



We have completed the first part of our Atlantic Crossing from West to East, from Martinique to Horta on the Azores. Zeezwaluw has already been moored for a week and a half, first at the quarantine quay of Horta and later on at the quay in front of the marina office. This last week's went quickly, just like the previous weeks after we left Le Marin on June 6<sup>th</sup>.

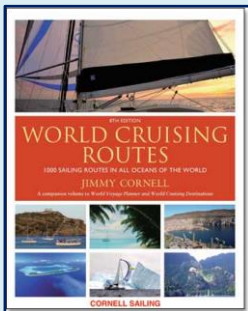


In this travel letter we like to describe our West-East Atlantic Ocean Crossing, but not day by day. That would be an uninteresting and unreadable story. What we do want to share is our considerations and decisions, regarding departure, communication once underway, our course based on the weather information available at that moment, encounter at sea, a number of "challenges" and the desire to finally arrive in the last days of the 27-day sailing trip. We think this approach and our experiences are more interesting to read for the (seasoned) sailor as well as for the non-sailor.

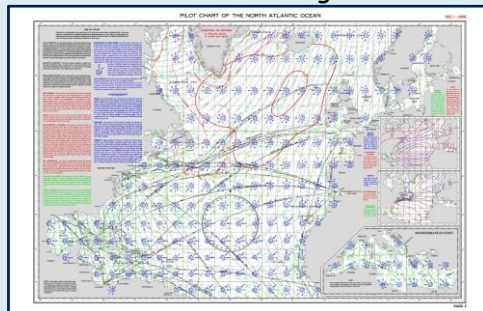
### When to leave Le Marin

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic we now leave Martinique and do not "hop" further north along the island chain until St. Martin or Antiqua, as in the original plan was. A bit more miles to cover but we are already further east, so that is an advantage!

Riens has collected and saved the 12-o'clock weather forecast of Passage Weather from the entire Atlantic Ocean on a daily basis for the past 10 years. By doing this, we now have a load of weather information to see how the weather is behaving on the Atlantic Ocean.



World Cruising Routes



Pilot Chart June



Great circle route

In addition, the statistical data from the digital Pilot Charts and Jimmy Cornell's (JC) "World Cruising Routes" are a great help in determining the "most" favourable period for the crossing. In the JC pilot the months April/May/June are given as the most favourable crossing period. Because we use OpenCPN on the laptop and Android tablet, the Pilot Charts can be used as an overlay as we do with the Gribfiles (the weather). We have plotted 2 routes in OpenCPN, the great circle route (the most direct course between 2 points) and a route based on the statistical data and the recommended route from the World Cruising Routes, which we adapted.

After extensive study of the weather information for that period, we had decided not to leave Martinique before of May the 15<sup>th</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> the Covid-19 pandemic now also plays a role. We keep a close eye on the internet to find out which countries are going to open their borders again, which rules apply to arriving yachts and especially whether there is a mandatory quarantine or not.



## Atlantic Crossing West to East, part I



Since the Azores Islands are an autonomous region of Portugal, we focus on all information from that angle. Actually we want more certainty that at least on the Azores we can rest for a couple of days, fill up with diesel and water and be able to do provisioning if we're not (yet) allowed on land because of quarantine. As soon as there shines some light at the end of the tunnel we're going to leave.



### The hope for departure gleams

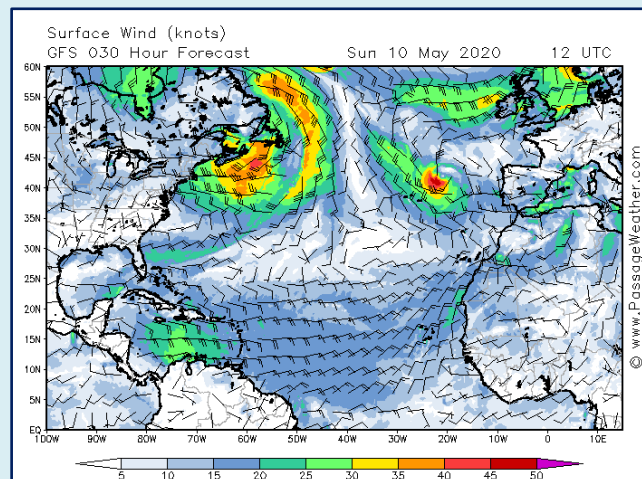
Our EPIRB ordered in Germany in February, just before the Corana outbreak, was finally delivered on 14 May. We tested it, signed it in the rescue organisations and mounted it in the sleeping cabin near the entrance to the cockpit.



