

Thursday, April 29, 2010

Vespina 3.0 and new plans.

The last three days I've been working on Vespina again. It sure feels like I'm working more than sailing. But I'm not complaining. All the people I've met on the way spend months, often years, working on their boat before they left home. And I basically just grabbed Vespina and started. The plan was to get going, and then see what needs to be done and do this as I move along. I can't say the plan didn't work - even if it's a lot more work than I had imagined. I've always said I never wanted to own a boat, because I imagined it would be a lot of work. Chartering is so nice: hop on, sail, hop off. Let others do the work. Now I know in detail what that work is. In part it was just maintenance, and in part it was repairs due to the rather windy conditions. But a large part comes from converting Vespina into a boat that can be safely sailed alone for extended periods. I hope that in the last three days I made some more progress in that last direction: by fitting a self-tailing winch for the Furlex, and by improving the wind-vane. The old winch. The new winch. Self-tailing. Awesome! I cannot count the many cries of frustration that the old winch caused me to shout into the wind. It is the combination of where it is placed, and that it is not self-tailing. I wouldn't believe how much that complicates operations if I hadn't experienced it myself too often. Rolling the furlex in and out became the most dreaded piece of work on the boat. Far worse than reefing the main-sail. I wanted to replace the old winch with a self-tailing winch a long time ago, but the shipchandlers were never able to get one. Or "in three weeks". Yeah, sure. Double that time. But the shipchandler here in Port Sherry said his supplier has one on stock, and I could have it the next day. Hurraaay! Two pins should make all the difference. Now the cogwheel can't slip anymore. The second improvement regarded the main character of my nightmares: the wind-vane. I'm kidding of course, it's a long time since I last had a nightmare. I like my wind-vane, even though it doesn't work. But maybe it will work from now on, because with the latest improvement it cannot slip anymore. Check out the pictures: the pins and corresponding holes are new, and will hold the rod, the spacer and the cogwheel forever aligned. Now the screw through the middle only has to hold the cogwheel in place, but not transmit the torque anymore. I further optimized the setup by changing the way the line to the tiller runs through the reels, and by replacing the rusty and slightly too short chain across the tiller with a longer one made from stainless steel. While I was in the vicinity I put a new coat of varnish on the tiller. I also spent a whole day on "the war on rust". Which is a lot more meaningful than the war on terror. And you even see progress. My trusted companions in that epic battle are: A grinder, a screwdriver, a can of rust-converter, a can of primer and lots of paint. Especially the combination screwdriver + rust-converter is pure magic for places where I can't reach with the grinder. Poke the rusty bits with the screwdriver and generously apply rust-converter. Does the job! Then it was time to inflate the dinghy and try my outboard engine, because it's anchoring weather now - bye bye Marinas. Well, the engine didn't start. So I serviced it, which is a very oily affair. Unfortunately it still doesn't start. So I'll have to look into that a little more tomorrow. My new stainless steel frame at the back is quickly becoming my favorite item. Not only does it securely hold the equipment mast in place. It is also great for attaching the clothesline and, even better, a lift for the outboard engine. Hehe. So despite the fact that I'm still not over the Atlantic, the morale is good. The plan now is to test the wind-vane on a day-sail in the bay. If it works I'll spend a night in Cadiz itself and stock up on fruit, vegetables and water, and then head for the Canaries. If it doesn't work ... nah, it will work.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:21

Tuesday, April 27. 2010

Through the strait, and into trouble.

