

ENTENTE CORDIALE

The eleventh edition of the biennial Classic Channel Regatta attracted large fleets of competitors from both sides of the Channel

WORDS NIGEL SHARP PHOTOS NIGEL SHARP AND RICHARD BROOKS

Almost 100 classic boats, mostly British but with an impressive 30 French entries plus a few German and Swiss, gathered in Dartmouth in July for the eleventh Classic Channel Regatta.

Held every other year, the regatta is a series of races of varying length, with a weighted scoring system that places more importance on the longer ones. Before the cross-Channel passage race, three inshore races around Start Bay were due to take place over the first two days. But after racing was cancelled on a windless Wednesday, there was only the opportunity for one race during a short-lived gentle breeze the following day.

Things went much more smoothly ashore where there was a supper party with music on Wednesday at

the open-air Old Market Square, a delightfully atmospheric venue with a seemingly unlimited supply of gins and tonics, beer and wine. Then on Thursday, a prizegiving for that one race up the hill at the Britannia Royal Naval College.

The start time for the Classic Channel Race to Guernsey on Friday

Above: *Mat Ali* leading *Kraken II* and *La Goëlle III* at the start of the cross-Channel race to Guernsey

Below: On board *Polly Agatha*

was brought forward by two hours (to 0930) in response to a forecast for a building breeze later that night. As it happened conditions for most of the competitors for most of the race were idyllic: warm sunshine and an ENE wind of around 15 knots. On board Jeremy John's *Polly Agatha* – a 2007 replica built by Cockwells of the 1904 Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter *Peggy* – there were smiles all round throughout the voyage. The course required us to leave Les Hanois Lighthouse to port, at which point we came onto the wind for the final six miles or so along Guernsey's south coast, and we were just able to cross the finish line due south of St Martin's Point inside the virtual distance mark without tacking. We finished just before 2230, in the dark, so it wasn't until

the next day that we realised we had finished first in Group B and come third on handicap.

The first and last boats to finish were both built in 1967: the Group A Sangermani ketch *White Dolphin* was more than two hours ahead of us, while the Twister *Rompa* eventually crossed the line just after one o'clock in the morning. The handicap winner in Group C was the 1967 Cal 40 *Breeze* and when the results were first published it seemed that she had beaten the Swan 55 *Lulotte* by a mere two seconds on corrected time. "If I had known it would be that close I would have asked the crew to stop making tea and do a bit more trimming!" said *Breeze*'s owner Phil Cotton. But when it was later found that *Lulotte* had inadvertently sailed inside a

virtual mark off the Hanois Lighthouse, she retrospectively retired.

Even at such a late hour, two particularly friendly and helpful members of the St Peter Port marina staff were waiting in small dories to supervise the berthing operation with great efficiency. We

Top: the Swan 55 *Lulotte*

Above: a lively raft-up in St Peter Port

Below: drinks at Castle Cornet

were moored up on a non-walk-ashore pontoon but with a seven-boat raft linking it to a walk-ashore pontoon. On one of my crossings across what seemed an endless raft, I made a negative comment, to which a crew member from the Albin Ballad *Shebeen* – and a regular London commuter as it turned out – replied: "it's better than the Victoria Line".

A Saturday evening briefing for the following day's race to Lézardrieux was followed by a drinks reception at the historic and spectacular Castle Cornet, sponsored by the States of Guernsey.

With a good deal of wind forecast for Sunday, there had been speculation as to whether this race would go ahead. Not only did it start as planned, but the competitors found the conditions far less challenging than expected.



CLASSIC CHANNEL REGATTA



Well, most of them did.

This time I was on board Mark Dowie's 1937 Johan Anker-designed 10-Metre *Bojar* and it wasn't long before we set a big masthead spinnaker and were broad reaching down the waves at speeds of up to 12 knots. This lasted for about forty-five exhilarating minutes before disaster struck when we carried away the bronze fitting securing the mainsheet to the end of the boom.