The reports about easing quarantine in the various countries in Europe are becoming more and more positive. Meanwhile we know that all arriving sailing yachts are allowed to anchor on 2

islands in the Azores, Faial and Sao Miguel. They are allowed to rest, can be provided with water, diesel and groceries, but no footsteps ashore. However, it is expected that the ships will continue as soon as there is a good weather window. On July 1st the border might open again. How exactly this will work out for the crossing sailing fleet is still unknown. In any case, the conditions at the end of May are acceptable enough for us to look for a weather window to leave.

However, the weather on the Atlantic Ocean is still a bit "unstable". Many (severe) depressions start in the USA and move from west to east or develop around the Azores, the weather is not really stable yet, which is very unusual. Normally, the Azores High Pressure (AH) area should already be positioned slightly southwest of the Azores. Around June 1st we notice that the AH seems to be forming and the weather is finally becoming more stable.



### Preparing for departure from Le Marin

The Gribfiles have been downloaded daily for months now and at the end of May we see that around June 7 there is an 8 day forecast predicting a quiet start for our  $\pm 2200$ Nm long crossing. So let's get to work.

The crates with numbered bags (grab meals) with complete tin/pot meals (in case of bad weather), packs of rice/pasta and flour to bake bread, are placed back underneath the table in the cabin and securely strapped. Now we don't have to search on a dancing ship under benches and floors for the right ingredient for the meal to be prepared. All loose objects are safely stored, the foul weather gear is hung stand-by and the thermal underwear and fleece clothes are dug up.



We say goodbye to our friends Monica and Patrick, not with a drink on a terrace unfortunately, but outside on a parking lot in the shade because of Covid-19.

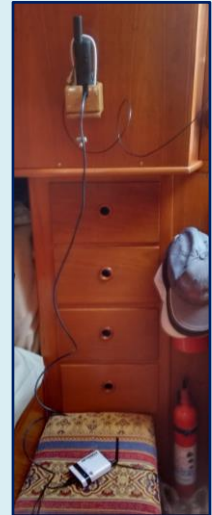


The Zeezwaluw is also being prepared for sailing; the high aspect headsail is on the furler because we mostly will have a windward course. This headsail is most suitable on that course; it gives less leaning-over and more comfort without loss of speed. The water tank is filled with fresh water and the purchase of fresh vegetables is done. We prepare 5 4-person meals (is for 10 days hot meals) which will be kept in the fridge or freezer in zip Lock bags (plastic containers take up too much space). On the day before departure we buy the last fresh fruit and a load of bread.

The Iridium satellite phone had already been tested for proper functioning<sup>1</sup> (bringing in e-mail, Gribfiles and SMS messages) with friends who would also leave.

A quick explanation on how to use the satellite phone to get Gribfiles every 2-3 days (or more often if, we think it's necessary) via a dedicated email address. We send out an email with the requested area, a square of 1000x1000Nm, with our position in the bottom left quadrant. We will receive an email back to our satellite email address with the requested weather forecast. We view these Gribfiles in the program ZY-Grib and project and study them over OpenCPN. Based on this weather forecast we maintain the current course or determine a new course.

June the 5<sup>th</sup> we walk to marina Le Marin to check out of Martinique. On the dedicated computer we fill in June 8 as departure date from French waters. We are now ready to leave tomorrow.



