

Monday, November 30. 2009

### **Alone on the Saone**

Vespina in one of the two 600m long tunnels. Vespina docked in Chalon-sur-Saône. For the last three days I've been driving alone now. Not only alone aboard Vespina, there is also no other ship on the Saone river. Maybe because of the weather: All Saturday and Sunday morning the wind was blowing with 5-7 Bft (max was 32kn), and it was 3°C Celsius cold. Sunday afternoon added rain, great. By nightfall I was so tired I almost rammed the bridge pier at Pontallier-sur-Saone. I docked 100m later and stayed for the night. Today the rain and wind stopped, but it's still only 5°C Celsius. I felt a little miserable today because the cold was getting to me. I had adapted to 10°C Celsius day and night, but less than 5 ... well. How long to the Caribbean? But now the thermometer behind me says 4°C, and my hands aren't even cold anymore. I guess I have adapted again. I've also noticed that I've lost another 4kg of weight, in one week. From shivering for sure! I've made very good progress though, and am now in a huge Marina in St. Jean-de-Losne. Shops, showers, electricity and ... WiFi! I stopped here because I had to buy a new waterway vignette (54 EUR for 16 days), and St. Jean-de-Losne is one of the few cities with a VNF office that sells it. I like the town though, it has a nice feel to it. Tomorrow I want to make it to Chalon-sur-Saone, with 60.000 inhabitants one of the larger Cities on the river. And then it's only two more days to my next big milestone - Lyon, where the Saone flows into the Rhone.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:13

Friday, November 27. 2009

### **Daily routine**

I've been asked what I'm doing all day. So here's a brief account of a very typical day on board of Vespina: I usually get up at half past six. Wash (cold water ;-), and then it's into the engine room: pump Diesel, check the engine oil, check the bilge, look for any leaks or loose fittings, cables, hoses etc. Have breakfast (tea, porridge, bread. Eggs every 2nd day), wash the dishes. Because the locks only open at 09:00 in the winter season, I can not always leave as early as I would like. So depending on the distance to the next lock I cast off between 08:00 and 08:45. Halfway to noon I usually give in to chocolate cravings (oh lovely Lindt!). When Hermann was still on board I made soup for lunch, now that I'm alone cooking is not possible unless I stop and it's bread and an apple or banana. Sometime in the afternoon I post my position via SPOT. And give in to more chocolate cravings . When I get bored at the rudder I do isometric exercises, take pictures, or listen to the radio. By five at the latest I have to be at my destination for the day, because then it gets too dark to navigate the narrow rivers. I check the batteries for charge and the bilge for any fluids. If there's a town around I go shopping for groceries, and then cook a nice meal. After dinner it's time for cleaning the boat and checking panels, closets and foodstuff for signs of moisture, mold, etc. Then I write another entry into the captain's log, sometimes the blog, and have a closer look at what tomorrow will bring. Around half past eight, nine at the latest, I'm dead tired, wash, and snuggle into my sleeping bag. Read a page or two and fall asleep. In fact, pretty much every day's like that. The only thing that varies is the number of locks and what's for dinner. As I wrote in an earlier post, it takes some getting used to. I had to align my perception of "progress" and "optimization" to the new situation. But now it's great fun, and also strangely satisfying.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:57

Wednesday, November 25, 2009

### **Locks on the Canal des Vosges**

Because I am often asked how it is in the locks, I made a little movie. As you can see, it is a pretty straightforward and smooth process, once you get the hang of it: Use the remote or call the operator on the VHF radio to have the lock opened, wait for the green light, drive in, throw the ropes up, climb the ladder, fasten the ropes, tighten them a little as the boat rises, wait for the green light (or doors to open fully), drive out. Of course it took a while (about 10 locks) until it was running that smoothly. It involved a great deal of pulling, shouting and running around at first. Here are four tips that made all the difference for us: Tip #1: No hurry. Tip #2: Stay as far away from the incoming water as possible. Tip #3: Let the ship move a little inside the lock with the water and don't pull too much on the ropes. Tip #4: If you are behind a commercial vessel, wait until it's fully into the lock our out of the lock and the water has calmed down again. VoilÃ¡ , my first youtube movie. Hope you like the soundtrack, it's called "rushing water"

