

Saturday, February 27. 2010

**Got you on my radar, baby ;-)**

Max, boss of "Inox Almeria", applying a free polish to the radar gimbal. My new chart-plotter with radar overlay: the purple "haze" is the radar echo of the ships and structures around me in the marina. The last three days I worked on the installation of my new GPS Chart-plotter, radar, Navtex-receiver and AIS receiver. What a "Kabelsalat" - cable tangle. Also the new radar dome is bigger than the old one and didn't fit on the gimbal. But Max helped me out and welded a new platform on top of it. The chart-plotter is able to integrate all data from the different receivers as layers into it's display, and of course I didn't want to settle for less than that. But - surprise - every piece of equipment has a different cable and connector type - Coax, RS232, Seatack, NMEA, you name it. So my brain, the multimeter, the pocket-knife and the crimping pliers saw heavy use again. But the biggest surprise was when I turned everything on today and it simply worked. I really wasn't expecting that. So now Vespina's navigation system is state-of-the art, and I'm certain it will be of good use next time when there's a lot of traffic, it's dark and I'm getting tired. But I'm glad that I came all the way without the little electronic helpers. Because I have learned to navigate well without them, and so I won't be in trouble should the stuff fail. I've also picked up my sails from the sail-maker yesterday. The main-sail has a third reef now, and the broken seams of the genoa are fixed. I've also bought a 6sqm storm-jib - thanks again to Chris, Pete and Caroline for letting me have theirs. And since the wind-vane is in perfect shape too .... I'm ready to go again! Well, if only the wind wouldn't be blowing from the west all the time. For tonight gusts of up to 100 km/h are expected, that will be fun. I guess I should be glad that I haven't made it to the Canaries yet, the second super storm in ten days. Because the long-term weather forecast isn't too optimistic about the next two weeks (west, west, west), I've decided that I'll have a little break and fly home. The plane is leaving tomorrow from Almeria, and I'll be back on the 10th of March. See you in Ulm!

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:40

Wednesday, February 24. 2010

**Welcome sunshine!**

The rainclouds are gone, the sun is shining, and the thermometer is creeping towards the 20C mark. If only the bloody wind would die down for a day, I might actually get some work done on the boat. But with the exception of Saturday (where I was in the Sierra Nevada) it has been blowing with more than 60 km/h every single day for the last week. So except for some insignificant tasks (like painting my survival gear bright orange and writing "Vespina DF5903" on everything) all I (can) do at the moment is sleep, read and eat chocolate. Horrible life, I know! Taking the wind-vane apart and putting it back together was an adventure by itself, as the boat was rocking violently on it's mooring. So I've decided against climbing the equipment mast to exchange the radar dome and installing the AIS antenna - the water is still too cold to go swimming involuntarily. This will have to wait for a less windy day. Everybody I've met so far on my trip was telling me how this winter is the worst - coldest and windiest - they can remember. Just my luck to go sailing now. But in a way I enjoy it immensely. It wouldn't be half as much fun if it was easy, would it?

Posted by Axel Busch at 12:17

Sunday, February 21. 2010

### **Sierra Nevada and Alhambra**

The last week has been raining mostly. I know, you guys have been freezing half to death, and others are being blown away. I won't complain! But when the sun came out yesterday it was nice anyway. I had arranged to pick up Caroline, Chris and Pete in Caleta de Vélez, and together we drove to go to the Sierra Nevada to get our dose of snow! Bratwurst for breakfast in the Maid of Mettle. On the way to the Sierra Nevada could almost be in the Allgäu. Turn right here. Some walking and sculpting. Pete, Caroline and Chris. A band of fearless sailors in the mountains. On the way home we visited the Alhambra in Granada. Beautiful gardens! It was a great road-trip and beautiful day out, and I enjoyed being in the mountains. Not to mention the snowball fight. Today it's raining again.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:25

Thursday, February 18. 2010

### **Essential equipment, software and books**

A little more than three months on the boat, and this is probably my first "useful" contribution for other sailors: A list of essential equipment, software and books. I have linked it permanently from the navigational menu, because I will probably add to it now and then.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:11

