

TAKEN FROM SAILING TODAY CRUISING SECTION, AUG 2009



Main: Sue, Christine and Liz crewing in Gib Bay. Inset: Team TOII.

GETTING THERE

Many regional UK airports serve Gibraltar direct, but are an expensive option. Flights from Gatwick cost less – no frills Easyjet was £75 return. Cheaper still, fly to Malaga then take the 75-mile, €10 bus trip to La Linea, just inside the Gib/Spain border a mile or so from Allabroad's base in Marina Bay. Allabroad's office is only a short walk from Gib airport, but luggage gets heavy and taxis are cheap.

Contact Allabroad Sailing Academy Tel UK 0871 2220274, International +350 200 50202 Web www.sailing.gi

COSTS

Allabroad's 5 day/6 night RYA Competent Crew course costs £495 in high season, including on board accommodation, berthing, fuel, use of oilies, breakfast, lunch and three evening meals aboard (meals ashore average £10 per head with drinks).

Allabroad's comprehensive range of RYA Sail and Motor courses includes the 14-week professional Yachtmaster Offshore Sail Fastrack. For a more personalised experience, Allabroad also offers Masterclass courses with only three students on board and private yacht charters with an RYA instructor.



SAILING LOG

Sunday 26 April	Introduction to boat and safety briefing			
Monday 27 April	Kitting out, exercises under engine in Gib Bay, sailed up to Strait for look around	10 miles		F3
Tuesday 28 April	MOB exercises and passage to Ceuta	22.5 miles	4 hours	F5 lessening to F3
Weds 29 April	Ceuta to Smir	10 miles	3.5 hours	F3 gusting F4
Thurs 30 April	From Smir, planned passage to Estepona aborted on rounding Ceuta – made for Gib instead	26 miles	7 hours	F5 gusting F6/F7, decreasing F4
Fri 1 May	Sail across Gib Bay, exercises and dinghy drill in inner Bay	18 miles		F3 inshore, F4 gusting F5 out in Bay

Going Strait



On joining *ST* from the RNLI, Production Editor **Elizabeth Paine** had limited sailing experience, but was keen to learn. So, when the opportunity to do her RYA Competent Crew course arose in sunny Gibraltar, she leapt at the chance



Half-dozing as the plane neared the Mediterranean coast, I heard the two women next to me mention sailing. I woke up fast as I realised they were headed for my Comp Crew course.

Thus I met Sue, a businesswoman from the Isle of Man, and her accountant friend Christine. Their other halves owned boats and both were fed up with being ordered around at sea without really knowing why. The girls chose the Allabroad course because it was in waters of similar power

to those in their own Irish Sea – but with nicer weather.

HELLO SAILORS

The promised 5-minute walk from the airport seemed, with the strong sidewind and my weight limit-nudging wheelybag, rather longer. We soon arrived, slightly out of breath, at Allabroad's office in Marina Bay and met our instructor and Skipper, former Newcastle teacher (you could tell) Trevor.

Paperwork done, we were led to our quarters for the next week. *Time Out II*, a Bavaria

44, gave us the luxury of a cabin each.

Our first night's 'domestics' briefing included the admonition to use the marina facilities rather than onboard heads when moored: "You can see where with a pair of binoculars," Trev half joked. Discussing provisions, we soon discovered that Christine was severely allergic to seafood, so with me gluten-intolerant and Trev vegetarian, dining would never be easy.

That first night though, most of Allabroad's students and instructors met at a crowd-



pleasing tapas restaurant for proper introductions. I knew that team mates could make or break a sailing experience and putting us girls together worked brilliantly.

LEARNING THE ROPES

On board I'd made the elementary mistake of not getting organised before dark,

Top right: Liz lassoes. Right: Getting knotted. Middle: Trevor pops the electrics. Far right: Sue on compass, Liz on helm.



so couldn't find my precious earplugs. I spent a largely sleepless night serenaded by clinking rigging and water sloshing against the hull in a fair impression of a washing machine. As Sunday dawned we were being so slammed at our mooring that I took over an hour to dress, getting an impressive start to my bruises collection. The water level had risen and it was a struggle just to get down from the boat, moored bows-on to the quay.

