare her; clearly, we needed four days and this enforced stay was a blessing.

We prepared the boat methodically; being the lightest (and oldest) it was decided I should go to the top of both masts and carefully inspect the rigging. All was fine except for the absence of three quite critical nuts and split pins, well the devil is in the detail. The mast and rigging were checked for tensioning and seizing. We had some complicated calculations to work out the volume of some odd sized water and fuel tanks and then decide on the amount of additional diesel cans and drinking water. As we did not know much about either the boat's sailing or engine performance, we decided to provision for nine days (which for two is not much more than a hoped for five to six day passage).

So, the great day arrived. With our preparations completed, a reasonable six day forecast and our passage route plan from Commanders' Weather, we felt ready to set sail at 0830 on 15 June. The weather forecast on the day was mainly cloudy with some rain or squally showers, then partial clearing at night. Seas 3-5ft, SE swell. Winds variable between S - SW4 to 12 kts true. We motored out of the bay in a light breeze and had a gentle sail out to sea. This lasted through to the following

The owner, Hugo Berney, contemplating his wardrobe



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afternoon as the wind strengthened to 15kts giving good sailing progress. The forecast on day two (when we were due to be in the Gulf Stream) was for favourable winds, W10-18kts and seas of 4-6ft. Mindful of our 'unproven' boat we put two reefs in the main and some rolls in the jib but still maintained about 6kts SOG.

The rhumb line course was SE, so SW/W winds would suit us well. When it veered W/NW (behind a cold front) we hoisted the mizzen staysail, a fun and rather underestimated sail these days; easily handled by one and it certainly increased our boat speed. By 1830 on this second day we had logged about 180nm, averaging about 5.3kts. We were also pleased to be close to our planned entry point into the Gulf Stream. Our chart shows the Stream running NE at 1-1.5kts. We had heard tales of intimidating micro-climates, very strong counter currents and extremely rough conditions in strong winds over the current. Fortunately, and to our relief, we had benign conditions during the twelve hours or so we spent crossing it.



Sunset on a calm night

We were due to exit the Gulf Stream between $37^{\circ}\text{N } 70^{\circ}\text{W}$ and $25^{\circ}\text{N } 30^{\circ}\text{W}$; it was difficult for us to know if that is where we exited it! However, once across we seemed to enter doldrum style weather; by 0100 on day three with a lovely night sky and bright stars we were becalmed about 10 nm south of our rhumb line. This position (not the calm) was fine by us as our worst fear was to be spat out of the Gulf Stream miles to the north leaving us close hauled to our destination. The forecast, anticipated a low developing just to the S and E of us moving E-NE or NE was again 'cloudy, chance of showers and squalls/thunder storms, mostly from S and E with seas 5-7ft, wind waves with S-SW swell': not very encouraging!

With no sign of change, the calm persisted. We were now behind on our recommended route plan and were anxious to keep up with it, so decided to motor

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sail; the apparent wind went forward helping us a bit in a moderate swell surrounded by thunder clouds with their own lightning shows. The engine, a 35hp three-cylinder Universal with a fixed propeller, was pushing us along at 4.5kts, consuming only about two-two and a half litres per hour at 1500-1600rpm. As we had a limited supply of fuel and a long way to go we decided to take it easy and wait for conditions to change. We continued, engine on, engine off as the wind clocked the compass; by 2130 on day three, after around 60 hours, we were about halfway, still with thunder and lightning clouds about and the occasional rain shower to remind us of the North Sea.



The crew, Julian Berney, having a North Sea watch

As always in calms we began to wonder if the wind was ever going to fill and our fuel reserves were looking touch and go should we have to motor far. Day four was frustrating with a diminishing NW breeze behind the weakening front. However, it was the cue for all sails up; I came on deck having had two hours off watch to find my skipper with all sails up – mizzen, mizzen staysail, full main, rolled genoa and asymmetric spinnaker.

Once again, by nightfall we were becalmed; we sent a message to Commanders' Weather asking for an undated forecast in which they had confidence. An instant reply confirmed, yes it has been lighter than expected but they were confident of improvement for the remaining days.

