

Revenge of the GREY POUPON

“Watch this,” I said as I spun the wheel of our spry (nautical talk meaning “draped liberally with dirty towels, women’s underwear and wet socks”) 42’ Jeaneau catamaran around and headed directly for the 120’ mega-yacht *Princess Magna* that was anchored nearby. As we rapidly closed in on her stern, two rather large Arab looking fellows, nattily dressed in their best black sharkskin yachting suits with matching mirrored sunglasses, stood up on deck, arms across their chests, hiding, I suppose, matching black Uzis. In a moment they were joined by another yachty looking fellow with silver hair and a blue blazer (the King of Magna?) as well as a short, slight, dark, and probably confused young lady—ah yes, the princess herself, undoubtedly wondering what all the fuss was about.

At the very last instant, I turned hard to port, swung along side letting our sails luff noisily, dashed over to the railing facing the *Princess* and shouted upwards in my most precise English accent, “Excuse me, but do you have any Grey Poupon?”

While the entirety of my crew fell to their knees with laughter, the shark suits weren’t as amused. Luckily the king was. He broke into a wide, yellow toothed smile, gave us one of those ‘royalty waving to the masses’ waves, and the entire entourage disappeared back behind the dark tinted glass of their salon (to continue torturing some servant, I imagine).

A few hours later my crew recovered from their laughter and we once again became the well oiled (read: intoxicated) sailing machine we imagined ourselves.

But perhaps I’m getting ahead of myself. The concept of living on a sailboat while windsurfing between the magnificent islands of the Caribbean is one of the truly most excellent (MTV talk meaning “truly most excellent”) things I could ever think to do in my life.

I decided we needed a boat with lots of deck space; a large catamaran was the only answer. Ours had four staterooms (for very small states, it would seem), two heads, (four tails?), and enough deck space for a platoon of whales. Having been on both mono hull sailboats and cats, I can say without any reservation that I prefer cats, if only for the deck space. Cats have a huge cockpit, lots of open, flat deck space to lounge around on (or store the usual piles of excess toys) and best of all, a huge trampoline net in the bow (great for late night disco contests after a day of drinking rum punch).

Having settled on a cat, I then enlisted a crew of six to join me. U.S. Olympic windsurfing coach Ron Steele (older brother of silver medallist Scott Steele) would be our ‘designated captain’, partially because he actually *is* a commercial boat captain (pilot, driver, whatever) but more importantly because his name is Ron and I strongly believe in life imitating art and I had just seen the movie ‘Captain Ron’.

So Ron and his wife Bon, friends Peter and Shari from Colorado, and Scott and Dawn from L.A. all met on St. Martin, just south of the Virgin Islands, to board our boat. Since we had never met each other before (that’s another whole

story...) we decided the best way to get to know one another was to get drunk, which, after just four teeny tiny 16oz. rum drinks, we proceeded to do. There we go—now we're all friends! Wasn't that easy?

Dawn, the model from L.A., loaded her three steamer trunks of clothes on board; me, the gearhead, loaded several hundred pounds of windsurfing gear on board; Captain Ron, the veteran seaman, tossed on his tiny duffel bag containing a spare compass, skivvies and eye patch. And off we went.

Another beautiful thing about a cat is how easy they are to sail. The jib is self tacking, meaning it flips from side to side by itself (sometimes even when you don't want it to) so there's no radical winch grinding or any of those other strenuous America's Cup nautical things. We headed out into the sparkling turquoise Caribbean and turned north for our first anchorage, Orient Bay, just a few miles away.

Captain Ron eased us into the picturesque bay with a white sandy bottom only a couple fathoms deep (yachtical talk meaning six feet, derived from the old English expression "fath mommas" which meant any woman with at least a six foot waist). Since our cat only needed 4-5 feet of water, owing to its shallow draft, we could easily sneak into places where a 'normal' sailboat couldn't go.

Windsurfers were zipping back and forth across the sparkling turquoise bay (there is a law that all water in the Caribbean has to be sparkling and turquoise) and I was chomping at the bit get on my board and go. Just as I was about to drop the anchor I happened to glance up and notice this totally naked, 300 pound woman (a "fathom") trying to pull up the sail of her windsurfer right in front of us. Trying to be as nonchalant as possible—after all, we *are* in a foreign country here and perhaps they do things slightly different—I tossed the anchor outward. The rope immediately wrapped around my ankle, snapping my feet from under, yanking me into the railing and pinning me there as my left leg lengthened considerably.

As I tried to untangle myself I looked back at Captain Ron, his hands gripping the wheel and his jaw hanging slack as he tried to figure out if he was really seeing what he was seeing. Suddenly he figured out that indeed there was a 300# naked lady trying to windsurf right in front of us. He yanked the wheel hard to port. Right into a three-foot deep sandbar.

The cat lurched to a stop as the keel stuck soundly into the shallow bottom. Everyone stood dead silent on the deck, trying to decide how to get our boat off the bottom without looking at the fat, naked lady who was bent over still trying to get her windsurfing sail out of the water no twenty feet from our boat. This was going to be a looooooong week.

Seems Orient Bay is a well known (at least in the land of fathoms) nudist colony—perfect for our first night together, getting to know one another. All our wives, not wishing to display their wares yet trying to fit into the local surroundings, donned their tiniest bikinis and set about sunning themselves on the trampoline while I went ashore to investigate windsurfing rentals.