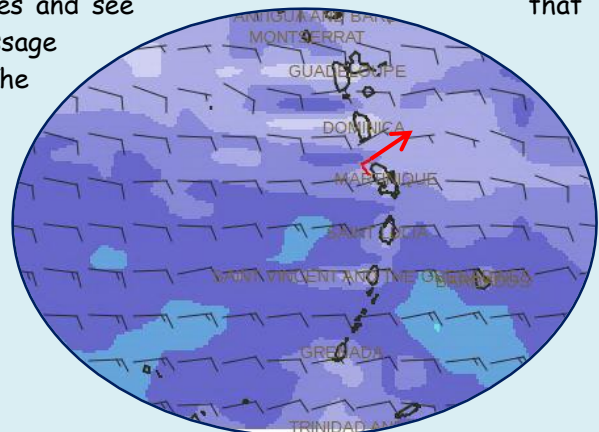
### Departure Le Marin and then finally on our way

At 10 o'clock on 6 of June we slip the lines from the jetty at Carenantilles in Le Marin and sail on the engine out of the anchorage area towards open water. Because we want to anchor at Saint Pierre for another night, we sail between Martinique and the islet Diamante on the south side via the west side of Martinique to the north. With only the headsail on a leeward breeze, we sail leisurely in the direction to the north.



At the bay of Fort de France, Mr Perkins was set to work as the wind is almost gone and the little breeze still blowing comes from the north. In the afternoon the anchor falls on a nice spot in the northern anchorage area of Saint Pierre.

Our dinghy is already upside down and tied up on deck because we don't have to or want to go ashore anymore. On June 7<sup>th</sup> we download the fresh Gribfiles and see that today and tomorrow the eastern wind in the passage between Dominica and Martinique will still be still. The 9<sup>th</sup> of June there will be less wind and we decide that that will be the day we set sail for the Azores.



The 2 waiting days were used to rest from the past busy days and to address some small things we had forgotten. Luckily the Gribfiles keep indicating the 9th as a good day.

<sup>1</sup> On the sailing trip from Curaçao to Martinique an automatic update of WINDOWS 10 appeared to have changed the settings on the laptop in such a way that the laptop no longer wanted to "talk" with the necessary Optimizer (router) for the satellite phone. It took 2 months before we figured out what the problem was by eliminating the possible broken hardware 1 by 1.



### Finally on the way

We're awake early on the 9<sup>th</sup> I guess it's from the departure stress. After a healthy breakfast we get ready to heave anchor. The AIS is switched on and when the anchor is on board and secured, we



gently sail on the engine towards the north of Martinique and then head east. In a lovely morning sun we see St. Pierre slowly disappear and look back on many good memories of Martinique.

In the meantime we hoist the mainsail with 1 reef (it can blow hard between the islands unexpectedly) and roll out the headsail. On the west side we have a westerly wind and we are neatly blown out of the passage. In the middle of the passage the wind turns southeast. With 60° to the wind we are able to sail and Mr. Perkins can go to sleep. The

first reef comes out of the main. So nice and quiet! The sun is above our heads, the wind is blowing through our hair and our boat glides wonderfully through the water. It's been a long time since we felt that, delightful!

### Day- and watch routine on long trips

Usually on the first day we steer by hand around 1 hour each to get our sea legs, to "feel" the boat move and to avoid seasickness. Just before the watches start, around 7pm, the Monitor, our wind steering system is put to work and we throw the towing generator behind the back of the boat into the water to provide green electricity and keep the batteries full during the night.

For the first 3 days the Monitor can maintain a compass course between 25° and 70° while we are sailing about 60° to the wind so we do fine with 9-14kn wind. That is a decent course and almost equal to the great circle course.

What work best for us in the watch system are 2-3-3 hours. These are not fixed clock times but flexible. The watch hours only start counting as soon as the "off-watch" goes to his/her bunk. The first 2 days it is a bit difficult to sleep but after that it goes fine. We start with 2 hours because we start the watches when



it is still daylight and then both of us have trouble falling asleep. So the clock time's shift and you almost never stay watch

the same hours as the day before. Through the years this way of doing watches has proven to be the most suitable for us.

