



A BUCKET FULL OF ACTION

It was the best St Barths Bucket yet, according to David Glenn, who joined in the excitement on three very different yachts. As this increasingly successful superyacht regatta comes of age, organisers are attempting to crack the safety and handicapping code without spoiling the fun

ST BARTHS BUCKET

“Go, Terry, go! Go, Terry, go!” I’m on the aft deck of the 151ft *Christopher* as she slides across the finishing line in the final race of the St Barths Bucket. The yacht’s self-appointed cheerleaders are giving it up as only Texans can, but helmsman Terry Gould is as cool as a cucumber as he eases the new 400-ton ketch over the line ahead of *Rebecca*. His arch-rival loses out by a coat of paint – result!

It’s an incredible finish, one that sends the crowd wild – high fives, whoopin’ and hollerin’, even a tear shed. One pumped-up guest tells me it’s his first time afloat, but he’s never experienced such an intensely exciting moment. Momentarily concerned, I wonder if there’s a defibrillator aboard. Probably.

The phlegmatic Gould, veteran captain of classics and modern yachts alike, allows himself a broad grin: “Not a bad day out, mate!” And the owner – well, he’s almost speechless, which is saying something for a Texan. For him it’s a brilliant finale to his inaugural Bucket, a moment to savour. The 70 or so guests he has invited have had a ball. They’ll be back, perhaps in their own boats.

An outstanding day

Astern of us, most of the Bucket fleet is rushing towards the line under acres of coloured spinnaker. The handicapping has brought them together in a gigantic phalanx of gleaming hardware and on the dock afterwards everyone agrees it has been an outstanding day. If you had to distil the essence of the St Barths Bucket, all its ingredients were there that afternoon.

This year’s Bucket got it just about right. With 40 yachts and a waiting list, this is the foremost superyacht regatta in the world. But more importantly, it is beginning to set standards by which other regattas will be judged in terms of safety and handicapping. Dull as these subjects appear, superyacht racing will stand or fall by them.

Barring some crushed and lost fingers and toes (trapped in hatches in both cases) and chest injuries caused by an ‘exploding’ block, this regatta took a big step towards better safety. Having said that, the conditions were



Carlo Falcone is all concentration as he steers the schooner *This Is Us* to weather of *Helios*. Right: *Maltese Falcon* looks dwarfed by *Kokomo* and *Mirabella V* (foreground)

Pim Van Hemmen



T Wright/photoaction.com



light to moderate and in fresher breezes some people's interpretation of 40m – the diameter of the imaginary circle around each yacht within which no other competitor should venture – would be questionable.

Captains and safety officers (each yacht must have a crewman in constant radio contact with competitors) were repeatedly reminded that the way to deal with 40m rule infringers, at least initially, was to 'have a quiet chat' with the other yacht after racing. Persistent offenders would simply be asked not to reapply for future Bucket events.

But how to police this? Easy – use a tracker, in this case the Kattack GPS unit (see *Supersail*, page 112). This regatta introduced the little black box, to be hung on each yacht's taffrail and returned to the race committee on a daily basis to download the yacht's track, thus verifying its good behaviour.

A brilliantly simple deterrent to bad habits, you would have thought. Yet some

offenders clearly thought they were driving Farr 40s rather than 500-ton cruising yachts. Sure, the rule can be difficult to justify if you want the right balance of safety and excitement, but for the time being rules are rules. It's work in progress, I would suggest.

However, on the whole the Bucket this year was an orderly affair. There were two other big improvements. The appointment of race officer Peter Craig as regatta chairman and PRO brought gravitas and mutual respect between the race committee, captains and owners, not to mention a sharper edge to proceedings. This is certainly no reflection on the previous management, but the Bucket has evolved and it should be congratulated for moving things on.

Splitting the fleet into three classes – basically, fast, slow and slower – with different courses in the same race helped to satisfy the constant demand for fairer handicapping. Bucket rule conductor Jim Teeters also left

starting sequences to the last possible minute, so wind-watchers around the island could provide up-to-date condition reports to give the handicapping a better chance.

The biggest curved ball Teeters had to field were the 15 newcomers to the Bucket, all of which had to be assessed on day one before settling them down in the handicapping.

