

Isla Adventures: Tiare's tale

555 nautical miles of blue water.

For the skipper, it's a daunting organizational, logistical and strategic challenge. For the crew, it's a test of stamina, skill, patience, fortitude, and unparalleled comradery.

It's a balancing act, taking on enough fuel, water and provisions for a crew of nine for six days and a four person return crew yet staying light enough to still race. It's a psychological test to blend the varied skills and personalities that will build team work while striving for the ultimate goal, having fun.

Racing skill is tested with a starting tide, two major currents, and large variations in wind angles and strengths. Strategic plans start weeks ahead. The ever changing technology is tested with on-deck computer navigation, single-side band down-loads and satellite communications (telephones, GPS, weather images and hopefully not your 406 EPIRB).

Tiare's safety and mechanical checklist is several pages long, only rivaled by the "to-do" and logistical lists. It seems there are a mountain of forms: registration form, crew lists (one type for the race committee and another for the Mexican government), room reservation form, and Custom forms. Don't forget the logistics of moving the boat to Pensacola, docking arrangements, crew arrangements, one-way airline returns, and finally the crew that is to return the boat from Mexico, their provisions and their other needs.

Mexico 2000 for the Cruiser and Cruiser/Racer classes started on Wednesday, May 10 with clear skies (that remained for the entire race) and wind varying from 16 to 20 out



Mac Hadden fine tunes Tiare's newly shortened rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

of the SSW. The fleet had a beat out of the bay, battling a rising tide at peak rate with a 1.3 foot range. Most hugged the west to minimize the tide. *Tiare* led out of the bay followed by *Sabadaba* and the rest of the cruiser-racer fleet. About 1:00 PM we heard *Cinnabar* dropping out with mechanical problems. At dusk, three competitors were behind us on the horizon and Thursday's first light confirmed our lead. That night, the wind lightened and by daybreak, only two miles were covered in six hours.

Friday morning, the wind picked up to 15 knots and backed to the

SSE with three foot seas. At 12:30, 240 nautical miles from the start, 275 from the SYC, the race for *Tiare* ended with a port upper turn-buckle failure. The top 20 feet of the mast buckled, ripping the sails. The rig was skillfully secured and sails cut down, including the two week old genoa. Thankfully no one was injured. *Tiare* took on a little additional fuel from the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Kodiak Island* which was coincidentally near by. Having feasted like kings for five days, *Tiare* arrived in New Orleans with the finest crew with which one can sail.

Bill Provensal

Isla Adventures 2: South of the border to Mexico on Sabadaba

When Bill Hightower sets his mind to do something, he does it right! Bill has sailed with me since college days at Tulane, on fish boats, Portsmouth, and cruiser-racer type boats. However, due to the pressures of work, and four years in Singapore, Bill never owned his own boat (probably one of his smarter moves in life - until now!) After returning from his four-year stint in Singapore with Tidewater Marine, Bill went boat shopping and wound up with a Bruce Farr designed Beneteau Oceanis 446.

As soon as Waldo Otis heard about this acquisition, the light bulb went on and Otis Staffing (a subsidiary of the Otis Tour Group) went into action to outfit and crew the vessel for the Regatta Al Sol. (*Author's note: As I now recall, Waldo approached me about the possibility of taking Avenger to Mexico in 1994 - I'd just need a few items, maybe a couple of sails . . .*).

Thanks to the ever-vigilant efforts of Otis Staffing, a sterling crew was assembled for the race, consisting of Bill Hightower, skipper; Mike Guiza and John Fox, co-navigators and electronic wizards; Waldo Otis, coordinator and tactician; Steve Fant, Rick Navarro, Bobby Schimek and Ben Hightower, sail crew; and yours truly, Jack Hulse, as lowly cook and transient helmsman.

Waldo mentioned to Bill that he may need to purchase a few items to ready the boat for Mexico. No one knows exactly what these few items cost, but Al Gooch, Larry Sintes, Cletus Junius, the St. Romain family and the West Marine manager have

looked a whole lot happier lately.

After completion of endless lists and a great delivery trip to Pensacola, *Sabadaba* got a good start in fresh winds on Wednesday, May 10. The winds held out of the channel and through the first night, and Guiza and Fox began the relentless search for the Stream. We made some easting, but a combination of a diminishing breeze, a predicted high over the Gulf and what looked like a complete break-off of the northern portion of the Stream's meander, made the

The breeze picked up as we got into the trades, and we were able to hold a course which allowed us to carry a chute and power across the stream at its narrowest point.

future look a little dim for a while. We had *Tiare* in sight for a long time, which made us feel we couldn't be doing too badly. Then we suddenly lost sight of her and learned later that she had lost her rig. We encountered some wind gusts and waterspouts about the same time that *Tiare* reportedly lost her mast.

