



PUIG VELA CLASSICA BARCELONA
**SPANISH MAIN
EVENT**

The Catalans have their own style of classic Mediterranean racing. *Guy Venables* was there





NICO MARTINEZ

As the A319 jet banked low in its final approach over the Mediterranean the seaward passengers gasped and cooed. Below us, unzipping the sea in crisp white 'V's were around twenty of the world's finest yachts, spinnakers up, mains like well starched collars, puffing out their chests on a hard run. I kicked myself for having packed my camera in the hold.

Once in the grand surrounds of Real Club Náutico de Barcelona I met the crews coming off their boats. The arrival of a regatta's worth of classic boats always puts quite a polish on a marina, and TV crews had arrived with crowds of people taking photographs. As I was wearing my Classic Boat badge the crews confessed

information freely, and cheerfully complained of any rule infringement by others. Later, at the bar it will be "Why don't you do more articles about my boat?"

Carlos and Maria, the effortlessly efficient organisers, showed me where to help myself to everything and I settled in to a night of partying gently 'til 4am in Catalan style. It was explained to me by a local sailor that you had to party until late at night as then the next day, you can blame any seasickness on a hangover. Crew members drew charts on the tables with beer-wet fingers and expatriate Brits talked fluently in Euros and metres.

Talk on the quayside was about the tragic dismasting of the lovely sloop *Peter* which, apparently, wanting to race in the classic category and in compliance with the strict regulations, took the epoxy strengthening off her

Previous spread:
Irene VIII
Above: Moonbeam
of Fife



NICO MARTINEZ

GIPSY

From the Royal Yacht Club of Santander comes *Gipsy*, owned by Ricardo Rubio, a 39ft (11.9m) gaff-rigged ketch. Built in 1927 and based on a design by Colin Archer, she was the only boat built for civil use by the Echevarrieta y Larrinaga shipyard in Cádiz and was numbered 16, thus the first boat to be built after the *Juan Sebastián de Elcano*, flagship of the Spanish Navy. Once finished she was shipped to Bilbao where she remained until the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

Miguel Sans, a Spanish sailing professional of the time and owner of *Altair*, skippered *Gipsy* during the Civil War, using her as a spy vessel for the National side around the bays of Creus and La Nao. She was also used to smuggle nationals

to the safety of France and arms back into Spain. Shrapnel marks can still be seen on the mizzen mast. The crew showed us a piece of ball bullet taken from the mast, which, interestingly for the late 1930s but unsurprisingly for the Spanish Civil War, seemed to be from a flintlock.

At the end of the war, she passed through various hands and was finally acquired by the Rubio-Vilar family in 1951, where she still remains to this day. *Gipsy* was fully restored between 2002 and 2006, on the express wishes of her current owner to the precise original specifications.

LOA 39ft (11.9m) BEAM 11ft 6in (3.5m) DRAUGHT 6ft 6in (2m)

Right: Happy winners at the prizegiving; *Alba*; The Spanish yacht ensign



GUY VENABLES



GUY VENABLES

“We placed ourselves by a marker buoy and let them all sail past us”

ANNE BONNY

Possibly the only Fife of Welsh extraction built in Spain (apart from her two successors) *Anne Bonny* is based on the 1935 Wm Fife III design (No 809) for the Royal Anglesey YC. Builder Niklaus Stoll, a Swiss from Basel, learned his trade in Sweden, then at the IBTC in Lowestoft, honing it at various yards around Europe before opening his workshop near Barcelona with the desire “to build a classic boat the classic way”, casting a lead keel, steaming oak timbers, sawing up a mahogany log for planking, using 2,000 copper rivets... He launched her in 2001 and sails her locally on the Costa Brava while running his boatyard and “longing for the magic moment” when he can build another classic boat. So far he has built two to the same design, *Chi*, 2003, for a German owner and *Vivi*, 2007, sailing in the Balearics under the USA flag.

LOD 24ft 6in (7.5m) LWL 16ft (4.9m) BEAM 6ft 3in (1.9m) DRAUGHT 3ft 4in (1.0m) SAIL AREA 30m² (323sqft) www.classicyachtsconstruction.com



NICO MARTINEZ

Above: Zacapa, Frers-designed 36-footer named after the rum used to celebrate her purchase

spreaders so they drove into the mast and snapped it. All the while four silent men in crisp white shirts shook gin cocktails for us without dropping pace for six straight hours. The lavish umbrella of hospitality shown to us from the Puig family was diligently ever-present.

