

Saturday, June 26. 2010

Diving Retrospective / Back to La Graciosa

Inside "La Catedral" Around La Catedral The last days I went mostly diving, as you might have guessed already. I have completed 13 dives now, most of them between 25 and 30 meters deep and lasting around 40 minutes. What is interesting is that I feel a kind of anxiety just before the descend. But it is easy to fight and once I'm underwater and breath regularly it is completely gone. The dive itself is just wonderful. I check my depth, my air and my timer regularly. I stay close to my buddy, and I have no care in the world. Just floating. Once I had trouble with my mask. It kept filling with water and I couldn't blow it out. I was about 27m deep and I couldn't read my instruments anymore with the mask full of water. I was afraid I would sink down, or even worse, go up rapidly. That was pretty scary, and I started to breath more quickly. The whole idea of diving felt like a pretty stupid thing to do suddenly. Pietro from Milano. Now lives in Munich. My buddy was a little ahead of me, but Pietro, another diver, was right behind me. I signaled him that I had problems with my mask. He came to me, and I held on to his vest with one hand. That took care of my anxiety to go up (thanks Pietro!), and I could begin to check what was wrong. As it turned out my hood somehow interfered with my mask (I think it was a bubble of air that had caught in the hood) and when I took off the hood and put the mask back on without it I could clear the mask and everything was fine again. Now I'm diving without the hood. Another wreck. Lots around here. On the deeper dives, more than 30m, I also start to feel itchy when the decompression time limit approaches. Then I get a little nervous and want to ascend with time to spare. I guess that's just inexperience, because I don't have a good feeling yet for the ascend. And how the deco limit changes with the depth. And I really don't want to have to do decompression stops on the way up. It's not really rational, because the dive computer tells me how slowly I have to ascend, and it's easy to calculate how long the air will last. But well, better safe than sorry, right? So far I usually surfaced with 50 to 70 bars left in the bottle and more or less with the other teams. I think that's ok for my level of experience, and I don't want to start pushing it before I feel really confident and have more air left at the end of the dive. These will be the last diving movies for a while: And now for something completely different ... Gudrun V! Tomorrow I fly to La Graciosa again, where I will meet with Marti and his whole family on Gudrun V. They want to collect some personal things, and then we will get Gudrun V ready so that I can sail her to Las Palmas. I visited the harbor master today and managed to reserve a berth at the same pontoon that Vespina is - lucky again. I am really interested in how other people that bought boats feel towards their sellers. Either I am exceptionally lucky, or all boat sellers are the most wonderful people in the world. Ulrich and Anke, who sold me Vespina, are just fantastic and helped me a lot in preparing for the voyage. Even when I was well underway they always made time when I called with a question. Very kind and caring. Same with Marti: First he left his sailing school for three days so that I could survey Gudrun V thoroughly before buying. Three days and two nights on a boat - what more can you ask? And now the whole family is coming for almost a week to make sure that my first voyage on Gudrun V will be a success. Amazing! I guess I am exceptionally lucky. But then again it is said that "luck favors the prepared", so maybe it is not totally undeserved. Only a little. Even though: it will be sad day when I leave Vespina and move to Gudrun V. There is nothing really wrong with Vespina, she is as fine a boat as they come. I feel Vespina was just the right boat for me at the time. Certainly I couldn't have handled a boat like Gudrun V alone in November, much less could I have sailed on the rivers with 2,50m draft. Truth be told, I will be hard pushed now to do everything right, and Gudrun V will not be as forgiving as Vespina. But that's how you improve - constantly and slowly pushing your limits ever outward. Never stop, never give up.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:41

Wednesday, June 23, 2010

Paperwork / wreck diving

Dive Guide Whatshisname Wreck diving is awesome. At the moment I am forced to wait while the paperwork for Gudrun V is being processed. A good chance to catch up on some studying for the Sportseeschifferschein and other interesting things like Spanish etc. But all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, which we can't be having of course. Well, the Canaries are known for good swimming, diving and hiking, which is exactly what I am planning to do. Since the weather is a little unstable the moment (there was even a slight hint of rain), I started with diving! There are a couple of wrecks outside of the harbor, and today we visited the KALAI, a Greek cargo vessel. Or what is left of her. Check out the movie: My buddy for the dive was Susana. It was her first dive after completing the PADI Open Water Diver course, but that didn't slow her down in any way. Up, down, left, right, spin around and the other way - I had a hard time keeping up with the little water flea. But in all the excitement she must have missed the part about the three minute "security stop" at 5m on the way up, and I pulled her down and helped her to the anchor line. But hey, that's what the buddy system is for, so no sweat. Looking for mermaids? Maybe down there? Word is there's one around the corner.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:03

Sunday, June 20. 2010

A new sailboat!