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 09:05

Tuesday, November 24, 2009

### **Halfway to the Mediterranean**

The last lock of the Canal des Vosges. Vespina in the marina in Corre. After 14 days, 102 hours of motoring, 125 locks, 210 liter Diesel, 2 liter engine oil and 740km of rivers, Vespina is now docked in Fluvial Loisirs in Corre, France. This is pretty much half of the way to the Mediterranean sea. It is going downstream and there are only 30 or 40 locks and two tunnels (!) left, so it will go a lot faster from now on. I think about 9 more days to Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône. Because of the circuitous route I had to take along the rivers, I am still pretty close to home - only 5 hours by car. Since there is still a lot of paperwork to do before I can be away for a year, I am using the chance and return home one last time for a few days. It's also my Mum's and Brother's birthdays. Looking back, I spent about the same time preparing personal and official matters for being away that I spent preparing myself and Vespina for the voyage. It is amazing how entangling modern life is. Hermann, who accompanied me for the last two weeks, is also returning home. We had a great time together, and it is sad to say farewell. But on the other hand I am very much looking forward to single-handed sailing (or motoring), and so I am also very excited at the same time.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:31

Saturday, November 21. 2009

### **Downstream**

Leaving a lock in the Canal. On Thursday I've reached the highest point of this voyage - 360m. The slow crawl upstream is at an end, from now on it's going downstream only. It's still more than 800km to the Mediterranean, but I feel like I can already smell the sea. Yesterday my brother and mother came to visit, and we had dinner in Epinal. It was my mother's 70th birthday, and this her birthday-trip. They also brought my Liferaft and Emergency radio beacon, which returned late from service. It's good to have friends & family that help out when things don't go quite according to plan. Today we will go together on the boat to Corre, where I want to leave Vespina until Wednesday. I have to return home for a few days for some last paperwork that wasn't important enough to delay the start of the voyage but has to be completed before I can be away for months.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:05

Tuesday, November 17. 2009

### **Au revoir la Moselle!**

Frost and fog in the morning. Fighting herons in the afternoon. Today we left the Mosel river around noon - after seven days, 396km, 26 locks, uncountable castle ruins and lots of rain. Now we're in the Canal de Vosges (also known as Canal de l'Est until 2001), which will lead us further south to the Saone river. The canal is 121km long and has 93 small locks, nine of which we navigated this afternoon. Yep, it's raining of course. But It's fun anyway . We were issued with a remote control, which can prepare and open the locks. After entry and securing the boat, you have to lift a lever, and the rest is supposed to happen automagically. It worked well for five out of nine locks, and at the others friendly lock tenders helped us out. I was told the lock tenders in the canal are all recruited from veterans and ex-hookers. Well, if all veterans and ex-hookers are as friendly and helpful as the ones we met today, then the world could use some more .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:08

Saturday, November 14. 2009

### **Vive la France!**

Sierck-les-Bains. First stop in france. Today we crossed the border to Luxembourg, and five hours later to "la grande nation", France. It was a little embarassing, because the lock operator spoke only french, and I had only started to learn french yesterday evening. To complicate things there was also a coal freighter waiting for the lock. But somehow we got it sorted out . I'm glad I spent the time fixing the radio antenna yesterday evening though. Now we're moored in Sierck-les-Bains, a little town just across the border with a huge castle. After a walk around town and up to the castle we celebrated the occasion with a bottle of Bordeaux. Lots of ducks around, btw. And signs on the bridges saying that it's forbidden to chase them away . Are ducks the holy cows of the french?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:10

