

Classic Regatta Anglo Breton

CRAB is as crab does, but it wasn't all sideways sailing as *Dan Houston* found when he joined *Lutine of Helford* for a classic sail – of classic boats – to Brittany from Dartmouth



The start of the cross-Channel race with French and English boats



Above: She goes in a breeze – *Lutine* with gennaker.

Far left: Clive helming.
Left: Remote shot: Mark, the ed, Clive, Richard and James



“I don’t want to make you gentlemen jealous,” says Clive our skipper as he glances down at the compass, “but out there in the dips this morning I saw a whale and then a basking shark...” He must have wanted to make us jealous, for we instantly rub our eyes and scan the land-free horizon. But, of course, the wildlife is gone. We’ve come on deck *Lutine*, now *Lutine of Helford*, the 58ft (17.8m) 1952 Laurent Giles teak bermudan yawl famously raced by Lloyds of London Yacht Club... and we’re a bit bleary eyed after two or three hours of sleep; racing at sea.

Seventeen hours earlier we had started the race, the first Classic Regatta Anglo Breton, or CRAB – a cross-Channel race for classic boats from Dartmouth in Devon to Perros Guirec in Brittany. It had been a magical, if slow, start with 55 boats on the start line in light airs off Stoke Flemming. The boats range in size from the 28ft (8.5m) *Brigand Chief*, a 1964 composite Twister designed by Kim Holman, to the 1912 78ft (21.8m) bald-headed gaff schooner *Elise of London*, designed by Wm Fife.

The very smallest boat is *Raki* from Paimpol in France, a 27ft (8m) plywood

sloop designed by Philippe Arle Harie in 1966. The largest boat is *Berenice*, a syndicate-owned 80ft (24.4m) J Samuel White ketch from 1923 (CB188).

There was as much disparate and classic design as you could shake a stick at, or scan through a pair of binoculars. There was the magnificent gaff cutter *Kelpie* – the 1903 65ft (19.7m) Mylne (CB206) crewed by 20-year-olds – sailing closer to the wind than most of us bermudans, and with her huge jackyard topsail dream catching zephyrs of upper air that some of us with lower aspect rigs could only sigh about. Then there was

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Gluckauf, the International 30 Square Metre skerry cruiser – 38ft (11.8m) LOA and with 5ft 9in (1.96m) beam, built at Abeking and Rasmussen in 1929 and recently restored to high standard by Andy King. She looked like a pencil sailing through the calm sea. She was on the start line, and had been on the race day the day before, Saturday 9 July, but, like several others, was not coming across Channel.

There were new boats: *Ivy Green* is the Ed Burnett/Elephant Boatyard 45ft (13.6m) gaff cutter from 2003 sailed by Jeremy Dumas; *Minstrel* is another 43ft (13m) gaffer; a 1991 Alan Pape, Gubby Williams and Rob Feloy collaboration, she came from Gosport to race here with owner Eric Stonham.

And there were old boats: *Dorothy* is a Linton Hope, teak on oak, 33ft (10.1m) Thames rater from 1894, kept locally in Dartmouth. There was also a smattering of French boats over here to sail back: *Iris*, for instance, is a 43ft (13.3m) John Illingworth design built in 1968 by R Labbé in France and sailed by Georges Even and his family. We're racing to go on to take part in the Perros Classic Regatta, established two years ago as a week-long Brittanian event. One of the French organisers Hervé Elies is sailing his 1962 40ft (12.1m) Olin Stephens sloop *Palynodie II*; he won the first Perros Regatta in her in 2003; she was built in Marseilles for the city's mayor.

The regatta began on Friday 8 July with boats gathering in Dartmouth. The harbour authorities invested £4,000 laying extra moorings for the 65 or so classics, rafting them in trots off the town quay. The evening kicked off with the *Classic Boat* reception at the Royal Dart Yacht Club with its superb views both down and upriver. Some crew had arrived by steam train with its connection to Paignton and National Rail.

With around 300 crew to cater for, organiser Bruce Thorogood had arranged council support with a venue at the Old Market Square, where we had a welcome supper on Friday and then a paying barbecue on the Saturday.

