



ALL ABOARD FOR THE BUCKET

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GORGEOUS GAZELLES AND GRAND DAMES WITH THEIR OWNERS LINE UP FOR SPADES OF FUN, BUT THERE IS A SERIOUS NOTE TO THE RACING

It's Bucket time: everyone is in a good mood and for once you would have trouble distinguishing who the owners are, if you didn't know, as they join in the spirit of the occasion wearing shirts emblazoned with logos and the boat name or colourful fun T-shirts. It's a time to muck in and enjoy yourself and everyone helps everyone else when it comes to pulling down an MPS... The person you see grimacing when there is a loud rip will be the owner (sorry Barry, that rip did hurt on board *Salperton* – but what an amazing retrieval and hoist of the spare sail by the crew for the first regatta race for the yacht. Bravo). Oh dear, there is *Baracuda's* MPS being repaired on the dock – but commiserations from Miss Pendennis would have brightened up anyone's day, even though she walked over it in stilettos!

If you want to give your crew a workout, what better place to take them than to the first regatta of the season in St Barth's. As this sleepy French island, drenched in Caribbean sunshine and surrounded by uncharted rocks and azure blue seas, comes to life we watch the quay at Gustavia, usually the domain of motor yachts, fill up with sailing yachts. Several new yachts whose paint has only just had time to dry arrive for a warm up at the Bucket this year including *Salperton*, *Riela* and *Hanuman*, to make up the fleet of delicious Grand Dames and Gazelles. The owners





1: grand dames dance alongside gazelles;
2 & 3: owners and guests alike relax during the event;
4: a moderate breeze keeps sails filled on a close hauled leg;
5: crew are kept busy on downwind legs



who really get into the swing of the regatta choose to go stern-to on the quay, while others, who are possibly less familiar with the event, decide to anchor outside the harbour. In retrospect, you couldn't blame them for this option when the queue to get in after racing is like a summer motorway traffic jam as everyone converges on one small area.

Firstly, hats off to the organisers for the courses. The pursuit starts, although still not popular (but then we all have to have something to grumble about), create quite a sight for the photographers and bring comment at the briefing after the first day's racing that the yachts 'slow down a bit when rounding marks'. Convergence on the committee boat gets a bit hairy as 'rock stars' throw the yachts across the finish line. Some even ignore the 40 metre clearance rule – yes, you with the blue hull, you know who you are! Please observe that this is gentlemen's racing, not for hooligans.

Racing is relatively tame in light breezes, with an absence of frisky Caribbean seas and the usual 25 knot breezes. We really only tickle up to 15 knots on most days, but it does mean that the downwind legs look spectacular, except for the lovely *Riela* who has to wave the fleet on as her wardrobe is *sans* MPS. That doesn't stop us having fun on board though and in fact it is the first regatta Christian has competed in. 'It was fabulous fun, more fun than I had expected,' he tells me.

I have to take my hat off to John, the owner of *Salute*, who helms his yacht for the whole course and enjoys every minute of it. Thanks for the VIP treatment on board – and I loved seeing one of your guests immersed in *Boat International*.

As the men enjoy a beer with the crew and talk tactics for the next day's racing, it is time for the ladies to show what they really enjoy doing at the end of a hard day: a visit to the local boutiques. Bags emblazoned with logos from Louis Vuitton, Bvlgari, Prada, Van Cleef & Arpels and so on are marched down the quay – what a great pastime.

Organisers of regattas face nightmares if things go wrong and we hear of one guest getting hurt, ending a race for *Baracuda*; two yachts ground in unfamiliar waters, while *Meteor* gets hooked up in the harbour; MPSs are shredded. But I do have a plea to make – captains, please give a proper safety briefing to guests. On the yachts I went on





1, 3, 7 and 8: Barry gives his crew a hand on *Salperon*, talks tactics and loses a sail; 2: the fleet; 4: John Williams enjoys his winning moment; 5: *Salute* powers ahead; 6: the organisers beached; 9: the sewing machine comes out for *Baracuda's* MPS 10: Alice Huisman parties; 11: boats for kids; 12: 'Manhattan' skyline after sunset

only one did this: you cannot assume that guests are sailors, or even used to being on superyachts. They need to know the 'no-go' areas, where the life jackets and liferafts are, what to do in an emergency and so on, or things will happen! Well-prepared guests will make the life of your crew much easier, especially when crew are fully occupied in race mode.

The social events are well attended, although on the first night most of the owners decant to Maya's restaurant, where the chatter is effervescent and owners catch up with friends. Each evening private parties are held at chic villas overlooking the ocean.

One thing that must change, though, is the yacht hop. I had three lady owners startled to the core as 'who knows who' lay straddled across beds having their photograph taken. Have you no shame? But more startling, the crew were letting people run amok – surely this isn't right? Such was the uproar that some owners will not attend the yacht hop next year, opting to stay outside at anchor. On the upside, the owner of *Andromeda La Dea* happily chirps over a glass of wine with me that he 'absolutely adored the yacht hop', and the party was on his boat and the one next door every night.

A highlight of the regatta has to be the duel between *Hanuman* and *Ranger*. With wicked comments going back and forth between the yachts it is all-out 'war'. *Hanuman* beats *Ranger* on day one, *Ranger* beats *Hanuman* on day two, but the final prize of the regatta goes to *Ranger*. With a smile broader than the quay, John Williams and his whole crew dance up on stage to take the trophy as the entire contents of a jeroboam of champagne are unleashed. Never have we witnessed such a glory of delight from this owner.

As the jets covers are taken off and the engines warmed up, it's time to let the sun go down on this year's Bucket. See you all for some great fun racing in June at the Loro Piana regatta in Porto Cervo.