Friday, November 13. 2009

### **Stopover in friendly Trier**

A commercial vessel passing Trier at six in the morning. After six days into the journey my mind begins to leave the land-based life behind, and settle into the new routine. This morning I cleaned the Diesel from the bilge for an hour. Luckily the weather was surprisingly fine, with 12 Celsius and only little cloud cover, and so I was too happy to mind the work. Then we drove for only four hours to Trier, where we stopped for a little sightseeing and shopping. Because I only had a few weeks to prepare the ship, every day new items appear on the "urgently required" list. Like for scrubbing the deck. Trier is said to be the oldest city in Germany, dating back to roman times. It's also a beautiful city with good shopping opportunities. We were a little clueless at first, but people here are extremely approachable and friendly, and so we had a very good time. After having scrubbed the deck thoroughly ;-), I will now have a look why reception on the VHF radio is so bad (I suspect the antenna), dutifully add an entry to the captain's log, and then probably 'retire early'.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:07

Thursday, November 12. 2009

### **PfÄhlich**

Today we've made it to PfÄhlich, not far from Trier. It is nicknamed "Moselherz" (Heart of the Mosel), because it is pretty much halfway up the Mosel. A marketing joke, if you ask me. The town is too small and remote, if there is any town on the Mosel not worth visiting, it's this one. Nice try though, it worked on us . But the trip today was quite nice. Only very little rain and temperatures around 11 Celsius. Even the sun almost showed. I think this is pretty good considering it's November . I'm almost over the lost pictures. But before my spirits got too high, Vespina surprised me with Diesel in the bilge of the engine room. I tracked the source to a leaking pump, which I use to manually pump Diesel every day from the 500 litre holding tank to the 50 litre day tank. I have to get the Diesel out, or risk a fire. Of course it gathered in the most inaccessible corner. I'll give it a second try tomorrow morning, too much Mosel wine in my head right now to work upside down . Some statistics: on average we manage 35nm a day, pass three locks, and use three liters Diesel per hour.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 23:22

### **Digital desaster**

Yesterday desaster struck: my cf-card reader malfunctioned and destroyed the cf card with the pictures and video-blog of the journey so far. The error message "a USB device is drawing too much power ..." was the last thing I saw of my pictures. I only use 4GB cards anyway, so that I don't loose a lot of data in case something like this ever happens. But it still hurts.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:07

Tuesday, November 10. 2009

### **In Treis-Karden**

Myself at the rudder. Again we've made it to our destination just as night fell. We had major luck at all the locks though, and never had to wait. The low traffic at this time of year is a big plus there. But then, in summer you can afford to wait: four extra hours of daylight - and it's not that cold. With any luck we will make it to Trier by Friday morning. All manoeuvres like docking, locks etc. work in perfect harmony now. No need for commands or synchronization. Very amazing. I'm doing the radio communication with the locks and harbors, and it's quite interesting. Of course there are very different personalities at the other end of the 'line', and not all are equally fond of small leisure craft. But it seems that calling the lock one kilometer or so in advance generally speeds up the whole procedure a lot, and prevents getting shouted at. I love my VHF radio

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:50

### **On the Mosel river**

On the Mosel river. We've left the Rhine and are now navigating the Mosel upstream towards Luxembourg and then France. Today we hope to make it to Treis-Karden. The early nightfall limits our range somewhat. The weather is better - not so much rain today. But with 5 Celsius it's not too warm. Beautiful landscape all around us - meadows, hills, vineyards and plenty of castles and ruins.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:35

Monday, November 9. 2009

### **Underway!**

Underway! From the bridge in Heidelberg. Photos courtesy of Ulrich Winter. It took all Saturday to pack and stow away the gear and get Vespina ready. So Hermann, who will accompany me for the next 14 days on the rivers, and I spent the night moored in Neckarsteinach and left Sunday at 8:30. The weather was fair, even the sun showed a little. Temperature 12 degrees Celsius. We navigated the five locks to the Rhine without any problems, and spent the night at the Yachthafen Marina Worms, where we stocked up on Diesel - 400 liters. Today it's rainy with only 8 Celsius. Morale is high nevertheless, a hot soup for breakfast helped. We left the Marina at 8:30, and hope to reach St. Goarshausen 115km down the river before nightfall. Speed above ground is 14,4 km/h. The Rhine is pushing us with 3 to 4 km/h. Thanks old dude .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:52