It almost goes without saying that the onshore element of the Bucket was fantastic fun. Such is the camaraderie of this field of yachting, the atmosphere is of a big happy family. This is carried onto the water and, usually, to the competition. Long may it last.

DAY ONE **Around the Island**

Twizzle, 189ft flybridge ketch Dubois/RWD/
Royal Huisman
Fleet result: 27th
Class result: 7th (Grand Dames)

As I approach *Twizzle* by tender, I notice her topsides are defined by an unusual feature for a modern yacht – tumblehome and lots of it. It softens the line of this huge ketch, her flying bridge and superstructure all tinted

“ Such is the camaraderie, the atmosphere is of a big happy family, even on the water in competition. Long may it last

The good-looking and very powerful *Twizzle* is a newcomer to the Bucket and as her work-up continues she is likely to become a serious competitor



Cory Silken



Above: life on *Twizzle's* flying bridge is leisurely during racing while Scott Zebny of North Sails stands with his remote mainsail trimming controller. Below: Robbie Haines explains the course to the stricken Michael Bradfield. Below right: Percy and Haines, wired for racing. Bottom: party time!



Photos: DG/ywpx

windows and curvaceous porticos. From following the yacht's design and build, I know that Redman Whiteley Dixon (interior and exterior styling), naval architect Ed Dubois and *Twizzle's* enthusiastic owners Michael and Bettina Bradfield have wrestled to get the look just right. Despite the yacht's 496 tons, the consensus is she's quite a looker.

I consider myself fortunate to be aboard at all because Michael had the toes of one foot almost severed two days earlier when a hatch accidentally closed on them. Ouch.

But here he is, fresh from hospital, bright and breezy, foot wrapped in a blue surgical bag; "Keep it *up*, Michael!" Bettina insists. Both are rallying the troops at the pre-race briefing, which is clear, thorough and at times delivered with aggression. Such is the desire to do well on *Twizzle's* Bucket debut.

Captain Gordon Percy, who has been with the Bradfields for 17 years, is the epitome of calm and charm as the vast vessel is readied for sea. The deck crew are all wired for sound – Gordon, Robbie Haines (1984 Soling Gold medallist) and navigator Mark Chisnell look more like Chinook crews with their voice-mikes, headsets and wasp-like sunglasses.

They orchestrate the pre-race checks and discussions from the bridge – more like a balcony so magnificent is the view – while owners and guests add advice from behind.

We're getting into race mode and Wally Walter and a bunch of crew from the late Roy Disney's *Pyewacket* campaign are helping to make it a good start. Do we go for the blade or the big genoa? I am told the latter was the biggest 3DL sail ever made on North's moulding table, itself built specially for the last America's Cup multihulls.

Our man on the rudder

One crewman intrigues me. He stands close to the bridge control area and spends all day with his index finger raised (see photo above). Then half a finger, then two fingers. I can't fathom it. He reveals he is signalling rudder angle to North Sails man Scott Zebny, who stands with his remote control on the flying bridge trimming the main. 'Rudder man misses out on headset' read my notes.

"There are some ludicrously big boats here," Bradfield observes, "but we are one of the biggest." This is confirmed by the fact that we are about the last yacht to start.

We sail serenely to weather before putting in a quick tack, once the headsail has been furled to get it around the headstays. One reason for her handiness is that *Twizzle* 'only' draws 12ft 6in with her board up and sports a shallow hull for her length. The idea is that she will be able to access some of the anchorages the Bradfields enjoyed with their previous *Twizzle* – a Feadship motor yacht.

But with the board right down the yacht draws an immense 35ft 6in. "She seems to spin on a sixpence," someone observes. "Let me assure you that absolutely nothing about this yacht relates to a sixpence," the owner counters, quick as a flash. The mood is jovial





in the guest area of the flying bridge – some suggest Bradfield’s medication might have something to do with it – and we enjoy a pleasant reach along north St Barths while lunch is served. The beef is sublime.

We make pretty good gains with the vast press of sail set, including the A4 (the biggest asymmetric), which I am reliably informed measures more than a third of an acre. There’s also the much-admired, gossamer-thin, Cuban fibre mizzen staysail, which seems to put at least a knot onto our speed and brings us onto the fetch home in extremely good shape. We’ve been doing 11-12 knots or more all day and some sly work by Messrs Chisnell and Haines has put us in a potentially commanding position.