Last week Liz came to visit. We met on Lanzarote on Sunday, because from Monday to Wednesday I had arranged to look at a boat there - Gudrun V. Because Gudrun V is a big boat (39ft), and I expect to sail her for many years, I wanted Liz's input before deciding on a purchase. Female intuition and all. Marti's. On Monday morning we took the ferry to La Graciosa where we were met by Marti's, the current owner of Gudrun V, at the port. He and his wife Yaiza had send me many emails over the last weeks with pictures and all the information I had wanted, and I felt that I had a good idea of what to expect. In turn I had send them my checklist for the pre-purchase survey, and we knew it would be two busy days. The side So we started right away. First with a look at the bilge, which is usually the worst part of a steel or aluminum boat. Then we worked our way upwards through the lockers and along the hoses and cables. Normally it is very hard to get access to the hull, if it is possible at all. On Vespina I have an axe and crowbar close at hand if I have to do it in an emergency. But on Gudrun V all panels can be taken away without turning a single screw. Same goes for access to the engine and propeller shaft from all sides. The only area that is hard to get to is the space behind the galley (kitchen). Wonderful setup, especially since it makes checking (and later maintaining) the boat very easy. Sprayhood and tentHugging, a very important sea trial. We worked our way through the checklist until 9pm, and then had dinner in town before crawling into the fore peak to sleep. After a quick breakfast on Tuesday morning we took Gudrun V out of the harbor. First we sailed a few tacks upwind and then downwind before throwing the anchor in a little bay. I put on my diving goggles and grabbed my camera to inspect the keel, propeller and rudder while Liz went snorkeling a bit. Then we motored back to the marina with the autopilot, which concluded the sea-trails. Wednesday morning we cleaned up and then escorted Marti to the airport. We had clicked very well in those few days and it felt already like saying good-bye to an old friend. Well, not for long. Gudrun V is such an awesome boat, that I've decided to buy her. The contracts are already signed, and only little paperwork left. We want to meet in a week to hand over the boat, papers, etc. Chicken on the volcano grill - yummy! Playa de las Canteras, Las Palmas The rest of Wednesday and Thursday Liz and I spent on Lanzarote, where I showed her my favorite places. Thursday evening we flew to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria for a visit to Vespina, the beach, and sightseeing in the city. Now Liz is on her way back and it will be August until we meet again. But more about Gudrun V: The stern. She was built in 1981 by Astilleros Gudrun of Cartagena. She is the fifth boat in a series of aluminum racing boats that the shipyard has built for trans-atlantic races. The primary work of the shipyard is for the Navy, and the racing boats are a sideline. More a hobby of the owner of the shipyard really. When you built battleships for a living some of the philosophy is going to end up in all your designs, and consequently Gudrun is a strong, practical ship that is built to last. The last 30 years hardly left a sign at the material. The cabin Marti's and Yaiza bought Gudrun 10 years ago. They have sailed Gudrun V to Turkey and back, and lived on her throughout the winters when their sailing school near Barcelona is closed. During that time they have rebuild the interior for living comfortably with their two children, while taking care not to overload the boat and distribute the weight perfectly. The result is a real home in the harbor and at anchor, and a secure, fast, stable and very well-balanced ship at sea. Now they are expecting their third child, and the boat is getting too small. The sail plan Of course there are also drawbacks. The biggest one is probably the draft of 2,50m. What is great for sailing is going to be a pain when entering harbors and especially near reefs. Will be interesting in the Caribbean. The other drawback is really a two-sided sword: no windows. Very safe in heavy weather, and very private in the marina. But unlike in Vespina (with her 360° vision) I cannot look out to see what is going on around me and will always have to climb into the cockpit. So what's the plan now? I will bring Gudrun V here to Las Palmas because I want to have the mast checked by professionals and change the standing and running rigging. She also needs new Batteries, new Antifouling, a coat of paint for the deck and mast, and new sails. Then I want to move some of the electronic equipment from Vespina to Gudrun, like the Satellite phone, Navtex, AIS and maybe Radar. And of course all my other gear. Then a test-sail around the Islands or to Madeira and back. Liz and I stayed for two full days and nights on Gudrun V, which is more than I could have hoped for before a purchase. But I expect that I have missed some things, and as usual many other little things will come up. With the trip to Germany in August it will probably be late September by the time I can leave the Canary Islands and sail to the Cap Verde Islands. And Vespina? Yep, tough question. I really like her and she is a good and reliable boat. It turned out she is not made for long passages, but she is very safe and really wonderful for day-sails around islands etc., especially because you don't have to worry so much what is happening underneath the water surface. I guess I'll put her on the dry somewhere here or find a cheap berth (e.g. La Graciosa) and place an add online. But I won't be too unhappy if she doesn't sell very quickly, and instead my friends come and sail or live a little on her now and then.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:56