Wednesday, February 17, 2010

### **Bushings, sails, greenhouses and a new radar unit**

On Monday I did a big tour of all the shops in Almerimar with ship-related assortment of goods. At "Inox Almeriar" I ordered a replacement for the Nylon bushing for my wind-vane. Colin, the sail-maker, agreed to put the third reef into the main and patch up my genoa, which had some small damage at the clew (Schothorn). And because everything went so well I let Spencer from Nautico Almerimar talk me into buying a new radar unit plus chart plotter, but that's a different story. Letting my sails dry. The last puzzle piece for my wind-vane! Tuesday morning it was raining heavily. I was pacing in my boat like a caged tiger, waiting for the rain & wind to stop so that I could hoist the sails and let them dry - the sail-maker won't work on wet sails. At 1pm the rain finally stopped, and I jumped out of the cabin and hoisted the sails. After two hours I saw the next rain cloud coming, and quickly took them down and stowed them away before they got wet again. I had just slammed the hatch shut when the next downpour started - whew, close! Today I collected the inox bushing for my wind-vane (that should settle it!), hired a car, dropped of the sails at Colin's, and then explored the immediate surroundings a little. Have you ever wondered where our Oranges are coming from? Every inch from the mountains to the coast which is not city is covered by greenhouses. Look at the pictures and judge for yourself. On the road to the mountains. Greenhouses stretch all the way from mountain to coast. My rental car - a Fiat Panda. Regarding the new radar: In the "good old days" the biggest challenge for a sailor (after the weather) was navigation: He had no reliable charts and no accurate way to pinpoint his position. Nowadays we have very good charts, and we have GPS to tell us where we are. On Vespina I only have a very simple GPS device that just displays the coordinates, so I still use paper charts, compass, pencil and a ruler a lot. But most yachts are equipped with chart-plotters that show your position, course etc. on an electronic chart. There is still a lot of navigation to do, but it has gotten a lot easier. But now there is a new challenge, and it is even more dangerous than being confused about your position: traffic. Modern cargo ships plough through the sea with 25 knots. If I keep a sharp outlook and the visibility is good, I can see them from a distance of 10 to 15nm when I stand in my cockpit. That gives me half an hour to prevent a possible collision at the best of times. That is not much. And at night, it is a lot less. This is where radar and recently AIS come in. Both systems can detect other vessels from a much bigger distance (because the antenna is higher up in the mast, they don't depend on visibility as much and they never tire), and provide information about the course and speed of the detected vessels. Usually the devices also provide the means to set an alarm, should a vessel come inside a certain range or be on a collision course. I really like the "old style" navigation: paper chart, compass, ruler etc. I even have a sextant with me, which I am looking forward to use once the wind-vane is working. Not that I expect to be any good at it, but I just like it - call me a romantic. But the other night, off Cabo de Gata, when it was pitch black and every five minutes a cargo vessel was zooming passed, I really wished for a modern radar or AIS system. Just for the ease of mind, and to be able to get some rest. And of course for entertainment, I am a technology aficionado after all. So when Spencer offered me a great deal on the perfect bundle: GPS Antenna, Chart-plotter, Maps, Radar and AIS all on one display (Raymarine C80), I just couldn't say no. Now I am eagerly awaiting delivery of the package! What I also like about it is the redundancy. Because the new system is just one display, I can keep my old system in place untouched. Should one fail, I still have the other. Then I have a handheld GPS, a sextant, two electronic and three mechanical compasses. Even if both primary systems fail I should be able to find land eventually

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:46

Sunday, February 14. 2010

### **Back in Almerimar**

Torre de Control, Almerimar. The Sierra de Gador in the background. The whole coast is covered by greenhouses. So, the wind-vane worked. For almost two hours I watched in total fascination as it kept Vespina reliably on all possible courses. And then it suddenly stopped working: the servo-rudder was twisted out of its vertical axis again. I strapped myself to the back of the boat, realigned the servo-rudder and then stayed there to see if it would happen again. Which it did. But now I know what exactly is wrong, and so I can fix it for good. What I need is the bushing between cogwheel and shaft made from Inox or Aluminum, and not Nylon. A beautiful day sail. The self-tacking jib is up. The part of the wind-vane which is causing the trouble. The bushing is now made of Nylon. Has to be metal. So I turned the trip to Malaga into a wonderful 30nm day-sail off Almerimar, where I will stay the next week and get everything sorted out: The bushing, the 3rd reef, the storm-jib. And whatever else comes up. I'm pretty sick of struggling because my gear is not 100% up to the task. And the wind turns back to West on Wednesday anyway. And now ... a steak and a beer!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:01

### **SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com**

Eureka! The wind-vane is working . And in the worst possible conditions too: light wind and big swell from aft.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:19