Then things go awry. First we have to establish where the finish line is laid, information now posted by the race committee on the yacht’s website. By the

time we extract this from the technology we’ve eased to leeward of that sweet line in St Barths which has you hugging the island’s southern shore right to the end of the leg. If you can ride the shifts and puffs through here, you will invariably do well.

Initially it doesn’t seem to matter and the line looks to be well within our grasp, but a giant header puts paid to our chances of keeping up with the yachts to weather and we end up letting in a handful of boats we’ve spent all day overhauling. Such is life!

Our compensation is a finish alongside *Elena* to leeward and the huge *Maltese Falcon* swooping in from the weather quarter, with Bill Joy’s *Ethereal* somewhere there, too.

“We must beat *Ethereal*!” Bradfield insists.

“That’s not very gentlemanly, Michael,” retorts his wife Bettina. “They’re coming to dinner tonight.”

I just hope he kept his foot up.

DAY TWO

The Not So Wiggly Course

Bequia, 90ft yawl by Stephens Waring White/Deb Staley/Brooklin Boat Yard Fleet result: 22nd Class result (Elegantes): 6th

From one of the largest yachts in the fleet to the second smallest. I say ‘smallest’, but *Bequia* is still 90ft, and every inch of her is beautiful. She was built in cold-moulded epoxied timber by the Brooklin Boat Yard in Maine in 2009, and her co-designer Paul Waring talks me through the yacht’s gestation. *Bequia* is owned by Jes and Deb Staley, who owned a Hinckley Bermuda 40 before falling for the lines of the W-Class.

Jes’s passion for sailing is palpable – he clearly uses the moments aboard as an escape from his high-pressure work as a banker – while Deb’s bright New England-style interior is admired by many.

Skipper Seamus Meharg sits me down in the cool comfortable deck saloon where Waring and I chat as the race crew join the boat. I’m used to an army of 20, even 30

“‘Is this our big kite?’ I ask. ‘This is *the* kite, David,’ Jes Staley says, at which point the halyard parts



The Campbell-James brothers steer and trim *Bequia* while owner Jes Staley has his finger on the kite winch button. Nick Hutton looks aft



T Wright/photofaction.com

Above: *Bequia*, an easy to sail 90-footer designed for family cruising. Below left: setting her effective mizzen staysail. Below right: Deb Staley, foreground, relaxes with a guest in the main cockpit



Onboards: D.Gywyrix

trooping aboard at the Bucket. Today we are racing with just nine aboard and I can't resist saying this feels like real yachting. There are one or two buttons, but this is back to basics and I feel very much in touch with *Bequia*.

Competent crew

I am introduced to one of the race crew, Paul Campbell-James fresh from winning the Oman round of the Extreme Sailing Series. He's aboard with his brother Mark who works for Jes Staley in London. The Campbell-James Show is impressive to watch – with Paul's regular Extreme 40 crew, Nick Hutton, they certainly know how to sail this yacht.

Even so, we are early for the running start and there's much ducking and diving as we teeter on the line. We're over, but this is the Bucket and a droll race committee announcer waves us through.

We're off like a scalded cat, a bulletproof A sail up and the mizzen staysail pulling well. Moments later I look on incredulously as the 270-ton ketch *William Tai* spins out of control, broaches and charges across our path, kite cracking like a rifle and far too

much of her bottom exposed. We duck her and leave her wallowing, her mizzen staysail in tatters and a lot of clearing up to do.

Then it's our turn. "Is this our big kite?" I ask. "It's *the* kite, David," Staley says. At that point the halyard parts and we spend the next ten minutes hauling *the* kite back aboard.

Luckily, the Not So Wiggly Course doesn't involve too many long offwind legs, so we knuckle down and start picking off boats: the Huisman schooner *Meteor*, then the alarmingly quick Hoek schooner *This Is Us* (ex-*Skylge*). The Campbell-James brothers put us on a line for the weather mark – I should say rock – which takes us within feet of the reef extending from it.