Fortunately, the boat never stopped moving, even in the light air, and the naviguessers finally got us to a point where we saw some benefit from the stream or at least no northward push. The breeze picked up as we got into the trades, and we were able to hold

a course which allowed us to carry a chute and power across the stream at its narrowest point. Once we reached the shelf, the breeze held, the adverse effect of the current was minimal, and we headed towards Contoy.

All this time, except for the first day and a half, we had no idea how we were doing. For some reason, we did not receive the daily position reports from the other boats. We didn't know if the other boats in our class, or the racing fleet which started Thursday, had experienced the same high pressures and problem with the Stream's meander. We were doing really badly or really well!

On Sunday, May 14, the fifth day out, we were pushing along the shelf towards Contoy. We had not seen another sail in days. Suddenly, a spinnaker appeared on our starboard quarter, which materialized not too much later into *Decision*, a Santa Cruz 52 skippered by Steve Murray. At least we knew we were in good company. *Decision* walked by us and was gone. We passed Contoy during a beautiful sunset and crossed the finish line at 8:30 that evening. We were both shocked and delighted to learn that *Sabadaba* was the second boat to finish after *Decision*, and the next boats did not start coming in until about 4 a.m. the next morning.

So Bill didn't do too badly. His first boat, his first race in the new boat, and he won first in cruiser-racer class and fleet and second across the line, right behind a Santa Cruz 52. I understand Waldo is now talking to Bill about a Little Harbor 62

Jack Hulse

On board *Sabadaba*, racing across the Gulf to the sun



SABADABA CREW HARD AT WORK—Out of sight and far behind the boat is the trail of dollars left behind by owner Billy Hightower (second from right) in preparing *Sabadaba* for the race to Mexico.



JACK HULSE preparing to do his apprenticeship at Galatoire's



BILL HIGHTOWER enjoying his new yacht *Sabadaba*

Isla Adventures 3: Report from the radio shack

Bill Parsons served as the Communications Officer for this year's Regatta al Sol. It is his responsibility to communicate with the racing yachts and plot their positions throughout the race, insuring that everyone is accounted for.

There is hardly anything exciting to report with regard to attempting to communicate across the Gulf of Mexico via single side band radio, particularly when sun spot activity essentially negates the entire network. Of note, however, involves not the hours spent at the microphone, but the "getting to" and "returning from" Isla Mujeres. When one gets the red light at the Customs counter in Cancun, there are many questions to be answered along with the presentation of letters from the Club de Yates de I.M. and the Mexican Navy explaining just why this foreigner needs to

import these suspicious radios into the country in the first place. Having a working knowledge of the Spanish language akin to the level of a two year old doesn't help matters. Suffice it to say that many people in very grand and official looking uniforms must be "satisfied" before everything is officially stamped for importation approval and you are on your way, despite the sideways glances from the sky caps who want nothing to do with any crazy gringo carrying bootleg radios to be used for God knows what nefarious purposes. That they leave you alone at all is a blessing in disguise.

Getting into Mexico is the easy part. Going home becomes an entirely different matter with a different group of security personnel, such as the guy behind the ticket counter clad in a black military assault-type uniform complete with

helmet and authentic looking automatic rifle. Experience has told this radio operator that your bags will be searched on the way out of the country once the x-ray machine lights up like the proverbial Christmas tree. Thus, it is better to declare everything in advance. Toss in a small bottle of Zippo lighter fluid for good measure and the result is more security people (including their relatives) than you can imagine taking an interest in the situation. I guess this falls into the "you're not gonna believe this but" category for them. Not only does everyone in line behind you get to see five days of very dirty laundry dumped on the floor. They are also treated to a comical explanation, in broken Spanish, as to why I had no intention of blowing up an international flight after having communicated with an armada of foreign vessels descending on the poor defenseless Island of the Women. There is, of course, a blessing here as well. No one wants to sit next to an obviously exposed CIA operative, therefore, one can enjoy a row of seats to himself on the plane.

Many years of experience in the above "in and out" procedures certainly helps one maintain his cool while contemplating the prospect of a Mexican firing squad. At any rate, the fleet was coaxed safely into port with no injuries and all accounted for, so it was worth it once again. As long as the beer is cold and the mosquito repellent works on the night shift, it's really not too bad after all. Hasta luego.

Bill "Arcos" Parsons

Regatta al Sol Results

CLASS A

1. *Decision* (1st in Racing Fleet)
2. *Mad Max*
3. *Fast Company*
4. *Kativa*
5. *Majestic*

CLASS B

1. *Dom Perignon*
2. *Man O War*
3. *Coquette*
4. *Roka Dobi*

CLASS C

- (CRUISER/RACER)
1. *Sovereign*

2. *XTC*

3. *Another Sea Horse*

CLASS D

(CRUISER/RACER)

1. *Sabadaba* (1st in Cruiser/Racer Fleet)
2. *Midnight Lady*
3. *Animal*

CLASS E (CRUISING)

1. *Caribbean Soul* (1st in Cruising Fleet)
2. *Esprit*
3. *De Adelaar*
4. *Laissez Faire*