On all previous trips we had our dinner (hot meal) around 6pm. This trip we had our hot meal almost every time between 12-2pm and that actually worked better. We both ate 1 plate and the leftovers of the hot meal during

the night.



### Communication and weather information on the way

Like we said, we use the Iridium satellite phone to get our Gribfiles. Because we did that the morning of our departure via internet, we don't have to do that for the first 2 days.



Simultaneously with the weather, we send out via satellite phone family and a few friends an e-mail with our position, the weather conditions and how we are doing. The third day we are planning to do that for the first time.

After all the hardware has been neatly aligned, we seem to have the previous problem with Windows 10 again, no contact with the Optimizer. There seems to have been an automatic update again, just before our departure. The solution from last time (back to the last restore point) doesn't work. Windows has overwritten it, grrrrrrrr!



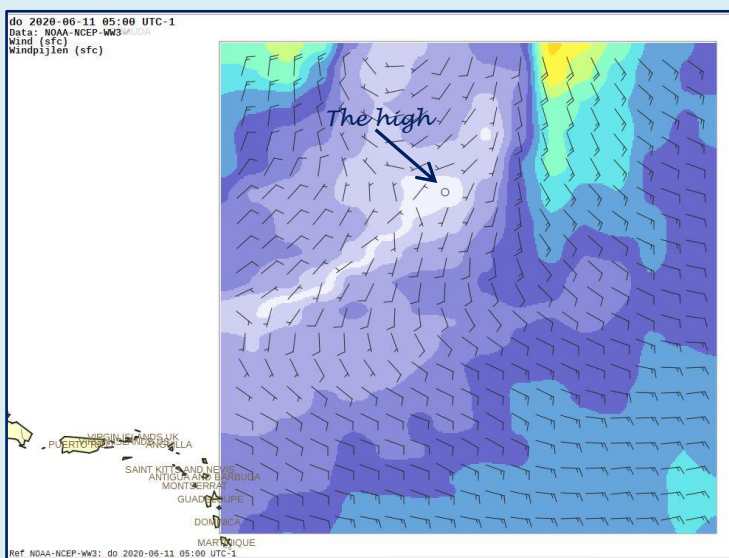
The first time of this problem GTC (our provider in the UK) suggested us to download the special software (app) on our Android tablet and smartphone. If that would work then the Optimizer would be fine. So we followed that advice. Tablet and smartphone were able to get the Gribfiles and e-mail without any problems. Now we had to use this hardware and software during the remaining of our Atlantic Crossing.

However, this method of working still needed some practice because we had only tested it once. The file from Gribfiles came in nicely and could be transferred to the laptop for study via the USB cable. The email gave some more problems because we never use the tablet for email. All partially prepared e-mails now had to be transferred from the laptop to the tablet, edited and sent. Because we didn't get the BCC's sent, we finally asked our cousin Alex to forward the e-mails we sent to him (with the



e-mail addresses in the text) and occasionally post them on Facebook. The mail to him went away perfectly and that problem was solved. During the transfer of the Word files (copy and paste) from laptop to tablet, some errors crept into the email addresses. Only 2 weeks later we discovered that, a blond moment so to speak.

Based on the 5-day weather forecast, we determine our course for the next 3 days. A little more wind and from a more south-eastern direction so that we could more or less follow our set course with day distances of just over 100nm. We would get occasionally some rain showers that give us beautiful skies. After 5 days the wind turned more to the east and we had to head north even more to keep enough wind to sail on, exactly as described in JC's book the "World Cruising Routes".



the remaining of the trip was similar to the one described above, always hunting for enough wind. Each time we had to determine where the wind would be at that moment in order not to end up in the "high pressure area" without wind. The barometer, which is read every 4 hours and plotted on millimetre paper, was also a good indicator of how our position towards that "high" was.