My debut in the atlantic ended like probably many debuts do: in disaster. And it all started so well! I had planned to leave Gibraltar at 4pm, 2 hours after high water. While I got the boat ready I thought it might be a good idea to leave an hour earlier. It shouldn't be a problem with the tidal streams, and I would be past Tarifa well before nightfall. AIS is cool. Lots of ships in the Bay of Gibraltar. Another boat heads out for the strait. By 2:30pm everything was ready and double checked. Time enough for a late lunch - DÄfÄ¶ner Kebap! With a full & happy stomach. and a light tingling in the mouth, I cast off around three, only minutes after another boat. Big surprise in the bay: two other sailing boats are heading for the strait with me. Looks like my planning was ok. The second surprise wasn't long to come - the wind blew around the rock with up to 40 knots. I only set the self-tacking jib, which is about the right size for that wind on a broad reach. I wanted to try whether it makes any difference to the autopilot or wind-vane. Unfortunately it didn't, and neither could hold the boat on course steady enough. It seems they just don't like waves, or when the boat goes faster than 4 knots. One of the super fast ferries. As for the strait, I needn't have worried so much. The entry is a little crowded, especially because of the high-speed ferries between the two continents. But in the strait a traffic separation scheme is in effect, so the big vessels are out of the way. In addition the traffic is tightly controlled and guided by Tarifa radio - channel 16 on VHF was always busy. The waves gave me a hard time at the rudder. They couldn't decide whether they want to come from the east, south or north. In places all three types met at the same time, splashing me thoroughly wet. But the sun was shining, so I didn't really mind. Triple treat: Cruiseship, Sailing Yacht, Dolphins. Dolphins! Unfortunately it was also hazy and so I couldn't see the african coast. But plenty of dolphins! Half a dozen groups of 2 to 3 animals each. Unfortunately the boat was moving too wildly and I was too occupied with the tiller to take a decent shot. So I just held the camera up with one hand, pointed it in the approximate direction and clicked away. Tarifa. Kite-surfing and wind-generator heaven. There was not much traffic in the strait, I only had to make sure that I did not enter the traffic separation scheme as I sailed before the wind towards Tarifa. The 40 knot gusts became more frequent as I approached Tarifa, the narrowest point in the strait. Then, only two miles away, I heard a loud "bang" and suddenly the jib was flapping like a courtesy flag. It took me a couple of seconds to realize that the sheet was gone! The sheet of the self-tacking jib is attached with a pulley to a metal bar on the foredeck, where it can move freely. And as I looked forward, the whole thing - pulley, sheet and all the shackles were simply gone. Parts of it were custom-made, and will be hard to replace quickly. But - "allzeit bereit", always at the ready - I had a spare sheet already prepared in the locker a long time ago. But preparing it in the marina and attaching it with 40 knots of wind are two different things. After many more salty showers I had the sheet on the jib and running via underneath the metal bar to the mast-winch for the mainsail halyard. Just as I had gotten back into the cockpit and set course for Tarifa again, a voice started calling the "sailing yacht east of Tarifa" on channel 16, and then stopped as they, probably, saw that I had the boat under control again. They must have meant me, because there was no other sailing yacht in the strait. Good to know the guys are watching. That's the wrong way, dude. Lonesome sailer sailing into the sunset. I sailed on, and met a sailing yacht going the other way! Under engine, mind you, bobbing up and down like a rubber-duck in the strengthening current. I would really love to know what extraordinary circumstances made the crew go through the strait into the night against a 40 knot wind and at the very worst time, just as the tidal current gets started. I noticed 3 knots going my way. But the strange encounter was quickly forgotten, because a utterly beautiful sunset was waiting for me. I continued on into the night, heading for Cadiz. At 11:30pm the wind died, and I had my first break - stretch, eat, drink, pee. Then I changed the jib for the genoa. I also changed the fuse of the autopilot which had just blown out for the second time today. Then I spent some time messing with the wind-vane, but it didn't help much. After midnight the wind increased again, and I had to take the tiller in my hands. It was 4:30 in the morning when the wind had gone down enough so that I could let the autopilot steer without blowing fuses and I finally got some sleep. The usual routine: Set the alarm to 15 minutes, lie down to sleep. Then have a look around, and if everything is ok sleep another 10 minutes. Usually there is always something, but that night I got a full hour of sleep that way - awesome! Sailing alone for a while now has drilled one thing into me thoroughly: Eat, drink and sleep (and pee) whenever there is a chance. Because the conditions will probably not be right when you need to. So whenever it is relatively quit, I lie down and grab 10 minutes of sleep. Sometimes I'm not so lucky and I have to sail all through the night and well into the next day without sleep. But then I usually drop the sails and heave-to and sleep for an hour, unless I'm close to my destination. The sun coming up over Cadiz. Dawn was only slightly less spectacular than sunset, because sun came up over Cadiz, and not the sea. I could be there by noon - or sail on towards the Guadiana river on the border between Spain and Portugal. Everybody keeps telling me how beautiful it is, and Ulrich and Anke, the previous owners of Vespina, spent many happy months on Vespina there. The sun was up, the sky cloudless and a nice force 4 was blowing from the east. Reason enough to keep on sailing, so I changed my course further north towards the Guadiana river. I quickly had breakfast while the conditions were good and the autopilot could steer Vespina. I slept for another half hour then looked at the wind-vane. Aha, the screw that holds the gear worked loose, and I quickly tightened it. How could that happened? I had put loctite on the screw when I put it in. Now the wind-vane was misaligned, and any

chance to use it gone. Around noon it looked as though the wind would increase soon, and I wanted to furl the Genoa in a little, because it is very frustrating to do once we wind is too strong. Not enough hands on deck to pull at the lines and keep the boat pointed into the wind at the same time. But I couldn't pull the Genoa in, the line wouldn't move an inch. I crawled to the prow, and saw that the line was fouled up inside the drum of the Furlex. I had to get the whole line out of the drum and thread it back in, which took almost an hour. I was just done when the wind increased. But not before the shackle of the starboard sheet roller broke. Sigh. I threaded the sheet through a big shackle as emergency repair. When five minutes later the autopilot ripped it's mounting from the cockpit, I thought "First the sheet, then the wind-vane, then the genoa, and now the autopilot. What will be next?". I shouldn't have asked that. Because only a few minutes later I heard an alarm going off. It wasn't the clock, and it wasn't the chart-plotter. So ... the gas alarm! I stuck my head inside the boat and reached for the gas-knob, which was in the right place. But by then I had already seen the reason - the boat was flooded a foot high with water. The salt water must have short-circuited the gas-alarm, which is mounted close to the floor. Despite the shock I had to laugh, because I thought how lucky I was that the gas-alarm had noticed the water. I often don't look down there for hours, because I can't leave the tiller long enough. The reason for the flooding was also obvious - the sink. I had forgotten to close the sea-cock. Oh dear, how stupid. It took the 500-GPH bilge pump about 45 minutes to pump out most of the water. Then it took me another hour to get the rest out. It must have been about 200 liters, and a lot of stuff got soaked. That will teach me for a while. Like many small things, this should not happen. But I guess it's just too common, that every couple of years you make such a "stupid" mistake, again. Like forgetting to put salt into the rice water, or cutting your fingers instead of the apple. Or leaving the seacock open. Which normally would not be such a big issue, since it is usually noticed early enough, when the sink is half full. But not when there is nobody else around and you have an intimate relationship with the tiller. After that I didn't ask myself "what next". There was a lot to repair and a boat to clean, and by now the wind was howling again. So I turned around and headed against the wind for Cadiz. There are five Marinas in the Bahia de Cadiz - Puerto America, Royal Club Nautico, Club Nautico Elcano, Puerto de Sherry and Puerto de Santa Maria. Where to go? I hadn't been able to get a map or pilot for the region in Gibraltar, so all I had was the Map on the chart-plotter, which did not have much harbor information. Puerto Sherry looked like it was the largest by far, and it said "Boatyard" on the map information. The decision was made easier as I saw two ships entering the bay before me, and both went into Puerto Sherry. So I followed them. Approaching Cadiz. I made it to the welcome pontoon shortly before 7pm. I docked and walked to the torre de control - closed. The welcome pontoon was not a good place for the night, because it was not protected from the wind and the waves. So I cast off again, and headed into the marina proper, where I docked at the first pontoon. As I walked down the pontoon towards the shore I realized how huge this marina was. 13 pontoons for 40 12m boats, two for 40 15m boats, one for 30 20m boats, and one for 20 25m superyachts - 650 boats. Guess which one I had picked. Next time I should look around more carefully, I guess Vespina felt a little intimidated next to all the multi-million-EUR boats, hehe. Sadly the marina has no Wifi network, so I will have to look for a restaurant to post this entry. There is indeed a huge boat yard and some shipchandlers, but not much else. There are few holiday homes, a small grocery store and three restaurants. And many "Bauruinen", unfinished buildings, like so often on the coast. But here even more than usual. I went back to the boat and started cleaning. Afterwards I had just enough energy left to make fresh potato salad and heat a sausage, and then I went to bed a little past ten. Where tonext? I'm undecided. Part of me wants to go south as fast as possible and cross the Atlantic. Another part wants to explore the area, head up the Guadiana River a bit, stop over at Madeira, etc.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:16