Friday, November 6. 2009

### **Radio interview**

Torsten Blätker. Another surprise - this morning the radio called. Whether I would have time for a brief interview regarding my voyage. Well, actually I didn't have the time, but can you say no when the radio calls? So 30 minutes later I was sitting panting across from Torsten Blätker in the Ulm studio of SWR, southern Germany's public radio station. With no time to prepare, the first question - whether I'm a millionaire or burned out - left me pretty speechless/stumbling/sweating. I was very happy that it wasn't live and we could start over again. In case you wondered - neither. My budget for the trip, including the boat, is 60.000 EUR. A lot of money, but not a fortune.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:48

### **Pictures from the "Bon Voyage" party**

Last Saturday I threw a little party to say good bye to my friends. The pictures are now in my Picasa Web Album. Thanks again to the great team from Café Omar. Special thanks to Anna for organizing the party while I was busy working on Vespina.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:40

Thursday, November 5, 2009

### Big surprise - press coverage

On Monday I got interviewed by the regional newspaper SÃfÃ¼dwest Presse regarding my little adventure. I wasn't expecting much, because I know from my experience with TRANSPOREON that a one hour interview often ends up as three or four lines in the paper, if at all. Usually with the facts all mixed up. To my big surprise, they printed half a page this time. With picture. And didn't even mix up the facts (except minor details). I am very impressed with the editor, Henrik Wilhelm. Here's a link to the online version. The picture shows me sailing in Thailand four weeks ago.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:10

### My story so far

My name is Axel Busch, I'm an entrepreneur from Ulm, Germany. I have left my last venture, TRANSPOREON, after nine years as CTO for a sabbatical in June 2009. The idea was to get proficient in an area very different from the software business, and to spend some time away from the computer screen, from airports and from meetings before my next venture. I choose sailing. I have been sailing for many years, but I have never owned a sailing yacht myself, or lived for longer than two weeks in a row on board of a ship. So first I had to educate myself about sailing yachts, sailing routes and voyaging in general. I read a lot of blogs and books, made plans, and talked them over with people that had done it before. In August I felt ready to start looking for a ship. Because I wanted to take only a relatively short break from regular life and work, I was looking for an inexpensive ship that I could get under way quickly. Six weeks later I found and bought Vespina. Vespina was in good shape and had most of the electrical, navigational and security equipment which I wanted already on board, if somewhat basic. As a strong believer in "keep it simple", this suited me fine. Maybe as importantly, I liked her owners (Anke and Ulrich Winter) a lot. They sailed Vespina for two years in the Mediterranean Sea, and both have been of great help since I bought Vespina. I spend two days on the ship and compiled to-do and shopping lists. After placing the orders and applying for the necessary official documents I went charter-sailing in Thailand with friends. Not ideal, but we had booked it half a year ago. When I returned after three weeks, most of the stuff had arrived and I could get to work. Now, three more weeks later, packets are still arriving daily. Looking at the ship I could easily spend many more weeks and a lot more money before she would be the ideal ship in all aspects according to the books I've read. But there is nothing vital that needs to be done for the first part of the voyage. So she is for now as ideal as she will ever get and I can safely depart in two days. The last three months were already very educating and fulfilling. Even should I sink Vespina in the first lock, which is just 300m downstream from her mooring, it was definitely worth the time and effort. But it's more likely that I'm looking ahead to a year at sea, and I'm very excited about what I will encounter.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:30