We were soon kitted out with lifejackets and oilies. Next, the briefing was all

about safety, after which some ropework instruction enabled us to set out into Gibraltar Bay for our first waterborne experience. We stayed under power, absorbing everything the Skipper threw at us including basic knots and mooring.

Monday morning we prepped the boat for proper sailing. Trevor made us laugh when, having stressed disconnecting the electricity carefully, he forgot and we reversed out, popping the still

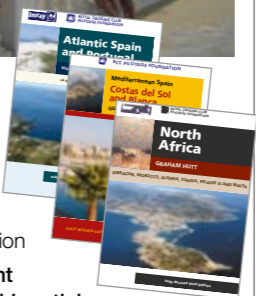
live connection. We sailed out of the Bay on a beam reach at 3.5kn. I was working the port winch, rather badly – I really don't have the muscles for this.

We'd been told to eat lots, because the hard work would burn it straight off, but I think I took this rather too literally. Gibraltar catered for me all too well; Rosemary's Deli consistently sent over really tasty gluten- and fish-free meals. That evening we had their chicken pie, the first I'd eaten in nearly 20 years. I thought I'd died

and gone to pie heaven. On Tuesday, we practised man overboard with Oscar the fender. Gib Bay was choppy, so Christine, going first, clipped on for reassurance as she waggled the boathook over the side. We went round again twice before she could get him securely. Sue and I watched and learned, both hooking Oscar at our first attempts.

NORTH AFRICA

That afternoon we sailed due south. Out of the bay the sea became quite rough – close



GIBRALTAR, COMPETENT CREW

WEATHER AND WATERS

Wind speed and direction in the Strait can change extremely rapidly, making for lively sailing – listen for updates from Gib's Met Office regularly. The katabatic Levanter wind blasts from the east/northeast at high speed to hit the rock and form a banner cloud streaming from the summit westward, while cold gusts drop straight down the western rock slope onto the marinas and town. The Levanter's opposite is the westerly Poniente and both mean business.

High humidity causes heavy dew, so don't leave wets out overnight to dry – they won't. In spring and autumn allow for chilly evenings, but summer may be roasting. The North African coast past Ceuta is warmer and calmer, although mountain winds can be cold. Seven knots of tide get forced through the busy pincer-point of the Strait. These waters are a robust introduction to sailing for novices, although Gibraltar Bay can usually be depended on to be sailable.



PILOTS & CHARTS

Atlantic Spain & Portugal, La Coruna to Gibraltar Martin Walker and Anne Hammick £37.50
Mediterranean Spain, Costas Del Sol and Blanca John Marchment £29.95
North Africa £37.50. All by RCC Pilotage Foundation

BOOK OFFER: Imray is offering a 10 per cent discount for *Sailing Today* readers who quote this article when ordering these pilot books. 01480 462114, www.imray.com.

Admiralty charts: Gibraltar Hydrographic Office is a UKHO offshoot.

CUSTOMS AND IMMIGRATION

Gibraltar, though British, is not part of the EU, so remember your duty frees will be limited (I didn't, but that's another story). With your passport handy it's easy to pop over to Spain. Your skipper will deal with crew passports for usually fuss free clearance at other ports of call.

Top left: Ahmed spans Tétouan street. Top right: Christine and Sue at Smir beach. Right: Christine watches *Moonraker* across rough sea.

Top: Liz helms *TOII*, sailing with *Moonraker* off Ceuta. Right: The ornate decor of El Santuario in Ceuta. Below right: Tétouan carpet merchant.

RYA COMP CREW SYLLABUS



This course is for beginners and those who would like to become active crew members rather than just passengers. By the end of the course you should be able to steer, handle sails, keep a lookout, row a dinghy and assist in all the day to day routines.