By a strange coincidence the wind moved southerly 5-7 kts leaving us close hauled under main, mizzen, and jib with a moderate sea of 3-5ft and S-SW swell. It now began to feel that we had moved into the north Atlantic circulation proper

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Magic under full sail

with wind waves on the swell and an ocean current of about half a knot, our SE course meant we now had swell, waves, and current working against us. As the wind built to 10 -12kts we began to get going with some spray across the deck (and down my back in the heads through an open porthole).

Our watch system of two hours on and two hours off during the night and each having three hours either in the morning or afternoon was working well and giving time for navigation, meals, hot drinks and general chat; we felt all was ship shape. Our watch system was derived from the experiences of Adrian Biggs (RCC) who undertook many cruises with the late Desmond Hampton (RCC), both keen short-handed yachtsmen. We pressed on like this through day five nursing the 60-year-old boat (and an even older crew); we were glad of a bright moon. During the night the wind freed by 20 degrees giving us good boat speed.

By 0220 on day six the wind had built to a steady 15-17kts from the SW giving an awkward cross-sea over the swell. *Magic* would probably have held full main but my skipper urged caution as the priority was to deliver her undamaged even if it took a little longer; the reef stayed in. It's surprising how mature one's children get.

Through that night we worked our way towards Bermuda but the current and leeway must have pushed us further east than expected so we decided to claw our way back by motor sailing. The magnetic variation was 15°W. Bermuda is only 23nm long in a very big ocean; maybe *Magic's* compass needs swinging (we had no deviation card) or we didn't allow enough variation in our course.

With 'extensive and dangerous fringing reefs' our entry plan for the Cut at St. Georges Harbour was via Kitchen (Shoals), Mills and starboard buoys, using the green sector light on St David's Island and the bearing of Cherrystone Hill in line

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with the centre of Town Cut. The Imray chart also strongly advises against entering Bermuda at night (or in gales). We resolved to heave to until daylight.

Our resolve didn't last long! We had a good moon, a new chart of the island, a hand bearing compass, a well lit buoyage system, a chart plotter albeit with only a small scale chart, and The Cut was in the lee of the wind and swell. I had sailed into St George's from the Caribbean some years before and remembered the lie of the land. We also called the Bermuda Maritime Centre (as required when approaching and when requesting entry); the duty officer was extremely professional and helpful and thought we would be fine. He also recommended we get in before a cruise ship due the next day as it would be easier clearing customs. Our VHF was receiving well enough but not transmitting so well. Luckily we were in mobile phone range to complete the formalities: thank you Craig. Whilst carefully working out the bearings and courses, I turned round to find Hugo secretly checking up on me using an updated Navionics chart on his mobile: long gone are cocked hats and running bearings.



Awaiting final clearance at St. Georges

Although Hugo and I have sailed several long voyages together with the rest of our family, including a Fastnet and a trans-Atlantic, it was the first time my son and I had undertaken a



We finally berthed safely at 0200 on day seven roughly 12-18 hours behind our route plan. We completed the 640nm (or so) in approximately six days averaging about 4.6kts.

We had a marvellous father/son adventure; it is a wondrous thing to do with one of your children.

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Magic en route to Dockyard from St. George's, photographed by one of Hugo's friends two-handed ocean voyage and experienced the relatively short watch pattern and time alone on deck.

Looking back our sail was in four parts: Rhode Island to the Gulf Stream, across the Stream, the quiet thunderstorm section and then the long slog into the Atlantic circulation proper (or Thrash to the Onion Patch as the Bermuda race is advertised). The varying weather patterns, currents and swells made for a more difficult sail than expected, but we would not have missed it for the world.

Magic is now moored at Dockyard, Bermuda enjoying her new life there and looking splendid on the sparkling waters. My phone is switched off in case there is a call to sail her back to the UK or the Mediterranean.

Skipper and crew properly rigged, Bermudian style, to go ashore at Dockyard

