

Monday, February 28. 2011

A Dinghy

St. Martin, Monday, 28.02.2011, 23:00 UTC-4 First thing this morning I took the toilet apart to see what's wrong and what parts I need. But once I had unmounted the bowl and could inspect it I didn't had to look much further. The electrical pump was completely corroded. That confirmed my decision to go for a toilet with a manual pump. Simple and reliable (and they don't flood the boat even if the seacock is broken/open and the boat is heeled over). Because after three weeks without a toilet I know one thing ... having a quiet place to "do your business" is one of the more important parts of a comfortable and sociable lifestyle. With a shopping list in my pocket I had a little time to kill before Scott would come to pick me up in his dinghy, and I used that time to review the pictures. From the 1200 pictures taken on the trip there are about 100 good ones, of which 30 are special. Well, to me at least. I hope that I can upload them to the blog tomorrow. But it's a little awkward without fast internet on board, only the 0.002 MBit(!) Iridium connection. I went to Burger King today because they seem to have the most reliable wifi around (and nice toilets), but there were so many emails to answer that I didn't get to upload the pictures to the blog. Fortunately I am now the proud owner of a Dinghy and independently mobile! The experiences with the Dinghies that came with Vespina and Gudrun had been very depressing - both lasted only 2 days then spontaneously self-deflated. Not wanting to see such a sorry sight again I was adamant to invest in the best - a Caribe 9X RIB. Surprisingly it took the whole day to get everything sorted out and rigged up and I have yet to install the Hydrofoils. Therefore I didn't get to do much else. But now I can go places, and fast too. I love it. For example I can go shopping! The first thing I bought was the new toilet. The second and third were anchors, a Delta and a Fortress. I only had one anchor (CQR) so far, which is absolutely adequate ... if you don't anchor and only stay in the marina. But with three strong anchors (and chain) I should be fine. And with a little luck I will finish installing the new toilet tomorrow. Then I'm set up and can relax and take it more slowly with the rest of the repairs. As Gerd pointed out already I'm in the Caribbean now! Beer, Rum & Cocktails, right? Incidentally, from March 3rd to 6th the 31st Heineken Regatta is happening here, and the motto is "Serious Fun" ...

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 22:35

Movie in the making

St. Martin, Sunday, 27.02.2011, 23:30 (UTC-4) What a luxury! A full night's sleep without having to get up. I was actually surprised that I could sleep for 8 hours straight, after sleeping for not more than one hour at a time for the last three weeks (and then with an uneasy feeling). Some say ignorance is bliss. But I say sleep is even better! First thing in the morning I installed the new solar controller - a BlueSky 2000E with Max Power Point Tracking. Roy said MPPT is the thing to have, and I trust Roy. Then I put my kayak into the water to meet up with Henk, Scott and Midge for breakfast. It took me 20 minutes to paddle to Henk across the Lagoon, and I was pretty wet by the time I got there. Too much wind for the sit-on-top. Scott arrived quickly afterwards and took us all to the shore with his RIB. Against the wind and waves, and then we were really wet. Actually I took my shirt and shorts off on the way and just sat there in the Dinghy in my trunks. But the sun was shining and we dried quickly enough. We had breakfast at a great french bakery, and I had a chance to look at my regular emails for the first time in three weeks. That hadn't happened in ... 16 years. I had not forwarded them to the Iridium account, because with only 2400 Baud bandwidth is very, very precious. And I had a chance to read the comments on my blog. I cried from laughing. My friends, I love you. You are wonderful, and I'm the luckiest man alive to have you and your support. I'm not surprised that I didn't feel lonely at sea - you were with me all the time. Thanks so much! On my way back to Gudrun I stopped by at Nimble Navigator Mike's boat, and then I went back to see how the solar charger is doing. Wow! 20A charge. That is just unbelievable (do you hear me Chris - unbelievable!). Connected to the Rutland controller (also not cheap) the best I had got was 5A from one panel. And now the two panels give me four times that. Unbelievable! Then I started editing the movie of the crossing for real. I had three hours and thirtyfive minutes of footage. And now, 11 hours later, I think I have a version that I can show to Liz for reviewing. It's 17 minutes long, and at the moment I can't find more to throw out. But the most difficult part is yet to come - the soundtrack. I don't have anything out of the can that fits that length, even if I cut it down to half. So I'll have to spend some time to cook up a score of my own. I'm going to use "Soundtrack Pro" for that. And that's going to take me a day at least, because I have next to no knowledge of composing, and only very little of Soundtrack Pro. But I'm looking forward to it. I wanted to do that since I was 14 and mixed music on my tape deck. Some things are worth waiting for, even if it's 20 years. With a little luck I can upload it on Wednesday evening. So, the plan for tomorrow is: #1 get a dinghy #2 find fast wifi, upload the movie and skype with Liz #3 go shopping for groceries #4 fix the head #5 review and select pictures for posting to the blog Hang on Matt! The pictures are coming. Some of them are also worth the wait

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

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:07

Saturday, February 26. 2011

In the Caribbean

After arriving in St. Martin (or rather Sint Maarten, since it was on the south (Dutch) side of the island), I anchored in the Simpson Bay and called Henk on the VHF. The anchor didn't hold, and as I lifted it up to try a second time Henk was already coming out through the bridge. The bridge is of the lifting type and opens for boats two times a day. We hurried up to get into the Lagoon before it closed again. Actually we were 10 Minutes late, but I had called the bridge on Channel 12 and the guy was so kind to wait for us. He wasn't happy, but he waited. Cool. Then we anchored in the Lagoon, also on the dutch side where the water is deeper. Not really that deep. I have a draft of 2.50m, and the water below my keel is 2.80. Not much left to spare, huh. Then we did the maneuver again because the anchor didn't hold again. Then we celebrated my arrival with a beer, before heading to the shore with Henk's dinghy to check me in. Checking in was surprisingly fast and painless. And a little funny. The girl at immigration asked me to please specify all crew members on the immigration and not just myself. I said I was alone. "What, you came all the way from Spain alone? Are you crazy?". Maybe a little. We also reserved a place in the Simpson Bay Marina for the time when I'll fly home to Germany to pick up Liz. Until then I'll stay here at anchor and do my repairs. There's a lot to do. At Budget Marine I picked up a new regulator for the solar panel and looked at Dinghies. You have to have a Dinghy in the Caribbean, or you're socially below the horizon because you can't go anywhere and don't meet anybody. Then we went back to Gudrun, hoping that the anchor had held this time. It had. Now I'm getting ready to sleep because I'm really tired. I just hope the planes don't fly all night. They pass directly over my boat when they lift off the airport. And I was wondering why there are relatively few boats here, hehe. But before I go to bed I have to savor that thought: I am in the Caribbean. Came here on my own in the boat that I've rebuilt from keel up for the last seven months. Isn't that just sooooo cool?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 18:02

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

at anchor in the lagoon. yeah!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 10:27

Land!

