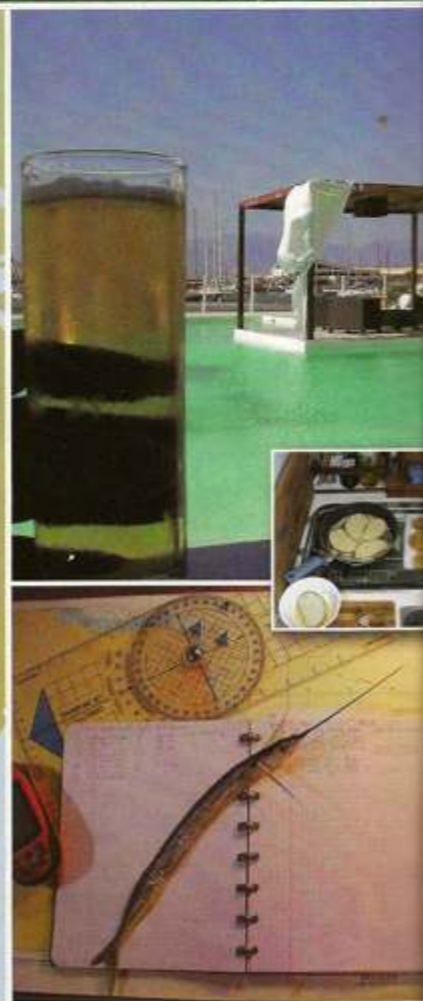




Clockwise from top: *Eileen* powers on; one last beer before crossing the Atlantic; French toast; my new letter opener; my course from the UK.



Brazilian BRAVURA



Some people put off their cruising dreams until they can afford a bigger boat, a better watermaker or the right suit of downwind sails. There is, however, another approach: David Matelicani took what he had and went, which in his case led to a transatlantic trip in a 23ft gaff cutter.

Family and friends, with absolutely no knowledge of sailing, had rallied to harangue me incessantly on the absurdity of my travel plans. They would all rather I find a new job, settle down and be responsible. Ha! No chance of stopping me now, I'm already at my jump off point in Cape Verde, but you would think they'd have had a little more faith given that risk management happened to be my 'bread and butter' profession. Let me digress a moment to reiterate my intentions:

I'm sailing across the Atlantic in a 23ft sailing boat (my Yarmouth 23 named *Eileen of Avoca*), not because it is a life-long dream, not because I want to set a record or publicise sponsors, and certainly not to prove anything to myself or others. I just want to be alone at sea in my boat, free to travel where I please for an indeterminate period. It's not a vacation, I'm not particularly trying to 'find myself' and I'm still insisting it's not a mid-life crisis (surely I'll live at least another 70 years?). However, I am intentionally getting away from the Machiavellian machinations of corporate life to pursue a rewarding hobby/lifestyle that has helped me relax, get fit, see new places and put some melanin back into my pallid office dweller complexion.

I have not rushed into any of this. I've spent the last two years equipping and getting to know *Eileen*. Cruising trips have only gradually become more ambitious and I've patiently acquired and familiarised myself with all the warranted safety gear.

I have confidence in my immaculately maintained craft and have left little to chance with regard to safety. I carry a liferaft, radar detector, AIS receiver, EPIRB, PLB, 2xVHF radios, HF receiver, a parachute sea anchor, Jordan series drogue, second complement of sails, Aries vane gear, two tillerpilots, a pyromaniac's horde of flares, three hand-held GPS devices and more. The only pieces of long distance cruising equipment I don't own are a watermaker, satellite phone and HF transmitter. On my budget I carry the water I use, live without SMS at sea and listen rather than talk all day on the HF. Not that any of this is likely to allay the fears of family or friends, so I'll just have to weigh anchor, do my Atlantic crossing and tell them "see, you needn't have worried" when I arrive. With a little luck I might be able to stave off the alternative 'find a new job, settle down and be responsible' option.

Time to walk the walk

While I left Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight

in mid September, it took more than three months to reach the town of Mindelo in Cape Verde. On 3 January, just as a dust storm from Africa reduced visibility in the island chain to less than five miles, I weighed anchor and set my sights on reaching another continent.