Rumours circulated about the prospect of tomorrow's wind, locally known as the Garbi, and every point of the compass was mentioned apart from the north. Schedules are tight as Rambla de Mar, the swinging footbridge over the marina, opens every half an hour to let the boats in and out. If you miss it, you miss your race.

The next morning there was a brisk northerly wind that picked up the waves and ruffled the hair of the palm trees. The swell had picked up considerably and there were surfers in the bay. The lack of a significant tide let

the waves roll in calmly without the sudden lurch of a sucking undertow. I was offered a place on a RIB support boat with three other battle-worn Spanish yachting journalists who wore those Arabic neck scarves and smoked continuously. We suppressed our wry grins as the Spanish television crew began setting up a tripod in the RIB next to us, to the skyward glances of the driver. We lurched out into the bay and the races began in bright sunlight in front of a delighted Barcelona beach.

With four different classes sailing at once and a choppy sea it was hard to discern what was happening, so we placed ourselves by a marker buoy and let them all sail past us, masts tilting, as if at windmills. The buoys are where the cameramen like to be as that's where you get the money shot, everyone grinding and sweating at



NICO MARTINEZ

ISLANDER

Islander, a 56ft 5in (17.2m) auxiliary cruising ketch, was built in 1936-7 by Dickie & Sons of Tarbet, Scotland, and designed by GL Watson for shipowner Archibald J Barr of Kilmacollm, Inverclyde near Glasgow.

Her frames are of British oak and the 1½in (38mm) thick planking and the deck are of Burmese teak, air-dried for eight years. Barr owned her until 1939, and then again from 1950 to 1954. In between *Islander* was owned by Sir Knowles Edge, an industrialist from the north east of England.

In 1954, Barr sold her to Ronald Strauss who in 1964 sold her to Tom Blackwell, retired merchant captain and heir to the Cross and Blackwell fortunes, who set a solo world navigation record in her. Between 1969 and 1971 he circumnavigated the world twice but was thwarted on his

third attempt in Durban due to terminal illness. He sold the boat and donated much of the money to the Point Yacht Club of Durban, which spent it on a new restaurant which they named The Islander Room.

The new owner, Durban lawyer John P Mathews, got her as far as the Canary Islands where the crew jumped ship after waiting for three months to be paid. Eventually she was discovered in Barcelona in 1981 and bought in 1989 by Ricardo Albiana who, after tracking down the original drawings from GL Watson, restored her to the match fit and beautiful 76-year-old cruising ketch that she had always been.

LOA 56ft 5in (17.2m) BEAM 10ft 10in (3.3m) DRAUGHT 6ft 6in (2m)



GUY VENABLES



NICO MARTINEZ



GUY VENABLES

Above left to right: *Islander*'s owner meets the media; preparing to sail; barmen at their work

once while the wake turns in a wide frothy arc. *Alba*, with her lime green hull, was just in the lead with *Samarkand* in close second. Then *Alba* slipped back; a line had fallen over the side and tantalisingly trailed in the water for over a mile, seen only by us. Small mistakes like that cost races. Only the day before *Moonbeam IV* had won by just two seconds.

At the end of the races *Manitou* ended up with the trophy in her Marconi class, whilst *Malabar X* took the gaff-rigged class. *Alba* won the classic class and *Moonbeam III* went home with the big boats trophy. That evening, tickled by the warm breeze, we laid ourselves to the mercy of the silent barmen while the prize-giving took place and a cover band set up, the lead singer of which was an Olympic skiff sailor.

Whilst studying the results board a couple of skippers showed me a light-hearted equation they'd devised to correlate the placing of the boats with the number of charterers on board as crew. On the way back to my hotel, under a 45ft (13.7m) Lichtenstein sculpture I sat on a bench and drank Orujo, a Galician firewater, with an old man who sold magic tricks and told me all about Barcelona, this fascinating city, "the great enchantress" a medieval centre for ropemaking, symbol of Catalan independence and a place so filled with culture the concrete never sets under the newly laid statues. As one sailor put it, "The one thing about this regatta that makes it far better than any of the others in the Med is that it's in Barcelona. And Barcelona is just excellent, it's not some snooty resort, Barcelona is for everybody."

