

The MOTSCH principle

or how to make sailing life REALLY entertaining

Of course we could set sail from some charming small Mediterranean harbor, the golden sunset bouncing back from the gleaming white gelcoat onto our designer sunglasses. For sure we would have tanned girls in smallish bikinis laid all across some thin teak foredeck with lukewarm turquoise water in the background. My main issue would be how to deal with the autopilot's Bluetooth remote control while holding a mojito in one hand and a Cohiba in the other one.



Marianna off Paimpol (Photo Mike Wynne-Powell)

But I've learnt my lesson. Been there, done that (including the mojito, the cigar and the girls, but not the remote control though) and I got bored. Never again. Especially since I discovered the principles of MOTSCH (Maximal Occupational Therapy through Sailing in the Channel) and fine-tuned them over the years. There are core ingredients regarding weather, destination, boat and people :

Wind and weather have to be pleasantly alternating between near gale and nothing at all. Rain is a plus : you don't have to rinse all the salt off your beloved varnishes all the time. Fog is a bonus: you get that open sea feeling constantly, even in the middle of the shipping lanes or close to shore. For all these sensible reasons, the North Sea and Channel navigation area is an obvious preference.

Destination should be minimum 300 miles with prevailing southwesterlies and tidal streams head-on. Dartmouth fits the bill perfectly for us, leaving from Rotterdam. Luckily, northern or eastern winds are an exception – they only occur when it's time for us to head back to Holland actually.

The boat is supposed to entertain the crew with some unexpected discoveries such as freshly caulked seams allowing the bilge to be flushed with 300 liters of new seawater every hour (at last those pumps do some work, ending the frustration of continuously having to purchase safety items that are never used). Or a new rudder construction fitted so tightly that every attempt to turn the wheel to starboard saves you an entire fitness centre session. Or a “transformer” type spinnaker pole switching to an L-shape in the middle of the night. Or a computer, hosting charts, GPS and AIS, overreacting to a little power surge by shutting down definitively. Never a dull moment!

The quality of the people we meet is also key to maximising sailing benefits. Mingling with grey-bearded, red-skinned old salts running on ale and jokes has an undoubtedly higher entertainment factor as compared to the Med bimbo’s routine. Gathering with our competitors every two years in Dartmouth, even though we don’t really know them well, is a significant part of the pleasure. After all, we share identical preferences... we all get that same homely feel when smelling the scent of our boat interiors, a carefully kept secret mix of wet sleeping bags, decaying wood and spilled diesel; we all get emotional contemplating a finely raked stern or even turned on when stroking a recently varnished teak coaming, we all prefer a lukewarm beer can in the cockpit to a fancy cocktail on a sunny terrace.

This year, however, Dartmouth was briefly tempted to offer us a glimpse of St. Tropez style regatta life : cloudless sky, flat sea, endless sunshine – it was all there and we were puzzled. Dartmouth racing definitely went DNF. But when the going gets rough, the rough get going and in the end we got what we wanted: a wet and bumpy night crossing to Paimpol.



Near gale conditions in Dartmouth (PhotoKarine Gillès de Pélichy)

After keeping the spinnaker for too long (hence the new shape in the pole) when the wind increased, after pumping so much we did not only empty the boat but the batteries as well, the morning brought back nasty weather conditions – sun and no wind. We couldn’t find “Drifting towards the

rocks with no engine (remember, empty batteries...) and sails hanging loose” in our best practices booklet so we had to call for help at 1 mile of the finish and were towed across the line. Not DNF but RET this time - the disappointed crew got their smiles back with a great evening party and an even greater “Summertime” interpretation.

Ile de Bréhat is stunning, as were the sailing conditions, so we could go for it and we did indeed, seeking revenge, bone in our teeth, trimming all the time, winching like crazy, and we were proud to fly across the finish line at honorable speed in the wake of Jolie Brise. Which went unnoticed, though, so there you go again: DNC (we hadn’t had that one so far).

Lunch was spent at anchor in the Trou de la Souris enjoying the best déjeuner ever, thanks to the official Crab VIP Picnic Pack, and we had an equally amazing afternoon sail, with double digit knots surfing across the wave tops. Splendid, and we got our first points!



Ile de Bréhat - Jolie Brise and Marianna rushing to the finish line (Photo Mike Wynne-Powell)

In true MOTSCH spirit, instead of the usual routine express crossing to Guernsey with westerlies in the port backstay we were given the opportunity to fight our way to St. Peter Port, tacking all day and all evening. A welcome gift from the organizers, doing their best to compensate for the appalling weather conditions in subtropical Dartmouth and sun drenched Paimpol. The midnight arrival at Castle Cornet was a glorious one, and we even received some points again. The last ones, unfortunately, for after Dartmouth it was now the Isle of Guernsey which went Mediterranean, not allowing enough wind to round Sark as usual.

So in the end we sailed from Rotterdam to Dartmouth, Paimpol, Guernsey and back, some 1090 miles in total and good old Marianna absorbed 129.600 liters of water (and pumped them out again, thankfully) – just for two properly finished races. A fine result if you ask me.



Marianna's family crew surprised by the Spirit of the Regatta trophy at Castle Cornet (Photo Karine Gillès de Pélichy)

Because the essence of it all is that once again we had the privilege to enjoy that subtle mix of great people, awesome destinations and gorgeous classic boats. Being part of that is definitely worth the effort, and by the way it's the effort which is in fact the privilege...



Marianna is a 44 ft bermuda cutter from the board of Max Oertz, build by Heitmann in Hamburg in 1925, winner of the 1926 Helgoland Race, brought to England and Lloyd's registered in 1936 by Major Ralph Blewitt ; sailed by his family, including his daughter Mary Blewitt of Celestial Navigation and RORC fame, in most races during the 30ies and 40ies like the first post-war Cowes-Dinard when she finished 2nd in class. Marianna was then sold by Camper & Nicholson's to Sir Maurice Laing in 1950. Redesigned rigging by Laurent Giles in 1954, fully restored in North Wales in 1996, she now sails under Belgian Flag since 2007, but based in Hellevoetsluis, Holland.