Of course our strategy does not always work, sometimes there is just too little wind to sail on or the wind is completely gone. On 20 June, the 11<sup>th</sup> day of our trip, Mr. Perkins had to assist for 3

days. At that time we had sailed about 1500nm, but the miles were not all in the right direction. We were making a "detour".



From the moment the engine could be turned off again, we always tried to sail no matter how little wind was blowing. Diesel had to be saved for the last stretch. The closer we would get to the Azores, the greater the chance we would end up in the Azores High. Then the last XX miles would have to be done on the engine and for that we would need diesel.

To find some wind we continued to almost 40° north (so above the Azores). These last days took a long time, it was a slow progress to the destination and we really wanted to arrive now. Finally, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1.5 day before arrival in Horta, we started the engine again; there was no wind at all because we had arrived in the Azores High Pressure area.

### Challenges and beautiful skies, sunrises and sunsets

Of course not everything is always going well; this time too we had some "challenges" during our trip. Somewhere halfway our trip, we heard a strange sound at night not knowing what it was while "somewhere" something was vibrating. In the end we saw that the 2nd forestay (we hardly use it for it is for a storm jib with hanks and always attached to the foot rail on the PS side). This happens



about once every 4 years due to wrong tension at the top at the attachment point. We don't blink anymore when this happens.

Together we pulled the broken forestay on board and dragged it to the cockpit and rolled it up. This time we are lucky because Riens had a modification made at the previous renewal at the place where the stay always breaks.

Now it was broken at the same spot but because of the modification not the whole stay but only the upper part needs to be replaced. (See photo).

*Note: The broken part has been repaired and the forestay is back in place, but forgotten to make a picture for it got a second modification. They used Northman instead of*

*swaging. So the next time it breaks we only need to renew the piece of stay.*

As 2nd we had to deal again with a gooseneck that gave up the ghost. This time not a weld that failed (as on the trip to Suriname) but a seam connection of the gooseneck. The mainsail with 1 reef fortunately still held the boom up and restrains the movements. With help lines to hold the boom at the mast and a lifting line to lift the boom a little we were able to disassemble the broken gooseneck and fit the original old gooseneck with jointed forces. After 2 hours of working we succeeded without having to lower the sail.

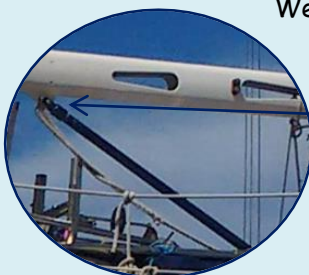


*Broken gooseneck*



*Repaired gooseneck*

We're a tiny bit proud of ourselves that we've done the job under sail and together.



~~The same night we saw that the cotter pin in the toggle connection of the hydraulic down haul to the boom was broken. The support was hanging loose on one side which probably happened because of the back and forth movement of the boom when the gooseneck broke.~~



With an emergency connection of a bolt, washers and nuts from the inexhaustible warehouses of the 'Zeezwaluw', it was repaired neatly and safely for the time being.

Mays, the Chandler in Horta has a good customer to us as soon as we get there. None of these are difficult or unsafe situations, more awkward if it happens to you on a long trip along the way. Together we have been able to give good first technical aid and we are very satisfied with that.

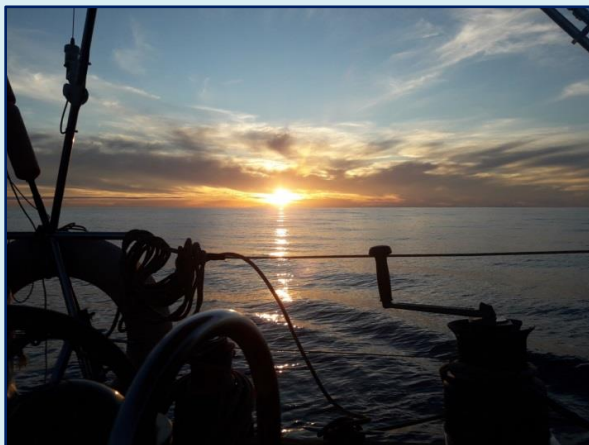
During our 27 day voyage the sun set every day in spectacular colours in the West, usually behind impressive cloud formations, while the next day it just rose again in the East.