With the mainsail pressing against the shrouds and – in the absence of a kicking strap – twisting, *Bojar* was rolling severely and the call was made to drop the spinnaker. But when the halyard became seriously tangled the only answer was to cut it, even though this inevitably resulted in the spinnaker landing in the sea. Several of us managed to retrieve it, then we motored into the wind and dropped the mainsail.

Although the whole episode had been pretty alarming, an air of calm had prevailed throughout. "These things happen," said Mark philosophically while we had a cup of coffee and motor sailed for a while with just the staysail. "The important thing is that no one was hurt." In fact, apart from the mainsheet fitting and the severed halyard, the worst that had happened was the loss of two hats.

Soon afterwards, with the mainsheet jury rigged to the boom, we hoisted the mainsail with one reef, turned the engine off and had a delightful cruise towards Lézardrieux. As we neared what would have been our finish line, the sun came out and the wind started to drop, and we later learned that many of the smaller boats behind us struggled to finish as it died further still.

Monday saw a fine picnic lunch on Lézardrieux

Above left and right: Mark Dowie's 1937 Anker-designed 10-Metre *Bojar*

Below left and right: Loïc Le Marchand's 1933 gaff yawl *Nyala*, designed by Maurice Griffiths

quayside, but conditions quickly deteriorated and barely half an hour before the fleet was due to leave it was blowing and raining unpleasantly hard. Just as suddenly, quite miraculously, it stopped raining and the wind almost completely died. We all cast off and made our way in convoy slowly down the Trieux river. This time I was on board the 1933 Maurice Griffiths-designed gaff ketch *Nyala* with her French crew, owner Loïc Le Marchand and friends Pascal and Philippe, with whom tremendous Anglo-French humour prevailed. The cruise in company to Paimpol was punctuated by steep wind-over-tide chop in the Rade de Bréhat, where some bigger boats around us seemed to be pitching more severely than we were.

The dates of this regatta always coincide with big enough spring tides to allow an hour or so of free flow through the lock into Paimpol harbour. Several people who had previously taken part had told me about the extraordinary welcome that we might expect upon our arrival. And how right they were: the lock and harbour walls were lined with great numbers of enthusiastic people cheering and clapping.

The reception was particularly enthusiastic for crews who had made an extra effort, wearing fancy dress and generally putting on a show. *Breeze's* crew were singing to the tune of "what shall we do with the drunken sailor" with specially adapted words appropriate to their boat. The crew of the 1976 ketch *Tamarind* seemed to be performing the 1979 pop song D-I-S-C-O.

After another rest day – which coincided with Bastille Day, as the regatta always does when the tidal requirements have been satisfied – a race around Île de Bréhat was scheduled for Wednesday when I was on



Clockwise from top left: Gentle breeze off Dartmouth; Twister Rompa; Thalia; Lulotte; Prizegiving at Britannia College; aloft on *Bojar*; Legionnaire; Moored up at Lézardrieux;



CLASSIC CHANNEL REGATTA



Manduvi



Pen Duick II



Speedwell on the way from
Lézardrieux to Paimpol

board Ben Morris's Swan 55 *Lulotte*. Our Group C started first in the lightest of winds which died away to nothing by the time we got to the first mark. Soon afterwards our race was abandoned, while the other groups had not even been started. We had a great deal of time to kill as we couldn't get back through the lock into Paimpol until early evening, and by now we were aware of lightning strikes which seemed to be getting closer.

And then it rained...and rained. We motored towards the entrance to the passage between Île de Bréhat and Île Béniguet, picked up a mooring and, after stripping off our now very damp oilskins, we all went below where we had a very welcome hot chilli lunch. A while later when Ben was becoming concerned about the depth of water, we cast off and went to anchor just south-west of Île Saint-Rion where some of us passed the time playing Uno – interrupted by the *Classic Boat* editor demanding an update. While we all would have preferred to be sailing in the sunshine, *Lulotte's* cabin was a pleasant place to while away the day. Eventually it stopped raining and it was time to return to Paimpol.

