

The ARC Transatlantic Yacht Race
Final Report



The ARC Transatlantic Yacht Race.

The Race started on 22 November 2009 just off Las Palmas, Gran Canaria. Great Escape is a 52' Jenneau designed yacht. She is fitted out to the highest safety specifications for Ocean Racing. The crew of 8 with Dave Wheeler as skipper had a good blend of experience with Skipper Dave - Ocean racing, Archie - Round the World Racing, Chris and Paddle off shore racers, Keith, Alistair, Mo and Biddy inshore racers.

About an hour before we left the pontoon, to start the race, a chap came up and asked why we were flying the H4H flags off our back stay and a halyard. We explained and it turned out that he had lost his son in Afghanistan, serving with The Rifles, just 4 months prior. He said that until it happened he had not been aware of the fantastic support agencies that looked after the bereaved and wounded. He also said that it was very clear how much more help they all needed.

We also had the support of Lance Bombardier Ben Parkinson from my old regiment 7 Para RHA, who is one of the most severely injured soldiers from Afghanistan and who has been making an incredible recovery, through sheer grit, determination and courage and the incredible support of his own family.

We felt very humble. But it also gave us that added impetus to get on and complete the race for a such a good cause.

We split into 3 watches doing 3 hours on, 6 off.



The Crew



Skipper and Alistair



The Start

We settled into the racing routine and with the favourable NE trade winds ranging from 10 to 30 knots, we "goose winged" our head sails and worked hard at our helming, particularly at night keeping her in the groove. A demanding part of ocean racing is the repetitive aspects of downwind sailing and getting used to the unusual sleep pattern of the watch system. We had to constantly watch for wear and tear on the sails and chafeing on all the sheets and guys. Pre-empting problems is a key to good ocean racing and good boat husbandry. We were to lose a head sail much later on to a bad tear. Chris gave Keith some instruction on the sextant whilst others read a lot -(Archie became a global warming/climate change expert sceptic - as Keith was to discover at 3am on watch change, when Archie bent his ear - Keith was very tolerant) .



Goose Winged headsails

Alistair was a determined fisherman and we made some great catches, mainly Durado, though we had a few flying fish. Chris, as our amazing resident chef, created some fantastic meals with the fish and many other ingredients. We were actually spoilt for choice. Archie spotted our only pod of whales and we also saw some dolphins. The night skies were amazing with stars and a full moon for part of the trip. You had to experience it to appreciate it, helming down a moon beam at 3 in the morning. Quite wonderful. Part of the beauty of Ocean racing is the vastness of the oceans, the scale of the skies and the space you have to think.

We had a lot of fun and although the routine can be quite demanding, particularly on sleep patterns, we kept it all together. We got the gybeing (when you have to change direction and therefore the positioning of the sails) of our goose winged sails, which is quite a complex manoeuvre, down from 36 minutes at the first gybe to 12 minutes at the end. Quite slick really for a scratch crew. What a difference 16 days of practice makes!



Archie at the helm during the night



Fishing



Paddle and Bidy preparing lunch



The "Atlantic rollers"
We managed to surf one at 15knots!



"Paddle multi tasking"



"Keith and Archie"
sharing the helm - nothing else!



Paddle -
"What is this bit of string for?"



Archie
"looking for divine guidance" !

Three days out (300 miles) from St Lucia Archie was med-evaced. He was passing kidney stones - not very clever! Extremely painful. He had to take morphine till the stones passed! For safety reasons, in case it was not what we thought, he had to be extracted from the race. His luck was in, as he was taken on board the MY Octopus - one of the largest private yachts in the world. The crew were incredibly professional on the exchange and very kind on board. He travelled in style for 24 hours and was then winched of at first light, by a French military Super Puma helicopter, 100 miles from Martinique and flown to hospital. He spent a day in hospital having checks. The hospital staff were extremely good. Then he flew back to St Lucia in time to hire a speed boat to get him back on Great Escape, 1 mile before the finishing line (with a bag of duty free champagne). So he crossed the line! It was a bit like a "Top Gear Race" - he was definitely Clarkson! Really great fun.



Mo - the best "watch chick" -
she looked after Archie when
he was at his worst.

Whilst Archie was having his adventure the rest of the crew carried on racing the boat for the remaining three days. Unfortunately they lost a main head sail to a bad tear but still made very good time. Great Escape finished 10th in class out of 60 and crossed the line 99 out of the 250 boats competing. Pretty good effort we thought.



Paddle and the finishing line - and Archie was back on board.



Start celebrating - first drink for 17 days - as we crossed the line. Skipper, Keith and Alistair



Great to be ashore in St Lucia Skipper on right

You will all be pleased to know that Great Escape held their own in the "party stakes" for the three days after the race, before we all had start making our flights home.

It was great fun and a great cause.

The skipper, who will be sailing/racing Great Escape around the Caribbean from January to April, has decided he would like to fly the H4H flag throughout. The roundel will keep pride of place on the bow. We hope it may generate further donations.

Well done H4H! Keep up the fantastic work and many thanks Ben Parkinson for your support.



Chris our Mate, Dave our skipper and Archie (on his knees again!) - note the H4H roundel on the bow. It was not washed off during the race!