This was it, the long leg: 1,400 miles of open ocean before I see land (at Fernando de Noronha) and another 240 after that before I could set foot on mainland Brazil. Was I nervous? A little. Since childhood I have had a healthy respect for the sea, especially as it almost took my life on three occasions, two of which occurred on the same day while playing in the surf at my local beach. I know the sea can get nasty, but I have done everything I can to play safe. Time to roll the dice now and hope for the best. Luck plays a large part in this sort of venture and I'm expecting my share for the crossing.

I don't think it's particularly dangerous to sail across the Atlantic, but if you happen to have a run of bad luck, things can get messy. As an example, one yacht taking part in the Soleil Rally sank en route after hitting a semi-submerged obstacle, but then, some people get hit by lightning playing golf, while others win the lottery. I just hope to sit happily between these too



Passing Salvador Marina en route to Ribeira (left). Girls of southern Iterparica (right).

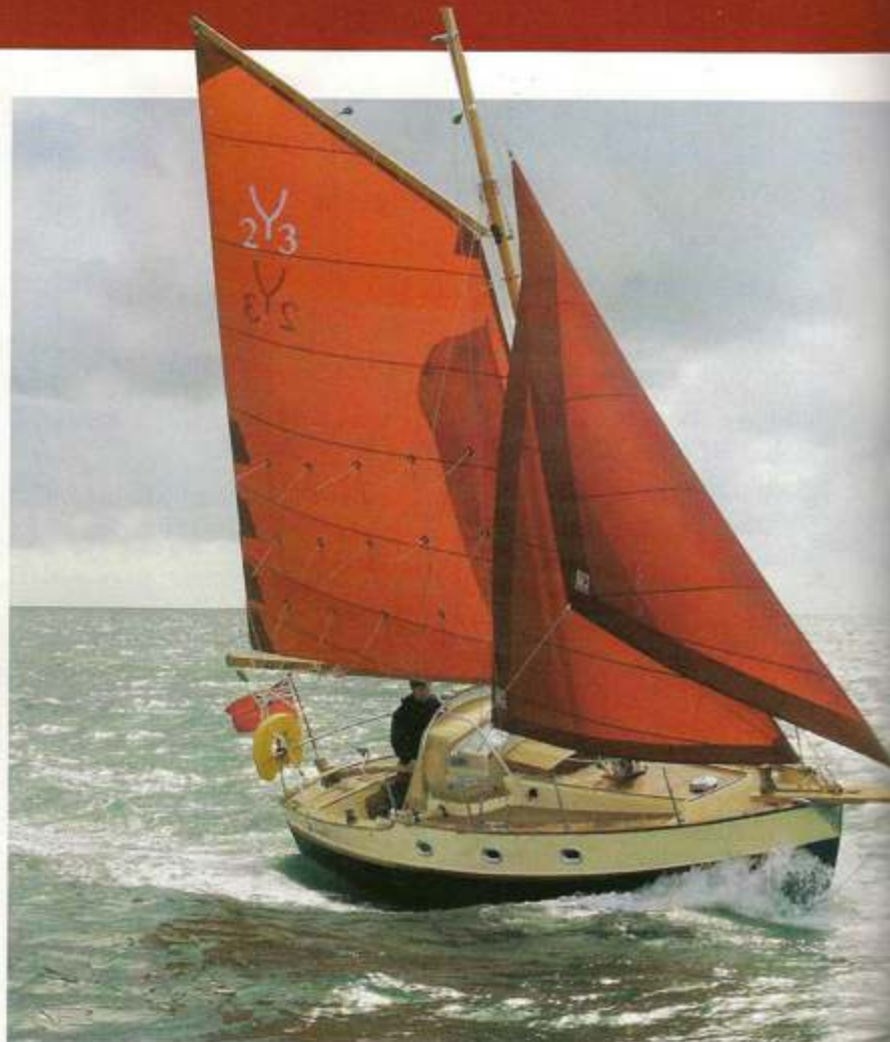


Navigation

I carry three hand-held Magellan GPS devices of various vintages aboard *Eileen of Avoca*. Two of them use MapSend BlueNav charts on SD cards. Not that that was very useful for my trip to Brazil, because the region isn't covered, but a chartplotter hasn't much use in the open ocean anyway.

My cheap Magellan eXplorist 100 was all I used for the Atlantic crossing, because all I really wanted to know was if I was on course, the miles I'd travelled each day and how many remained before I reached a particular co-ordinate. As a bonus, the eXplorist was gentle on the rechargeable AA batteries.

