

Where Gazelles meet the Grande Dames

It is now 14 years since the first St Barths Bucket was staged, but this thrilling informal event for superyachts has gone from strength to strength. David Glenn sampled life in the fast – and the slower, more sedate – lane aboard three impressive entries

Photos: Omne van der Wal
The awesome *Maltese Falcon* with *Meteor* sailing over her and *Timoneer* to weather



By any standards this year's St Barths Bucket was one of the most spectacular superyacht events ever. With 34 yachts taking part and the tradewinds in fine fettle, the competition was fierce, despite the assertion that this is a fun regatta.

The first St Barths Bucket took place 14 years ago when four yachts competed, fishing was one of the major activities during racing and captains downed a daiquiri before a high-speed tender dash to their yacht. They were then required to sail off their anchors before racing round the island. Proper job!

Political correctness, to say nothing of health and safety, ensured the alcoholic Le Mans-style start was short-lived, but for owners today the regatta cocktail served up on this tiny Caribbean island situated a few miles south of St Martin has proved irresistible. And the Bucket, a beaten up old spittoon first awarded in Nantucket when the first big yacht competition was run 23 years ago, remains the Holy Grail of superyachting.

Things have changed a touch, but tribute should be paid to the current organisers, led by Hank Halstead, who have succeeded in keeping subtle control not only of the competition, but also the commercial and practical pressures which without deft management could easily take the polish off this exceptional event.

There's no headline sponsor needed in St Barths, but the financial wheels are kept oiled by a select group of industry luminaries, including leading builders and designers, who maintain a low profile.

The secret lies partly in their key personnel all being passionate sailors who never lose sight of the fact that this is a regatta first and foremost for owners who use it as an opportunity to enjoy the yachts which have taken them so many years to plan and build.

Industry bigwigs

Having said all that, the Air France flight from Paris to St Martin, currently the most popular way of accessing this notoriously inaccessible island, was loaded with industry bigwigs this year – it was as if the Monaco Yacht Show had literally taken off.

Perini Navi were backing an impressive nine-boat entry, including Tom Perkins's still awe-inspiring *Maltese Falcon* and their new 125ft go-faster Briand sloop *P2*, to say nothing of the new 164ft *Baracuda*, complete with purple sails. Royal Huisman had been given the run of Dan Myers's schooner *Meteor* to celebrate 125 years in business.

Yet another excellent feature of this event is the rating system and the pursuit style of competition. In

other words, yachts start one by one at minute intervals with the slowest first. The finishing order on day one determines the new start times for day two and by day three the fleet should be poised not only for a mass finish, but also extremely close competition in the latter stages of the race. "You will all finish at 1421 today," Hank Halstead joked at a pre-race briefing – in fact, he was uncannily close to the mark.

With so many newer performance-orientated yachts, Halstead and rating guru Jim Teeters, who has an unmatched database of superyachts, have also divided the fleet into Grande Dames and Gazelles to create races within races (more prizes).

The overall effect of the pursuit system is to ensure safe starts with the fun kicking in three-quarters of the way around the course. This year there was some mighty close racing and on page 104 we look at some of the concerns creeping into the event.

A day with the Meteorites

An invitation from her builders to race aboard the Dykstra/Alden-designed schooner *Meteor* provided a dream of an opportunity. Alice Huisman, Mike Koppstein and Evert van Dishoeck were entertaining aboard the yacht partly to celebrate 125 years of Royal Huisman, but also to provide an opportunity to those who appreciate the excellence of the product. *Meteor's* owners had left her in the extremely capable hands of skipper Dean Maggio and his small, but efficient crew.

The last time I had been aboard *Meteor* was in 2007 at the Superyacht Cup in Palma, Mallorca. That had been the yacht's first and only competitive outing, but between Palma and St Barths the 170ft schooner has sailed 30,000 miles, most of the time shadowing owner Dan Myers and his *Numbers* race campaign.

With her wide sweeping decks, deep bulwarks and wonderfully protected cockpits, this was a fine yacht aboard which to watch Bucket proceedings. Then just before heading for the start our last guest arrived, one Jimmy Buffett, the legendary musician and author who also happens to be a mad keen yachtsman.

Having arrived in his own RIB – he has a house on St Barths and his Delta motor yacht was anchored in the bay – I asked Buffet about his cap, which bore the unmistakable M36 logo of Morris Yachts. "I love the look of that yacht and in fact I've bought one," he explained. He's going to keep her in Long Island.

He also has a beautiful little Tofinou called *Groovy*, which he keeps in Gustavia for day sailing round the anchorage off the town, the trailer-park as he calls it.