*Sun rise*



*Sun rise*



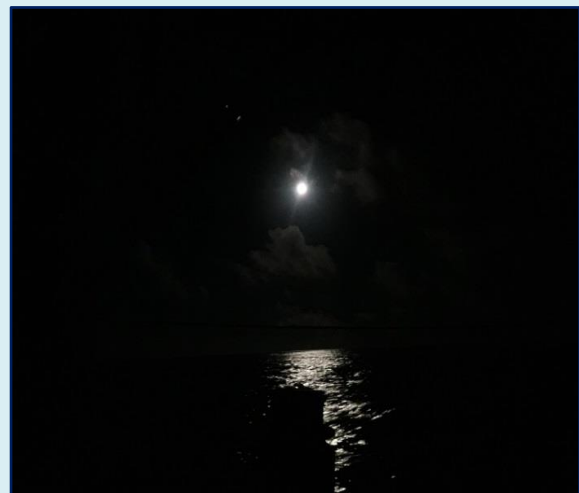
*Sun set*



*Sun set*

We noticed that the nights were getting shorter and shorter as we moved further north and east. The clock regularly has to be set forward 1 hour to have the local time when we arrive. During the nights we went through the lunar cycle from almost full moon via new moon back to full moon again. Despite the period with new moon, we had quite some light because of the beautiful starry sky.

We saw the well-known constellations Big and Little Bear appear in the sky with a brightly lit planet here and there. You can wonderfully daydream during such nocturnal hours, while the water gently murmurs along the hull, sometimes fluorescing and the wind makes music along the sails and the rigging.





### Marine life

Actually, we've seen very little marine life. At the beginning of the trip and for at least 14 days, we were followed by a beautiful bird, a shearwater. It flew up a bit, landed on the water next to us and only put its head underwater. This pattern repeated itself endlessly! What he/she sought underwater remained a riddle because we never saw a fish being captured. Every day, we were visited (at an appropriate distance) by a pair of white birds with a very long thin tail feather. We wondered what they were doing so far out on the ocean because the art of flying was more like that of a parrot than of a seagull. Furthermore we didn't see any birds. There were whole fields of seaweed, Saragossa, floating with the current and wind. Regularly the rudder of the Monitor wind steering system had to be cleared of "caught" seaweed.

Only somewhere in the middle of the ocean, we occasionally saw dolphins. They never came close to the boat to play with the bow wave. Only once we saw dolphins in the distance that jumped out of the water and splashed back.



From halfway through the trip to almost all the way to Horta, we saw whole fields full of jellyfish,



Portuguese warships. Big and small, meetings of several together, but always their 'sail' was up and they sailed somewhere by the wind and counter current, just like us. We also noticed that contact with these jellyfish can indeed be vicious. Our towing generator, which was hanging behind Zeezwaluw from the start of the voyage, had to be hauled in at some point because we had too little speed through the water. The line with propellor functioned more as a dredge than as a means to generate electricity. When the line was brought in, it appeared that there were "remains" of these jellyfish twisted around the line.

When touched, especially the dark purple strings, your hands started tingling and itching terribly. Good ways to learn to put on gloves the next time you bring in the line with propellor.

On 2/3 of the trip, we have seen groups of pilot whales several times. Once they even came very close to the boat and we were able to see these magnificent mammals in the crystal clear water perfectly. Unfortunately we were not able to take pictures of them again.

### Encounters at sea

We haven't seen much other shipping traffic, just the occasional freighter. Usually we looked at a completely empty ocean. Even the AIS was usually in hibernation mode because no targets were detected. At a certain moment we saw a group of 9 AIS signals without further data but we could not find any boats.