Day 22, Saturday, 26.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (08:00 local), 18:00.4N 62:49.0W, 25.5°C, 1016mBar Almost there. And it's about time, too. Yesterday afternoon I had to tape the autopilot to the tiller because the bolt on the tiller to which it connects had come off. I can put it back in its hole, but I can't fasten it. With the sticky tape it's holding out surprisingly well, but I wouldn't want to have to go another day. The first thing I have to repair in port is that tiller. Take it apart completely and replace all nuts and bolts. Also I ran out of water this morning. Well, in the forward tanks. The main tank and the emergency supply is still untouched, so I'll probably survive the last three hours. The forward tanks hold 150l in total, but I lost about 30l due to a leak. 120l in 21 days makes about 6l a day. A little more than I had expected. Now compare that to your regular household consumption. The last night must have been one of the longest in my life. Even longer than a transcontinental evening flight heading west in the tourist class with a noisy neighbor and no in-seat IFE. I passed Barbuda in the middle of the night and entered the Leeward Islands. Sleep was hard to find after that, especially after I picked up the first vhf radio transmission since leaving Las Palmas an hour later. I feel much safer far, far away from land and other vessels. At five thirty in the morning I could make out the volcano ridge of St.-Barthelemy to the south-west. Land! Only 30nm to go to St. Martin. Because of my draft of 2.50m I can only enter the great Simpson Bay Lagoon of St.-Martin through the southern entrance on the Dutch side, and to get there I had to pass Pointe Blanche, the cape in the south-western corner. The water is usually between 20 and 40m deep, but the charts warn of shoal patches in the area. I'm pretty much done preparing the boat for anchoring at the entrance of the bridge, where Henk wants to meet me. Then I have to check in and find a place to put the boat. I'll probably go into a marina for the first few days to clean and repair the boat, before moving to the anchorage inside the Lagoon. Nimble-Navigator-Mike should be there too. 18nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:13

Friday, February 25. 2011

UTC-4

Day 21, Friday, 25.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (08:00 local), 18:23.0N 60:03.0W, 26.5°C, 1015 mBar Yesterday was one of the best sailing days ever. Blue sky with traces of cirrus clouds, wind of 10 to 15kn from NE, and a calm sea. I had full sails up all day and Gudrun was going fast and steady westward. An easy 180nm, absolutely fantastic. The boat was so steady that I finished reviewing and classifying the video footage and did some rough editing too. The night sky was clear and dark, the moon rising only early in the morning. Great for spotting stars and shooting stars, there were a few. But about five in the morning the wind increased and I had to reef. Now the sky is full of cumulus, the sea is getting rougher, spray is washing over the deck and yesterday's pleasant cruise is already a distant memory. Today is a holding-on-to-something-day. So, is this what my last day at sea is going to be like? Well, at least it's fast going and unless the weather is playing tricks on me I'll reach St. Martin before noon tomorrow (local time). And I have enough battery power left to run the fridge and have a cold beer ready for Henk, who is waiting for me. Incidentally I have just passed the 60th longitude and entered a new time-zone, UTC-4. Four time zones in 21 days. Well, three really, the canary islands are right at the border of UTC. Which means that at this pace I would circle the world in 168 days. Not that I intend to. This was a fun and interesting trip, but I'm looking forward to make landfall and sleep through a full night for a change. Without having to get up to have a look around or reef the mainsail. 180nm to go. Only one more day!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:02

Thursday, February 24, 2011

A ship!

Day 19, Thursday, 23.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 18:51.7N 57:04.8W, 26°C, 1014 mBar Yesterday was very nice sailing. The sea was pretty calm in the morning and at first it went very well and comfortably with the Parasailor up. But by noon (local time) the wind had gone gradually down to about Bft 1-2 and I wasn't happy with the speed I was making, only 4kn. Since the wind was coming from about 160° I took the Parasailor down and put the main-sail and genoa up. Which gave me upwards of 6kn of speed, much better. I kept the standard sails up for the rest of the day and night. See note below for a verdict on the Parasailor, if interested. One thing I always wanted to do is take a video of the boat while sailing. From outside. The idea was to string a camera to a kite and let that fly. For that reason I had brought two kites, one with 1m² and another with 1.3m². Yesterday was going to be the big day. But it turned out the wind was too light and the kites wouldn't fly. Later there was more wind, but they always kamikazed into the main-sail. Turbulence I guess. So ... no footage of the boat sailing yet. But I'll tr again today. I am getting close to the Caribbean and am expecting more traffic again. I haven't seen another ship in 15 days. And just as the sun went down I saw one. A freighter, the "Crystal Gate", bound east. Both the AIS and Radar Detector saw it too, but I saw it first. Suckers . We have this little competition going. Who is the last to see the first ship of the day has to do the night watch. Haha. After sunset the wind increased and I reefed down for the night, but the wind dropped again later and at three in the morning I changed from 2nd to 1st reef, and at five from 1st reef to full sail. At this point the first self-inflicted damage of the trip occurred. I tore the rope of the starboard lazy-jack. I had noticed that it was going a little hard on the winch, and looked out for the lazy-jack because it's the usual suspect. But in the dark I couldn't see anything wrong despite the flashlight and then ... snap, it was suddenly very easy on the winch. Uuups. Next time I'll use dark lines for the lazy-jack so they contrast better against the sail in the night. To fix it I would have to climb the mast up to the second spreaders. Since I have no mast-steps and nobody to haul me up on a winch I would need to go up with my climbing ascensors while the boat is rolling around. Sounds like fun. Or I'll just throw a rope over the first spreader and pull the lazy-jack over that for the time being until I'm in port. 345nm to go. Really close now! Verdict on the Parasailor I've sailed now for 18 days in 0 to 40kn of wind, using alternatively the Parasailor and the Main and Genoa. Though I didn't sail the Parasailor in more than 25kn of wind. After that trial it has become clear that my boat does always go faster with the standard sails than with the Parasailor. Depending on the angle to the wind the difference is between 10% (160°) and 30% (90°). I don't think that this is true for every boat, and that the difference in speed is that big on my boat for two reasons: 1st I have a 7/8th rig and my Spinnaker halyards don't come out at the top of the mast but just a little over the forestay. Therefor my Parasailor is a lot smaller than it would be if I had a top-rigg and it flies lower and creates less pull. 2nd my standard sails are very well cut (and very new) DC66/77 triradial sails and with the 7/8th rigg I can trimm them just right. However I'm still happy with the Parasailor and downwind of 160° I prefer it to the regular sails for a number of reasons. 1st the difference in speed is downwind not so big. 2nd the boat rolls a lot less because of the lift of the wing. The added comfort is huge, especially in light winds and old swell. 3rd I don't have to be afraid of a accidental gybe. 4th it looks really cool. So my final verdict on the Parasailor: Great downwind sail. Needs no pole and is therefor a lot easier to use than a Spinnaker. Needs a little practice with the ropes (2 downhauls, 2 sheets). Can sail up to 60° to the wind, but in practice you would not go closer than 100° unless it's only for a few miles. Good investment.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:08

Wednesday, February 23. 2011

Footage

Day 19, Wednesday, 23.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 19:02:5N 54:24.0W, 26.5°C, 1014 mBar Every few hours I turn on the chartplotter to write down my position. So far there was only open sea around me, but since yesterday when I turn the thing on I see the Lee- and Windward Islands on the edge of the map. And every time a little more of them. Very good for morale, very good. The sea was rather cooperative yesterday. Noticing that I had difficulties doing the dishes the swell went down and the pots stopped sliding through the cockpit. Thanks sea. That encouraged me to wash some clothes as well and do some general cleaning. The wind also dropped way below 20kn, and I put the Parasailor up again. Now I have less than 10kn of wind, and it's going very slowly. No chance to finish the rest of the trip in three days, it's going to be four for sure. Then I sat down to edit some of the footage. Normally I shoot in 720p resolution, which is plenty enough for TV and Web. But because it's very unlikely that I will do this many more times in the near future I thought "let's shoot in full HD (1080p)". Now I have 50GB of movie clips, and working with them takes ages and is right at the limit of my computer (and my patience). Especially running of the battery. But some of the footage is surprisingly nice. There is one scene: boat sailing into the night, dark sea, sunset in the background, and a dolphin jumps out of the water in the middle of the picture. Cool. But I'll have to convert everything to 720p before going on (which the computer ensures me is going to take 12 hours). I only have a vague idea of what to show and no story-board, so putting a rough cut together takes a lot of reviewing and moving clips around. And I prefer to do this without a lot of waiting in between. But I noticed already that I'll need some more scenes where I "address the audience" and tell what's going on. Just watching the boat sail along and me doing stuff gets pretty boring otherwise, even for my friends ;-), and I don't like voice-overs much. 500nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:57