Helios is coming in from weather and I start thinking about the new regulations involving zones, the 40m rule and safety officers as we squeeze round without losing a tenth of a knot. It's tight but fair and we head off downwind minus the A sail. Shame.

At the leeward mark we follow *Helios* round and have *This Is Us* right on our stern. We're tight on the mark, but the schooner ambitiously considers climbing inside us. They've got to be kidding! And if that's 40m between us, I'm a Dutchman.

We direct her to leeward and she squeezes between us and *Helios*, much to the annoyance, I later discover, of Dawn Riley, the pro aboard *Helios*. I have to say *This Is Us*



Marie's owner brought his own vintage aerobatic display team, which performed at the regatta

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behaves inappropriately in the context of the Bucket's new 40m rule.

We press on and suffer another short offwind leg before the fetch for home, which is fast, furious and fun.

We're desperate to pip Donald Tofias aboard *White Wings*, but the slippery sloop stays ahead and instead we're looking over our shoulders at the magnificent *Marie*, the 170ft Hoek ketch which comes closer with every surge of her bow wave.

We hold her off by 27sec and contemplate what might have been had that damned halyard not parted. My notebook also records that 26 yachts finish within 16 minutes of each other. There's no hole in this Bucket.

DAY THREE

The Other Way Round

Christopher, 151ft aluminium ketch, Ron Holland/Pendennis Shipyard
Fleet result: 7th
Class result (Elegantes) : 2nd

Having enjoyed the lofty view from *Twizzle's* balcony, I find it interesting to compare the haves and the have-nots when it comes to flying bridges. *Christopher* is a have-not, so the helmsman, Terry Gould, and afterguard are sandwiched between two communities: the convivial guest contingent housed in the vast main cockpit; and the after-deck crew, which comprises headsail and A-sail trimmers, mizzen and mizzen staysail hands plus the inevitable 'fluffers and floaters' (including me), who gravitate towards the comfortable seats right on the stern. I lose count, but I swear there are 50 people on board. Some I never meet, let alone see.

The decibel level from the Texan contingent and the goings on abaft the helm position in the pre-start forces Captain Gould to concentrate hard as we manoeuvre the yacht for a mainsail hoist. Time is getting



on and with one crew still perched on the boom tending to batten pockets he is glancing at the line and his watch. "Come on lads," he seems to be urging.

Christopher's owner has hired the crew of *Avalon* (a regular, but this year absent, Bucketeer), so they know the score and out of the apparent chaos *Christopher* emerges in decent shape on the line. The Texans see this a major achievement and deliver their first (of many) "Go Terry, go!" choruses.

"A mighty fine sight"

Ron Holland himself shares the helm with Gould and we have a great opening leg and an even better beat, making mincemeat of the schooners. I am staggered to hear from Holland that the steering aboard *Christopher* is of the rod and bevel box variety, so that the helmsman has direct contact with the yacht, as it were. There's real feel.

According to Gould, the twin rudders prevent the helm from overloading and she



Main pic: Cory Silken. Left: DG/ywpx

Top: the newest boat at the Bucket, *Christopher*, on a charge. Left: trimming hard, trying to keep the lightning fast *Rebecca* at bay. Above: designer Ron Holland was pleased with *Christopher's* performance

looks fingerlight. In speed, she's in the 10-11-knot department upwind and we start hitting 13 and 14 knots as we reach the top of the island and start the bear-away.

At this point things start to get pumped. We've had a fault-free day and Holland predicts that, compared with the yachts around us (there's that pesky *This Is Us* again), we should have the legs once we crack. Momentarily, even the Texan decibel level drops as the realisation dawns that something could be on.

Christopher's owner emerges from the cockpit, moves to the aft deck and trains his binoculars on the chasing fleet. "That's a mighty fine sight," the Texan drawls.

The race is very much on.

We are in the home straight, but we need to get a big gybe in and we have *P2* on our transom at about 10m – come on, guys! Not only that, we can just about see the whites of the crew's eyes aboard *Rebecca*.

We have to beat her. She's the other Pendennis boat in the Bucket and is searingly fast with a new suit of ultra-modern-looking sails. And she is steaming up on us. Fast.

I'll end where I started. Let the party begin!