Saturday's racing had been shortened in the disappointingly light airs. In spite of the heat and gradient offshore winds a decent sea breeze never set in and many boats had to give up on the butterfly course in Torbay. I swear I saw one small gaffer remain in the same place, just stemming the tide between the start and the windward mark... for the duration of the race! Some boats put the hook down between the casual arrivals of moving air.

No matter, it was a chance to try all our different sails and sail combinations. *Lutine* lacks a spinnaker, but has a reaching gennaker with matching mizzen staysail for light airs. We weren't as fast downwind as we would have liked but it kept us going. We were, in any case, limbering up for the cross-Channel race.

After the festivities on Saturday night, where the band Alka Salsa played while we queued for the one-man barbecue (!) at the Market Square, it was a slow start on the Sunday. Dartmouth is pretty in almost any weather but with the classics dressed overall in bright sunshine the harbour looked positively festive. After the race briefing at 11.30 the *Lutine* crew found a place on the shaded upper balcony of RDYC from where we could watch the comings and goings on the river. The club's £7 barbecue lunch was an excellent way to stoke up for a night sail and we rehydrated on orange juice and lemonade.

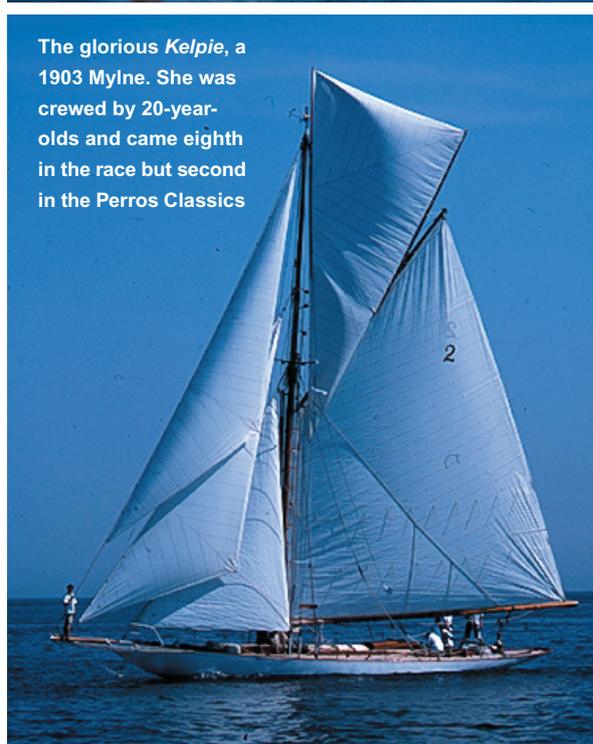
We are five aboard: Clive Emmerson, who runs the Gweek Quay Boatyard in Cornwall where they restored *Lutine*, is joined by his son James, then there are Richard Murray and Mark Prior, and me.

“At 95 miles on the rhumb line the course is too long to do a course to steer in fickle conditions”

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The glorious *Kelpie*, a 1903 Mylne. She was crewed by 20-year-olds and came eighth in the race but second in the Perros Classics



The event's gentle pace begins with a parade of sail at 3pm, with *Kelpie* leading our majestic little fleet out of harbour. Some, like Alan Dykes' *Drumbeat* – Ray Hunt, 1957, 65ft (19.7m) – or Tim Blackman's *Josephine* – Philip Rhodes, 1954, 45ft (13.6m) – will not be coming across, because of commitments to the British Classic Yacht Club Regatta a week later (which Tim runs) but have really added to the event here.

With light airs again the start at 4.30pm shows us heading for a token windward mark a cable and a half to north. There are



Pamela of Liverpool leads *Destina* out of Dartmouth Harbour



Above: A slowish start
Above top right: *Mingary* looking excellent. **Above right:** *Elise* with her interesting staysails rig. **Right:** *Clarionet* had come from Brighton for the event

Above: Checking the chart. **Right:** Dartmouth Britannia Royal Naval College. **Far right:** The French crew of *Iris*



a lot of jellyfish in the quiet water. We turn the mark in the first bunch and try to get our offing, hoping to find more breeze out in the bay. Most turn it and make a tack to the south following the slippery *Kelpie*; her professional skipper Tom Strivens, at 20 is the youngest in the fleet. The cutter's average age is 24 and there are 10 on board, including three girls; at sea they can hot bunk their accommodation of seven berths but in harbour some sleep on deck and they rig a hammock under the boom. She is helmed by James Clapham, 24, and Sam, Tom's brother, is also aboard.

