

Here is an account of my trip and details of how the Marshall award saved my cruising plans! I do not find it easy to write like this so please excuse my skills.

Ollie Graffie

I started in optimists at the age of six. At 9 years old I sailed my optimist 28 miles from Falmouth to Fowey which took nine hours! I have raced sunbeams and Falmouth working boat since the age of 15. At 18 I started sailing bigger boats working on Griff rhys Jones' Yawl "Argyll" for three years, competing in the FastNet in 2015.

In 2015 I purchased my own cruising boat. A Halcyon 27 from 1972. She was exchanged for £1 and an old speedboat from the yacht broker in the Hamble. She was complete but in bad condition. She was quickly fixed up and sailed back to Falmouth where she was lifted and put in a tent at Mylor Yacht Harbour. Me and Tom, the other young lad that would cross the Atlantic with me, stripped everything excluding the yanmar and wind vane. She was re painted, varnished, plumbed, rigged and wired again from the beginning. Time was also spent strengthening the hull around the chain plates.

We left Mylor, with not much money but a huge wealth of tinned food and a very strong little boat. We sailed- Falmouth-Baiona-Peniche-Cascais-Porto Santo-Maderia- Las Palmas-Antigua. Covering 4500 miles in 4 months 11 days. It was a brilliant experience and I am itching for more but for now my priorities are to pack up my boat in Carriacou to fly back to England in search of work and a summer in Cornwall.

A highlight of the trip was Maderia-Porto Santo- Las Palmas. We were used to life onboard by then and we were catching beautiful Tuna. Las Palmas was exciting times, we were getting ready at the same time as the ARC which was filler with lots of parties and plenty of day work in the marina. I also repaired our sails here, fixed leaking water tanks and autopilot.

The most exciting and challenging part of the trip was most likely the Bay of Biscay. After flying the spinnaker for two days out of Falmouth in light wind we were hit by big winds and massive waves that forced us to heave too for 16 hours. At this stage the boat was still fresh from the shed and we were concerned if she would be able to handle it. It felt like the wave were going to smash the windows in. We sat there with the storm jib up in the little cabin drinking tea and speaking to passing ships about the weather on the VHF.

When we opened the hatch to see conditions easing I was delighted to see the bimini and solar panels in tact.

Five hundred miles from Antigua the rudder broke in half. Leaving the underwater body on the hinges and no way to control it. Initially with the sea anchor we "hove to" to repair the rudder, starting at 4am. I was in the water securing lines to the underwater body of the rudder to gain control from the cockpit winches. By 8am we were sailing on course again with a steering system of spectra, Spanish windlass' and cable ties. Over the final days of the trip we achieved our best miles in 24 hours. We tested the repair up to 10.5 knots with just the small jib.

On arrival in Antigua I set to work removing the broken rudder with the idea to repair or rebuild the rudder. When the rudder fell in two pieces it was obvious that it was not the first time this had happened, it had been badly repaired in the past with plenty of filler and I am surprised it took so long to break! I was kindly given the use of a work bench and electrical supply by Woodstock boat builders. The Marshall award funding was used to buy an angle grinder, fiberglass, resin, stainless steel plate, nuts and bolts and some paint. Over the next few itchy days the rudder was repaired with new core and fiberglass outer layer, followed by a 5mm stainless plate bolted to the side of the rudder to tie the pintles together to make sure it cant happen again.

We then sailed south through the islands to Grenada with lots of stops along the way. Rudder performing beautifully, we were on the go again! The Mashall award put our plans and budget right back on track and able to sail hundreds of miles in leisure. I am so thankful for that and I look forward to being part of the RCC!