Sunday, April 25. 2010

Planning the passage through the strait

View from the rock into the strait. When planning a trip through the Strait of Gibraltar it is important to get the timing right. Many skippers have ended up sailing for hours on the same spot, or even sailed backwards, because the currents were going the opposite way and they can be stronger than a small boat can sail. The currents through the strait own their strength to three facts: • The water level in the Mediterranean is some meters below that of the Atlantic, because water evaporates in the Med faster than all the waters from the rivers flow into it. This creates a constant current into the Mediterranean between 1 and 2 knots. • The wind creates a surface current, depending weather it is levante (easterly) or poniente (westerly). Tarifa, which lies in the middle of the strait, records more than 30 knots of wind on 300 days in the year. This makes the wind definitely a factor, and it is practically impossible to sail against the wind through the strait. • The tides. While they are negligible in the Mediterranean, the spring range is 3m on the western end of the strait, which adds to the current. Fortunately the tidal streams through the strait are well documented, so all I have to do is leave Gibraltar at the right time with the wind from the back (levante). And the weather forecast for the next weeks looks good too: Easterlies the whole week. The tidal streams are documented in my pilot book, and I couldn't find an online reference. Looking at the tidal stream charts it is relatively obvious that I need to be past Tarifa 2 hours before high water in Gibraltar. On the other hand, I should aim to get there not much earlier than 5 hours before HW Gibraltar in order to sail with the west-going current. The distance from Gibraltar to Tarifa is about 20nm, and Tarifa is 10nm into the strait. That translates into 5 hours of sailing, which means I have to leave Gibraltar 10 hours before high water. Because high water happens every twelve hours, this is the same as leaving 2 hours after high water. Next I have to look at the published tide tables for Gibraltar to get the times for high water. Today it will be at 13:49, which means I should leave shortly before 16:00. Hm, this would mean to reach Tarifa just at sunset, and sail the rest in the dark. I do not really want to do that. I want to take pictures! The next high water is at 02:00 in the morning, which means I would have to leave 3 hours before sunrise and sail in the dark until I am halfway to Tarifa. Damn, also not great. Because the hour of high water is getting later over time, it would be best to wait at least until Friday, when high water is at 04:55 in the morning. Fortunately the boat that reserved the berth I am in is late and will not arrive for another week, so I could stay here that long. On the other hand, who knows what the weather will do until then? Sail today into the night, or wait a few days and sail in the morning. Both options are not ideal, but I could live with either of them. At moments like this I wish for a second hand on board, just to talk things through and swing the decision either way.