Now I gotta tell you, dressed to the hilt in my faded old surfer shorts, standing there talking to this totally naked guy sitting behind his desk in the beachfront watersports equipment rental office was as close to a Felini movie set

as I've ever been. The owner oversees an entire fleet of unclothed instructors who casually rent kayaks and windsurfers without a stitch of clothing. Ah yes, the tropics!

We rented some toys and soon we had joined the fathoms out on the bay. The wind was blowing around 18 knots (a boating term for speed, only used when the speaker wants to impress or confuse the listener; one "knot" equals approximately ten fathoms per second squared) and the water was warm and inviting and also sparkling and turquoise.

The next day we headed south to famous St. Barts, stopping at several tiny islands and beaches for swimming and snorkeling along the way.

First stop, Gustavia, the main town on St. Barts where we head for the dock to fill up with water. The fellow who rented us the boat had said that our four water tanks should easily last the entire week; our wives made sure that it only lasted two days so that we'd have to go ashore to fill up and "oh look honey, shopping! What a surprise!"

Time to explore. We jump on mopeds and proceed to terrorize the entire island population. Zipping around the steep, narrow roads like the bunch of out-of-control tourists we were, it was easy to see why locals everywhere hate mopeds and tourists. St. Barts is a beautiful island, with dozens of isolated coves with sugar sand beaches and lots of that sparkling turquoise water. We spend the day eating, drinking, exploring and napping on the beach. Our anchorage, just outside the main bay, was just close enough to town that the commute from our boat for eight of us in our four man dingy was survivable, but not so close that we'd be tempted to sneak back to shore for one last nightcap (or shopping spree).

St. Barts is quite French and thus quite civilized. Long, leisurely lunches in cozy beachfront cafes are the norm and combined with voluminous rum drinks, the time seems to pass much too quickly. We spend another lazy day touring about, swimming and chatting with the locals, and watching to occasional Twin Otter plane try to land on the short, steep, wind-blown runway which is littered along the edges with failed attempts from the past.

That night we moved our anchorage to Anse de Columbia, a small secluded bay a few miles east of Gustavia. The snorkeling was superb and afterwards we enjoyed a long hike to the other side of the island. Sleep comes easy after fresh grilled fish, warm French bread, tropical fruits and the sound of water lapping against the hull. [Wife: What's that noise? Are we sinking? Husband: No dear; if we were I'd be swimming instead of sleeping.]

"Hey, get up you lazy slob!" Scott yells from high up on the mast. "It's windy! Let's go windsurfing!"

Since Scott had never windsurfed before, this was indeed a revelation. It was also indeed windy. Back to shore, we hop on the scooters and zip over to Grand Cul de Sac, a large shallow bay on the northeast tip of St. Barts. There we meet with Pasqual Vallon who owns the local windsurfing school and rental center. If anyone on earth ever looked like the quintessential French pirate it must be Pasqual. With his mirror sunglasses, dark tanned face, 6 o'clock shadow and red bandana around his head, he rules the bay.

“Pasqual,” I say to him. “I have seven friends here who all want to windsurf. What do you say to that?!”

“Aha, this is good!” he fires back. “Let’s get them some gear and go!”

We get our gear and head out. Meanwhile Pasqual is teaching several beginners to windsurf. Nothing unusual here.... except that these particular students are aged 4-6 years old! “Yez,” says the pirate, “zeeze leetle onez really learn zee sports quickly, no?” I nod my head in agreement as I watch a ‘veteran’ of seven complete a sail-body 360, a difficult free-style trick I have been working on for three years—unsuccessfully, I might add.

After a few hours on the water, we are famished. An exquisite if somewhat pricey (\$50/person!) luncheon of salad, lobster, and massive rum drinks was followed by desert. “Let me order,” announced Dawn. “I know French.”

She looked the desert tray over carefully and gave the waiter the order. In French. He looked a bit puzzled but shrugged his shoulders and disappeared. Moments later he returned with the desert tray and set it down on our table.

“Well, dig in!” Dawn gushed. Yes, she had ordered the entire twelve-item desert tray. “They all looked so good,” she bubbled. “I just couldn’t make up my mind.”

Being surrounded by the sparkling turquoise water made my pounding sugar headache more palatable as we headed directly north the twenty-five miles to Anguilla the next day. In perfect sailing conditions, we rounded the northern tip of Anguilla and spent the day poking our way along the north coast towards Road Bay where we checked in with customs and anchored for the night. Many more beachside cafes and funky thatch-roofed bars lined the bay and once again we had a superb dinner washed down with punch made from three kinds of rum mixed with a spoonful of fruit juice. Had it not been for the full moon we’d still be out there bouncing off yachts in our overloaded dingy, looking for our boat.

During the night the wind really started to kick in and by 10AM it was howling. We took off on a broad reach, rounded the western tip of the island, and headed downwind back towards St. Martin. With the 25-30 knot breeze, we made a quick passage to Marigot Bay, then spent the morning tacking back up the northern coast. An hour later we rounded Point Nord, flew around the white sands of Tintamarre Island, and headed back into the northern end of Orient Bay—the non-nudist end, I might quickly add.

More great food, more potent drinks (after all, Rum is \$4 a bottle down here) and we spent our final night aboard our boat, which we had renamed the *Grey Poupon*. An early morning start brought us back to the boat basin at Oyster Pond way too soon. Weren’t we supposed to stay out another month or two?

The bottom line is, drop what ever you’re doing, get some friends (it doesn’t matter whether you know them or not—you’ll soon become friends), charter a boat and have the time of your life. If you don’t know how to sail a boat don’t worry: most charter companies can supply you a captain (and cook!) for a reasonable fee.

And don’t forget your Grey Poupon.