1. Knowledge of sea terms and parts of a boat, her rigging and sails:
Sufficient knowledge to understand orders given concerning the sailing and day to day running of the boat
2. Sail handling:
Includes setting, reefing and handling of sails and use of sheets, halyards and winches
3. Ropework:
Ability to tie different knots and know their correct use, handling ropes and warps including coiling and securing to cleats

4. Fire precautions and fighting:
Awareness of the hazards of fire, how to prevent it and knowledge of the action to be taken in the event of fire
5. Personal safety equipment:
Understand and comply with rules for wearing safety harnesses and lifejackets
6. Man overboard:
Understand the action to be taken to recover a man overboard
7. Emergency equipment:
Know when to use and operate distress flares and understand how to launch and board a liferaft
8. Sailing manners and nautical customs



THE BOAT

We sailed the 4-cabin, 2-headed 2003-built Bavaria 44, *Time Out II of Beaumaris*. With just four aboard she was very comfortable, although Allabroad never takes more than five students at once. As a well used charter/school yacht she presented mainly little niggles, such as loose doorknobs and a sticky heads pump (a replacement finally turned up on my last day), but these were minor compared to horror stories heard elsewhere.

to the coasts the waters are always disturbed. Across the 9-mile Straits a keen lookout is required for shipping, because it is the only through channel for the entire Med.

Winds were up to a good F5 with 1.5m waves, so we had to put a third reef in. I took the helm and it felt great.

Soon the clouds blanketing southern Europe passed astern and we were into the blue. Heading for the tallest mountain on the African coast (Jebel Musa at 848m), our destination lay just east of it. Ceuta, a peninsular Spanish 'exclave' off Morocco, holds much the same status as Gibraltar does with Spain.

Entering Hercules Marina, heat hit us like a wall. We reversed up to the pontoon and, after minor difficulty when the Marinero decided to 'help',

we set the warps and stepped off the transom.

We girls left Trev to do his skipper thing and strolled off for some photo opps. Christine trailing admirers in her wake. Nordic blondes acquire fans quickly in these parts.

Ceuta is dense, cosmopolitan and a great North African stopping point for Europeans – it's even part of the EU. The town was buzzing, the ring road running right past the marina. A modern, palm lined mosaic promenade ran parallel to the tall, impressive old town buildings and there was a noticeably different architectural feel about the place. The Casino Hotel boasted the biggest swimming pool I've ever seen. I blagged us free entry – then my camera battery gave out.

That night Trevor partially abandoned skipper mode, taking us to the Fort, a vast, forbidding



edifice that seemed to take up half of Ceuta. That early in the season it was eerily quiet at night, but the bar to which he led us was intriguing: El Santuario had once been a chapel and still contained religious decor and sub-Sistine murals.

On Wednesday we returned to a transformed Fort. The vast courtyard, empty the previous night, was crammed with stalls and demonstrations from local lifesaving organisations. Since these featured an astonishing proportion of handsome men I can heartily recommend this destination to lady (or otherwise interested) sailors – just for the scenery, of course.

SMIR

Our next stop was 10 miles down the beautiful eastern coastline of Morocco itself. Leaving at noon, we'd been warned of 28kn winds outside Ceuta Bay, but although skirting the peninsula was a little tricky, once clear of the nasty swell we changed course for a fabulous 7kn sail.

We hooked up with Allabroad's *Moonraker*, a racy Sun Odyssey 36i. In the calmer lee of the African mainland we hoisted the Moroccan flag and the two boats danced each other down the coast.

The entrance to Marina Smir was shockingly tight – lots of newcomers get it wrong. We

dropped *TOII*'s sails outside the harbour in deference to our inexperience – upon which the smaller *Moonraker* nipped past and promptly claimed the prime position. We made a temporary mooring and Trev went to deal with immigration at the port office, while we girls relaxed in the warm sun. Only a quarter full, the marina was tranquil.

After a while Trev came back with a slightly worried expression and asked what credentials I had – Immigration was touchy at the visit of a 'journalist', so I handed over an issue of *ST*. He was gone again for ages. I began to get nervous, but he

eventually returned grinning – the officials had simply been engrossed in the magazine.

