

BLONDIE: A LIFE OF LIEUTENANT-COLONEL HG HASLER: FOUNDER OF THE SBS AND MODERN OCEAN RACING

Ewen Southby-Tailyour
Leo Cooper 1998 Pen and Sword 2003



The first OSTAR

In his biography Ewen Southby-Tailyour uses Blondie's entries from his 'social log' to describe his experience of the first Observer Single-handed Trans-Atlantic Race (OSTAR) in June 1960.

I look at the sail, my delicious Chinese lug-rig that I tried out for the first time half-scale in a pram dinghy nine months ago and have been in love with ever since. Is it really capable of crossing the Atlantic? I've never even crossed the Channel with it: never had it out in open water: never weathered a gale: whatever happened to all those exhausting trials that used to be bracketed over a period of several months – my master programme? I know the answer because it's the old answer; I took so long to design, brood over, organise, make and fiddle with it there wasn't any time left to try it out. But this doesn't worry me, work is more fun if you have a gamble on your guesses: I'm not staking anything I can't afford to lose...

Those long sail battens are bending like fishing rods already: I expect they are too thin and will break – so what! There's a complete spare set in the fo'cs'le and as for spare timber: 'What on earth's all that wood and stuff for?' said the reporter that peered down my fore-hatch at Plymouth. He only saw a small part of it... Sail damage? I am carrying a spare terylene mainsail – never yet set – and a lot of repair gear. Rope? Over one hundred per cent spare of everything and I'm damned if the famous manufacturer didn't give it to me for nothing – some of these firms are nearly as bad as my friends!

That un-stayed mast that seems to wring sharp cries of alarm from seasoned boatmen. I think it is the strongest thing in the ship, much stronger than I need but if that guess fails me and the whole rhubarb collapses over

Above everything I want this race to be a success; to become a regular and recognised event

Ewen Southby-Tailyour is, like his subject, a yachtsman and a Royal Marine. He is also a historian, high latitudes explorer and a navigator. His father was a contemporary and close friend of 'Blondie' Hasler. In 2006 Southby-Tailyour instigated and organised the single-handed Jester Challenge for yachts between 20 and 30ft.



the side I rub my hands in odious self-congratulation and emerge from the fo'cs'le with two long spars already fitted up as a bipod jury mast and the sweetest little jury sail you ever saw. No, I don't think I can win the race with it but the whole episode would be technically satisfying...

One by one our escorts have dropped away and now we are passing the Eddystone and there

are none left – just the four of us strung out in long procession and I'm at the back of it.

Above everything I want this race to be a success; to become a regular and recognised event. I believe that the design of small sea-going sailing boats is still in its infancy. This is the best way of encouraging it to grow up. I know there are many yachtsmen who are set against the whole idea and I can understand their point of view and I think of them back there waiting to be proved right: they can go on

waiting while I look up at my own un-stayed mast twitching away like a turning fork as she plunges into the Channel Sea. Oh well! I suppose this is the quickest way to learn...

I did feel a little squeamish but I have not yet been sick: no sea-sick pills; no laxative pills; no other damned pills – no point in owning a beautiful self-compensating machine if you are going to start throwing spanners into the control system. All it wants from me is no food until it's hungry, no drink until it's thirsty and above all I think it wants me to lie down and stop fussing – peering anxiously round when there is absolutely nothing to see and only slightly more than nothing to worry about – so I lie down with a rather faint smile...

[...]

We are now at 56°N, in mid-Atlantic, in a very boring gale that has been blowing for

three days and shows no sign of stopping. If I were cruising I should be comfortably hove-to. As things are I am driving the poor little thing into a filthy, breaking sea with four reefs down. I suppose it is natural under these circumstances for me to talk to her and encourage her but I notice that I am now addressing her as 'darling' which is a habit I may have to eradicate when I start sailing with a crew again. I have turned the hood so that its open side faces forward and I stand with a full belly and a glass of wine in my hand revelling in the way she goes. This is what I came for.