But today Mike Koppstein, Huisman's sales and



With her wide decks, deep bulwarks and protected cockpits, this was a fine yacht on which to observe the Bucket



Photos: Billy Black; Omne van der Wal; D.Giemm/ywpx

We did it! Alice Huisman raises a glass of champagne to the crew of *Meteor* after Day 1 win



Top left: the majestic sight of *Maltese Falcon* rounding Ile Fourche on the Wiggly Course. Main picture: *Meteor* really getting into her stride off the eastern side of St Barths. Above left: the dream team? Mike Koppstein of Huisman, musician Jimmy Buffet and skipper Dean Maggio form the afterguard aboard *Meteor* for Day 1. Above right: the Dykstra-designed 170ft schooner has 30,000 miles under her keel, mostly shadowing her owner Dan Myers and his *Numbers* campaign



ST BARTHS BUCKET

marketing manager, aimed to hand the wheel over to Buffett, who had always admired the *Meteor* look.

And did he have a day to remember! Our position in the start sequence looked OK, but as one of the Grandeur Dames we weren't exactly intending to set the world alight. But we made a cracking start and with Jimmy Buffett looking the part on the wheel we started overhauling *Maltese Falcon* as we fetched east-south-east across a flat calm sea with 12 knots on the clock, everything up and not a fleck of spray on deck.

As we came off the bottom end of St Barths we got the full force of the tradewind blowing at a neat 15 to 18 knots, enabling us to sail higher and faster than *Falcon* to the mark. "I think I need one of these," beamed Buffett. "It can be arranged, Jimmy," countered Koppstein quick as a flash...

Impressive afterguard

It seemed we could do no wrong. We timed the first tack to take us to the eastern end of the island to perfection as old hand Phil Wade aboard *Timoneer* had to tack out on port and fall in behind us. We then settled into an MPS reach all the way down to the final turning mark around Ile Fourche as lunch was served.

As a couple of yachts, including *Helios*, lost control of their kites we began to realise there was something on here and it went quiet as we contemplated the importance of snuffing the A sail successfully.

Dean had positioned us well for a wide rounding of Ile Fourche, but in an uncharacteristic foul-up the tackline of the MPS got away early and, despite the best efforts of the big men on the foredeck, including first mate Steve Prees and hired hand Joe Finelli – aka Joerilla – we couldn't get the bucket down over the billowing sail. Then bang! the halyard parted, the bucket and its bits seemed to explode in a shower of nuts and bolts and we lost the snuffer...

Dean Maggio expertly steered the bow under the out of control sail and somehow we scrambled it onto the deck without losing out much to the opposition.

Just one yacht lay between us and glory, but to my eye we looked too far away. The afterguard had other ideas as they assessed the slippery André Hoek-designed cutter *Shamoun* which was being chartered by a gentleman who has just ordered a very large schooner. This was the moment to impress him!

Maggio decided we'd be too close to the lee of the island if we tried to sail high of *Shamoun* so he cleverly used the full effect of *Meteor's* massive sail area to drive down to leeward, a move that saw us beat her over the line by a mere 23 seconds.

So a bullet on day one and a huge champagne celebration aboard *Meteor*... and to cap it all *Meteor* went on to win The Bucket!

What this also proved is that you don't need a particularly heavyweight crew to be effective and I mean no disrespect to Maggio and his team. What they know after 30,000 miles of sailing is exactly how to run their yacht, what she is capable of, when to set the right sails and when to take them down. It is was an object lesson in simple, effective sailing not tempered by anything too overbearing. A brilliant day out. ▶▶

At this point I have to admit I lost control of Baracuda, performing an embarrassing involuntary gybe

Photos: D. Glenn/Yvix. Inset: Onne van der Wal, D. Glenn



Main picture: thumping to weather with 422 tons of alloy beneath your feet is quite an experience. Left: *Baracuda* powers upwind. Above: comfort on the flydeck

The Wiggly Course just got wigglier

It's always alarming when you step aboard a brand new 164ft US\$20 million superyacht and you're asked by the builder – Perini Navi in this case – to take the wheel, do the tactics and generally run the yacht throughout the race. Phew! Not sure what my insurance policy says about this sort of thing, but here we go.

By chance I'd overheard a conversation involving *Baracuda's* delightful skipper Sergio about the steering being a bit iffy. So iffy they'd been 15 minutes late for yesterday's start. This is a new boat so teething problems are normal, but unreliable steering and the Bucket would not make good bedfellows.

I suggest that it would be a good idea while the line is still clear to do a couple of practice runs to time our approach under full main, mizzen and the big headsail. This seemed to be OK until we turned downwind to begin our first run. At this point I have to admit I lost control of *Baracuda*, performing an embarrassing involuntary gybe. We had to phone a couple of nearby yachts to warn them of our plight while I handed the wheel back to Sergio.