We're able to keep *Kelpie* on a bearing of 235° magnetic for around 40 minutes in our little patch of wind, but she gradually pulls ahead. Way to the north of us *Paziienza* – the 60ft (18m) Laurent Giles racehorse from 1956 – seems to be heading across Lyme Bay. With her Italian colours spinnaker she is soon hull down and I can only see the top green and white stripes as she slips below our horizon. By 6pm we have a Force 2 from the SW, nothing like the forecast NE3 *Paziienza* has gone off in search of, but we are trucking along at 7.2 knots on GPS (over the ground).

At 95 miles on the rhumb line the course is too long to do a realistic course to steer in these fickle conditions so we sail down the rhumb line pointing reasonably high at 180° magnetic. We feel good about being able to lay the race in one board... at this stage.

I wonder about the smaller boats, like the two Yonne Class Harrison Butlers, *Sabrina* and *Destina*; at 32ft (9.7m), with bowsprits and bumkins taking their length to 37ft (11.2m), they look like they got stuck in the failing airs and contrary tide that immediately followed the gun.

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Sabrina, 1935, is sailed by Craig and wife Kate Nutter, taking their children Jack and Molly, aged two and eight months. While *Destina* is helmed by Mark 'Tommo' and Susie Tomson; at the briefing Mark had identified himself as a doctor, just in case any might need mid-Channel advice.

Clive goes below and from one of *Lutine's* many lockers produces a Helford sponge cake, fresh from its tin and, with tea to wash it down, we settle into a fine evening's sail with our two headsails, main and mizzen pulling us on happily.

We see porpoises as the land disappears into the haze.

At around 7.30pm we hit a hole in the weather that slows us down while we play with sail combinations to make the best of the air. We settle on just gennaker and mizzen staysail and can make 4 knots. By 8.45pm I can count eight boats ahead of us. *Kelpie* and *Palynodie II* have stretched out their lead with spinnakers drawing well while the big surprise, behind them, is *Elise of London*, which has so little sail aloft that we wonder if she carries her own wind generator. It's a case of yes and no, as later they tell us they motored to keep her going. Clive regrets not having a spinnaker as the gennaker keeps collapsing; sitting on the pulpit holding its luff to windward is tiring work. We have no spinnaker pole.

As sunset falls Bruce Thorogood's Kim Holman 1966 designed 42ft (12.6m) *Pendragon* has been catching us, but we find enough force in the firmament to keep us ahead. The Moody's built sloop had been taken to America in the 1970s and Bruce bought her in California earlier this spring, trucking her to Texas and shipping her back. He sold his old boat, the immaculate GRP/wood *Cariacou*, a 35ft (10.6m) 1967 Strider Class Holman, just last Wednesday and her new owner Andrew

Jennings has brought her along on this Channel race.

As I will be up during the first half of the middle watch I go below to see if I can get into the Chinese coal mine. But although my eyes are just about shut and it's dark, Clive has the autohelm on and the servo motor of the rudder's quadrant steering gear sighs like an old man climbing stairs. Later I have to ask him if he found it at an old people's home!

I come on deck at midnight with everything covered in heavy dew. We are slatting along on our course of 185° (compass) and alone in the dark I hear a yacht crossing our wake, overhauling us to windward. Abandoning the course to coincide with hers I follow the wind veer coming to 205° and keep up, but it's slow and frustrating business. At 2.15am we're due north of Perros, about halfway. After I go below the wind dies altogether and there are sail changes while at times we spin on the tide and fickle air. Clive switches on the engine for an hour before the forecast northeaster makes a lacklustre appearance, and where he can at least, enjoy his whale. The brutal noise of the engine saws into my dreams, bringing me out of the watery depths of sleep before I start to hear tunes in it and subside again.