I had to do a little homework first and ensure I'd entered and written down all the relevant GPS co-ordinates for the trip and, thanks to a fellow sailor I met in Gran Canaria, I do carry a complete set of paper charts for the coast of Brazil, even if they have seen little use so far. Just following the 50m depth contour is enough to see you safely along the coast here, but it's always handy to plan for contingencies. My electronic charts will come back into play as I reach French Guiana on the way to Trinidad.



extremes of fortune.

Some armchair sailors might be interested in the 'how to' of crossing an ocean in a small yacht. To them I say it's no different from shorter trips. You just take it day by day and before you know it, weeks have passed and as a side effect you find you have accomplished the task.

I set my mainsail with two reefs in Mindelo, tied the boom to starboard, set a whisker pole on the staysail and left the jib unfurled. I sailed in this goosewinged configuration for 15 days. The only adjustment necessary was the occasional five degree course correction on the windvane (accomplished by pulling a string leading back into the cabin). This kept *Eileen* nice and steady in the 15 to 25kn trade winds where I averaged 75 miles a day just sitting around doing nothing. The best run was 105 miles and the worst 63 in a 24 hour period. I could have gone faster, but every sail change is a potential risk and what's the hurry anyway? Until reaching the equator, the weather was fabulously consistent. Trade wind sailing at its best. Yes, the waves can appear intimidating, but it doesn't take long to grow accustomed to them. Waves are fine no matter how large... unless they start to break.

Technically, my crossing was elementary. A Yarmouth 23 is a sturdy boat and *Eileen*

of Avoca handled the conditions admirably. The other long distance sailors I have met on my travels all agree that 'size matters not'. Small can be exceptionally seaworthy, it's just that you tend to be a little slower than the rest of the cruising set. While my boat was obviously in her element, it took me a little while longer to settle in. I spent the first two days feeling I had a head cold. This apparently is my version of

stains on the headlinings and daydreamed.

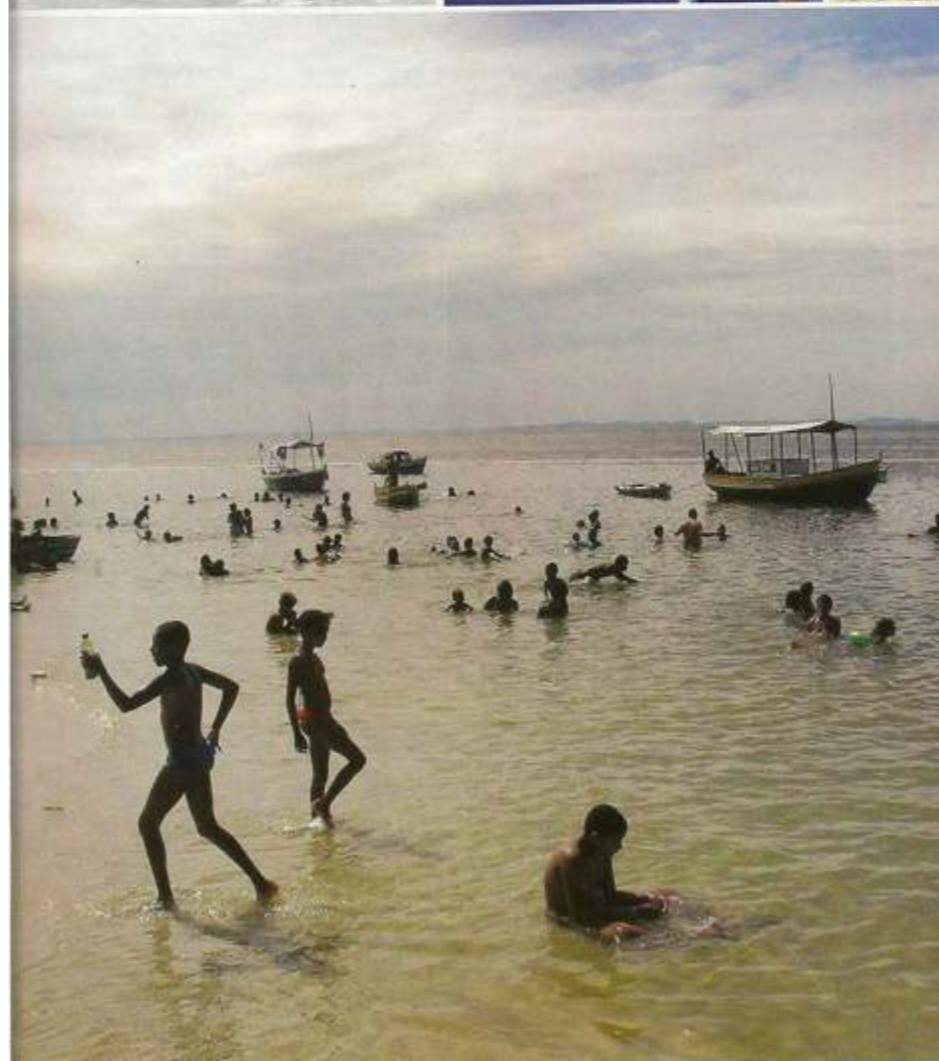
The passage of days was marked by numerous momentous events, such as eating the last slice of fresh bread, pining over that final piece of cheddar cheese, boiling the last egg and snacking on my penultimate doughnut. Rather exciting, don't you think? By contacting the occasional passing ship, I was able to keep tabs on the weather, but this wasn't strictly necessary. The winds