The problem lay with the electronic steering system. To steer successfully the helmsman had first to turn the wheel, then check an analogue potentiometer reading on the dashboard and then a dial showing the actual rudder angle which would eventually catch

up with the initial turn of the wheel. Clearly the delay was way out of synch and someone needed to delve into the electronic guts of the controls to sort things out. Electronic steering of this type provides not an iota of feedback on the wheel and a delay like this is extremely unnerving for the uninitiated.

Sergio's more experienced touch brought things back under control and we got away just a few seconds late. I decided the best thing I could do would be to take on a more tactical role and I was in a good position to see the effects of *Baracuda's* extraordinarily deep swing keel which increased draught from 13ft to 33ft!

On the leg from Colombier to Ile le Boulanger, the twin-engined, 422-ton ketch fairly thumped into the waves and kept well to weather using the considerable 'bite' of the keel. We could do nothing but marvel as *Maltese Falcon* came swooping past us to weather on the penultimate leg, but on the final fetch we picked off a couple of yachts to prove that *Baracuda* has more potential to fulfil. With six yachts behind us it was a great improvement on the previous day so the press went ashore content in the knowledge that we're not entirely useless when reviewing these things!

We'll be taking a closer look at this dramatic-looking Perini in the next issue of *Supersail World* – watch out for her amazing John Pawson-designed interior.



“Today will be all about traffic management.” Choosing the right lane, taking the high road on the motorway to victory ...

Above: the new Perini Navi 38m P2, designed by Philippe Briand, is good-looking and fast. Below: the afterguard included Peter Holmberg, Robbie Doyle, Richard Bouzaid and the designer Briand



Photos this page ©rne van der Wal

P2 battles the traffic

So Day 3 beckoned. The new P2, a 125ft Philippe Briand sloop, was in town to prove that Perini had at last added a faster yacht to their portfolio. In fact, P2, owned by Mr and Mrs A from Aspen, had already gained a reputation for being good-looking, fast and full of potential.

Mr A, who as a result of a skiing accident had to be content with the comfort of the cockpit, had acquired a formidable afterguard. America's Cup skipper Peter Holmberg was steering, sailmaker Robbie Doyle and designer Philippe Briand graced the aft deck, together with Richard Bouzaid from Doyle's Auckland loft. David White, a legend from the 'old days' of the Whitbread, was running the foredeck.



They'd had almost 18 knots on the boat speed clock the day before and P2, weighing in at about 155 tons, was looking good. She could win this regatta, or at least her class which would be quite a coup on her debut. All she had to do today was beat the 128ft Ed Dubois-designed Ganesha (ex-Zulu and weighing around 190 tons) which admittedly was starting a long way ahead, but was definitely catchable. But there was a canny bunch aboard Ganesha.

The Highway Code

"Today," announced Peter Holmberg to the assembled 38-strong crew, "will all be about traffic management." Choosing the right lane, taking the high road or the low road, checking out traffic, passing traffic, avoiding traffic – we would be on the motorway to victory if we chose the right 'lane' around the island.

A two-hour pre-start ensued with a long test beat east and then a long run to assess the 'motorway lanes' on what would eventually be a crucial leg from Grande Pointe to the finish.

Unfortunately, a computer glitch had us a long way from the line as our start time loomed, forcing us to motor back. We ended up not being at all where the brains trust had intended. No matter, P2 was soon up to

speed. Trouble was we had a cool customer in front of us – Brad Butterworth was calling the shots on the J Ranger and she had a very tight grip on the 'high road'. By the time we reached Les Greandins Ranger was long gone and we got entangled in a melee of yachts trying to round the point. We were still stuck in traffic and there was not a lot we could do about it.

We had a final opportunity on the last turn where we could have either done a bear away set, left the 'motorway' and chased down Ganesha which was now in our sights on the 'low' road or remain high and wear down the opposition. We remained high, found ourselves bumper to bumper with the likes of Unfurled (112ft) and Sojana (115ft) and watched as Ganesha sailed on ahead of us.

Disappointment at not beating Ganesha and thus losing our grip on a class victory cast a rather long shadow across the large crew. What did this indicate? That no matter who you have at the back sometimes a simple, well-drilled approach pays bigger dividends? Maybe.

It's early days with P2 and she will surely cut the mustard back in Europe. She is unquestionably quick, but in St Barths she simply got stuck in traffic... See page 104 for the Bucket safety debate



Crew photos: Billy Black



The Bucket is all about 'winning the party'... Top: the crew of Avalon have a good hair day. Middle and above: the crew of Axia won the Skulduggery Cravat (the noose) for the best Bucket humour. Left: Tom Perkins (right) receives the Perini Navi Cup from Giancarlo Ragnetti and Milena Perini. Below: the fleet at anchor in Gustavia. For a full set of results go to www.bucketregattas.com



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