Saturday, February 13. 2010

## **Reefs, jibs and a video**

On the trip from Ibiza to Almerimar I had wished again for a third reef in the mainsail when the wind exceeded force 6. And once you get started on thinking about sails, there is really no end to it: A smaller storm-jib than the 9sqm one would be useful, maybe 6sqm. And then all the books are telling me that as a prospective blue-water sailor I need a Trysail. But that means adding a second mast track to allow easy hoisting of the sail. However, thinking about how bad it was in the force 10 storm with gusts of 11 to 12, I honestly doubt whether I would be able to get the lugs into the track alone and hoist the sail. But the third reef seems like a very good investment, and so does the smaller storm-jib. So I went to the local sailmaker, Colin. Adding the third reef would take him a morning and cost about 180 EUR. But a lot of sailors came to him over the last two weeks with torn sails (no surprise!), and he has a lot to do. Especially because he's going skiing in a week from now. The storm jib would take one to two weeks to complete. If I want it cheaper and have the time, he suggested I have the canvas laser-cut in Thailand instead of Spain and send here, which would add another week. But looking at the weather forecast, I don't have much time to spend in Almerimar. The current easterlies only last until Tuesday, and then it's back from the West for at least another week. So the plan is to sail to Malaga tomorrow and visit a friend of Colin there to get the third reef added to the main sail. I'm also thinking about ordering the storm-jib in Malaga, and have it send to the Canaries while I sail there. Then I spent some more time on the wind-vane today (in between showers). I think I made some progress ... the rod that leads from the gears to the servo-rudder is not 100% straight and there seems to be a "sweet spot" which I have to hit when tightening the screw. I'm excited about the next trial tomorrow! And then ... there is a new video

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:41

## **In the Alboran sea**

In the bay of Sant Antoni, leaving Ibiza. Na Gorra. Sailing into the sunset. Tuesday morning Cha came to say goodbye before I leave for my next trip. And also Ramon, a sailing instructor from the Marina. Ramon wants to sail next winter to Turkey and back. Good luck for your trip Ramon! I had a last coffee at The Willow Tree (and thanks again for the Oranges, John!) and cast off at noon. The north-westerly was blowing strong into the bay, and I had to motor against the big swell for the first four miles until I passed the lighthouse at Isla Conejera and could turn south. The swell was so bad that I got seasick within minutes after leaving the marina, and I participated three times in the popular "feed the fish" program. Tom, now I know how you felt in Croatia! The problem with seasickness is that it totally takes the fight out of you. I could hardly convince myself to leave the cockpit and set the sails. But once they were up and I was sailing, things improved quickly. And then I thought: I've done it, I have escaped the magic of the island and actually left Ibiza! Inside Vespina, my home for the last three months now. "Team Germany" on tour The last two days before leaving I had worked on the wind-vane, and when I dropped the servo-rudder into the water I expected a reasonable chance that it would be working. But no such luck - the swell twisted the shaft of the servo-rudder out of its carefully aligned axis, and then bent it's mounting sideways. And that was basically it. I fiddled with it for a while longer, bent it back and realign it, but the result was the same: wind-vane not working. Unbelievable. Later more on that topic. Unfortunately my Tiller-pilot is also useless in a big swell. It doesn't react nearly as fast or strong enough, and the boat gets pushed off course and into the wind. Oh joy, this trip was going to be another workout for my arms and abdominal muscles. In the night to Wednesday the wind changed to West force 5 to 6. Close-hauled the swell is uncomfortable, but it is very easy to trim Vespina so that she stays on course by herself. The trick is to put just the right amount of sail area up, align the sails at the correct angle to the wind, and then use the traveler on the main-sail to fine-tune the pressure on the rudder. Easy :-p. But I had sailed most of the way to Ibiza like that already and it gets easier every time. So I managed to catch up on some nap-time while the rudder was lashed down and Vespina sailed herself towards my destination. Things felt good again. A ferry. Reminds me of the Jawa Sandcrawlers from Star Wars. One of the many, many container vessels. One of the three or four cruise liners that pass me every day. On the night to Thursday I was passing Cabo de Palos, the cape east of Cartagena, where a traffic separation scheme is in effect. A traffic separation scheme is something like a "Autobahn" for the sea (minus the white lines and MacDonalds of course): You are only allowed to go one way, and it is very busy. Since a sailing yacht compares to the other ships like a bicycle to a truck, it's best to stay out of it. I feel safest at sea when I'm far away from land and other ships. In my mind this makes perfect sense: With only unoccupied water around me I cannot run aground or into other ships. And should the weather get too bad to sail I can simply shut myself inside Vespina, be safe and wait it out. So my plan was to pass the cape 20nm off the coast, which should put me outside of the traffic I had encountered so far. The plan worked. I was sailing in peace and silently through the moonless night, looking at the stars (so many!) and the lights of the far-away commercial vessels. And then the strangest thing happened: another sailing yacht passed only 50 meters from me, going the other way! The first sailing yacht I've seen

