

Cherbourg 2008 – 24 May 2008

This year we wondered if we might actually make it across the Channel for once: on the Monday before we were due to sail to Cherbourg the weather forecast was so gentle it looked as if we'd have to motorsail all the way, by Tuesday a delightful forecast of E3-4 offering a broad reach all the way, Wednesday it looked a bit more interesting and by Thursday gusts of 37 knots were being forecast.

By Friday a forecast of F 6-7 occ 8 put paid to the whole thing – again. However, it was only then that we discovered that the French fishermen were, with the usual Gallic logic, blockading English yotties to bring down fuel prices in France. Quite how they expect this to influence the French Government escapes me, but presumably it relieves their feelings. We found out that several boats had been anchored in the petite rade at Cherbourg for a few days unable to get ashore and that other boats had been blockaded since the Tuesday: the fishermen take a very violent and aggressive approach to keeping small boats blockaded although all the ferries seemed to be operating without problem. The French restaurants loss was Waitrose's gain.

Mad Max and Kaprys were the only ones that had both intended to give it a go but after a further warning of "F8 coming in this afternoon" from the next door boat decided the hell with it, let's at least go out for a bit. Mad Max had an exhilarating sail to Bembridge and back while Kaprys decided that they'd go as far to France as seemed reasonable with the prediction and went round the Nab tower. The record wind strength was held by Jackie who was on the helm when it reached 33.5 knots but the majority of the time the wind speed was in the mid twenties with a surprisingly flat sea. Once well reefed down all seemed to enjoy themselves with the boats going well and the sudden white spray as they bounced through the waves looking dazzling in the unexpected bright sunshine.

The crews finally met up on Kaprys for drinks with the visitors just getting back before it started pouring with rain, which it did for most of the night. Mad Max went back for dinner on the boat which they finally got at around midnight. Kaprys's crew weren't so strong minded and had pudding and went to bed.

Sunday dawned grey and with light rain and minimal wind. The forecast seemed to indicate a brightening in the afternoon but Mad Max had got so much to do with impending weddings they departed early leaving Kaprys to change their minds 20

times over whether to go home, wait and see what happened or go out in the drizzle. By the time the decision had been taken to go home the weather started to clear and minds were changed yet again and Kaprys went out for a pleasant afternoon sail in light winds and strong sunshine – a big contrast to the previous day.

Returning to Gosport Kaprys came across Galatea and after giving them 5 blasts of the foghorn a somewhat disjointed VHF communication was opened with Galatea telling the Solent they had been to Bembridge for lunch (or possibly overnight) which was brought to a sudden conclusion when lines and fenders needed to be got out.

The forecast for the Monday was dire: strong winds and lots of rain. Kaprys' crew decided enough was enough and packed up for home. Just for once the met office were spot on, winds up to F8 in the Solent and rain hammering down most of the day.

Ah well, there's always next year. Although – heresy – it has been suggested that since the late Spring Bank Holiday has had frightful weather for the last few years, should we try and confuse it by attempting the club channel crossing some other time? Anyone think this would work or should we try and fool it by advertising a rally that is just to everyone's home marina and then whip across the Channel if the weather is good?

PM