Posted by Axel Busch at 02:17

Saturday, April 24. 2010

Sightseeing in ... Gibraltar

All the long shiny bits are new. This morning Matt from Gibstainless came to weld a fitting to my equipment mast, which clamps down on the new stainless steel frame. Now my equipment mast is held securely by the new frame, and I can start moving the Compasses etc. to the centerline of the boat. Awesome. Come on guys, really, this is sooo cool. With the last puzzle piece of all the upgrades I had planned in place, I was finally ready to do some serious sightseeing. The friendly fellow from the tourist information office told me that the only way to do this was to hire myself a taxi. Because all the sights are too far apart for walking. Ha, little did he know that he was facing a veteran sightseer, who's shoes had walked a million miles (at least) on all continents of the world. Minus south america, australia, and the arctics that is. Well, some on some continents at least. 426 meters in 6 minutes. All hands ready to repell boarders! Me ape. So I grabbed one of the free maps, and off I went ... to the cable car. The first thing that caught my eye after the nice ride to the top of the 426m high rock was one of the famous apes. She jumped right on the car as it approached the landing, hoping to surprise us and grab some fruit or chocolate no doubt. By the way, the fine for feeding one of the apes is GBP 500. I do not know if this also applies for unintentional feeding by way of having your lunch pack stolen from you. I hope not, because one of the ladies in the cable car had her lunch-pack stolen after a minute, hehe. She took it out of her backpack to get at her sweater. Just what the apes were waiting for. She got jumped immediately, and the food was gone. View to the south-west. View to the north-east. The way I've come. Although it was quite hazy today, I could see the african coast to the south, and also a long way up the coast to the north-east, from where I've come. The view is very spectacular, and by itself well worth a visit to Gibraltar. The multimedia guide that I had received on leaving the cable car informed about the Greek Legend that is attached to the place. According to the legend the rocks on either side of the strait bore the warning "Nec plus ultra" ("nothing further beyond"), serving as a warning to sailors to go no further. I stood a long time on the viewing balcony. I thought about my trip so far, and looked along the Strait of Gibraltar to where I will sail next. All hidden in the mist - how fitting. I watched the big commercial vessels moving out of the bay and into the strait. From up here they look like toys, and the world like a model railroad landscape. In the morning I had planned my trip through the strait, and I imagined myself sailing along that route through the strait. Very soon now. The southern-most point of the rock with it's big gun. Looking out of a gun-port to the east. Nice view on some ships at anchor. Tingling with anticipation I left the viewing platform and walked along the ridge to the south. At the very south is a military installation with a huge gun, which can shoot all the way across the strait into Morocco. Hasn't been used, and I don't think it will ever, which is a good thing. This part of the rock was closed-off by big fences and gates. There is a way leading down the east face of the rock, called the "Mediterranean steps". The first few of the steps can be seen in the picture of the view to the north-east. St. Michael's Cave The cave is also used for concerts. One of the most important things to see in Gibraltar is apparently the St. Michael's Cave, which is a little way down from the top. The cave is indeed imph http://www.brainforge.net/serendipity_admin.php?ressive - very large, high ceilings, lots of stalactits. The multi-colored lighting and music spoiled it a little bit for me, I like my servings of nature raw. But still very impressive. "Halt, who goes there?" The siege tunnels. After a visit to the siege tunnels I started to have enough of crawling around underground and skipped the World War II tunnels, even though they are said to be worth a visit as well. The Moorish Castle wasn't very impressive - I guess I am a little spoiled from my visits to all the great medieval castles and ruins as a child. It's spring. But she's not in the mood yet, hehe. The castle steps. Hungry and thirsty I made my way down the "Castle Steps" to the Main Street, where a pint and generous helping of "Steak & Ale pie" cared for my bodily needs, and concluded my sightseeing trip of Gibraltar. Here is the link to my picasa album with the best pictures from Gibraltar.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:25

Thursday, April 22, 2010

Back in Gibraltar!

The plane to Gibraltar left Luton with barely an hour delay. There were only about 20 passengers on the Airbus A321-200, and so the acceleration at take-off was noticeably higher than usual - nice. The pilot must have been really experienced at flying fully occupied aircraft. Because he fumbled the landing of the empty plane shortly after 11pm. After it had finished kangaroo-hopping down the runway I rearranged my bones and everybody left the plane. Immigration was deserted, so we helped ourselves through the closed but not locked doors and picked up our luggage. On the way to customs I picked up an english couple headed to Fuengirola. I had arranged for a airport transfer to Gibraltar. Fuengirola is on the way and I had two empty seats. The driver waited after customs, happily waving a sign with my name. We threw our luggage into the car and the rest of the trip went in a blurr of lights and fast corners. The driver explained, in very good english, that the police doesn't control the speed limit at night. So there is no need to be worried about speeding along with 200 km/h - through towns and all (3 year old Merc E320 with 470.000km!). He dropped me off at the border to Gibraltar, and I walked well past midnight through a deserted (of course) immigration and customs building and across the runway into town. After another 30 minutes of walking I was back on Vespina - oh joy . Now I'll visit Gibstainless to pick up the extension to the equipment mast, and at two the mechanic from Sheppard's will come around to service the engine.

Posted by Axel Busch at 03:43

Wednesday, April 21. 2010

Hello London. And now?

A quick look at the departure information for Berlin SchÃ¶nefeld and London Luton airport confirmed that flight operation has been resumed and my flights were on schedule. Relieved I made my way to the Airport, checked in my luggage, and boarded the plane without delay. The delay came while waiting for take-off: "Dear passengers, this is your captain speaking. Ground control has just informed us that the airspace over Berlin is closed and take-off will be delayed by approximately two hours. I am sorry for the inconvenience. More information will be available in about half an hour. Parents with small children are invited to have a look at the cockpit." Ten minutes later my wild dreams of jumping out of the window or posing as a small child and hijacking the plane were interrupted by another announcement: "Dear passengers. The airspace has been opened again and we are cleared for take-off. Please proceed to your seats and fasten your seat-belts. Crew prepare for take-off." Very trust building, isn't it? . But the remainder of the flight from Berlin to London was uneventful. No funny cloud colors, no smell of ash, no burning engines (hehe), nothing. After I've arrived at London Luton my first concern was the departure information screen. Quick glance: all green except for the Ryanair flights, who had said they would only resume operations on Thursday. Looks good. Wait, one more flight is cancelled. Which one? Ah, to Gibraltar. To Gibraltar? But that is my flight! What the "Yes, we are very sorry. The flight plan has not been approved by the authorities. We can book you into the 18:30 flight to Malaga if you like". I did not start to wonder why a flight to Malaga was approved, while one to Gibraltar 100km to the west was not. I thought briefly about flying right back to Germany, just to get off the Island again and be able to take another means of transportation. But then I remembered that all trains had been sold out for days in advance. Well, to Malaga then please. I don't really expect to arrive there tonight. And then there is of course the question of how to get to Gibraltar at 22:30. But I've decided that this is also a kind of adventure by itself. And the harder it is to reach Gibraltar, the happier I'll be once I get there and can set sail again. Right?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:08

