

Tuesday, August 31. 2010

Vacations and unwelcome visitors

Last week Wednesday I returned to Las Palmas to find that I hadn't missed much. The mast was still in the same condition as when I had left: The boom was still unpainted. The batteries and spare parts for the winches not delivered yet, the request for deletion of the Spanish flag unprocessed, etc. August in Spain - the whole country on vacation. Because a hot wind was blowing from the Sahara and my back was still giving me problems I decided to take it easy as well and wait for conditions to improve. Back home everybody always called me a workaholic, but I have no problem at all to sit (or lie) on my boat for days and just read. My quiet reading on Vespina Thursday evening was however soon interrupted when I saw a little cockroach scurry past. Eeeeeek! After unmercifully killing it with a handy little anti-cockroach spray I went looking for it's brothers and sisters. And found one more, which was disposed of as quickly. Then I went outside to get away from the effects of the spray as well as to contemplate the next steps in the "retaking of Vespina". Cockroaches! On my boat! Unthinkable. I remembered reading that for each of the little buggers you see there are 100 hidden. Images of hordes of cockroaches crawling in the holds of Vespina sprang up in my head. Horror. But where had they come from? Why had they picked Vespina? How to get rid of them without harm to myself? I didn't sleep well that night, even though I moved to Gudrun, which seems to be free of cockroaches. Next day I talked to Roy, a great source of knowledge about all things connected with boats (as well as electronics and management). He wasn't surprised that I had found some cockroaches. Apparently half of the boats on the pontoon got invested while I was away. The boat of his neighbor so badly that he sprayed the whole boat with gas and went back to England. According to Roy cockroaches get on board usually in one (or all) of three ways: eggs carried on in cardboard or on the soles of the shoes, or they climb up the ropes themselves. In the latter they need only the tiniest gap to enter a boat. (Well, they don't have to look long for a tiny gap on Vespina. There are very big ones at the companion hatch!) Inside the boat they live mostly from remains of food (e.g. under the stove) or simply cardboard. They like the glue of cardboard boxes especially. And corrugated cardboard is like a purpose-built shelter and hatching environment. Fortunately they can easily be gotten rid of by cutting their access to food and water, and distributing boric acid. And patience, because it can take up to three weeks for all eggs to hatch. Here's the recipe for "anti cockroach cake": • 5g boric acid • 5g icing sugar • 10g flour • a drop of oil and a little water Mix, put on aluminum foil and distribute in the boat. water trapa serving of "anti cockroach cake" First I removed all cardboard from Vespina, and made sure that all access to water was plugged. Then I prepared the "anti cockroach cake" and put it into the holds and along the supposed "cockroach highways". I also built a "water trap", poisoned with boric acid and sweetened with icing sugar. Then I sprayed all possible entrances (wire holes, etc.) with anti-cockroach spray. After also spraying the mooring lines and cleats I left. But I was sure glad that I didn't have to fly "to england" but can just stay three boats down the pontoon on Gudrun . Today, four days later, I checked up on my "treasure hunt". I couldn't find any cockroaches (dead or alive), only some tiny flies in the water trap. Well, patience. New batteries. 3x40kg and 1x14kg In the meantime August is almost over and people are returning from vacation. Yesterday Octavia proceeded with the rigging, Lolo started to paint the boom, and today even the batteries got delivered! The winches & spares are still missing, but are supposed to arrive "within the next days". Good news, it looks like I can put the mast back in maybe as soon as Friday.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:45

Sunday, August 22. 2010

Sailing classes at Lake Constanz

A dinghy full of sailing students The instructor posing with one of his students For the last seven days I was "working" as a sailing instructor at the Lake Constanz (Bodensee). As usual at the lake in the summer there is either rain+wind or sun+none. We had plenty of rain this time. And wind, which was great. It's been the 7th or 8th time for me, but it is always exciting to see how the students learn to cope with the usually new situation on a boat. And this year it was especially exciting for me to see that I had changed since last year - a lot more calmer and patient. Interesting. Personally I think that few things are as rewarding as a good sailing class. Apart from acquiring what could be a survival skill it teaches lessons that are very handy in everyday life: Assessing a situation, making a decision, communicating it clearly and executing it in sync with others. And not surprisingly it's the communication part that takes the students longest to learn every year A pirate on board? Sheltered bbq. Next for me: Three more days in Germany, and then back to Las Palmas!

