

DAY SKIPPER COURSE

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Sun Odyssey 389
September 2021, Gibraltar



I chose to carry out my practical course in the unique Straits of Gibraltar, one of the world's busiest shipping routes, which comes with the added bonus of beautiful sunny weather in late summer (or so I'd hoped!) My previous sailing experience had consisted of obeying my dad's instructions at the helm and working the sails on trips in the Solent, the English Channel and the Mediterranean, so I was excited to gain the skills and confidence to become a day skipper myself.



Day 1:

Our first day involved a few safety briefings as well as a full breakdown of how to prepare the boat for sailing. This included a 'WOBBL' engine check and starting up the log. For our first sail, we stayed within the bay of Gibraltar and practised all the points of sail. We then came alongside in La Linea Marina and planned the week's itinerary over some tapas.

Day 2:

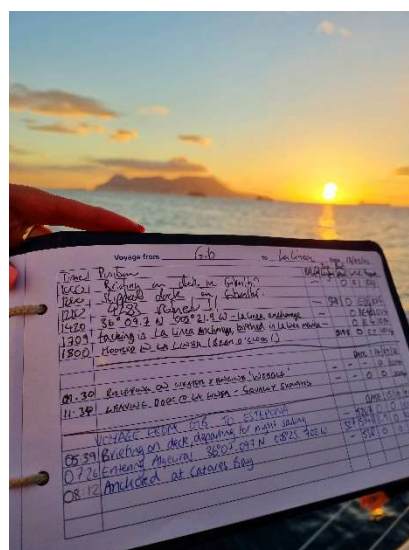
After a refreshing rainy run on the seafront, we headed out to an empty corner of the marina where we learnt some manoeuvres - carrying out tight turns using the 'prop wash' and 'prop walking' techniques, as well as coming alongside a pontoon on 'wind on'/'wind off' situations and how to spring off the bow and stern. My final task of the day was preparing a pilot plan for an early morning 'night sail' to Algeciras, one of Spain's busiest shipping ports - no pressure!



Day 3:

We set off at 5.30am, of course having scheduled time for a cup of tea and biscuit whilst we prepared the boat. I then took control instructing the helm, with my pilot plan and a hand-bearing compass in hand. It was challenging spotting the light patterns of the buoy with the port lights in the background but using bearings was a useful way to stay on track until we had visibility. We made it there in one piece and were rewarded with the most beautiful sunrise which we watched from Catares anchorage over breakfast. Next we set off to Estepona, with the wind on our beam while I took fixings with visible bearings. As we approached,

I prepared a daytime pilot plan for Estepona marina, organised the crew to come alongside and took the helm. Our arrival was very poorly timed with a squall, which made docking the boat a challenge with strong winds coming off the pontoon - I could hardly see due to the horizontal rain but we came in very smoothly. The clouds cleared and we spent the afternoon having celebratory cocktails in the sun – naturally!



Day 4:

The aim for today was to reef the sail so many times that we could do it in our sleep – challenge accepted! I had seen this done many times before but had never been the one giving instructions so it was excellent practice for me. Once we reached the anchorage in Gibraltar, we dropped 'Roger Moor' the mooring buoy and mastered picking up a buoy under sail. This was challenging at first but thankfully became second nature after five successful attempts in a row. Then came the easy part: picking up under engine!



Day 5:

For my final morning under examination, I was tasked with preparing the boat for sailing, 'springing' her out of the marina, docking for fuel, putting the sails up, sailing to a nearby anchorage and dropping the anchor (while under sail). After a spot of lunch, we were briefed on the man overboard protocol, weighed our anchor and set out to put it all into practice. It was very daunting trying to remember everything that needs to be done while in a state of panic! We hoisted the sails then without any warning, 'Bob', the MOB fender, was thrown off the stern- again and again, until perfect. Then came the thrilling news that I had qualified as a Day Skipper!

THANK YOU to The Royal Cruising Club for facilitating an incredible week of sailing. Now that I'm qualified, I am already excitedly brainstorming for my next sailing adventure, which I'm hoping will be a bareboat charter in Croatia next summer with friends.

