

Croisière Bleue 2010 France (Antibes – Calvi – Antibes)

Sailing magazines have been giving regular, but so far, somewhat sparse, information on the SIG45, a concept from Hugo Le Breton and architected by VPLP. After finishing The Race on Club Med and a few seasons on ORMA 60s, I found the concept of the SIG45 very appealing and interesting. This was confirmed during my visit on the boat at the Cannes Boat show in September of 2009. Decision was made to set an appointment for a test ride shortly after the show.

The opportunity came about to have a sail during the Voiles de St Tropez in September alongside Sébastien Audigane (helmsman aboard the recent trans-Atlantic record breaking Banque Populaire). The ride was a real eye opener for us - “love at first ride!”. The first cruising boat I had stepped on that was responsive and extremely fast in most sailing conditions. I just had to try it racing.

The first race opportunity was the Multi Med Cup, (largest multihull race in the Med organized by the French Multihull Cruising Association AMH), running from Cannes to St Tropez and back, and in the Bay of Cannes. With a totally relaxed crew of 3, we ran at more than 20 knts and did the 24 Miles St Tropez to Cannes leg in 1 hour and 53 minutes. First win, and 3 big smiles on the boat. Having the windward hull skimming the water surface, with the genaker sheet in the hand only to tweak the trimming with each wind variation, we had a dry, safe and effortless ride. The numerous trimarans in the race certainly had a fun race too, but a lot more humid ...

Racing the SIG45, one tends to forget that it is actually a very comfortable cruising boat. The very refreshing night on board, with the luxury of each having our own private cabin, had us top fit and ready for a new day of racing that next morning.

The last day of racing was in light to medium winds and had us take line honours for a second time. As the wind gradually picked up, we decided to head back to the boat's port in the Gulf of St Tropez, right after crossing the finish line. Our week end was rounded off by an other run at 16 knots, this time enjoying our lunch with a glass of St Emilion in our hands pure pleasure.

Needless to say I hopped on board for an other race, this time the Med classic “Croisière Bleue”, from Antibes (Côtes d'Azur) to Calvi (Corsica) and back. 94 NM each leg. A very soft start at 7 PM due to weak winds, with only 4 NM on the log after 3 hours, gradually evolved to what ended being a run at 20 knots arriving in Calvi, only 3 seconds behind Carbon Arrow, a Reichel Pugh designed, full carbon built Marten 72, despite his very impressive start.

Helming the boat that night in a totally dark night, alone on the deck, I couldn't help but feel the same type of pleasure as during the incredible The Race. The combination of this level of reactivity and comfort are hard to find on a sailing boat. Two round the world races, 17 atlantic crossings and numerous years of racing, mainly on monohulls, allows me to particularly appreciate the SIG45's easy speed, simple and safe manoeuvres, with the boat almost level. At more than 15 knots average on the last few hours of the leg, we take over one after the other the boats that managed to escape during the early hours of the race (our later start was more affected by light winds). The competitive nature of the crew had us change the sails a few times to respond to the wind shifts. This was done hassle-free and quickly by two

crew on deck and a helmsman, explaining to my 13 year old son, whose first race it was, why and how things were done.

The weather forecast two days later at the start of return leg from Calvi was not very favourable for catamarans: choppy seas, 8 to 15 knts on the nose. Needless to say that Carbon Arrow took off in these conditions and was hard to see on the horizon, despite our 10 knots speed average on a slightly lower course (we were favouring speed vs. wind angle, especially as we were betting on a windlift for the later part of the day). At mid day it did indeed come in and here again we take off and move into 2nd place within no time, regularly flying a hull on a close reach at 17 knots, despite the chop.

Close to the arrival in Antibes, the unfortunate Carbon Arrow got stuck in a wind hole and could only watch as we passed them by on a wide detour, to finish 45 minutes ahead of them.

Surprisingly to me, given the weather forecast and the actual chop conditions, it was a very pleasant ride back from Calvi. The wave passage of the VPLP designed bows is quite different from what I had experienced on the high volume Club Med bows, but it works remarkably well on this boat. The monohulls were heading higher against the wind, but once again the VMG story is the right one for multihulls, particularly in these sea conditions.

So our target now is a participation in the Middle Sea race of this year, and I am anxious to see how the SIG will perform in this race that I won aboard Morning Glory 3 years ago!