To fly or not to fly

Good news: a new guidance by the authorities "allows a phased reintroduction of much of the airspace which was closed due to the volcanic ash plume over the UK" from today onward. Which means that planes are flying again, hurray. However, I received two emails this morning from Monarch, the Airline that operates the flight to Gibraltar: #1, at 2:21am: A Volcanic ash cloud drifting over the UK has resulted in the closure of UK airspace and forced the cancellation of all Monarch flights on Wednesday 21st April. #2, at 2:42am: Monarch will be resuming flights from 21 April. Additional services are being operated to and from Europe to repatriate customers currently displaced as a result of the recent airspace closure. Flights operating from the UK will operate as standard Monarch operations and passengers holding bookings for these flights should proceed to the airport and check-in for these flights as normal. So ... canceled or not? I guess we will see. It is a little risky, and I might be stranded in London. Hehe. We'll see

Posted by Axel Busch at 00:37

Monday, April 19. 2010

Grounded

"We would like to advise passengers that all flights have been suspended, owing to the ash cloud generated by an Icelandic volcanic eruption." Isn't it just too funny? The short trip to see my mum will, again, take longer than expected. Friends, please admire my skills at picking just the wrong time for my trips . Mum broke her wrist and elbow. Mum is fine though, and was really happy to see me. Which is all that matters at the moment. She will be in hospital for another week and then in rehab for three weeks. Let's hope her wrist will be fine again. And folks, take care with your gardening work now that spring is here! It is obviously much more dangerous than sailing. Now I am waiting for my return flight to Gibraltar via London. Because of "the ash cloud" I've rescheduled my flights to Wednesday. The fact that the authorities are prolonging the flight suspensions on a half-day basis gives hope that it is only a temporary situation and the planes will fly soon again. Surely they have gathered hard data by now and would inform us if the conditions were not expected to improve for a while. Or would they? It never surprises me how often authorities act unreasonable and obscure. So a plan B is required. In my case this is the 28 hour train ride via Paris and Madrid to Malaga, and then a Bus to Gibraltar from there. I've decided not to take the Sunday or Monday trains, because they are traditionally overcrowded at the best of times and I didn't want to take the space from people that need to get to work. But depending on the developments today I might book a ticket for the train tomorrow because I have to get out of the marina on Friday. And there is still the engine service and some welding to do. Ironically the wind has been blowing pretty steadily from the east for the last three weeks, and the forecast says it will continue like that for the next two. With that wind it would have taken me only two weeks to sail from Barcelona to Gibraltar, and not three months. To quote Robert Burns: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft agley." . In the meantime I am enjoying a few sunny days in Berlin. I've never been here as a tourist before, so I can catch up on a little sightseeing today and maybe tomorrow.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:24

Tuesday, April 13. 2010

More upgrades / shopping around in Gibraltar

The first day in a new place is always very busy, but yesterday was even more so. After a shower and breakfast I did my laundry and spread out the sails to dry. When I arrived I was told that I had to leave after four days. This wouldn't have allowed me to fly home, so after the office opened I went to the harbor master again and got permission to stay until the 25th. The harbor master had also given me the address of a stainless steel workshop, and I spent two hours with yardstick, Mike and his son from Gibstainlesspencil and paper to create a drawing of the back gantry which will support the equipment mast and take all the antennas and compasses. By now this is an impressive array (2x GPS, Iridium, Navtex, Wifi, AIS, "regular" compass and Autopilot compass), and it would be just a little inconvenient if I lost it in a storm. With the drawing in the backpack I went to Gibstainless to discuss the setup with Mike, the owner. After incorporating his suggestions I placed the order. It should be ready by the 21st and will set me back Å,Å£300, but I think that is well worth it. Actually I had calculated with a little more than that, so I was happy. Gibraltar Main Street. After that I went to Sheppard's yacht maintenance to get an appointment for servicing my engine. It is quite a while since it has been serviced, and on the way to Gibraltar it started to puff air out of the little tube that you use to measure the amount of oil in the engine. Nothing serious I think, should be just a clogged up valve or tube that feeds back to the air intake. But it's a good opportunity to make sure everything is fine before I leave Europe. And going over the engine together with an expert will help me troubleshooting it myself in the future. Another well invested Å,Å£80. The main square. Next stop was Sheppard's ship chandlery. The winch for the furlex is not self-tailing and is giving me big headaches because I'm often running out of hands to hold on to things. A self-tailing winch makes sure that the line is always secured and cannot slip out after it has been hauled in, and that is exactly what I need here: a Lewmar #7 self-tailing winch. Another thing that is giving me headaches is the block for the genoa sheet. At the moment this is simply a block shackled to a rail with many holes, and impossible to adjust without leaving the cockpit. It also bangs noisily against the boat often. What I want instead is a rail on which a car with the block can be moved by pulling a line from within the cockpit. Now I'm waiting for the quote and expected delivery date. I'm afraid that will be a lot more expensive than the back gantry. That concludes all "must-have" upgrades I have on my list for Vespina for now. There are a number of things on the "nice-to-have" list, like a solar panel, an electrical anchor winch or a small stereo sound system. But I haven't missed either of them really so far, so I'm not getting them. Then I had to book the flight to Germany. Unfortunately it turned out that the flight via Madrid which I had planned to take had just been discontinued two weeks ago. The only flights from Gibraltar are now going to the UK. After a lengthy search I ended up booking flights from Gibraltar to London Luton (Monarch), London Luton to Berlin (EasyJet) and Berlin to Stuttgart (Germanwings). Lol! A somewhat extended itinerary is the price for the novelty of walking from the city center to the Airport - only 500 meters. I think that's cool, and in a masochistic kind of way worth the trouble. Just this once. Curry in the Maid Of Mettle Having successfully completed all errands I visited the Maid Of Mettle. Carolin, Chris and Pete planned to leave today towards Cadiz, and had invited me for a Curry. Yummy! Little did I know that they had devised an evil plan to pay me back for beating them at "Gotham City Racing" on the XBox. They had set up a multiplayer version of "Bomberman" on their Laptops, a classic console game. They had practiced for the last weeks, and I got bombed to pieces without the slightest hint of a chance, haha. I hope they made it through the strait all right and will arrive safely in Cadiz. They are not quite sure where they'll go next. Maybe, hopefully, we'll meet again somewhere.