"The other long distance sailors I have met on my travels all agree that 'size matters not'. Small can be exceptionally seaworthy."

being seasick. Luckily, it does not impair my sailing in any way. I just need to get acclimatised. At noon each day (GMT -1 for my ship's clock), I logged my position and the distance traveled, then set about killing time. No fishing this trip, because I'd heard enough horror stories of people falling overboard paying too much attention to their catch, so in the tradition I'd set on longer routes, I stared at my favourite water

are markedly consistent at this time of year and the periodic squalls within the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) – the doldrums – turned out not to be as severe as I had been led to expect. By day 17, Fernando de Noronha was in sight and my Atlantic crossing drew rapidly to a close.

After 17 days at sea I found myself reluctant to make landfall. How odd, I'd never have imagined feeling this way, but



Clockwise from top: The Yarmouth 23 is a sturdy boat and handled the conditions well; (inset) the Magellan Explorist, which helped me across the Atlantic; the girls of Brazil; bedsheet and tablecloth for a sail; ship chandler, Mindelo; keeping upright during the equinox tides; Ribeira beach; no fishing was the rule on my longer trips, but shorter ones saw plenty of success, such as this swordfish (centre).

The boat

My initial glimpse of a Yarmouth 23 came from a sailing magazine review of the first production boat in 1999-2000. I remember thinking that if money were no object, she was just the sort of seaworthy little craft I'd appreciate owning.

One year later I saw my first Yarmouth 23 on the Isle of Wight. This was when I was still working in the city and just days after having been inspired by the London Boat Show. I had a weekend with little to do, so I made the most of it by paying the Yarmouth boatyard a visit.

What interested me most about the boat was that despite her diminutive dimensions, all the features I'd learnt to appreciate in an oceangoing vessel seemed to be incorporated in the design. Here was a little boat that would obviously withstand a real beating at sea and still keep you safe and dry. Yes indeed, just the sort of vessel I'd fancy owning.

Five years later, with a few Yarmouth 23s starting to make an appearance on the secondhand market, I found the new love of my life, *Eileen of Avoca*. The previous owner, Bill Boyall, had died unexpectedly and left *Eileen* looking somewhat forlorn. Despite her ragged appearance, I could see that she was shipshape and within days I'd arranged the purchase. With a little attention she was back to her former beauty and even making my girlfriend jealous. Apparently I looked back too often when I left her (*Eileen* that is).

Originally I'd just planned to take *Eileen* through the canals of France and potter around in the Mediterranean, but after two years of doing just that, it was time for a new challenge. A circumnavigation might be in order.

Don't be deceived by her charm, as this adventure has demonstrated, the Yarmouth 23 is as much a serious and safe pocket cruiser as she is a fun weekender. Designed in the UK by Wyatt and Freeman, of Fisher fame, and now built by Neil Marine in Sri Lanka, Asia's largest boat builder, she is imported, fitted out and commissioned by the Fisher Boat Company in Chichester.

For the DIY-minded yachtsman in need of an absorbing project, she is also available in a variety of self-built versions.

A fully fitted out boat, with RCD Category B offshore certification, comes with a price tag of £69,000.

Website www.yarmouth23.co.uk



The Yarmouth 23 has a simple, open layout and can accommodate four. In terms of handling, the gaff cutter rig was well balanced. On the Atlantic run, I barely touched the sails for 15 days.