Tuesday, February 22. 2011

Rollercoaster

Day 18, Tuesday, 22.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 19:07:6N 51:57.6W, 25Å,Å°C, 1016 mBar I love it when a plan works out. Yesterday I sailed north-west close-hauled for 35nm in a light to moderate westerly. As the wind turned north I tacked and sailed west. Unfortunately right into the swell that had already built, but that couldn't be helped. The wind increased steadily and I started reefing. Slowly the direction of the swell followed the turning wind and instead of jumping up and down the boat started to roll left and right. With the odd jump in between. Very entertaining. Also entertaining was the sky. Mostly bright blue, but with some big and nasty-looking black clouds in my path from which a thick curtain of rain extended to the ground. Scary, especially as the sun began to set and colored the sky around the black clouds blood red. I dodged them as much as I could and only got a little rain. It was a fast but also very bumpy ride and I didn't get much sleep in the night as I was tossed around in my bunk. I tried to make myself comfortable and relax, but it's kind of hard when your face gets alternatively ground into the pillow or smashed against the wall while your butt is hanging outside of the bed in the lee-cloth. Hehe.. If the this night is the same I have to set up the camera and film it. This morning I dropped the main-sail and am now only going with the genoa.. I lost a knot of speed, but the boat sails more upright and doesn't turn so hard into the wind when hit by a wave. Easier on the boat, the autopilot and on me . Overall I sailed 180nm yesterday again, but only 140 towards my destination. I like going fast. But I have to admin that going slower and more comfortably is also very appealing at times. But I think so far on the trip I was very lucky and caught a good mix. Now I have to do the dishes from yesterday. I was a very hungry sailor and had outmeal for breakfast, sweet pancakes for lunch and tortillas verde for dinner. I was hoping that the sea would be quieter today, but no luck. There are still a lot of potatoes and onions left, so today I'll make some bavarian potatoe salad. 635nm to go. Getting there

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:07

Monday, February 21. 2011

So slow

Day 17, Monday, 21.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 19:04:0N 49:31.3W, 26^oÅ, 1013 mBar I was writing about how calms are much worse than storms, but in the end decided not to post it. It's just ranting. Only so much: I think calms are worse because in order to survive them you have to become Buddha. Desire nothing, wish nothing, just be. Yesterday was pretty calm, a little less than 5kn of wind from the east, turning south. But just enough wind that the Parasailor would fly and so I managed to log a surprising 90nm. I choose to head further north, because it was faster sailing and from the weather map it looked like there would be more wind there. If possible I wanted to avoid the center of the depression which is passing through from the west. And it looks like I just made it, although I got into quite some rain this morning. Now I have a slight breeze from the west and I'm heading further North-West under full sails and an incredible 3.5kn of speed . The wind should change back to North-East some time in the evening and then I can put the Parasailor back up and sail in a straight line to St. Martin. That's the plan at least. Otherwise not much news. Nothing broke over the last days, but I ate a lot yesterday because I was so bored inside my little hot boat and there was nothing to do. I tell you, calms are the worst! 775nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:09

Sunday, February 20. 2011

Time

Day 16, Sunday, 20.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 18:23.1N 48:05.3W, 26Å,Å°C, 1011 mBar Yesterday I had an important decision to make: To shave or not to shave. Do I want to arrive in the Caribbean like a peaceful and law-abiding man, or like a pirate. Will Turner or Jack Sparrow? Put it that way the question is easy to answer. Will get's to marry pretty Elizabeth. So away with the stubble! Other than that the day held little excitement. Some dolphins came by, but were not interested as I was going way too slow for them. Twice a Sooty Tern circled the boat, but was gone each time before I had the camera ready. But he'll be back, and then I'll shoot the little bird . All through the day and night the wind remained very light (5-8kn) and variable, and every half hour at the latest I had to adjust the course and trimm of the sail carefully to keep my speed close to or over 4kn. I'd rather go a little zik-zak then just sit dead in the water. The sky was mostly cloudless and I hid from the sun during the day as much as possible. Instead I reviewed the pictures and clips I had shot. There are some really nice pictures, but I have to film more if I want to have enough material at the end to get a decent movie out of it. Maybe I'll edit some today which will give me a better idea of what is missing. As the sun set I moved back into the cockpit to watch the sky, spot stars, and read up on them. I'm not really good at astronomy. Although I find it most fascinating I've never spent the time. Well, looking at the weather I'll have a lot of time left on this trip to read up on the subject . Time! By now there is a 3h difference between ship's time (UTC) and localtime (UTC-3). But it doesn't matter much because I have little need of knowing the time. Like any other worthless idler my routine is governed by the sun. And the wind. The only moment I need to know the time is when I post to my blog every day at 12 UTC, when I also measure my progress over the last 24h. Hey, looks like I managed to log just over 100nm. I'm very happy about that, regarding the conditions, and I hope I can maintain that pace until the wind picks up again. 855nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:07

Saturday, February 19. 2011

Moss

After a request from Markus I checked my boom to answer a pressing question. There is no sign of moss. Or algae. Even on the molecular level. I've analyzed numerous samples with my tricorder and in the ship's state-of-the-art laboratory. There is, however, a thin crust of salt on the windward side. That's east. Maybe you guys can formulate a substitute theory for the marine environment?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:02

Two weeks at sea

Day 15, Saturday, 19.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 18:23.1N 46:23.0W, 26.5°C, 1012 mBar Two weeks at sea! And I still like it, what a surprise. Even more of a surprise is that there is still fresh (more or less) fruit and vegetables left, and I still don't have an excuse to cook cheap pasta. But I'm down to oranges, apples, lemons, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and garlic now. But then I decided to use Buitoni Bolognese sauce anyway, just because I can, haha! Ok, with onions, carrots and garlic. Yesterday my brother told me that people are commenting to the entries on my blog, and wishing me all the best for the trip. Thank you all very much for thinking of me and caring. Also to the people who just read and care, and don't comment so much. Unfortunately I cannot read the comments while on the way, but I will catch up once I get to my destination. Apparently some even post the one or other helpful advice. For example regarding navigation in European forests. But what probably very few know is that one of the culprits who comments so much is actually guilty of inspiring me to these kinds of adventures. Yes, and at an early age too. My "Sandkastenfreund" Markus M. We were neighbors during kindergarten and primary school and actually played in the sandbox together. And it was his idea to walk across the Alps, Germany to Tirol, after High-School. Which I liked so much despite an injured knee (and wishing I was dead at one particular time) that I fell for the outdoors. So it's all Markus' fault, hehe. Thanks Markus. Back to the present. The weather was great yesterday, wind and sun, and I was absolutely over-motivated in regard to filming. I decided to film how the parassailor is set. Only instead of a "how-to" it became a "how not to". If this ever makes it into youtube the whole sailing community will crack up laughing. But when night fell the weather decided it had given me (obviously) enough sun, but (unfortunately) also enough wind. No more, and there is still pretty much no wind now (though the sun came back up). I had a hopeful look at the weather forecast a few minutes ago, but it doesn't look good. The overall situation is: no wind until Tuesday, then lots. Sun only during the daylight hours. Three days baking in the hot sun and not moving much. Oh dear, my worst nightmare is coming true. Morale is still high though. Very tempting to use the engine. But I only have fuel for one day, haha. Good that I have books for many, many more days.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:10

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Startup error

“Startup error, please contact your service provider” is all I get from my Iridium 9555 phone anymore. The thing is basically brand-new. Now it has packed up, after about 250 hours of use. It is a replacement for my last Iridium 9555 phone, which packed up after about 300 hours. Do I see a pattern there? Fearing something like that I brought a spare one. Expensive, yes, but what can you do. There are little options. But who knows how long this will last. So, just in case it stops working soon too and I can't post any more blog messages: I'm alive and well. Don't call the MRCC, SAR, Coast Guard, Ambulance, Marines, SAS, SBS, Newspaper, ... I still carry an EPIRB in case something bad happens and can notify the MRCC myself. Otherwise I'll just have to sit it out on my strong boat until the currents brought me to the Caribbean. The place is damned hard to miss, and there is enough food and water on the boat. Damn electronics. And they advertise it as the toughest phone on the planet. Yeah right.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 08:05

Becalmed

Day 13, Thursday, 17.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:28.7N 42:16.5W, 25C, 1016 mBar

Yesterday was the best day yet. Beautiful weather, little swell, and no damages. Awesome! The wind was very light, only 10 to 15kn, but with the Parasailor up I made nevertheless relatively good speed of 6 to 7kn. Until the evening, when the wind began to fall below 10kn and my speed decreased to 4 to 5kn.