Posted by Axel Busch at 10:45

Monday, April 12. 2010

In Gibraltar

Vespina in Duquesa. I've finally made it to Gibraltar. Originally I had hoped to get here in January, but between the weather this winter and my excursion to Germany I lost a lot of time. Not really lost, just spend in other ways than anticipated. I've made a lot of new friends on the way, and have very dear memories of time spend together on boats and on land. Something which would not have happened had I been able to rush through. Approaching the rock from the south. Collision course with a freighter. Solved by a quick tack. The last leg, from Duquesa to Gibraltar, was just a regular day-sail on a reach with a pleasant force 5. The swell of the last days was almost gone. After I've rounded the rock it got a little more exciting, because I had to stay clear of the many commercial vessels and ferries. The AIS chart overlay, which shows all vessels with course and speed, worked very well. Although during the day it is easy enough to guess that by just looking at the ships for a few moments. Entry into the Ocean Village Marina. On the left the Airfield. I knew the Maid of Mettle was still moored at Ocean Village Marina in the north, right next to the runway of the Airport. So I headed there and was greeted my Caroline, Chris and Pete on the pier. After plenty of cheering, hugging and a reunification Whiskey I wanted to clear into the marina. But the harbor master told me that the marina was closed because of the boat show, and that I'd have to leave immediately. The berth I was in was not really free, it only looked so. But he was kind enough to arrange a mooring for me at the other marina, Queensway Quay. Which is not next to the runway, better sheltered, closer to the city center and cheaper too. So no reason to complain really. Plenty of cannons line Queensway Quay Marina. The marina is really very nice, and there are a lot of very expensive boats around. All in the 50+ foot range. Although I was told the most expensive ones are all at the boat show at the moment. I therefor expected to pay a lot of money per day, especially because space is at a premium and the marinas at the Costa del Sol extorted 25 EUR per day from me. But no, Å,Å£8.50 it is. Great! The British Pound. I hadn't expected Gibraltar to feel that British. There are strong traces of north-african and spanish, like some of the architecture and the many scooters. But at first glance it looks (and sounds) like a bustling British city, just with a lot nicer weather.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:00

Saturday, April 10. 2010

Vespina likes muscle

Wow, what a trip. Although it was only a healthy force 7 today, that one deserves a nice meal and a beer. Make that two beers. And a chocolate fudge cake for dessert! Leaving Fuengirola look back I left Fuengirola, and got immediately and thoroughly soaked by a big, cold wave. And then again:-). Once clear of the breakwater I unfurled the genoa a bit, which was enough for 6 to 7 knots. Really no need for a main sail today. Without a main-sail Vespina didn't keel over that much and shoot into the wind, just as predicted. But the waves pushed her mightily off course anyway when I was not extremely carefull. Sadly the wind-vane and the autopilot where again useless. I tested with more or less sail area, sheet length, rudder gain etc, but to no avail. The downside of having no mainsail was that she rolled a lot more. Very uncomfortable. But on the good side again I could sail a lot better downwind, without having to fear a chinese gybe (Patenthalse). Another interesting incident today was the near-loss of my equipment mast. The screw that had fastened it to the stainless-steel fence must have tired after all the beating. The lines held it still in place, but it moved precariously back and forth. I tied the mast back on to the fence with a heavy belt as an emergency repair, and replaced the screw when I got here. Of course I had to half lean out of the boat, but was securely tied to Vespina at all times. I am so glad that I made a stainless-steel fence one of the number one priorities when I looked for a boat. The number of times this helped me are uncountable. Now I'm thinking about upgrading the equipment mast to a proper back gantry and weld it to the boat. That would also be a convenient place for a small solar panel to power the radar/chart-plotter on the crossing. Approaching Duquesa Swell at the entrance to Duquesa. Hmm, doesn't look like much from a distance. Surprisingly Vespina set up a new personal speed record today - 9.4 knots SOG, without current. The waves assisted a little;-). But the best (and adrenalin richest) part was the harbor entry into Duquesa. The swell was so crazy that the two harbor masters watched with binoculars from the pier as I made my way in, waves washing over me and Vespina keeling strongly. After I've safely docked at the welcome pier we all shared a big at my expense and they clapped me on the back heartily. Lol, awesome . I'm not surprised that Vespina is the only sailing Yacht out there in this weather when all harbor entrances are like that. The beaches at the Costa del Sol are very shallow indeed. But then I also have to say that the conditions in which I've happened (had) to sail so far were hardly what you would take your mother-in-law out in. Unless you wanted her to never again talk to you;-). Except for three nice since January the wind was always force 6 to 9, and the sea-state 3 to 5. But what can I do. I have to sail on the few days where the wind blows from a good direction. Whos's steering? Fortunately on the one occasion where I sailed on a nice day with the help of the wind-vane (last Tuesday), it worked very well. So there is hope. I also have good video footage of that. It will make you all jealous! Can't wait to edit the next movie:-). Regarding the rest of my voyage I can only hope that my luck changes and that I'll have more nice days ahead of me. The winter's over, and the regular sailing season very close. Also the Med is almost behind me, only a few more miles. Just around the corner really. I'm sure it will work out all right. And the very good thing about Vespina is that the only thing I have to be afraid of is: getting soaked. The cockpit is a little low. But she's incredibly tough and save and I never had a reason to be scared. Which is what I had hoped for when I bought her, so no reason to complain. Unfortunately my mother will be in hospital for a week because she broke her wrist badly yesterday. So tomorrow I'll sail to Gibraltar, my second major milestone of this voyage, and then fly home again to visit her and see whether I can help out. Get well soon mum!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:50