Wednesday, November 4, 2009

### **The route as planned**

Click to enlarge. The map shows the route as planned. Since Vespina is at the moment in Neckarsteinach, Germany, I have to navigate the rivers through Germany, Luxembourg and France to get to Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône in the Mediterranean Sea. The trip on the rivers took three weeks, and I arrived in Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône on Dec 8th. In Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône I had to step the mast and set up the rigging. But for three weeks the winds were blowing with force 8 to 10, and it took me three weeks to complete all the work and get going. I spent New Years in Barcelona and then sailed to Ibiza. 12nm before reaching the harbor of St. Antonio a storm wind gusts up to 63knots caught up with me, but I made it safely into the harbor. Unfortunately for the next four weeks the wind was blowing from south-west, and I had to wait before I could continue my voyage. I sailed without stop to Almerimar, where I had to wait for another few weeks. By that time the window for this season's crossing to the Caribbean was over, and I decided to take it slowly from then on and cross late in 2010. I sailed along the coast to Gibraltar and then through the strait to Cadiz, where I prepared Vespina for her first Atlantic passage to the Canary Islands. The trip to the Lanzarote took seven days. It was both wonderful and frustrating, as I learned that Vespina is not designed for such a long trip. Vespina has a bilge-keel with low draft, which is great for coastal or inland waters. But out at sea she is lacking balance, and I was forced to reef very early if I wanted to use the wind-vane or autopilot. Instead of sailing along with 6 or 7 knots, I only made 3 to 4 knots, and the heavy rolling got on my nerves after a few days. It hadn't bothered me much on the shorter trips, where I just sat at the rudder myself most of the time. But the trip to the Canary Island was the test for the Atlantic crossing. And I realized that this is not the way I want to sail the next 12000nm. On the Canary Islands I looked for and found a boat. I had expected to spend two months on the refit and then sail to the Cap Verde Islands. However the refit took me seven months (July 2010 to February 2011). In February I sailed across the Atlantic to the Caribbean. I didn't stop over at the Cap Verde Islands and sailed directly to Sint Maarten. From Sint Maarten I plan to sail further west and visit Cuba, and then go north and visit the US and Bermudas. I would like to return to Europe via the northern route which takes me to Iceland. This route can only be sailed late in July or early August because of the icebergs. Alternatively I could skip the trip to Iceland and return via the Azores. In which case I would probably not head for Germany but to the Mediterranean sea and cross my backwash at Gibraltar.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:51

Monday, November 2. 2009

### Back in the water!

Last Saturday Vespina was launched again after lying at the shipyard for almost three years. This was very exiting because I've never launched a ship myself before, and I've also never seen Vespina in the water before. But everybody at the shipyard helped out with coffee, advise, a hand where necessary and plenty of jokes at my expense. The weather was great too, and after the whole show went according to plan and even the Diesel started immediately we motored a few kilometers up and down the Neckar river. I was surprised at how smooth and quiet the engine was running, and she made 6 knots without any effort. Big thanks to Ulrich Winter, the previous owner, who taught me a great deal after the purchase about Vespina and about owning a boat. Thanks also to Roland "streichler" for his advise and energetic personality. And of course to Ralf, Mum and Liz, who are constantly providing help and support in so many ways.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:35

### About Vespina

Vespina is a self-made steel Yacht of the Reinke 10M design. She has a semi-cutter rig with a roller-furled genoa on the first fore-stay and a self-tacking jib on a second fore-stay. Specifications LOA: 10,35 m (34 ft) LWL: 8,70 m (28.5 ft) Width: 3,00 m (9.8 ft) Draft: 1,15 m (3.8 ft) Sail area: 56 sqm Displacement: 7,5 tons Engine: Mercedes OM 621/3 inboard Diesel with 55 HP and a fixed shaft Diesel: 550l Water: 200l History Her original owner started building her in 1990, and finished in 1999. She was mainly motored and sailed up and down a river for three years, until her previous owner bought her in 2002 and fitted her out for a cruise around the Mediterranean Sea, which took place from 2004 to 2006. Since then she has been lying on the dry, until I bought her for 29000 EUR on Sept. 17th, 2009 and since she was in pretty good shape launched her again on Oct. 31st, 2009 after only a little overhaul. Here is her profile at the date of purchase, with pictures and the equipment list (in German). Pictures Vespina in the Mediterranean Sea Vespina after overhaul.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:34