But more annoying than the low speed is usually the strong rolling of the boat that comes with it, as every little wave sets the boat in motion. Something that is most annoying. Fortunately I was spared this experience mostly because the dynamic pressure wing in the Parasailor creates enough lift to stabilize the boat. Fantastic invention. So for the first time on this trip I could sit in the cockpit without getting wet and enjoy the trip. I played some tunes on my tin whistle, read in my books, wrote some, and even had a glass of Macallan as the sun went down. Life is good.

Octavio send me an email describing in detail the possible issues with the Furler and what to take care of when I have a look at it. And Stephan gave me some tips on how to trim the Parasailor properly. I have to admit that I have very little light wind experience. It's just my luck that there's a lot of it most of the times I sail. Or rather: I don't go out in light winds often.

I also took lots of pictures first of the sail, then the sun, and later the moon and the boat in the night. Thanks to a f/1.4 lens and a great sensitivity of the sensor in my camera. For the moon I used the f/4.0 400mm super tele at f/16. The first part of the night I slept in the cockpit, but then it got a little chilly and damp and I moved into the salon. The direction of the light wind wasn't very stable during the night, and every half hour or hour I had to get up to pull a little on the sheet and ease out the downhaul, or the other way round, to maintain my breathtaking speed of around 4kn. The Parasailor needs a little more attention than the genoa, but the reward of higher speed and stability is well worth it.

Well, that was the night. Now it's morning and .. where's the wind gone? Nothing moving. I set here becalmed. Looks like a day rather for fishing than for sailing ... Well, as a good friend once said: "You can have anything you want. But not everything."

1180nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:11

Wednesday, February 16, 2011

Lost in electronics

Day 12, Wednesday, 16.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:11.5N 40:05.5W, 25[°]Å,Å°C, 1017 mBar The relative peaceful weekend with no more problems had lulled me into thinking that I was on top of the game now, and that the rest of the trip would be nice & quiet. Haha! Monday taught me better with the Chartplotter and Furler causing trouble, and yesterday it went on in the same tradition. I was just cutting the cake to celebrate the fact that I've covered more than half of the distance, when the boat suddenly turned into the wind. I climbed into the cockpit, saw in passing that "STLK FAIL" was written across the autopilot display, and quickly jumped to the rescue of the tiller-pilot. The rudder was lying far on port, and the tiller-pilot was extended as far as I've never seen it before. I steered the boat for an hour myself, thinking about the best course of action. Then I decided to furl the genoa away, lash the tiller down and go over the complete Raymarine installation while the weather is relatively nice. I wanted to understand how the problem came about, fix it, and find out what possible alternatives there are in case it happens again and I'm pressed for time. Six hours the boat sat there without moving as I removed panel after panel to check each connection. I'll spare you the details. It's hard enough to connect the little wires in places you can hardly reach when the boat is not moving. But when it's moving ... Well, at least I think that I should not have any more problems with that stuff in the near future. And should the autopilot quit it's job next time with a "STLK FAIL" (Seatalk Link Failure) error, I know that it's enough to simply disconnect it from the other Raymarine devices. It will work happily on it's own. But if it detects a problem on the common bus it shuts down. Unlike the other Raymarine devices, which just don't show the missing data. Interesting, huh, considering that the autopilot is the only device of that whole installation that I really need. My phone, the iPod, even the camera has a GPS and can tell me where I am and where I'm going. But now that the wind-vane is out of action nothing else here can steer the boat while I eat my little celebration cake in peace. Think about it, Raymarine guys. After I was back on course, with the spare tiller-pilot steering, I took apart the other one and made sure it's going to move ok again. Then I cleaned the cockpit, galley and floor, because I like cleaning. It's dirty, you clean it, it's clean. That simple. No crypted error messages necessary to tell you it's dirty (e.g. NT CLN), no rebooting necessary to find out if the last two hours of work were wasted or not, and no jumping between states. Clean or not clean. And it looks nice too. In the meantime it was dark and the moon high above me in a clear sky. Time to practice some astronavigation! You never know, the way it's going on this trip tomorrow all the GPS satellites might suffer a catastrophic software failure and need a manual reboot. Or cleaning. Maybe I should apply at ESA/NASA for a position as janitor on the ISS after this trip. I could clean the station and in my spare time fix stuff. Like plumbing, solar panels, navigational computers etc. Hang on! The "Space Quest" adventure game series of the late eighties comes into a whole new perspective suddenly! 1310nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:25

Tuesday, February 15. 2011

More challenges

Day 11, Tuesday, 15.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:18.2N 37:47.5W, 24Å,Å°C, 1018 mBar It didn't clear up yesterday, but stayed overcast all day with the occasional drizzle of rain. Which didn't matter much, because I was busy inside with the Chartplotter (Raymarine C-80). The thing wouldn't turn on anymore but kept on rebooting. To my surprise this behavior was covered in the manual: do a factory reset like this then re-install the firmware. How fortunate that I had prepared a suitable compactflash card before the trip with the necessary utility and firmware! Before the reset I tried to extract my waypoints and tracks from the memory of the unit with the help of the utility, but that caused the thing to crash too. So after the reset I had to set up everything again. It tells something about the internal problems a company must have when a product is shipped like that and the latest firmware, which could solve the problem, is from March 2008 and labeled "Development build". Shortly after having solved that problem I received an email from my friend Henk, a fellow single-hander, who is at the moment waiting for me in St. Martin. He says I shouldn't worry too much about damages on the trip. A long journey like this is very tough on the material and everybody has damages.. Just repair them on the way or when you get there. That lifted my spirit somewhat. Knowing something in theory or having a friend tell you "it's ok" is not the same thing. By that time the wind had dropped and I wanted to furl in the genoa to set the parasailor. But the genoa wouldn't furl in. Or furl out. It wouldn't furl at all anymore. Talking about damages, ey. But usually that's no big deal, it's just the furling-line getting fouled-up in the drum. I had a look at that, but it seemed ok. Then I removed the line which should make the sail unfurl itself completely. But it didn't. Then I removed the drum. Nothing, at least nothing obvious. Nothing loose, no screws missing or sticking out. And looking up to the head of the sail it looked ok too, no halyards twisted around the slider either. A mystery. The next step is usually to unshackle the sail from the furler, pull it out and then take it down. But by that time the wind had already increased to 25kn and it was getting dark. Chances were I would be without my primary sail for the night, or maybe the whole rest of the voyage. So before doing that I called Octavio from Alisios Sailing, who had installed the thing. And I also asked my brother Ralf to have a look at the schematics, the guy's an absolute genius with everything that moves. But no news on either side. The big question then was: Sail down or not? I decided not to. Reasoning that it's furled away enough for the nightly 30kn-Party, and that I can always take it down and had done so in much worse conditions. Of course this night the wind increased to 40kn. It's hilarious isn't it . Well, I kept the sail up, but de-powered it by trimming it badly. I didn't get too sleep much, because I checked the sail often and when not the boat was moving so crazily and everything was banging and clonging that sleep was out of reach until things calmed down to 20kn this morning, the sail still furled in as before. I fell asleep. Dreaming of Sails, lines and wrenches. But hey, what's that! The angry sound of the genoa flapping in the wind intruded into my peaceful slumber. I jumped out of the bunk, went outside, and behold! The genoa had unfurled. Interesting. What had happened? Applying Occam's Razor, the simplest explanation is that I must have developed super powers on the trip and can now fix stuff in my sleep. Call me "Sleepman"! If you require my help simply project a big pillow-shaped icon into the cloudy night sky of your city and I'll come and fall asleep for you. I only hope it's not urgent, because it takes a long time to get anywhere with a boat. I put the whole thing back together and was able to furl the genoa in and out again. Whew. But it doesn't run as smoothly as it should. I have to pull a lot and then it turns one time. Pull, pull, pull, turn. Pull, pull, pull, turn. And it should turn just as I pull. Like the stay tension wasn't right, but it looks ok. Hmm. Maybe I have to sleep over it some more 1440nm to go. Half-way there!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:17