Posted by Axel Busch at 07:32

Friday, August 6. 2010

The ideal navigation dashboard

Yesterday I got interviewed by a "Strategic Design Consultancy" about route planning, navigation, chart-plotters and the like. One of their clients is working on a new line of products for the "light marine" market - fishing, recreational and leisure craft. I happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time (or right?), and ended up being the first interview subject. The interviewer wanted to know how I go about route planning and navigation. What software and devices I use and what I think about this and that. He had done projects for the same client in the aeronautic and maritime industries, but the private market was new to him. As was sailing. For two hours we talked about route planning, navigation, software, devices, interfaces etc. Only recently I had experimented a lot with the subjects on Smart-phones (iPhone, Android), Laptops (Windows, Mac), Chart-Plotters (Raymarine, Furuno and Lowrance). So I guess he could have picked a worse interview partner. Or maybe not. It seems while the client has admitted that at the moment he has no idea what his customer base really needs, he has already decided what they are going to get. Software for cool hardware like the iPad and with cool features like augmented reality. Which is a wonderful idea if all you want to do with the gear is to show off in the bar to your non-sailor friends. But actually using it on the boat? Not really. First of all capacitive touch-screens don't work at all with wet fingers or gloves on. Not that I wouldn't be fascinated by cool hardware and features. But as a sailor that has had his share of frustration with electronic gear I am begging on my knees: Please get the basics right first before you add the cool stuff. To me the basics are: • Course over ground (COG) • Speed over ground (SOG) • Compass course • Depth • Distance travelled (Log) • Distance, bearing and time to next waypoint • Time • Temperature • Atmospheric pressure • Battery voltage (• Humidity) Despite having spend more than 4000 EUR on navionics equipment this year (aaargh!) I still need to consult four displays and click buttons just to collect the data that I enter every couple of hours into my logbook. So ... here's my ideal navigation dashboard: My ideal navigation dashboard. See below for glossary. My Raymarine C80 has a dashboard, but it only shows a fraction of the info. And the font size is too small to read from further away than one meter. And the alarms are next to useless. And it uses too much power. And, and, and ... it's actual surprising how bad it is, given the price and the many years they are developing the stuff. We'll see. I send my design to the consulting company together with a summary of the preferred features and some issues. I don't think it'll help much, because I have seen too many times that products are more defined by what's considered cool and company politics than by real market requirements. But we have to try, don't we. Glossary: SOG: Speed over ground Vel: Velocity in water COG: Course over ground HDG: Heading, course of the boat in water Log: Distance travelled Lat: Latitude Lon: Longitude Dpth: Depth VMG: Velocity made good towards the waypoint. BRG: Bearing. Direct course from the current position to the waypoint. DTW: Distance to waypoint. TTG: Time to go. ETA: Estimated time of arrival Best BRG: Fastest course to waypoint. Calculated from VMG on different COGs. MMSI: Maritime Mobile Service Identity. The radio number of a vessel. CPA: Closest point of approach TCPA: Time to closest point of approach

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:31

Monday, August 2. 2010

The mast is painted, but not yet ready.

Cracked weld at the spreader base.rewelded and paintedOriginally the mast was supposed to be put back into the boat last week wednesday. As it turned out the spreader bases had to be completely rewelded, which took a few days longer. Then the entry to the sail-track had to be adjusted from racing-sails without cars to cruising sails with cars, which took additional time. On saturday the paint was finally sprayed on ... and it looks magnificent! The painted mast. In the background the boom with primer.But still all the rolls, terminals, wires, cables, mounts etc. have to be fitted, which will take two or three more days. Unfortunately the work won't be completed before I fly to Germany for three weeks on Wednesday morning to meet friends and family. So the mast will have to wait at the boatyard until I return. Well, better slow than sloppy. In the meantime my new friends here are totally determined to help me improve my Spanish to a level that allows conversation. Some even refuse to talk to me in anything but Spanish! I know I should be glad, but I can tell you it makes "going out for a beer" suddenly hard work. Fortunately, as we all know, the ability to speak a foreign language increases in direct proportion to the amount of alcohol consumed ... salud! Hicks!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:06