

Saturday, April 21. 2012

No damages!

Saturday, 2012-04-21, 11:40 (17:40 UTC), 06:19S, 103:47W, COG 260, SOG 8kn, Wind 18kn E

The weather is changing daily, today for the better, hurray! Clear skies, nice wind from the east, and the sea not too bad. Liz is lying in the cockpit sleeping while her iPad is charging. She's got a looong list of books to read for the trip. Very tiring. Gudrun is rolling a little, but not too jerky. The autopilot is doing fine.

I'm very glad for our self-steering gear. I remember very well the 1000nm I had to hand-steer single-handed through the Mediterranean, and it was no fun. In good conditions it's just great to be able to do something else then sit on the helm. And in bad conditions it's invaluable to be able to hide below deck. As self-steering systems go, there is the choice of a windvane, or an autopilot.

The windvane is big mechanical contraption bolted to the stern of the boat. It has a little vane that sticks up into the wind, and a rudder that sticks down into the water. The vane is adjusted to a certain angle to the wind, and through gears, levers, and ropes the rudder part keeps the boat on that course. Once it's set up it's very simple and reliable, and requires no battery. The autopilot is either an electrical or hydraulic system that gets it's direction from an electronic compass and works on the rudder of the boat. Nothing to set up, just switch it on. But depending on the model, boat size, and balance it can draw a lot of power. The important thing about using self-steering gear is to always have a good sail trim, and not too much heel. Otherwise the gear gets quickly overloaded and then it fails, which is almost impossible to repair at sea.

Gudrun has both, a windvane and an (electrical) autopilot (and a spare drive for the main autopilot and another whole spare autopilot. You can see how important self-steering gear is to me). The windvane came with the boat, but it's a pain to set up and requires a bit of attention every few hours. The autopilot also came with the boat, and is easy to set up, requires no attention, and is very robust. Partly because the whole steering system for Gudrun is simple, efficient, and robust. And because Gudrun is a very well balanced boat, the autopilot draws only about 1,5 Ampere per hour (20Watt). That is very little, and so we're exclusively using the autopilot and have the windvane as backup stowed away in the lockers. I used the windvane across the atlantic for a few days, and it works well, but why bother.

Also I have to say, we're almost a week into the journey now and no damages at all. That's the longest time in 2 1/2 years that I didn't have to repair anything, and that even at sea! Hurray and knock on wood! Simpy fantastic. I'm so happy I gotta go hug Liz now

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:42