Monday, February 14. 2011

Books rule

Day 10, Monday, 14.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:19.4N, 35:11.8W, 24Â°, 1020mBar The sky is overcast today and there is a slight drizzle of rain now and then. But if the last days are anything to go by it should clear up a little over the course of the day. The afternoons are usually quite nice, and the wind becomes a little steadier. Unlike in the night, where the wind quickly and often changes from Bft 5 to 8 and back, accompanied by much and very sudden movement of the boat. Every evening I check the boat and reef down so I don't have to do it at night, because it's so much more work, and more dangerous too. Yesterday afternoon I cooked a huge pot of vegetable stew before the eggplant and leek go off. I'm surprised that the fruit and veggies are holding out as well as they do, and I still have a good supply. No need yet to open any cans or ready meals. Later I cleaned the boat a bit and when it got dark I sat in the companionway under my little sprayhood and watched a movie. But sailing and watching movies at the same time doesn't do it for me. A good movie is something that takes you completely in and away from your surroundings. In addition there's so much noise on the boat that I need to crank up the volume or wear headphones to understand the dialogues. But that makes me quickly feel disconnected from the boat and the voyage, because I don't hear the wind and the sea, and I don't like that. For the same reason I don't listen much to music. Books on the other hand are awesome, you can be in two worlds at the same time. At the moment I'm reading "Badass", "Eine kurze Weltgeschichte f r junge Leser", and "The Republic of Pirates". But movies are a good thing to have in case I should get becalmed for a longer time. Because that drives me crazy, and some disconnectedness can only be helpful then. I guess that's one reason why they carried so much rum on the boats in the olden days. Disconnects you very quickly from your surroundings, hehe. I haven't touched my rum supply yet, but in the last nine days I've emptied one bottle of wine and two cans of beer. It would have been a lot more beers if Rolf or Arndt were around, right guys? While cooking, cleaning and watching the movie I neglected trimming the genoa a little and only made 170nm in the last 24 hours. 1590nm (2800km) to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:06

Sunday, February 13. 2011

The SPOT is dead

So far I've used a SPOT messenger to update my position on my blog and on facebook every 6 hours. But when I turned it on this noon and wanted to send a message, the little lights indicated "Unit self test failed. Contact Manufacturer". Subsequent attempts to make it work (like changing the batteries) didn't prove successful so far. Ok, Mr. Manufacturer, would you please be so kind and drop a new one by? I'm only a third way across the atlantic. Well, I guess from now on the daily blog at 12:00 UTC will have to suffice. I still carry a EPIRB in case of emergency, so it's only an inconvenience and not a problem. If you want to track me on a map, you can use my alternative blog at <http://blog.mailasail.com/axelbusch/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 08:59

Flying fish

Day 9, Sunday, 13.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:27.36N, 32:20.51W, 23.5°C, 1021mBar This morning I found two flying fish on my boat! Unfortunately they weren't even three centimeters long and not worth throwing into the pan. So instead I had bacon, eggs, toast and fruit. Sunday breakfast! Yesterday was actually a really nice day. Wind still very variable with 20 to 35kn, but very sunny and a somewhat settled sea, at least until the evening. I used the opportunity to shoot some pictures and even a few video clips, but I have to say I prefer other people than myself in front of the camera. I tried to record a video blog too, but felt so silly I quickly stopped. Most of my thoughts are on this written blog anyway, and as you can see they are hardly worth recording. But it will be a big laugh for sure when I read it again in a few years, and that makes it worth it. What I forgot to mention yesterday was that on the night from Friday to Saturday the wind had a keen edge, as did the waves. Little Gudrun was tossed about a lot, and I was reminded of the knock-down I had suffered west of Rabat last year. As a result I completely locked down the boat as an exercise, secured all lockers, hatches, and vital gear, and kept the grab bag etc. at the ready. And it's not as if I had anything else important to do here anyway. The knock-down didn't come of course, but it was a right pain in the a** every time I had to go out to pee. And, who would have thought, right that night I had to go a few times. Well, this morning I was glad that everything was still stowed away so nicely from Friday, because Gudrun was actually hit by two braking waves in rapid succession and the port side was under water up to the halyard-winch on the roof. Not quite a knock-down fortunately, but not far off. Of course I had just climbed out of the companionway a few seconds before and was hit in the face by the first wave, then flooded up to my butt by the second. Nothing like that to wake you up. But in no time at all Gudrun was up and on course again, the water drained out of the cockpit, and only a glass full of water had made it down the companionway. Great boat. And I went down again to change into dry clothes, yet another time. Another thing that has a big frustration potential on a moving boat is proper cooking. It's incredibly hard to cut something up nicely when the subject is always accelerating away from under your fingertips, while your body is moving in the other direction in order not to fall over. Makes me want to throw my anchor in the evening in order to cook in all quiet. But that wouldn't work here, would it. Besides I should have brought about 12km more anchor chain. Maybe for the next crossing (haha) I should get some crew. Or even better one of these awesome cooking machines my friend Ivo has. You throw everything into a bowl and it cuts the stuff up real sweet and in no time at all. I remember reading an ad for a sailing yacht with a gimballed salon that stays always level. Must be quite a sight, when you sit in all quiet and the whole hull moves around you like a rollercoaster. But after eight days I'm quite used to the movement now and pretty comfortable in my bunk with the lee-cloth. Which is where I'm probably going to stay most of the day if the weather stays like it is. The wind is still very variable, Bft 5 to 8, and I've reefed down a lot. The speed of the boat ranges from 4 to 11 knots, but it seems to average out at about 180nm every day. Only 1750nm left to go to St. Martin. We're getting there

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:25

Saturday, February 12. 2011

There goes the shoe

Day 8, Saturday, 12.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:33.75N, 29:21.28W, 24°C, 1021mBar To me, one of the most amazing aspects of human physiology is how the ability to detect annoying sounds improves dramatically as soon as you assume a horizontal position. For example, when I stand in front of my berth and listen everything seems quiet. But as soon as I've climbed over the sea-cloth and made myself comfortable in my little nest I hear them. The little annoying bings and bangs and clongs. And I swear they haven't been there a second before! And when I get up to check them out they are gone. The only way I can locate them is to lie down again and wait a little, then have a careful look around with the flashlight. It's like hunting for little monsters. I propose that further research be carried out on this topic. It has paramount importance for humanity and is sure worthy of a Nobel prize, though I'm not sure whether it's in the category Medicine, Psychology or Peace. On the boat nothing has changed much. Every day I check all the moving parts, and every day I'm surprised at what I find. Like yesterday I found out that I'd almost lost the tiller because the screws had worked loose (The tiller is vibrating slightly from little turbulences at the rudder.) I was just in time to screw them back together, and now I used nuts with a little plastic ring. I've also marked the place with silver sticky tape for further inspection. I'm doing this to all the places on the boat that are giving me trouble, like lockers that don't stay properly shut or lines that chafe. The idea is to remind me of each problem on my daily inspection and also that I see them every day and so fix them before the next trip. It's good to write the things in a book too, but "paper is patient". The wind is still 20-30kn from the North-East, turning more easterly as I get more west. I've only the genoa out and stay close to the 20th latitude. Still doing around 180nm per day. From the grib files it looks like the wind will go down a little on Wednesday, which I wouldn't mind at all. At the moment the cockpit is too wet to enjoy staying in, and every few hours a larger wave brakes over it in which case it's even a little dangerous. Yesterday I just happened to be forward of the sprayhood, checking the blocks on the runners, as one of those waves payed a visit and swept me off my feet and towards the open sea. I held tight to the runner so I wouldn't bang against the rail, and I was clipped in anyway and couldn't have gone overboard (but easily broken a rip). But it managed to tear the shoe of my right foot and took it overboard. That will be quite embarrassing, walking into the Marina office in St. Martin with only one shoe. So unless I'm working on something or giving the autopilot a break I stay inside and stick only my head out every half hour or so. The radar-detector and AIS do a wonderful job at looking out for commercial vessels, and there is no big need to worry about sail-boats because they all go in the same direction and at pretty much the same speed. Not that I've seen any. Visibility is only 3nm because of the high waves, and by far the most common thing to see are dolphins, which come by at least every other day. By the way, the first third of the trip is behind me now. I'm already eagerly eying the little cake for the half-way celebration in a few days. Very tempting. Maybe I should better hide it from plain sight.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:06