We moved to our proper berth, bedded down the boat and then hit the showers. The block was much nicer than in Ceuta, but the hot water ran out mid-flow, cueing a chorus of girly squeals.

Walking to the evening's eaterie we spotted our first camel, grazing in an adjacent field – and were bitten by our first mosquitoes. Replete after our Moroccan meal, we returned after dark to the din of local dogs vying to see who could bark the loudest across the valley. I was glad of my earplugs that night.

GET FOUND WITH FAST FIND
The connection to the Global 406 MHz international search and rescue system

NEW Find out more: www.fastfindplb.com



CURRENCY

Sterling is used in Gibraltar, on par with the UK. Euros not only suit for any Spanish stopovers, including Ceuta, but are gladly accepted in Morocco (where Dirhams, at roughly 10 to the euro, are the official currency) as well.



Left: Old Tétouan street. Middle: Tétouan market. Top right: Trevor manfully wields the emergency tiller. Middle right: Christine and Sue soak up the rays on *TOII* at Marina Smir. Below left: Marching band in Gibraltar town.

Top: Allabroad fleet at Marina Bay, Gibraltar. Top right: Lifesaving demonstration at Ceuta Fort. Right: *Time Out II* under full sail off Ceuta. Below: Trevor and Liz circle *TOII* on dinghy drill in Gibraltar Bay.

Ports

Gibraltar isn't pretty, but it's fascinating. ASA is based at Marina Bay, which has a depth of 4.5m and 200+ berths offering not only water and power but telephone and sat TV. Costs per night from £7.50 low to £12.50 high season (up to 12m). The marina officials are professional and English-speaking. The pontoon-end shower and toilet facilities (inc disabled) are good and cafés line the quayside. Old Gibraltar town, a 10-minute walk away, has a market, the usual UK high street shops and indigenous and duty



free alternatives with a big British supermarket nearby for easy provisioning. Historic Casemates Square houses the many bars popular with the Royal Navy ratings stationed on Gib – at night it can get a bit boisterous. By day, take the cable car up the rock to see the monkeys (*not* apes) or visit historic sites. Right next to Marina Bay is the new Ocean Village complex, offering higher-end shopping, eateries, a sports bar and a casino with nightclub. Time in Gibraltar GMT/BST+1hr. www.marinabay.gi

Spanish **Ceuta** is on the North African coast. Marina Hercules can take 375 moorings with a max draught of 4m, but is rather behind the times and the shower/toilet facilities are woeful. Nonetheless, the marina is conveniently situated and secure. Dating from before 400BC, Ceuta boasts a gargantuan port and the biggest swimming pool in North Africa. Time as Gib. www.mahersa.es

Marina **Smir**, 10 miles south in Morocco, lies in an attractive, modern beach resort with smart, securely gated facilities. For its 450 berths it claims a max beam of 4m, but has a

narrow entrance channel. Dirham rates p/n from 58 low/97 high season. From Smir one can take a guided tour, for €50 per taxi-full, to the old hilltop town of Tétouan – an other-world experience. Time in Morocco GMT/BST-1hr. www.portmarinasmir.com/ing. Other destinations (weather depending) may include Tarifa or Estepona in Spain and, on longer courses, Portugal. ASA no longer visits Tangier, because too many 'presents' were expected by officials.

OLD MOROCCO

Thursday saw an early start – a half-day guided tour of real old-town Morocco. We dressed modestly and Chris wore a cap to cover her blondiness.

Our taxi was an ancient, rickety Merc without working seatbelts, whose leather was as cracked as its owner's face. The car was his pride and joy.

The coastline was studded with clusters of white block buildings. The landscape was stunning, glistening sea to the east and green-covered red earth foothills nestling under the cloud-capped Rif mountains to the west.

The driver gave us into the care of our English-speaking guide. Ahmed kept up a commentary as he led us through the very narrow, but pristine alleyways of old Tétouan. Hidden behind the worn facades, pauper's quarters abutted homes of the well off, distinguishable only by detailing on doors that briefly opened to reveal glimpses of rich mosaics. Two traditionally garbed women collected water at a pump (few homes have water or power). I pointed at my camera to ask

their permission to shoot, but they shyly shook their heads.