I feel absolutely fresh and only faintly unwilling to plunge back into civilisation. My experimental boat has done better than I would have dared to have hoped. My head is full of wonderful bits of design for my next boat, for *Jester* is only a beginning – a timid step forwards in a new direction. Two broken sail battens along the way and that seems to be about all the damage. I've never had to go on deck in an emergency or in bad weather. The wind vane steering gear has become part of me – something I shall never again sail without even if it is only from the Hamble to Beaulieu for the weekend.

The approaches to New York have now accepted all the worn, torn, ancient, friendly, warm clothes that I have been wearing in the high latitudes and I felt an absurd little pang as they went over the side. There's half a loaf of the world's best bread left in the food locker. I baked it myself yesterday morning starting with wheat grain and grinding it in a coffee grinder, making it ferment with sea water (which happens to have just the right amount of salt) and dried yeast and baking it in the bottom half of a pressure cooker with a biscuit tin lid covering the top [...]

Now I can see the Ambrose light and *Jester* sees it too and picks up half a knot. I've washed, shaved and put on clean clothes. If I stopped and thought about it I would get that uneasy feeling that everything is too perfect to last. As things are I sit down and write in the log, 'Light vessel fine on the port bow – distant one mile.' I then light the stove to make a cup of Elizabeth's Lapsang Souchong – there happens to be one very small piece of lemon left.

MINGMING II & THE IMPOSSIBLE VOYAGE

£12.99

Roger D Taylor, Fitzroy Press

Roger Taylor's most recent titles have the ring of an adventure series (think Harry Potter books or the Indiana Jones films) and that's how they read. The central character, however, is not a teenage wizard or fedora-wearing archaeology professor but a small, 24ft concept yacht. *Mingming II* is junk-rigged, bilge-keeled and designed with such rationality that the human element (Roger Taylor) can travel with her for 56 days, covering 3,480 miles, only needing to exit her main hatch seven times. When conditions are at their toughest, Taylor has no need to struggle into his foul-weather gear and grapple with sail-changes; he furls the single sail and either heaves-to or trusts the self-steering gear. Then he lashes himself into the leeward bunk and trusts her in-built buoyancy to ride the rhythm of the seas.

In this fifth (and possibly final) instalment *Mingming II* carries Taylor north of Svalbard, then east along the line of 81°N into the usually inaccessible Queen Victoria Sea. They sail close to the islands of Franz Josef Land until they discover their 'limit of rational endeavour'. Taylor's lucid explanations can be watched on his videos which are recommended: this book offers his reflections on the overall experience. *Mingming II*'s voyage took place in 2018 and should have been impossible because these areas are normally ice-bound. As he looks back to earlier explorations and forward to a possible ice-free future Taylor knows he is 'sailing along the cusp of a seismic shift in our species' relationship with its world.' He feels the grief yet achieves intellectual distance and some challenging insights.

Mingming II and the Impossible Voyage is philosophical but not gloomy. It has passages of lunatic humour and conveys the sweetness of the small yacht herself as she frolics home. Taylor and *Mingming* were previously awarded the 2010 Ocean Cruising Club Jester Medal for their 'outstanding contribution to single-handed sailing'.

CHILE: ARICA DESERT TO TIERRA DEL FUEGO 4TH EDITION

£45

Andrew O'Grady, Imray

The photographs of anchorages in this book tell an eloquent tale. They are austere, deserted, surrounded by steep slopes and often rocky shores. Beautiful certainly but with a challenging beauty – one can almost feel the 'rachas' – the fierce, sudden winds.

This is a vast cruising ground, redolent with history and never to be taken lightly. Andrew

O'Grady clearly loves and understands Chile yet there are large areas he has not had time to investigate in detail, even over 16 years. He is scrupulous in saying so. His guidance on the official permit requirements of the Chilean Armada (navy) are detailed and he is sensitive to aspects of southern hemisphere cruising that may seem counter-intuitive. An explorer's guide.