More muscle than brains

The harbor of Motril. In the background the still snow-covered Sierra Nevada. Vespina at the pier. "Something big" in the commercial harbor of Motril. Yesterday I left Motril to make my way further "as far as possible" towards Gibraltar. I planned to stay closer to the shore, where the wind should come at a slight southerly angle to the land. That way I hoped to be able to sail a more easterly course, and avoid the worst of the waves. The plan worked in so far as that I could sail a course of 260°, as much east as I needed to. I was less lucky with the waves though. The problem was the same as yesterday: neither the autopilot nor the wind-vane could cope once the boat got pushed of course. With a new wave coming in from behind every 4 seconds (I stopped the time), and many of them breaking, that happened quite often. I have some nice footage which I will upload after I've reached Gibraltar. Swell overtaking Vespina. Approaching Fuengirola. Lots of muscle needed yesterday. I can't remember the last time I had to earn my miles so hard. By the time I arrived in Fuengirola my arms hurt so much that I could hardly finish the entry in my log book. All very heroic . But stupid. Had I used my brains instead of my muscles, I might not have had to work so hard. After I arrived here I checked my emails. Roland (Äfâ€"streicher), Jens (Detlefsen) and Thorsten (Braun) had answered to my last post, suggesting that I don't hoist the main sail and simply sail only with the genoa. Moving the center of pressure thus forward will probably not prevent Vespina to get kicked off course given the current swell. But it should prevent her from keeling over

and shooting into the wind, which should allow the wind-vane or autopilot to adjust the course again. Roland described in detail how he hadn't managed without a wind-vane at all. Sounds like a plan, thanks a lot my friends! Let's see whether I can put that in effect today, and how far I get. Gibraltar is a little beyond my reach for a day-sail, and after last night I don't need another night-entry in a gale for a while. Originally I wanted to anchor off the coast, but there's no good spot in an east gale. Specifically I recommend not to approach Fuengirola in an east gale as I did. The rollers are madness. But once you are behind the breakwater it is very nice and quiet. Anyway, I hope my sailing gets smarter again quickly. I'm not particularly proud of the last days. Maybe too much of that easy land life made me all soft in the head . I've just checked out at the marina office and am ready to go. The weather forecast says 30kn of wind from the east. Yep, that fits to what I'm seeing here. Oh, I have to leave going out against that horrible swell. Better get the camera ready, that will be "fun"!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:02

Thursday, April 8, 2010

My little prima donna

Lifting the anchor Last night the wind changed from west to east, and increased to 30 knots. At half past eight I pulled up the anchor (no electrical anchor winch), and set sail towards Gibraltar. Or as close as I could set the course towards Gibraltar, which was not very close. With the wind from east, I should have been pretty much running before the wind. Because it is very hard to hold that course, and boats roll uncomfortably from left to right, I usually sail at an angle of up to 20°. More or less, depends on the boat. Looks like it's rather more for Vespina. She was still rolling heavily at 30°, and the waves were constantly threatening to push her off course. Broad reach instead of running. I had to be very alert and stem with all force against the rudder to keep her from getting turned into the wind. Unfortunately the wind-vane was no help at all today, because it could only hold a course of about 60° to the wind. So instead of running before the wind, I was more or less reaching and baby-sitting the rudder again all day. At first I blamed it on the wind-vane. But then I remembered that I had encountered the same phenomenon a couple of times before. With no swell everything is fine, but Vespina acts all funny as soon as those waves start pushing her around. I have to work the rudder so much that it feels more like rowing, and not sailing. No kidding. Maybe the problem isn't the wind-vane, but just Vespina's bilge-keel design? I looked into my log book for past wind direction vs. course steered. And yes, there seems to be a pattern. Either I'm doing something continuously horribly wrong, or Vespina has some severe limitations. Here is my highly scientific conclusion in form of a drawing: It shows at what angles of wind Vespina is easy to sail (green), hard unless there is no swell (yellow) and very frustrating (red). Angles of wind Looks to me like Vespina is a little prima donna who likes nice weather. Which is no problem for a 40nm or 50nm day-sail. But it is not so great when the plan is to cross an ocean alone, where the wind is pretty much always from behind. 20° more or less on course matters a lot when the distance is more than 2000nm. Hell, it even annoys me tremendously when it's only 100nm. But the real problem of course is that the wind-vane can't cope. Hm ... Well, over the next days I'll continue and try to make my way towards Gibraltar. I'm afraid it will not be pleasant. Any tips are highly appreciated! Or maybe I can simply weld a deep long-keel to Vespina's belly?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:33

