

# My First Atlantic Crossing

*Camille Parrain's personal reflections on her first ocean passage.*

*Crossing the Atlantic is a lifetime experience. For me it has been the most exciting and memorable experience of my life. I decided to make the voyage because it has always been my dream to do it and also because it was part of a fieldwork I had to do for my PhD. I therefore joined Star Chaser, a Swan 51, with Dutch skipper Boogie and his first mate, Marlies. The crew was international which made it especially interesting. In total we were from five nations – the Netherlands, Canada, Denmark, Britain and France and we spanned an age range of 19 to 54 years.*

## *So what about the trip?*

It was hard to leave the harbour. The excitement was electric but also other thoughts crossed my mind. "What am I doing?" said the voice in my head. "Come on leave the pontoon and step aboard on the boat before she goes without you" said the voice again. My feet were almost stuck to the pontoon. By stepping onto this boat today, I knew that was it. There was no turning back and I may have to face all kinds of situations that I have not experienced before. Once on the boat, another step: letting go of the rope that binds me to the land. I hold it firmly until the skipper says "Let it go!" OK... here we go...

I remember the swell. There was lots of swell outside the harbour in the starting area. Some of the crew will not forget the swell as they fell victim to mal de mer. However, luckily I can't really say what being seasick is like (and I don't want to know) because I haven't been seasick.

## *Magic Moments*

There are magic moments at sea: a wall of stars at night; the moonrise; the sunset; the birds; the flying fish. There are also some more extreme moments, especially at night: the power and the sound of the sea; an intense darkness that intensifies sounds; the rain squalls. Night is probably the time when I had the most emotional ups and downs. It is not easy to sleep with 25 knots of wind and a rolling swell that at times makes the boat jump or scream and at others you feel her sliding through the waves and think "Who on earth is helming?"

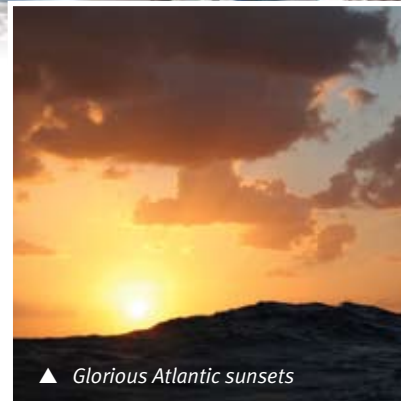
You get grumpy and tired when you are below decks: "I wish I were home. What am I doing here?" But then it is time to stand your watch and you laugh about the feelings you had just a few minutes before. It is so nice sailing at night; fascinating, sometimes scary, but you share some incredibly good times with your crewmates as well.

The best reward from a night watch is probably the time very early in the morning: it's another day in paradise, another day on our own little floating island where we share our feelings and experiences in our own special world.

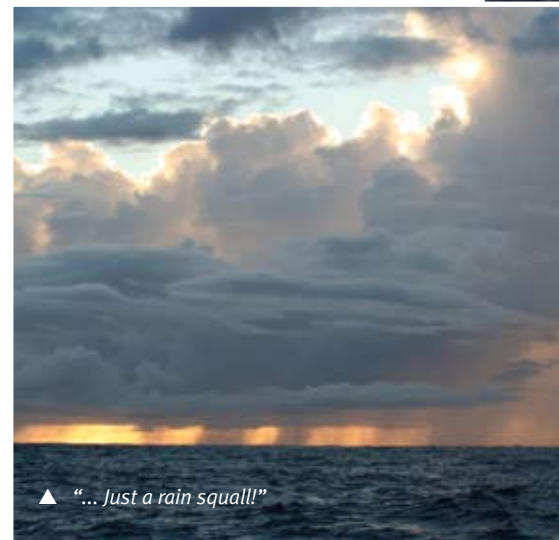
There are days when I realize how great and fascinating the ocean is. I woke up one morning with pilot whales following us, sunshine and a good breeze. The whales danced with the boat and followed her for an hour or more. A fin breaks the surface then it dives and the creature does its watery dance. There are tears in my eyes. This is the first whale that I have seen in my entire life and it is in the middle of the Atlantic, in its own natural habitat. What more does one need? Such simple and natural things can bring so much joy. It feels like we are in harmony with nature. Overwhelmed by this wondrous feeling I slip my feet into the ocean, trying the water with my toes. How see-through it is, just like fresh water. I take a tiny splash on my tongue; I have drunk and tasted the deep Atlantic Ocean, just like our friendly whales!

## *Adrenalin Squalls*

What a great day, it feels so good to be out here, but oh my God! What's that? "Just a squall" says an experienced voice. From that one word 'squall' I get a rush of adrenalin. Is it going to hit us? How strong? OK here we are; it's getting darker. Luckily it went to our right. OK, but there's another one and another one. Looking around I spot them all but we can't dodge them all and at last always seems to hit us bringing increasing wind and refreshing rainwater. After it passes the black cloud and its 'tail' of rain slowly disappear in the skyline. It is strange how it is always at the end of the day or



▲ Glorious Atlantic sunsets



▲ "... Just a rain squall!"



in the evening when this happens, as if the Atlantic was making fun of us and saying "I won't let you sleep again tonight!"