The following day ten boats took part in the blindfold rowing race which was won by the crew of the 1930 Alden yawl *Blazing Star*. The mayor of Paimpol, Mme Fanny Chappé, then opened the prizegiving at which, amongst several other presentations, the 1966 Armagnac Class *Raki* was announced as the regatta's overall winner and the 1963 Saxon class *Manduvi* was awarded the Spirit of the Regatta trophy in recognition of the fact that she, and her owner Richard Bryant, had taken part in all eleven regattas. Who better to later send the message "do not miss this event" to future potential entrants, while adding that he always enjoyed "the competition, the friendly European engagement and the great social vibe". At the end of the prizegiving, Bruce Thorogood (below) and Peter Costalas, who were both standing down from their roles as chairman and race director respectively, received retirement gifts from both the British and French organising teams. The regatta's finale was a supper party in the quayside Salle des Fêtes "which was suitably riotous as usual with much singing by the crews," said Bruce.

Among many positive comments from competitors after the regatta was this one from Polly Agatha: "an amazing ten days sailing in great company... such beautiful boats (and people), fantastic organisation and warm welcomes on both sides of the Channel... an awesome, epic experience."

The provisional dates for the next Classic Channel Regatta are Saturday 15 to Monday 24 July 2028.

www.classic-channel-regatta.eu



The fleet entering Paimpol

History of the Classic Channel Regatta

In 2003 Bruce Thorogood sailed his 35ft Strider class Cariatou to Perros-Guirec to attend a classic boat regatta. After finding that Cariatou was the only British boat there, he got into conversation with the organisers about how they might get others to attend in future. They agreed that it would be a good idea to organise a feeder race from somewhere in southwest England to the next Perros-Guirec event in 2005. Bruce was friendly with Dartmouth residents Peter Lucas and Peter Batts, and while the three of them began to make plans for such a race from Dartmouth, backed by the Royal Dart Yacht Club, they decided that it should be preceded by a couple of inshore races to make it more worthwhile. Fifty-seven boats took part in that event but it was the last time that the Perros-Guirec classic regatta was held. Bruce then made contact with Société Nautique de la Baie de Saint-Malo and made arrangements for the 2007 race to finish there. The event might have gone back there again but for a clash of dates with the more established Coves to Dinard race. So in October 2008, Bruce and his wife took their car across the channel and "literally drove around the whole of North Brittany, looking at every port to see which one was workable." The last port they visited – having established that virtually nowhere else would be able to accommodate the number of boats involved – was Paimpol. "I was just praying that we would be able to make this one work, otherwise we would be completely stuffed," Bruce told me. "And as soon as we started a meeting with all these dignitaries, the mayor said 'we'd love you to come, what can we do for you?'"

There have been some variations with regard to other ports, and the order in which they are visited, but Paimpol has been involved ever since. "I can't think of a better place to bring a regatta," said Bruce. "We are right in the middle of the town and they provide everything free of charge for us, including berthing for everyone for five nights and all the facilities such as the Salle des Fêtes for our big party on the last night."

This year's event has been the eleventh and has marked the 21st anniversary of the regatta. It has also been Bruce's last as chairman as he has decided to stand down after an extraordinarily long and dedicated tenure in the post.



Kraken II

Group winners

Group A

- 1st Pen Duick II (in which Eric Tabarly won the 1964 OSTAR)
- 2nd Pegasus (2008 Ed Burnett design, based on a traditional pilot cutter)
- 3rd Yanika (1965 John Illingworth design)

Group B

- 1st Manduvi (1963 Saxon Class)
- 2nd Kraken II (1949 Henri Dervin design)
- 3rd La Goëlle III (1964 Philippe Harlé design)

Group C

- 1st Pen Duick V (in which Eric Tabary won the 1969 Transpac)
- 2nd Breeze (1967 Cal 40)
- 3rd China Girl (1974 Peter Norlin design)

Group D

- 1st Raki (1966 Armagnac Class)
- 2nd L'Aquarelle (1977 Contessa 32)
- 3rd Barr Avel (1991 Nordik Folkboat)



L'Aquarelle



Breeze



Pegasus