Wednesday, April 7, 2010

At anchor

Who's steering? Not me! I left Almerimar yesterday morning. It was slow going with a light breeze from the south-east, but it felt great to be sailing again. Especially because the wind-vane did all the work on the rudder and I could enjoy it as never before. The wind changed slowly to the south, and around 15:00 it died completely. At anchor in front of Adra. Night falls. Because the forecast for today was a westerly, I had to find a place to stay. I made my way north and dropped anchor in front of Adra. My first time anchoring with Vespina! Anchoring in the sun is much nicer than lying in a marina. Today the wind is indeed coming from the west, force 3. But the sun is hot and it's a great day to sprawl on the deck reading. Could be worse .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 09:52

Sunday, April 4, 2010

Storm coming up (Updated)

The weather forecast: Force 8 to 9. I just downloaded the latest GRIB file with the meteorological data for the next few days. Very interesting. This would be a nice opportunity to test that third reef which I had put into the main sail. On the other hand it seems almost a little reckless to leave into a storm. Well, I'll see how it develops over night. Always think positive . Update It's eight in the morning now. I've only slept three hours last night, and spent the rest thinking whether to sail today or not. Which kind of answers the question already, doesn't it. The psychology of staying too long ashore: I get all excited about leaving, but at the same time scared to do it. Of course that's the thing about courage: You are scared to do it, but do it anyway. On the other hand I just now watched a seagull as I looked out of the window: It caught a fish, but the fish was too big and the seagull couldn't fly away with it despite all its crazy wing flapping. Don't bite off more than you can chew . And I don't feel like I can chew a storm today. I'll stay. The forecast for tomorrow is still wind from the east, force 2 to 3. And only a light breeze in the night. The other extreme. But that means I could try some light wind sailing with Vespina, which I haven't had the chance so far. There was either a lot of wind, or none at all. That would give me the opportunity to use the Gennaker and boom out the Genoa with the Spinnaker boom and see if everything works as expected before heading out into the Atlantic. *yawn*, I'm really tired. back to bed.

Posted by Axel Busch at 15:12

Saturday, April 3. 2010

Getting ready to leave for Gibraltar

Good news: the weather forecast predicts a full week of strong easterly winds beginning on Sunday evening. Over the last days I have been frantically working on Vespina to get her ready for the next trip. It never ends to surprise me just how much there always is to do, especially after the boat has not been sailed for a few weeks. The last I want to do is run into any avoidable surprises at sea. The usual "pre-flight" check includes: Run the engine for a while. Check the fuel. Check the engine-oil. Climb the mast. Check the boom and the lines inside. Check the stays and shrouds. Check the halyards. Check the winches. Check the rudder. Check the through-hull-fittings. Check the windows. Check the spinnaker pole. Hoist the main sail and unfurl the genoa. Check the sheets. Check the mooring lines. Check the anchor & chain. Load & check the batteries. Check the navigation & masthead lights. Check the instruments. Check the VHF radio. Check the GPS. Check the gas bottle. Check the maps. Check the weather forecast, tide tables and navigational warnings. Do the laundry. Backup the hard-disks. Re-pack the grab-bag. Stock up on water, food, toilet paper, soap, sunscreen etc. ... And a good thing I checked: One of the stays for the equipment mast had come loose, the lamp of the position lights in the front was broken, and the rudder needed greasing. In addition I replaced the sheet for the Blister with a thinner one (6mm instead of 12mm). That way the Blister should be more usefull in very light wind because the lighter rope doesn't drag it down so much. All of that is done, and then some. What's left to do is to plan the trip! Ideally I would leave Almerimar at daylight and approach Gibraltar well after dawn, and with enough safety margin should the trip take a little longer then planned. The distance is a little less than 140nm. All of it in a straight line with the wind of force 4-7 at about 15°, from the back. That means that I should be underway for approximately 30 hours. Sunrise is at the moment at 08:00, and sunset at 20:45. So I could leave Almerimar at 08:00 in the morning and expect to arrive around 14:00 next day in Gibraltar. Which means I will be well away from the rock during the night, I will come in with the rising tide, and I will have about six hours of safety margin before the sun sets. Sounds good. However, the weather forecast predicts gusts of more than 40 knots in Gibraltar for Monday during the day. Fast sailing, but because the Marina in Gibraltar is not too sheltered I would like to avoid arriving in these conditions. I'm a chicken, I know. Tuesday afternoon looks much more promising, only about 25 knots. So here's the plan: Leave Almerimar on Monday morning at 08:00, and arrive in Gibraltar on Tuesday afternoon. Visit the caves, take pictures of the apes on the rock, and with any luck leave again on Thursday and pass through the strait and into the Atlantic. Finally!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:34