on any crossing, and we almost run into each other. Seems like there is somebody else who feels the same as I do about traffic separation schemes. I stared at it in disbelief and missed the chance to take a picture. You cannot imagine how happy it made me to finally encounter another sailor at sea. Shortly before dawn the wind changed to North-East 7, and Vespina was flying along with up to 8 knots through the water. Which is pretty fast for a boat with a design limit of a little over 7 -> surfing. Hard work on the rudder without a wind-vane, but great fun! But as much fun as it was - by three in the afternoon I was very tired. So I layed by for half an hour and got a little sleep. Then I continued towards the Cabo de Gata. A freighter at dusk. And this is how it looks at night. Or even like this. Not much to see, is there? The traffic increased with every mile I came closer to the cape and the Alboran sea. I stayed even more south to get out of the way, but there was no chance that I could stay clear off the commercial vessels at the cape. There were dozens all around me, zapping this way and that in complete darkness (clouds, no moon). Theoretically as a sailing yacht I have the right of way. But who wants to argue with a superfreighter? So I tried to hold my speed and course very steady, and hoped that my lights were bright enough and my radar signature good enough. One of the longest nights in my life. Scary. Now I had to make a decision: sail on towards Gibraltar or stop at one of the next marinas? With my Iridium phone I downloaded a weather forecast. It predicted only 5 knots of wind for Friday and showers. Five knots is not enough to get Vespina going. Rain is not getting me going. And the wind-vane is not working and needs looking into anyway. Dawn, the time of day I'm looking most forward to. The lighting at sea is nothing less than spectacular. Approaching Almerimar under motor. Mainsail up for stability against the swell. So I decided for a stop-over. The chance to catch some real sleep and a hot shower had nothing to do with the decision. The Mediterranean Almanac advertised Puerto De Almerimar as a "Useful yard with all facilities" and having "Good discounts for winter stays", so I decided to have a go for it. I had to motor the last 10nm because the wind failed completely, and arrived at noon. As far as I can see the Almanac was right: six shipchangers, a boatyard, and only 8 EUR per night. 320nm in pretty exactly 72 hours - not bad. I could have made it faster (and a lot more comfortable) if the wind-vane was working. My model is a home-made copy of the "Windpilot Pacific". I am sure it was working for Ulrich, and I am at a loss to explain why it isn't for me. Obviously having to replace the cogwheel and spacer didn't help. Maybe the little "bump" against a pontoon on my way down the Saone did more damage than can be seen by the eye? A wind-vane is a very delicate machine with little tolerances. Maybe Ulrich used it in different conditions, not in a force 6 and higher? The fact remains that the wind-vane is probably the most important piece of equipment when sailing single-handedly. I absolutely need a reliable way of holding the boat on course. Not only so that I can rest, but also to work at the sails, for which I have to leave the cockpit. At the moment I have either to lay by, or sail a close-hauled course with the rudder lashed down. The tiller-pilot is of some help, but it only works when the wind is light and there is no swell. But the tiller-pilot uses up energy, and my wind-generator is not charging the batteries when the wind is light, so I cannot sail like that for long. I am very happy with my voyage in all other respects. And Vespina proved to be a fine ship - predictable, maneuverable, reliable, sturdy, watertight, and easy to maintain. But the self-steering situation is getting to me. Today I'll take the wind-vane apart again and put it back together. It can't hurt, I learn more every time I do it, and maybe I have an "Eureka!" moment this time. Then I give it another try on a day-sail or on the way to Gibraltar, depending on the weather. A new wind-vane costs EUR 2850, maybe half the price for a used if I can find one. So definitely worth spending the time. And the matter is too serious to take any chances. The trip from Gibraltar to the Canaries is 700nm, twice the distance I have sailed so far on a single trip. I don't want to imagine doing this without reliable self-steering, seeing how tired I am after only (ok, "only" is relative I guess) three days. Anyway, having to baby-sit the rudder around the clock takes all the fun out of sailing on anything but a day-sail. But this trip is as much about having fun as it is about learning, at least that was the plan. And not some masochistic undertaking, right?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:21

**Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>**

Wednesday, February 10. 2010

**SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com**

Caught a fine northerly. Passing Cartagena and heading for Almeria.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 21:52