Friday, February 11. 2011

bye, bye wind-vane

Day 7, Friday, 11.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:53.7N 26:19.0W, 24.5°C, 1018 mBar I'm sailing west along the 20th latitude north, which is pretty much the southern route to the Caribbean. The wind is still blowing between 25kn and 30kn from the north-east, and now the famous atlantic swell is starting to build. Long and rather high waves, some reach already over my head when I stand in the cockpit. But the sea is still very rough with many smaller waves in between, and those little buggers make life pretty uncomfortable when they brake, as they spray deck full of water and toss the boat around. The dolphins seem to love it though and it looks like they have a hell of a time jumping out of the crests and darting beneath the bow of Gudrun V. Despite looking out for the wind-vane very carefully it stopped working yesterday. The stainless steel hinge that holds the servo rudder is bent out of shape, presumably by a wave, and I cannot fasten the servo-rudder anymore. I quickly switched to the auto-pilot and then took the servo-rudder out of the water and dismantled the vane. Then I had a chocolate bar. And then another. And another. Now it's done to me and the tiller pilot, and we take turns on the rudder. Fortunately I have a spare tiller pilot with me, in case one gets seasick, as they are known to do. I have a plan on how to fix the wind-vane with what I have on board, but for that I need much calmer weather and seas, because it involves drilling holes in the stainless steel hinge, which I can't take off from the back of the boat. Unfortunately no easy weather is supposed to come my way anytime soon. Ah well, nobody said it would be easy, right. There is also good news. The back-ache, which has visited me on Wednesday after some over-enthusiastic work at the main-sail halyard, is gone. The treatment as subscribed by the ship's medic (my humble self) had consisted of Diclofenac-Colextyramin (2x 150mg per day), a neopren bandage around the waist, the proper use of the halyard-winch, and a modest dose of excellent Rioja (2x 100ml per day). Otherwise I'm surprisingly busy on the boat. The first week is almost over, and I'm not even halfway through the book which I thought would last me a few days at the most. When not working the sails or maintaining or fixing things I'm mostly sleeping. Or cooking, but not very much really. I'm more tired than hungry. I usually start the day with fruit and bread, then yesterday's dinner for lunch around two, and a hot dinner (vegetables + noodles, rice, couscous etc.) around seven. Later some more fruit and maybe bread with smoked ham and parmesan. Glass of wine if the weather is nice. Not a bad diet I guess. I have lots of chocolate and cookies on the boat, but except for special moments (e.g. when the wind-vane brakes) they remain surprisingly untouched. My brother informed me that not all SPOT messages with my position arrive. Especially the one I send every morning at 6 UTC seems not to find its way to the satellite.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:59

Thursday, February 10. 2011

180nm in 24h

Day 6, Thursday, 10.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 20:19.06N 23:26.8W Yesterday afternoon and this morning I made very good speed towards west, 7-10kn in 10-20kn of Wind from north-east. During the night the wind dropped to around 12kn and I took the mainsail down for safety because clouds were coming up and I needed to get some sleep. I had been very busy yesterday looking after the boat and didn't manage to sleep during the day at all. The current tack and speed also don't lend themselves to sleeping until I'm very tired, because the boat is moving a lot and I haven't figured out yet how to catch some quality sleep in the saloon on a port tack. My berth is on the starboard side and I don't like hanging in the lee cloth. And outside is too wet, a lot of spray. Well, I have two more weeks to try different things I guess. Fortunately the wind-vane does a reasonably good job at the tiller and I don't have to have a constant eye on it. Being a wind-vane it's very sensitive to gusts, which change the angle under which the wind is perceived. But it usually stays within 20° of the set course even in stronger gusts or waves. As a result of that veering my speed (and heel) varies a lot and I'm covering some extra miles. But in order to deactivate the wind-vane I would have to take the servo-rudder off. That is quite an operation, especially because it has to be undertaken outside of the boat on the little bathing platform. With both hands under water and feet in the air. Nope, I don't want to do this unless necessary, so the wind-vane is supreme commander of the tiller at all times and I'm happy with the result and do all the other stuff. Like trimming the sails and keeping watch. Although there isn't much to watch. I haven't seen a boat, bird or fish in two days I think. And according to the radar detector no other boat has seen me, or it would have beeped. It does beep a lot when I use the iridium phone though. Once I jumped out of bed at night as the alarm went off to look for that freighter/fisherman/tanker. But it was only a message on the phone. Veery funny. Energy-wise everything is fine. Chris, ex-co-owner of "Maid of Mettle", advised me by email that I could always connect the second panel directly to the battery if I'm in dire need of a cool beer. Thanks Chris! But I think I'll reserve that option for a real emergency. I'm quite happy to wait with the beer until I'm sitting on a beach bar in the Caribbean. Gives me really something to look forward to. Only 2260nm (4080km) to go to my destination. At my current speed it would take me only 10 days, but that is completely unrealistic. I'm also not sure if the material would be up to it. 16 days is more likely. But it doesn't matter much, does it. "Der Weg ist das Ziel".

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:11

Wednesday, February 9, 2011

Back on track

Day 5, Wednesday, 09.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 20:44.8N 020:42.4W Back on course! A look at the battery monitor this morning showed that I've gained 15Ah over the last 24h, despite a very bad angle So my new energy plan works out. With no new troubles and sufficient food and water I've decided to go back on track towards the Caribbean and bypass the Cap Verde islands. New course: West. Because of the difficulties with the water, wind-vane, autopilot, head and solar panels, I had sailed a much more southerly course than originally planned. Simply because it had looked like that I had to stop over at the Cap Verde islands, and sailing on a starboard tack was more comfortable (my berth is starboard). It seemed like a good idea at the time. Well. On hindsight it wasn't such a smart move. I could have sailed more westerly without giving up the Cap Verde island as a safe haven. As it is now I have added probably two days to the crossing. Well, learn from your mistakes Axel and look ahead. The good news is that you're heading for the Caribbean now! And in pleasant weather too. The wind is a little light, and has been since yesterday. I took advantage of that and did my washing yesterday afternoon. Then I washed down the boat and especially the rails, which were caked with salt from the spray. Can't have that on a true swabian boat, can we . If only I could bring my recycling to the "Recyclinghof" too, hehe. I took care to take as little food in plastic wrapping with me as possible, but it can't be entirely avoided, especially for emergency meals and stuff that goes into the fridge. Because the fridge is now turned off and I had to eat that stuff quickly, I already have a little bag with plastic that I will now carry with me for the rest of the trip. This morning I set up the two GoPro HERO HD cameras in the cockpit, one on either side on the bimini frame. I can swivel both to look anywhere I want, including forward. That should allow me to film whatever comes up without too much trouble. A pity really I hadn't set them up before, because a lot of "interesting things" (e.g. trouble) has happen't already, and I hope that from now on it's going to be rather boring. Well, we'll see Because the wind is so light (6 to 8 kn) I'm only making 4.5kn of speed at the moment, which would mean about 30 days for the rest of the trip at that speed (aaaargh!). In an attempt to gain more speed I tried to set the main-sail (2nd reef) in addition to the parasailor. Which was another stupid move. No wind for the parasailor left, and it wrapped around the shrouds. But it had to be tried, hadn't it. And yes, I have that embarrassing event on camera. Fortunately no damage was done, and now everyting is back as it should. Plan for the rest of the day: check all lines, blocks and shackles. Then tidy the interior which is a little disorganized after all the repairs.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:10

