

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Gudrun's Panama Canal transit

Our guests and line-handlers Scott, Liesbet and Mark arrived Wednesday morning within minutes of each other. Liz and I were still busy getting the boat ready, so Scott took a seat in the restaurant and Mark and Liesbet went to another sailboat for a pre-arranged visit to sell and install one of their wiries. By noon we were done and had lunch together, then I checked out of the marina and at 2pm we cast off and headed for the "flats" anchorage to wait for our adviser.

Mark fixing my wirie which I smoked accidentally by switching the wires

The adviser showed up at 4pm and we proceeded to the first set of locks, the Gatun locks. We were scheduled to transit them with the "Sargento Aldea", an amphibious assault ship of 12000 tons that Chile had bought second hand from France in December and which was on it's way to Chile. Shortly before the locks we tied up with two other boats and then entered the locks together, Gudrun as the port hull of the makeshift trimaran.

Approaching the lock behind the Sargento Aldea and two other sailboats

Entering the locks as a raft

As the doors closed and water began to stream in I played Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" on the cockpit stereo which I had installed for that purpose, and everybody broke into a big laugh. It took the edge of the tension that had built up among the three skippers and crew, and started a row of bantering between the boats about British and Germans in general, and beers and humor in particular.

We passed through the locks without incident and dropped anchor in the anchorage just behind the locks. After dinner (Pasta) everybody went to bed early because we were scheduled to receive our adviser early the next morning at 6am, just like on Venus and Mojomo the week before.

Breakfast table

Only this time we had to wait until twelve before an adviser showed up. Surprise, surprise. We then proceeded at maximum speed (up to 7.5kn) and soon left the other boats far behind us. Which was just as well, because we just made it to the rendezvous with "Sophia Z", a freighter with which we were scheduled to transit the Pedro Miguel locks at 4:30pm. As we learned later, the two other boats had to spend another night on the lake.

Sailing on lake Gatun

Approaching the Centennial bridge

Between the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks I noticed that less cooling water was coming out of the exhaust than usual. Lacking a temperature gauge I took a reading with the infrared kitchen thermometer and measured the engine block at 76C, 10C more than I measure normally. As far as you can call somebody who regularly points a kitchen thermometer at his engine normal. I left the engine cover open to help in the cooling and in the next lock Mark and I checked the salt water strainer and impeller, but couldn't find a fault. Mark suspected that something was jammed in the hose, but we didn't want to take it off the thru-hull with 10.000 tons of freighter 20m behind us. When I took the hose off the thru-hull later I found a piece of a plastic bag inside, which we must have sucked up in the lock.

Side-wall in front of Sophia Z

Not a lot of space

But we made it through the locks and then proceeded down the channel to the La Playita anchorage where we arrived at 9pm and dropped the anchor to everybody's relieve. Beers and vegetable soup followed and then we went to bed because everybody was really tired after a long and exciting day.

Last lock opening

The lock crew

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:10

Well done! Bravo.

Anonymous on Feb 29 2012, 10:17

Well done am so jealous my sailing days are over now alone on a boat going nowhere isolamia is for sale x:(

Anonymous on Mar 8 2012, 13:47