LOA	7.06m (23ft 2in)
Length including bowsprit and rudder	7.92m (26ft 2in)
LWL	5.49m (18ft)
Beam	2.28m (7ft 6in)
Draught	0.89m (2ft 11in)
Displacement	2,800kg approx (6,160lb)
Sail area	28m ² (304ft ²)
Fuel: diesel	45ltr
Fresh water	75ltr
Headroom	1.88m (6ft 2in)
RCD category	B (offshore)
Designer	Wyatt and Freeman
Builder	Neil Marine, Sri Lanka
Import, commission and fitting out	Fisher Boat Co, Chichester

because *Eileen* felt so safe and cosy en route, I simply didn't want the journey to end. I adored passing lazy days listening to the orchestra of sailing sounds. The creaking of ropes and leather, the trickle of water against the hull countered by the slap of the mainsail or the growl of a passing wave. I felt completely safe and was loath to leave my floating cocoon.

While I can now boast of having completed a solo Atlantic crossing in a tiny boat, I'll let you all in on a big secret. Despite the cocoon analogy, crossing an ocean alone delivers no metamorphosis of the soul or life altering catharsis. Not that I really expected it to, I'm not the spiritually receptive type, but hope springs eternal,

does it not? Well, no great surprise then that I didn't 'find myself' while at sea *à la* Moitessier. Perhaps the whole venture needs to be significantly more difficult, in which case, I'll leave it for someone else to achieve.

Now that I'm on the other side of the pond, the best is yet to come.

With a whole new continent to explore I've been busy anchorage hopping to my heart's content. From what I have seen of Brazil so far, it's a wonder there aren't hordes of yachtsmen and charter businesses here already. Long may it remain so.

The first stop in Brazil

Fernando de Noronha is where most



Clockwise from top left: The mud people of Gamboa; through traffic in Jacare; beach in Itaparica; Pier Salvador Marina Ribeira; traditional dress, Salvador; even the beer is beautiful (inset).

sailors make their entry to Brazil. This beautiful island is mostly national park and unfortunately there are all sorts of environmental taxes to pay upon arrival, but as I've not spent a cent for 18 days, why not splurge a little now?

I stayed two nights in this idyllic retreat before setting sail for the mainland. I could easily have remained for weeks.

Exploring Brazil

My subsequent landfall was at the small marina in Jacare, near Cabadelo and Joa Pessoa, a fishing village retaining much of its quaint sleepy atmosphere. If rest is what you seek (following your Atlantic crossing), then you can't go wrong by stopping here. Some sailors are so content here that they haven't bothered to budge in over five months. What more of an endorsement can a small village marina get?

Not the type to be so easily content, I soon set my sights on reaching beautiful, bustling Salvador a further six day's passage to the north.

The question you may be asking yourself is why would I set sail for Baía de Todos Santos in Salvador Bahia, almost 500 miles away, after just a week in Jacare? Especially when I'm supposed to point *Eileen* in the opposite direction to reach my next objective, the Caribbean. You will just have

"When I heard of Salvador with its exotic mix of culture, music and race, I couldn't let extra miles keep me from its delights"

to believe me when I tell you it sounded like a good idea at the time. When I heard other travellers speak of Salvador with its exotic mix of culture, music, religion and race, how could I let a measly 460 extra miles prevent me from experiencing the delights of this city? For the sailor, the city of Salvador is just the gateway to a plethora of fascinating island destinations.

I started at the northern tip of Itaparica, an island once popular with the well to do of Salvador city as a weekend getaway. It still attracts many a floating gin palace. (Or should that be a Cachaça palace in Brazil?) There are dozens of pristine anchorages to explore, though I hear that the in crowd have adopted Morro de Sao Paulo and Gamboa as their current playgrounds.

After so much time spent alone at sea, a little socialising might be in order, so *Eileen of Avoca* is set to continue her island hopping in Bahia for the next five months. Eventually it will be time to sail north to

the Caribbean.

The adventures of *Eileen* are just beginning and my latest risk analysis suggests there is more fun to be had.

About the author:

David Matelicani worked for the financial and telecommunications industries as an IT Security, Risk and Compliance Manager in London, Amsterdam, Luxembourg and Belgium. Now he sails his Yarmouth 23 full time, putting some of what he preached into practice. As far as he's concerned, the cruising life is all about risk management, albeit in far prettier surroundings than he was used to. David got into sailing on the island of Mauritius at the age of six where he had a little yellow sailing boat with his brother for the day with the proceeds of their exploits on the one armed bandits.