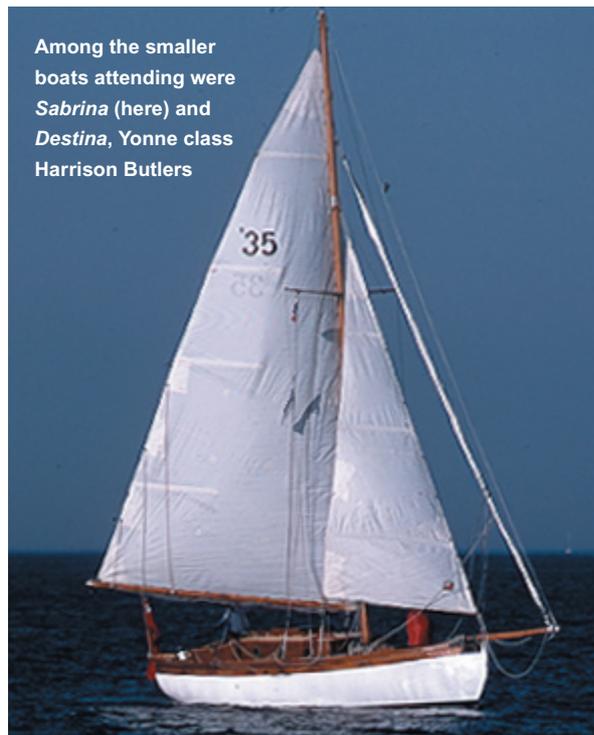
We eat well on *Lutine*; breakfasts are big and English and by 8.00am we enjoy a NE3, which has filled in at last. It's a clear day with no cloud in sight. We admire the French gannets diving with such purposeful precision into the navy-blue sea. Richard says when they grow old their sight goes (from all that diving) and they starve to death. "It's a wonder," Clive rejoins, "that they didn't evolve further, to be able to dive for earthworms." Our humour is a bit like that.

We're 21 miles from the coast and *Pendragon* has overtaken us; *Kelpie Palynodie II* and *Elise* are out of sight.

"I come on deck at midnight with everything covered in heavy dew. We are slatting along"



Among the smaller boats attending were *Sabrina* (here) and *Destina*, Yonne class Harrison Butlers



The 35ft to 40ft boats have done well in the race and with their spinnakers we can't really catch them without more breeze – what there is soon dies out again.

We practise our sail changes and close the coast, plotting a course that will take us close to the eastern edge of the Sept Isles, just off Perros. The last bit of the race sees the easterly breeze building in fits and starts and we have a cracking little finish, less than a cable (200 yards) off some menacing rocks by the Sept Isles and with the west-making tide taking us down onto the finish mark.



The silled marina at Perros Guirec, with most of us safely ensconced



Kelpie is joined by the *Fife Nan* for the race to St Peter Port after the Channel Crossing (where they had a match finish over the line)



Top: Tim Blackman brought *Josephine* along to Dartmouth and the start.

Above: A squeeze on the mark. Left: Craig and Kate Nutter brought their young children Jack, 2, and Molly, 8 months.



Above: *Pazienza*
Left: *Minstrel*.
Right: Bruce Thorogood, the organiser, on *Pendragon*



In fact the last bit of racing, with *Uomie*, the Arthur Robb, 1952, 39ft (11.8m), Fastnet and Sydney Hobart winner, close on our tail and *Pendragon* and *Iris* with *Foglio* – Norman Dallimore, 1937, 42ft (12.7m) – and *Jaynor* – Arthur Robb, 1966, 42ft (12.7m) – all close to windward, is the most fun. Not that it matters with us taking ourselves out of any serious running with our engine help.

We cross the finish mark at 2.30pm, having sighted land at 10.20 am. We pick up a buoy and rest. All through the afternoon yachts come sailing in while we wait for the

tide on the buoys off Perros to make our entrance into the silled marina at around 7.00pm.

It is a proud procession of yachts that enters port, where authorities have extended the marina with an extra pontoon to cater for this event. And it is great to see these yachts, many of which were campaigned by serious offshore yachtsmen of their day, still making a Channel crossing under race conditions, in the classic spirit.

The next day local schoolchildren are invited aboard the boats and a constant stream of visitors shows how much interest

there is in classic boats in France – where frankly, they are culturally superior to the English in this respect.

The prizes this time will go to *Palynodie II* (*Kelpie* was eighth), in Vintage Class I while *Sabrina* wins Class II. The Classic division is won by two French boats, *Helisara* (Class I) and *Raki* (Class II).

We get to swapping stories and having the odd beer while waiting to race to St Peter Port, which will see around 70 boats taking part on Bastille Day, 14 July. But that was another slow, windless race and it's still too tiring to even begin to tell it. ☺