Suddenly we saw some kind of buoy and maybe that was one of the AIS signals, the rest we could not spot. A couple of times we saw a cargo ship on the horizon but most of the time they were too far away for visual contact.





Because we knew that many sailboats from all over the Caribbean and USA were on their way to the Azores, we expected to see some sailing ships on the AIS regularly. But only 5 days before we arrived at Horta the AIS came to life in the middle of the pitch dark night. A sailing yacht crossed behind us. In the distance we saw a light but we had no radio contact.

The next night it happened again, another sailboat on the same course as us, close behind us. The radio started calling us and we had contact with the Dutch sailboat "Saline", with Jan Paul and Marjolein who were also on their way to Horta. Their AIS system did not work properly and they asked if we could see on our AIS if they were not on collision course. Luckily everything went well and half an hour later the "Saline" had crossed behind our stern and disappeared in a rain shower. Via Marine Traffic this nightly meeting was recorded.

(Thanks to Rob from SY Happy Hour for forwarding).



Via satellite phone we knew that the Dutch Zahree, with Tineke and Herbert was on its way from the Chesapeake Bay in the US to Horta. E-mails back and forth with our positions let each other know where we were. Because we had regular contact, we expected to meet each other somewhere. But because they stayed above the Azores High Pressure area and we had to cross it we never saw each other on the way and they had already left Horta before we arrived. Only near the coast of Faial, we saw other sailing boats.

Arrival in the Azores in well-known and famous Horta



Coming from the north, we saw Faial's mountain peaks appear on the horizon growing very slowly. Slowly the island grew as we got closer and closer.



Houses, roads and meadows became slowly more visible in the last rays of the sun. Seagulls welcomed us and we saw little boats detach themselves from the shore. Closer by, the impressive top of the volcano Pico appeared behind Faial.

It is a beautiful sight after almost 4 weeks of an empty horizon. In fairly flat water we see a beautiful sunset that involves Faial in a play of colours.



The last part we cover in the dark but the lights ashore point us in the right direction. The position of the harbour lights is again "European" green and red in the right places and we feel at home again in Europe.



27 days and 2790Nm (so we had made a "detour" of over 500nm) after leaving Saint Pierre on Martinique, we arrive in Horta on Faial at 11.30 pm on July 5th in the dark. With the help of the Marina guard we moored at the quarantine quay. Happy and satisfied we safely arrived; we had an arrival drink in the cockpit before we were able to dive into our bunk together after almost 4 weeks!

### Reflections

Looking back, how did we experience this Atlantic Crossing from West to East? Did the trip go otherwise than expected or not?

Both of us weren't really nervous before or during the trip. Maybe also because we had made a long crossing before and many multi-day trips so we had prepared for a smooth and easy trip this time too. Only the day just before departure we were a bit tense, but we think that's normal.

Of course the "challenges" were unexpected, the temporary solutions made sure that we didn't suffer during the rest of the trip and so were well solved, we think. We are very satisfied with the preparation and special meal provision, this time we had found the right balance in quantity, time and packaging. The whole trip we had light winds from the eastern quadrant, sometimes a bit more North-East or North. This was according the expectation from the statistics and not unexpected for us.



*A squall comes closer*

Except for a strong wind (27Kn) at the approach of a squall we fortunately had no storms, which was very nice and gave us peace of mind.

Because of the low sailing speed and the 500nm extra miles made, the voyage was a lot longer than expected. Luckily the supplies were sufficient for that extra time at sea.



The extra days were difficult at the end, we got a bit impatient and actually we wanted (Ineke) to turn on the engine to hurry up. But that was not an option because the diesel would run out before we got there. Would we bring more diesel next time? No, we don't think so because we already had 75 litres extra in jerry cans. We would now, in retrospect, prepare in the same way for a long crossing. We are very satisfied with the way things turned out.



*Riens and Ineke Elswijk ab SY Zeezwaluw*

To be continued