

A Corinthian cruise across the Channel



A stunning group of classic cruising yachts will sail to Brittany for a week of fun in the Classic Channel Regatta, says Peter Cumberlidge

In our frantic age of medals, awards and intense competition, it's a treat to join a highly sociable yacht regatta founded in true amateur spirit. Cricket was once like this, the Olympics too, so the 'gentlemen's racing' ethos of the Classic Channel Regatta is both pleasingly nostalgic and a breath of fresh air.

The 2017 races from Dartmouth to Guernsey and Paimpol run from Saturday 8 to Friday 14 July. Brittany enthusiasts will spot that the finale in Paimpol on Bastille Day promises lively celebrations in the best traditions of Entente Cordiale.

This regatta feels like a mini Voiles de St Tropez series but in more interesting waters. Its amiable 'Franglais' atmosphere is familiar hereabouts because many West Country owners look naturally to Brittany for summer cruising, while



Cervantes IV and others converge on a mark in Start Bay

Breton yachts with hardy Gallic crews have tacked into Devon and Cornish harbours since the 1920s. Both regions have a sense of independence and a shared history of trading by sea, with or without excise duties. Each is renowned for their shipwright skills and enthusiasm for classic boats.

Classics new and old

While the regatta celebrates genuine old timers such as the sleek 1904 Alfred Mylne cutter *Kelpie*, or the beautiful 1948 Sparkman and Stephens yawl *Argyll*, it also welcomes many GRP classics. You'll see Nicholsons, Van de Stadts like the Pioneer 10 and

Excalibur 36, plus a range of Holman or Holman and Pye favourites including Twisters and early Bowmans. Tough Peter Brett Rivals are popular in Class 3. There may be Breton yachts from the 1950s and 60s, elegant cruiser-racers with similar lines to Illingworth or Buchanan.

Mutin has been the largest participant, a famous French gaff-rigged fishing yawl with a straight sheer, generous freeboard and flat Breton stern. Built in 1927, she was active in the Second World War, ferrying SOE agents between England and Brittany. At over 100ft overall including a harbour-sweeping bowsprit, *Mutin* looks fantastically piratical with everything up.

The regatta begins with two keen days racing off Dartmouth. Although this is my home turf, I can honestly say that Start Bay has one of the finest coastlines in Europe, a soothing panorama of neat Devon farms and scattered villages. Start Point juts out like a dragon's tail before the land falls low behind a two-mile beach. Blackpool bay is fringed with pines like a slice of the Riviera. Add to this up to 100 classic racing yachts and you have a spectacle to remember. The pageant continues as the fleet sails into the River Dart for evening drinks at the Royal Dart Yacht Club and supper in Dartmouth's market square.

Exact courses for the cross-Channel races are set near the →



Pernez II under full canvas during a race off Dartmouth



The fleet moors in St Peter Port pool



Quayside music at Paimpol



Regatta's end at Lézardrieux marina

The fleet heads out into the Channel. Janessa chases in a perfect breeze

time when the weather shows its hand. The lower handicap boats might approach St Peter Port east-about Guernsey via Platte Fougère lighthouse, but the faster yachts will be sent on a more circuitous route, probably west-about Les Hanois, the island's rugged west tip. Both crossings are straightforward navigationally, except that Guernsey's north coast is rather rocky and tidal streams strengthen near the Channel Islands.

The 70-mile east-about route skirts the Casquets TSS, but unless conditions are seriously foul any ship-dodging will be in daylight.

The bigger boats will sail more than 100 miles and could be sent off to the Ore Stone near Torquay, or the Eddystone before heading for Guernsey.

St Peter Port is a great place to finish, its jumbled town meandering up from the waterfront. Not quite English, a little bit French, Guernsey's capital looks exotic from seaward, a halfway house towards Brittany. The fleet will raft on the outer pool pontoons, with an evening reception at Guernsey Yacht Club.

The next stage is a 45-mile race down to the Anse de Paimpol, a long sheltered inlet with Paimpol harbour at its head. The course trends SSW, passing about three miles east of Roches Douvres plateau and its tall lighthouse. Entering Paimpol bay



Kelpie rounds a cardinal beacon in the round Bréhat race

you feel the special vibes of North Brittany. To starboard there are rocks everywhere, not hostile fangs but friendly breakwaters, a maze of outcrops stretching towards Île de Bréhat. To port the coast curves in towards a buoyed fairway which, above half-tide, leads across drying mud to Paimpol entrance lock.

