

Monday, May 24. 2010

Results of the "passage test"

I've mentioned in my last entry, about my sail to the Canaries, that this trip was to be a test for me and Vespina. So how did the 650nm (1200km) and 7 days turn out? Personally: wonderful. I had no problem at all with being on my own for a week, and being far away from shore and help. Actually I loved it! I also found out that while sleep periods of 10 minutes are a little short in the long run, periods of 20 or 30 minutes are all I need to stay fresh. Far away from the coast and shipping lanes, and with the help of Radar and AIS, that should also be safe to accomplish. Vespina: she did also fine, except for two things: Speed and stability. An average of less than 100nm per day is slow. More speed is not only more fun, it is also safer. A faster passage means less risk of running into foul weather (or no wind). You also need less supplies. But I knew that Vespina was no record-breaker before I bought her. I bought her because she was a strong boat. And for my first voyage I thought it would be wise to be rather safe than fast. But on the way I learned that while strength does provide a lot of safety, it does not go all the way. Speed, to an extent, increases safety too. But even more so does stability, especially in stronger winds. When I discussed the design of Vespina with other people before I bought her, the general understanding was that she would heel quickly to about 20°, but then remain stable. To me that sounded stable enough, and since she scored high in all other areas of importance to me (especially the budget department), I took my chances. And Vespina did very well on the 2000nm (3600km) from Heidelberg to Cadiz. The bilge-keel with only 1,15m draft was a blessing on the canals, which were low on water. And her strength carried me safely through the many storms I encountered on my way through the Med. I will never forget that one time north of Ibiza where the wind howled with 63 knots. But most of all I love the 360° vision through the saloon windows. This wonderful feature sets her quite apart from other boats, and it is a joy to sit inside in foul weather and still be able to see everything that is happening around me without getting wet. As long as the wind-vane or the autopilot is working, and as long as she doesn't get pushed over by waves. And this is where it looks like my gamble didn't turn out so well. Vespina is a great boat in a certain environment, where her bilge-keel is an asset. But I'm sailing her in a different environment and with a different mentality, and for me the bilge-keel is more a liability. Because of her very low draft she lacks in stability and as a result I get thrown around inside a lot as she jerks suddenly from one side to the other, and the wind-vane and the autopilot only work in a small range of wind speeds and angles. Furthermore I have to reduce the sail area early and she doesn't sail to luv very well. The former means I'll be always sailing rather slow, and the latter could be necessary to bring me out of trouble. Well, here we are. Of course I could remove her two small keels with a grinder and weld a deeper one to her bottom. But I think this is the point for a business-like decision: Accept the state of the product as it is and stop complaining, or cut my losses and find a different boat for the rest of my voyage. Because giving up is of course out of the question. This is just another lesson on the way, this time in ship design. But for the next few days or weeks I'll enjoy the Canary Islands on Vespina. Which is, incidentally, what she was built for. I've heard this area is supposed to be great for diving too. Maybe it's about time I make a license!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 08:08