At a Berber carpet house we were served mint tea as the charming owner explained how to tell Berbers from other arabs by their blue-green eyes. We didn't fall for his soft sell, but he still led us to his rooftop for a spectacular view over the white-topped town.

The market itself was a sensory overload. Secondhand goods piled high to the street sides and shops crammed into spaces no bigger than a closet. Live chickens clucked briefly before dispatch (we looked away at this point) and fish reeked, attracting skinny cats.

Eventually the streets widened onto a plaza and we found ourselves back at our taxi, breathing freely again.

ESTEPONA OR BUST

Back at the marina we had time to try springing on and off (beyond Comp Crew level). After lunch on board, Smir's fabulous beach tempted, but it was a bit brisk for a dip.

We'd planned to include night sailing to end the long passage back over to Estepona in Spain, but high in the sky,

cirrus clouds promised real wind – it needed a rethink.

Making north for Ceuta, we were soon sent below to don full oilies. Rounding the headland we not only felt the sudden force of a F5, but an ominous bang from within the boat herself.

Perfectly calm, Trevor told me to keep the boat on course while he radioed *Moonraker* to shadow us back to Gib. It was gusting F6 or more and we couldn't turn to starboard – we were in trouble.

The next we knew, Trev popped up in the hatch in what looked like a miner's helmet – he'd been delving in the bowels of the boat, wrestling with slippery gears. I thought we weren't in any real danger – our skipper was trained for this.

Then the wheel wrenched away from me and I landed hard on my backside, the boat turning full circle. Sue and Chris shouted for the skipper and, for the first time, I felt rattled – not least because I'd had my hands too full to grab any pictures. Trevor raced back up to the cockpit and

quickly regained control.

Our best option was to disable both wheels completely and install the emergency tiller. I was up for manning that, too, but the force of the 17-ton boat concentrated in that one lever swept me clean off my feet once more – I was getting used



to the treatment. The skipper was more successful.

The rest of the long haul back was a slow and very wet slog under engine, lightened for a while by the company of dolphins playing in our bow waves, seeing us safely back.

Almost dark when we finally approached Gibraltar, we took refuge in the main harbour to lower our sails before limping back to Marina Bay. I'd barely stopped grinning all day.

WHO'S THAT MAN?

Next morning I returned from the showers to find a strange man in my bed! The hatch to the gear cavity was in my cabin and the mechanic was stretched along my berth with his head inside the hull.

Steering sorted, we had final exercises in ever-windy Gib Bay. After a frisky sail we joined another ASA boat for dinghy drill.

We ended with a civilised lunch on deck – our first time having the cockpit table open. The sun shone, jazz played on the stereo and the world felt good. I even managed to catch up on my notes.

GOODBYES

Christine and Sue left that afternoon. We vowed to keep in touch – with our patient as a saint skipper too, whom we could not thank enough for making us 'competent'.

Meanwhile, I still had a night to kill. Trevor bowed out early, leaving me with ASA's current crop of Fastrackers. Fresh from a week at sea, they were ready to party. We ended up at the casino/nightclub

near our own marina. With no sailing the next day, I let loose and danced for hours.

Saturday I awoke with bruises on my bruises, where I'd taken a tumble onto the quayside the previous evening (and that was before things got going). Now they hurt doubly, but I wasn't about to waste my last hours on the rock.

Thinking there would be too little time to take the cable up to see the monkeys (plus it was getting chilly anyway and I don't like heights), I opted to explore the town. There was a festival happening – it could have been England with a costumed band, red fire engine and even British bobbies.

I ran into Trevor and Fastracker Fiona as the wind picked up and changed direction. The sky turned grey and cold gusts raced down the escarpment, lifting me off my feet. They told me it was the Levanter, a fierce wind peculiar to the rock. Gibraltar was in for a wild weekend.

It had been a hugely enjoyable six days and I'd laughed as much as I'd learned, but perhaps I was leaving at exactly the right time.