This attractive port has a colourful past. St Malo privateers once used it as a base for raids against British ships, while Paimpol *bisquines* sailed to the North Atlantic for cod fishing off Newfoundland. What better setting for a gathering of classic yachts and their crews. Paimpol's affable mayor and indeed the whole town are generous hosts at salty events, including their own *Festival du Chant de Marin* (sea

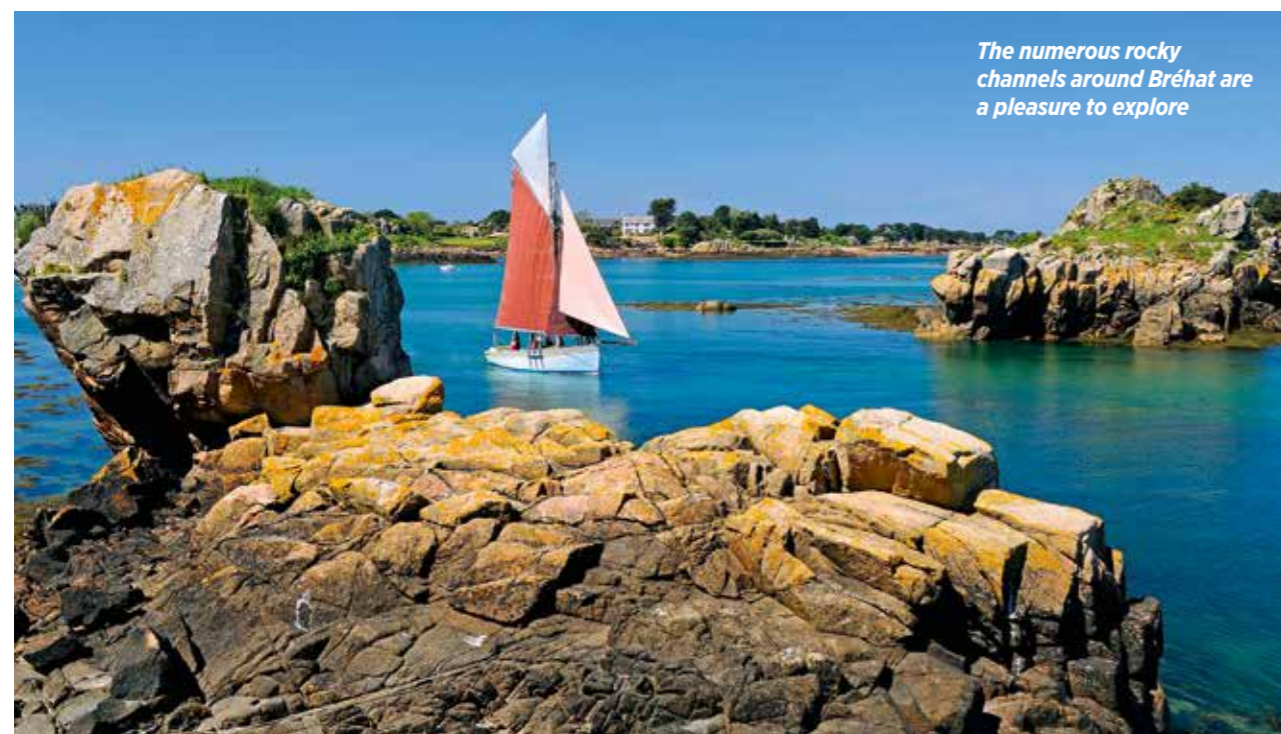
shanty festival) in August 2017. For the Channel Regatta, the cobbled quays will be packed with seafood stalls and supper will be jolly and protracted.

From Paimpol a delicate channel steals north inside acres of rocks, emerging off Île de Bréhat whose pink granite shores are dotted with Breton cottages. The day race around Bréhat is a real bonus, where you can thread fascinating channels with local boats. This active day finishes in the Trieux River and the fleet gathers for the night at Lézardrieux, a sleepy town three miles upstream. The prize-giving and drinks are at the Yacht

Club du Trieux, right on the quayside.

On 14 July, France has its *Fête Nationale*, the hallowed anniversary of the 1789 storming of the Bastille. The regatta yachts will sail into Paimpol en masse to find the quays piled with fine victuals. At dusk, fireworks will light up the port. This should be a tremendous evening, with many a late dram around the harbour.

Anyone who enjoys the Channel Islands and Brittany will appreciate this convivial, multi-stage regatta which has pleasure in mind. Whatever the weather, entrants will enjoy good company and plenty of après-race cheer. If you've never visited Paimpol or Bréhat, this Anglo-Breton event is an ideal way to sample these places with folk who know them well. ▲



The numerous rocky channels around Bréhat are a pleasure to explore



The Trieux estuary leads to Lézardrieux and the event's final stopover



Classic owner David Dimpleby presents the main trophy

'To starboard there are rocks everywhere, not hostile fangs but friendly breakwaters'

How to enter the Classic Channel Regatta

The rules allow a catholic mix of entrants. Class 1 is for yachts designed before 1968, which are maintained to their original design without any significant changes. Class 2 yachts are as per Class 1, but which have had significant changes made to their original design or materials since 1968.

Replicas built to an original design created before 1968 are also eligible in Class 2. Class 3 includes yachts built between 1968 and 1974 as a one-off or in series production and yachts designed before December 31st 1968 built in an industrial series, and at least 25 years old. Class 4 is for any yacht eligible in Classes 1-3 but with high-tech sails or any material

other than wood, aluminium or steel for spars, regardless of year of design.

There is also a Cruising Class for boats eligible for any of the other classes but who prefer to cruise rather than race.

There are multiple prizes up for grabs across the different classes and legs, as well as the trophy for the overall winner of the Regatta.

Entries: Classic Channel Regatta enquiries or entries to David Newman

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For more information visit www.classic-channel-regatta.eu