Tuesday, February 8. 2011

Halfway to the Cap Verde islands

Tuesday, 08.02.2011, 11:30 UTC, 22:34.1N 019:24.8W The weather has been the same for the past three days. Sunny, with winds from 10 to 20kn from the North-East during the day, and 20 to 30kn during the night. As the wind increases during the night the waves get very choppy and the ride uncomfortable as the ship rolls with the waves passing underneath her, especially when a wave breaks. A right cacophony of clings and clongs. During the morning the wind goes down a bit, and the waves gradually too, until the sea is quite nice in the evening. And then it all starts again. I think it has something to do with the Sahara to the east of me, which might be the source of that wind as the land cools rapidly in the night. So it should get better further west. But the afternoons are really nice, and quite good for working on the boat too. Yesterday I fixed the problem with the head that was filling up. I removed the hose from the seacock and plugged that with a wooden peck. Good news and bad news: the boat is dry, but I have to use the bucket from now on. Then I had a look at why the Batteries are not being charged. I have two 135Watt solar panels at the stern, and even though the angle to the sun is bad on my current tack, they should charge at least a few Ah. Turns out the controller shows the battery voltage at 14 to 16V with the Solar Panels connected, and 8V when not. Maybe a broken diode, but whatever the reason, the controller is gone. Fortunately ... just for that contingency I had bought a controller for the wind generator which would accept at least one of the panels. I hooked that up, and now the batteries are being charged. With half the capacity, but better than nothing. I turned off the fridge and chartplotter, and am now only running the sumlog, compass, windinstrument and navigation lights. The AIS is gone with the Chartplotter, and I'm glad I invested into the little radar detector which worked very well through the night. Beep, beep, beep -- ah, there's another freighter. This evening we'll see whether the one panel is enough to balance the energy consumption. It's a little sad about the fridge, because it's full of cheese. But the Parmesan should be ok for a while, right? So, lots of problems on the boat. I didn't expect the voyage to be without problems, after all it's the first time I'm taking Gudrun out for a longer trip. But I hadn't expected that much, and in such a short time. On the other hand I'm quite happy that I managed to fix the things up with what I took with me. Feels a little like being an astronaut on a space station, hehe. Only they are in a much more dangerous environment. Minus the waves, lucky bastards. But also minus the dolphins. Last evening I cooked dinner and then went on deck to eat it. Only I put it down very quickly instead and took my camera because there was a school of dolphins playing around the bow of the boat. The sun was just setting, and I sat there in the cockpit eating dinner and watching the dolphins being silhouetted against the sinking sun as they jump out of the water. What a show!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:40

Monday, February 7, 2011

Quite windy

Monday, 07.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 24:27.44N 17:46.96W My hopes that the conditions would stay as nice as yesterday afternoon were shattered when the wind increased to 30kn after nightfall. It's very gusty with irregular waves and the boat moves jerkily. Very noisy too. I need to hold on to something all the time and accordingly everything takes a lot of energy. Even sleeping it seems, and my neck is sore from trying to keep my head from lolling around. Consequently haven't been able to do much but mind the boat and trying to sleep. Originally I wanted to film as much as possible of the trip, but apart from two short clips I couldn't bring myself to do it yet. State of repairs: It seems I managed to fix the Wind-vane and it is doing the steering most of the time. The autopilot is also ok again, although the whole raymarine system behaves a little funny and I get "Lost fix" "Lost Heading" "Shallow depth" and all other kinds of alarm every now and then. I think it's seasick . I have some wooden pecks for hammering into the hull in case of a puncture, and it seems that the biggest one would fit into the hose of the untight seacock. Otherwise I'll make it fit with the thick silver sticking tape. Wonderful stuff. I will try that once the ride gets a little smoother. The sky is bright blue, no clouds, and it's impossible for me to see whether the wind will increase or not. A few times I changed the sails, only to change them back half an hour later. That also takes a lot of energy, and I don't really gain anything by it in terms of average speed. Plus I don't care enough for speed to force myself to do it for naught. It was very nice to go 9kn yesterday afternoon when the sea was relatively quiet, but as long as I'm going with more than 6kn I'd stay rather comfortable. I set the parasailor a couple of times, but handling a 90sqm sail, six lines and myself at the same time is not easy in more than 20kn of wind. I think it's better if I keep it in the bag for when the wind drops below 15kn. At the moment I'm doing 7 to 8kn with only the genoa, but I think I'll reef in an hour. The trip might take a few days longer, but what the heck. My esteem for the shorthanded long-distance regatta sailors grows by the minute. Absolutely crazy. Regarding morale it's ok. I wished the boat would move less so I wouldn't tire so quickly, and I hope that it gets better once I've reached my southern waypoint and turned west. That would be in about 3 days. Maybe a little earlier if I decide that I don't need to stop over at the Cap Verde islands. But last time I checked the weather forecast a storm was supposed to hit the area north-west of the islands on Wednesday and Thursday, so at the moment I'm keeping myself rather east. I don't want to make the same mistake I made when I sailed to Ibiza last year .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:56

Sunday, February 6. 2011

Smoother going

Sunday, 06.02.2011, 18:00 UTC, 26:02.037N 016:39.9W Today I slept until ten because I was so tired from yesterdays' weather and generally not being used to living on a moving boat anymore. Then I spent some more time on the wind-vane, and I hope it's repaired for good now. It's been doing a fantastic job since lunch. The autopilot worked through the night, but has it's glitches. I didn't get around to look into it because something else is keeping me busy: water. It seems something in the seacock for the toilet-intake gave yesterday, and the bowl is slowly filling up. "Slowly" depending on the heel of the boat. I reduced sail to go almost upright, and am now going at 6 to 7 kn. I could do more, but then I'd constantly be flushing the toilet. As it is now, with the boat rolling a little and a little heel towards the starboard side (where the toilet is unfortunately), I only have to do it once every hour. Not sure what to do about it. I think the best thing is to wait until I'm on another tack and then effect some emergency repair (e.g. stuff it). But I don't want to force it, since it could take a while to fix ... unfortunately I didn't bring anything suitable for the big vetus tube. Or stop over at the Cap Verdes and repair it for good? I'd prefer not to. Either way, I've decided to head pretty straight for the Cap Verdes for the moment, instead of keeping further west. See how it goes. Weather-wise today was pretty good after lunch. The ugly waves are mostly gone, and the ride is considerably smoother. I even managed to cook, although only pasta . At the moment the first freighter of the day passes me on port, as the sun begins to set starbord ahead of me. The wind is blowing with gentle 12 to 16kn from the east, and I begin to settle in.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:52