Another big moment for us all is the "middle". That's when we start to have some equipment issues on the boat with faults on the engine and generator, but that's also when we land a huge Marlin that will feed the crew for days. We are halfway across now with fewer miles ahead than behind us.

### Secret Sounds in the Night

I feel in tune with the rhythms of the boat and the ocean. "Marlies; did you call me? No." Deep asleep there is a voice that whispers my name or that sings a song. The wind in the mast suddenly sounds like the soul of the boat talking to me. During my watch a sound in the background could be children chattering; the sails flapping sound like hunters in the forest. Are people living in the sea I wonder? Again these funny and mysterious things happen at night. A multitude of new noises are created by the boat and her environment when I concentrate and listen, or when I'm tired and the sounds creep into my world. If I ask the crew in the morning: "Do you hear voices sometimes?" they will think that I've turned crazy. I think that they sleep too much, or they don't have good hearing and creative imaginations or perhaps I just don't sleep enough? Last night Marlies heard it as well. This is reassuring; I am not the only one!

Look around at sea; the ocean is alive. The long pulsing swell just proves it. If like me you are a dreamer or if you know someone who disappeared at sea, you would say the ocean and sky are filled with all the souls the sea took away.

▼ Wild Atlantic waves

We are getting closer to St.Lucia now. Each time any of us pass the chart table it is impossible to avoid glancing at the GPS slowly counting down the number of miles left. The day before the arrival is the weirdest day so far. The combination of tiredness due to lots of action during the night and the excitement of getting closer brings on a peculiar ambiance. Unstoppable laughing because of nothing, half the crew flying across the saloon on a wave that the helmsman didn't see....!

thought we had found our sea-legs after two weeks, but alas, no!

### St.Lucia, where are you?

I did not expect the last few miles to take so long. It is surprising how keen we all are to arrive. Is it because we've almost made it, or is it because we are fed up with life at sea? I decide on the first one because I am looking forward to sharing this amazing experience with others.

Here we are; we are arriving. Silence; a strange atmosphere descends over the boat as we close in on the finish.

We have been eagerly waiting the whole day for our arrival. Lots of laughter and excitement aboard, lots of final jokes to share. Finally we see the island in the clouds, we see the lights, and we smell the land. We make our first communication with Rally Control via the VHF. A new voice comes back through the speaker penetrating our bubble "Star Chaser, it is good to hear you. Welcome to St.Lucia." That's it we are arriving, people are waiting for us in the night! We can hear music and smell barbecues on the beach. We all shout as the aroma wafts aboard "it smells like food!" It is dark; the crew all go quiet as we get closer to the line, the Finish Line, the point that will officially end our trip. We all jump and shout as we pass the line! Hugs and kisses for everyone. We are happy. Then this joyful



▲ Star Chaser Crew

climax is followed by anticlimax. One second later everybody sits and stays silent. We look around. We hear music. It is noisy. We can't see people, but you can feel the movement and the crowd. We discover in the night a new land, a new world. We are in the Caribbean, in St Lucia! We try to figure out where to moor the boat. We hear another voice on the VHF and a light that shows us where to go. Some boats use their fog horns to welcome us. It is so quiet and silent aboard, kind of heavy. We are speechless. This is it. We put out the lines. I step off the boat; I cry.

There are already other boats in. They made it as well. We all have our own stories and lived in different moments of the ocean, but somehow it is the same story. We crossed a powerful ocean that permitted us into its realm for a few weeks. I achieved a dream. For that I thank the crew of Star Chaser and the ARC. Let's do it and live it again!

## ARC 2007 Online

Once again the ARC was enjoyed via the Internet by many thousands of online viewers reading the boat logs, rally news and looking at pictures and yacht positions. The ARC website attracted around 12,000 visitors per day over the four week period of the Rally, with an average of 65,000 pages read on the site everyday. The most popular pages on the site are the daily yacht logs and fleet positions. Over sixty yachts submitted regular logs during the ARC and prizes were won by the crews of Wagtail, EHO1 and One Too Many for their logs. Mathilde & Ola Minerva won the prize for the best children's log book.



*Here are some extracts from the winning logs. All the ARC 2007 logs are still available to read online at [www.worldcruising.com/arc](http://www.worldcruising.com/arc)*

### EH01 Log – the Big Brother Boat

The daylight aerial bombardments from the flying fish brigade are beginning in anger and I wait with interest to see which crew member experiences the first full on wet-fish-in-the-face experience. I didn't have to wait very long - no sooner had the evening watch change taken place Shane piped up "I wonder who will be the first to receive a flying fish" - then wallop! Smack into his right shoulder a not unsubstantial fish arrived smartly right on cue! Very amusing and you couldn't have paid for better timing!

### One Too Many Log – the Beddoe Brothers

Today we decided to change the time. I mean, just on the spur of the moment we decided that actually we should drop the clock back by an hour. A bizarre experience! In this tiny world of ours we have a veto on what the time is going to be, that is for the various watches. By common consent we now eat, drink, sleep at one hour different from ten minutes ago.