Friday, June 11. 2010

Bye bye Fuerteventura

Christina and Chris. Chris up the mast. Lunatic. After two weeks on Fuerteventura it was time to move on. Thanks to Michael and his family I had seen the interior of the Island, and in Morro Jable/Jandia I had made extensive use of the great sandy beach. The diving added another (new) dimension to this, and with every time I liked it more. There is something special to swimming weightlessly among the fishes, and seeing what usually remains hidden from view on the boat. Lucky for me Bettina, my new-found diving buddy, had an underwater camera with her. Unfortunately it stopped working at 20m. But it's enough for a very very short movie: Preparing the gear. blub blub. Nice, ey? Seems like 'some people' get the rapture of the deep already at 5m meters, tststs. Usually we were diving at the reef between 20m and 30m, but one time we went down to 41m, and that was really something. Very blue, very tranquil. Magical. During the two weeks Vespina was mostly in the harbor. Except for the two Saturday excursions, once with the Reuthers, and once with Chris and Christina from the diving school. Unfortunately most days the wind was too strong to put the boat at anchor and leave it unattended. Vespina at anchor. But on my last day there was only a very light breeze during the day, and I anchored in front of the old harbor and paddled around with my kajak. A good opportunity to take some pictures of Vespina. Gran Canaria, the next island, is only 58nm from Morro Jable. With my "speed limit" of 4 knots that means either to get up very early and arrive late, or to leave late, sail through the night and arrive early. I prefer to arrive early. So in the evening I lifted the anchor and set sail towards Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. After 14 hours and an uneventful night I was about to enter the harbor and started to furl in the genoa. When the lumbago (Hexenschuss) struck. Dammit! I had taken great care when lifting the anchor. Sitting down, back straight, etc. But 21kg at the end of 50m chain is a lot of weight, and there is just no really comfortable way to get it up. I had noticed a slight discomfort at the small of my back at the time, but it was quickly gone. So it was a big and very painful surprise when half a day later I suddenly crumbled over the genoa winch. Painkillers helped me to get Vespina into the harbor, where I started treatment with capsaicin and diclofenac. At the moment I can hardly walk, and I'm afraid washing the salt of Vespina and exploring the city will have to wait a little while. And it looks like an electrical anchor winch just made it onto the very top of the must-have list.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:31

Friday, June 4, 2010

Swimming and diving.

Helloooo little fishes This week I spent mostly swimming and diving. The beaches here are absolutely fantastic. After a little research I signed up for a CMAS bronze course at the Tauchschule Felix, and I am really happy with my choice. The theory goes deeper than I had thought, and the teachers are laid back and competent. Tomorrow I'll take some of them sailing on Vespina. Let's see how they like it. The other major activity besides swimming and diving was looking for boats on the internet. Vespina's designer, Mr. Reinke, never got back to me regarding the center keel. As I have mentioned I am really unhappy with the way Vespina sails. And after pounding the issues for days in my head, I decided that I will not sail much further with Vespina. In this regard "our personalities" just don't match, and so it is very frustrating. This sounds like a catastrophe for the voyage. But I think it is not. Vespina was the perfect boat for my relative inexperience, the journey on the rivers and the horrible weather in the Mediterranean throughout the winter. But the nature of the voyage changed over those miles, and my knowledge and confidence as a sailor increased. Considering with how little I started, it is not surprising that I now look for different things in a boat than I did nine months ago. Financially it is also not a catastrophe, because I knew from the beginning that something like this could happen. And true to my beloved KISS-concept I kept it simple and didn't invest too much into my first boat. There were some upgrades, but they either increased the value of Vespina or I can take them with me to the new boat. Of course there is the question of the new boat. Fortunately I found one that seems almost perfect, and she is right here on the Canary Islands. I hope to get a chance to sail her soon, so stay tuned.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:12