Sunday, 06.02.2011, 06:00, 26:53.76N 15:56.13W I left Puerto de La Luz yesterday at 11 in the morning, accompanied by Guiellermo in his boat along with Krasimir, Madonna, Marianna and Orlin. Krasimir had a hand-held speaker and was shouting encouragements, awesome.. Near the coast the wind was blowing with 20kn from southeast, and I had to go east for 18nm before I could turn SSW and pass the island. Guiellermo was already kidding me whether I want to go back to Germany . The sea was very choppy and I was glad when I could finally tack, because sailing close-hauled in 20kn is not very kind on the material. And the skipper. But Gudrun was going very well at 7-8kn, and within three hours I had passed two other boats that had left before me. Both Katamarans, which had a very hard time making any way towards the wind at all. Good downwind boats though, they'll probably pass me later. Then the wind-vane stopped working. And while I was lying on the bathing platform to fix it the autopilot stopped working too. What a wonderful start, just like in the old days! Well, I got the wind-vane working after a while, and then went below decks to have a look at the autopilot. The first thing I noticed was plenty of water in the bilge. The taste-test confirmed my suspicion that it was from the leaking water tank. I decided to pump that out first and see if it solves the problems with the autopilot, which it did. When the sea gets a little calmer I have to remove the floor-boards and have a look at that cable. At 6pm, Shortly before nightfall, the wind changed to East and dropped below 10kn. I exchanged main and genoa for the parasailor, and the ride become a lot smoother. Less rolling from left to right. Time for a nap! Unfortunately only three hours later the wind increased to above 20kn again, quite gusty, and I dropped the parasailor and unfurled the genoa a bit. The conditions haven't changed since, and I'm going with 6 to 7 knots at 217°, towards the Cap Verdes islands. The boat rolls a lot with the waves and it's not very comfortable. But it always takes a few days to settle in. Let's see what surprises today brings!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 07:24

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

Saturday, February 5. 2011

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

on the way. sunny, 16kn wind from ssw. going 7 to 8kn at 60 degrees. only 2998nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:00

Friday, February 4, 2011

Ready and set

Ok, this is a little embarrassing. Half-way through yesterday I realized that the huge hang-over I had from the bon-voyage-party the night before wouldn't leave me quickly, and that there was no going sailing that day. Head throbbing and dead-tired I dragged myself through the day, and a few times I thought that maybe sailing with crew isn't such a bad idea after. Especially as I carried tons (at least!) of fruit and vegetables back from the market. So no sailing today.

With the extra time that this day gave I managed to do some of the lower-priority works, like changing the cushions of the cockpit seats. Not vital for sailing, but for sure some welcome extra comfort. Then I washed my clothes, filled the tank and two jerry cans with diesel, cleaned the head, galley, and bilge one more time, and fell into bed at nine. Now everything is as ready as it gets, and I'm waiting for Guillermo to come around with his boat in the morning and Marianna, Krasimir and Madonna to see me off. They insisted, and how could I decline. It's a so much nicer start into a voyage. I only hope Marianne wakes up early.

There are six questions everybody is asking me: Where are you going? How long will it take? How much fuel do you carry? How much water? How do you sleep? What are you going to do all that time?

I am heading for St. Martin via the Cap Verde Islands. I don't plan to stop on the way, but will of course do if necessary. The distance is about 3000nm (5400km) and it should take about three weeks. That is an average of 6kn or 10km/h. Though I have a friend who was underway for 38 days last year. I have 60 liters of diesel in my tank, and 60 more liters in three jerry cans, in case something happens to the diesel in the tank. At approx. 3 liter/h that gives me a maximum range of 40 hours or 200nm (which is 7% of the distance). So I'm not planning to rely on the engine to get me there. The engine is for taking me in and out of ports, and to charge the battery should the solar panels fail.

I have 300 liters of water in the tank, plus 60 liters of water as a backup in 5 liter bottles. At calculated 5 liters/day that means I can live comfortably for 70 days. I also carry a little desalinator (Katadyn Survivor 06) which produces about a liter of fresh water per hour with lots of work. I usually sleep from midnight to noon, half an hour at a time. Most of the time I spent in the cockpit, unless the weather is not agreeable. For that case I have a little sprayhood over the companionway with a flap at the back. I can sit in there and sleep or have a look around while being nicely protected. When I'm not sleeping I'm either reading, writing, cooking, taking pictures, recording video, playing the tin whistle, working out, and of course "sailory things" and keeping the boat shipshape. Bored? Never. Lonely? Sometimes. Scared? Certainly. But honestly, I've never been as scared on a boat as I am every time I drive with the Motorbike on the street.

So many crazy people on the road, and always distracted by other things - phones, iPods, eating, smoking, makeup, squeezing spots. Therefor my thoughts go out to you my friends that have to drive to work every day, and I wish you safe commuting and no traffic jams. The cockpit, where I will spend most of my time for the next few weeks. Awesome bbq, ey?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:05

Looking good!

The servo-rudder at workYesterday was a great day. After checking all blocks and tightening all shackles I configured the wind-vane and then went out to test it. I turned some circles and it worked. Just like that. With less than 6 kn of apparent wind I have to change to the bigger vane, but that's normal. No more surprises. Fantastic! In the evening I went for dinner with my friends. They had picked an Uruguayan restaurant, and the main course was lots of meat. Lots. Then they surprised me with a present and ... a captain's uniform (Carnival). A big laugh! Ah, I'm going to miss them. Meat! Surprise! Looking sharp, ey The weather forecast for the next few days is good, and after some final shopping today for fruit, veggies and fuel I plan to leave around noon. Seeing that it's already 9:30 (mucho fiesta ayer) it will probably be a little later than that.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:27

Wednesday, February 2, 2011

Test sail

This morning we finished installing the new terminals. The wind was ideal for testing the rigging - force 5 at 20kn. So I went out alone to see how it goes. I was a little nervous because I haven't sailed alone for a while now, and then you would wish for a little less. But well. I always get like this when I'm too long in the marina. Confidence at sea is something that takes constant practice. But usually once the mainsail is up and the engine off my nervousness fades as quickly as the exhaust fumes. Today was no different, and I quickly began to enjoy the little trip. Sails! - But where are the boats? I hope that the wind goes down a little towards the evening so that I can set up the wind vane nicely. With the current swell and wind there is just a little too much action to do this alone safely, because it usually involves a lot of leaning out of the boat. But everything together it looks quite good. The wind-generator is also working nicely again, everything is stowed away, and the to-do list is down to buy fruit, fillup fuel and water, setup wind-vane, pickup my diving gear, and put Vespina "in mothballs" (not sold yet). Maybe I'll even find some time to catch up on my emails and answer some, I was just too busy during the last weeks. Tomorrow I plan to be out for most of the day, and then have a look at the terminals again. If everything goes well I want to leave on Friday around noon.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:45

Tuesday, February 1. 2011

No more surprises, please

Netting to keep things organized. Three shelves covered, three to go. The galley Because it was raining all weekend I spent most of the time inside the boat and organized everything for the voyage. I packed away clothes that I won't need so I don't have to search so long for the ones I do need on the way, and then did the same to pretty much everything else, including tools and camera gear. Then I put netting in front of the shelves that might spill stuff, and re-packed my grab-bag. One of the things I put inside is a orange 1.2sqm kite. Should I really have to enter the life-raft I can fly that up to 70m high and actually have a chance to be seen. Octavio removing the terminals of the runners One of the things I always do before a longer trip is go up the mast to check that everything is ok. I did that yesterday too ... and discovered a problem with the terminals for the top shrouds and running backstays. Which has to be fixed before I can leave, because there is a risk that they break and then I would loose the mast. Octavio assured me it is no big deal to fix it and they will probably finish today, but it destroys my plans to leave for another few days. After the new terminals are in I should at least do a test sail and have another look, before heading off across the ocean. I also discovered that one of the expandable water tanks (100l) leaks. Luckily it's at the top, and if I don't put too much pressure inside it's more or less ok. I sure don't want to take that tank out now, because Murphy's Law and all, it will probably keep me busy for many days. So I just bought a dozen 5 liter bottles, just in case. No more works. I want to go! Luckily the weather looks like it's going to stay nice for a while, and so at least from that side everything should be fine. Actually most boats delayed their departure because the wind is a little strong at the moment, and it looks much better towards the weekend. But it's just always a big blow to morale when you get ready, stow everything away, prepare mentally for the trip and then can not leave. So, please, no more surprises for a while.

Posted by Axel Busch at 06:06