Monday, February 8. 2010

### **Getting ready to leave Ibiza (again :-)**

The weekend was business as usual: First I won the World Championship ("Project Gotham Racing" beaten). Then I survived the final suicide mission (!?) on my spaceship, rescued all my crew-mates from evil aliens and saved the Galaxy ("Mass Effect 2" beaten) . Afterwards I put the XBox back into the (cardboard) box - enough gaming for a few months. Weather forecast for Tuesday... and Friday. But the real world is no less interesting: The weather forecast promises NW to E winds from Tuesday on! Looks like the waiting paid finally off. Maybe those guys should have waited too, hehe. So I'm getting Vespina ready for another go at Gibraltar. That includes doing the laundry, filling all tanks, charging all batteries (boat, handheld emergency radio, cameras, navtex, gps, flashlights, laptops, phones, ebook-reader, mp3-player, radio, portable speakers, ... Oh dear, do I really need all that?), stocking up on food (especially fruit & chocolate!), checking the rigging and lines, testing the lights, downloading weather charts, updating the route and the GPS waypoints, backing up the hard-disks, packing the grab-bag and finally stowing away everything that is not absolutely necessary. I can't stand it when stuff is (f)lying around on the boat while I'm sailing. I had a great time on Ibiza and made many new friends which I hope to see again. But the Island really is a place for youths on vacation and pensioners. The weather is great and it's really nice, but every day's the same. So my recommendation is to not come here for an extended time unless you can leave ambitions and big plans behind, or you'll go crazy eventually. Ok, back to work!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:46

Thursday, February 4, 2010

### **Bon voyage "Maid of Mettle"**

Yesterday morning there was a very (very) light easterly (0 to 5 knots), and Maid of Mettle set sail, no, started the engine, around 11am. Destination: the mainland. I hope they found some wind on the way and managed to get the sails up. But they wanted to take advantage of the calm water, and were ok with motoring all the way if necessary. It is interesting how different the priorities are among sailors. Chris and Caroline are mostly concerned about the wave heights, since they get seasick easily. I don't mind the waves (as long as they let me sail my course at all), but I get bored easily and flapping sails get on my nerves. So I prefer stronger winds, say 3 to 8 Bft. Great fun, plenty of work and you never get bored. Though with more than 6 Bft I prefer not to sail close to the wind if it can be helped. It does get uncomfortable, I'm not that tough. Then there is my friend Rolf, who doesn't mind the conditions or whether he is motoring or sailing, as long as the anchorage at the destination is safe and the beer is cold. And Arthur, who enjoys sailing fast, but is very careful when he plans a trip and wants every aspect covered. Planing a trip with him is like watching an artist while he prepares to paint a masterpiece. So after another look at the weather forecast I decided to stay here and wait some more. It wasn't easy seeing Maid of Mettle leave and stay behind. Especially as the wind picked up a little after noon. But then it turned west again in the afternoon. Then it dropped. Then for a while from the east again. Then no wind. Then rain ... I think it was a good idea to stay. Thinking about my trip so far, I really don't know why I hurried so much at all. It seemed like the right thing at the time. And yes, it was cold and I wanted to get south as fast as possible. But I think it was also because I was still in the same "hurry mode" in which I've been in since I started writing software for other people 15 years ago. And with all the stuff I had planned for my sabbatical I didn't get out of that mode after I left the company. So maybe there is a lesson for life in this for me after all. At least I will try to approach things a little calmer for a while. Even if this will add some more time to the voyage or change the route. For example, should I arrive too late on the Canaries for sailing to the Carribean (hurricane season), then I could simply wait until November or sail to Brazil instead. I've never been to South America before anyway, why not sail there?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:21

Monday, February 1. 2010

### **A day on Ibiza**

Wayne and Cha.I have to write this down, because I'm sure that in a few weeks time I'll be asking myself what I've done on Ibiza while waiting for easterly winds. I got up shortly after eight. After a light breakfast and checking the weather forecast I went a little running. Wayne and Cha had an appointment at ten to get their boat lifted out of the water, and I checked whether I could be of help. No need, so I went on my way and bought a new mattress. After throwing out the old one I had a real breakfast at "Rita's Cantina" and read emails and news with their wifi network. I got to talk to the guys sitting next to me, and it turned out they were from Ravensburg. The "LÃfÃndle" is everywhere. After fiddling a little with my boat (there is always something to do) I went to the beach with Caroline, Pete and Chris. I tried their inflatable canoe in the bay, we played football, and sat a while in the sun. After a shower, a nap and some fruit I discussed with Chris the best place to install the iridium antenna on the "Maid of Mettle". Yesterday I had talked with Wayne about Rapid Prototyping, and I read some articles about the current state of the art, available products and prices. When the sun went down I switched on the XBox 360 to advance my "career" in Project Gotham Racing. Next I'll have a look what's happening in the "Willow Tree", and then I'm looking forward to making myself comfortable on my new mattress with a book until I fall asleep. Yes, life is good

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:20