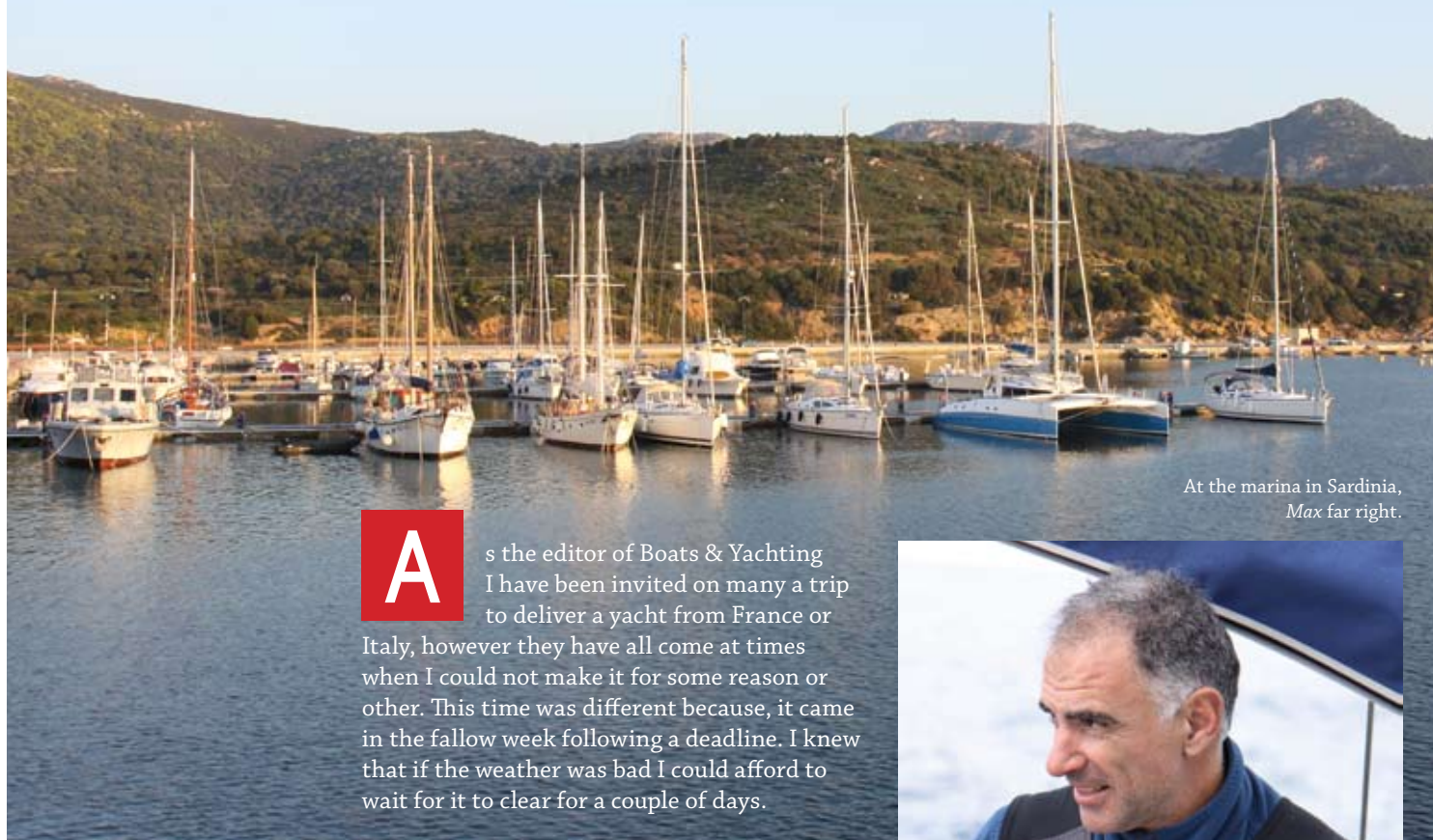


USING THE WIND TO THE **MAX**

IN MARCH, RICHARD MUSCAT AZZOPARDI TAGGED ALONG ON A JOURNEY TO DELIVER A DUFOUR 455 FROM CAP D'AGDE TO MALTA.

by Richard Muscat Azzopardi



At the marina in Sardinia, *Max* far right.

As the editor of *Boats & Yachting* I have been invited on many a trip to deliver a yacht from France or Italy, however they have all come at times when I could not make it for some reason or other. This time was different because, it came in the fallow week following a deadline. I knew that if the weather was bad I could afford to wait for it to clear for a couple of days.

The boat we were to deliver was sold by Malta's agents for Dufour – S&D Yachts – and Chris flew with us to France to oversee and help out with the provisioning of the yacht for the owner and skipper – Jonathan Gambin.

I already wrote a boat test of the yacht (a Dufour 455) in this issue – so I will not be going into much detail about it. The version we were delivering is the four cabin version targeted at the charter market. Jonathan Gambin charters yachts – both skippered and bareboat – and *Max* is the latest addition to his fleet. It is also his second Dufour – readers who follow the racing scene might know his other boat – *Ton Ton* – with which he manages to compete with thoroughbred racers in RMYC races.

We arrived in Cap D'Agde on Saturday evening and planned to leave for Malta the following morning, however our airline managed to misplace half the bags on our flight and one of



Owner and skipper – Jonathan Gambin

the crew was left without his suitcase. On Sunday morning we got in touch with the Airport, who told us they would try and send us the bag by noon. When we did not receive it by 4pm we decided we'd better make a move so we called the airport and asked them to have the bag sent back to Malta instead. With that sorted, we checked that everything below deck was well secured and left.



Max before maiden voyage.

Leaving on Sunday evening was crucial for us for two reasons – Jonathan wanted to make it to Malta by Saturday at the very latest since someone was ready to take the boat out for charter on Sunday and he also wanted to make the voyage without having to stop for fuel – which meant we'd need to sail most of the way. Jonathan and Edward Gatt Florida – who was the other experienced sailor on the voyage – had a look at the weather charts for the next 36 hours and decided that the best way to go would be past Sardinia if we wanted to sail. Usually boats on deliveries pass between Sardinia and Italy, stopping several times along the way, however our route meant we would be sailing for much longer on our first leg.

We left in relatively benign conditions – 20 knots of wind on a broad reach until we were about an hour away from land, but then the wind died. With a 6 knot wind we could not really sail so we started the engine while opening up the sails completely to make the best of the little wind we had. We motored on for a few hours and then Jonathan and I went down to sleep for the first shift of the night. Edward and Clint, a friend of mine who loves sailing and who joined for the experience, had a quiet shift. However by the time we came up at 11pm the wind was building up slowly. We turned the engine off and were enjoying the sail, however the wind just kept picking up. An hour into our shift the wind was howling at around 35 knots with gusts of above 40 knots. Reefing alone and in the dark on a new boat was really not an easy task – thankfully Edward and Clint came up to help with the procedure. Once reefed and settled we sailed at an average of 11kts for most of the night – peaking at around 13.6kts (ground speed).

From then till Tuesday morning, nearly 40 hours after we left, we did not need to use the engine at all. We sailed down to the southernmost point of Sardinia and on Tuesday at around 17.00 we sailed into Tuelada. We showered at the marina's facilities and spent the night there for the princely sum of €20. The guard on duty even lent us his car to go for dinner at the village nearby. The marina is in a beautiful and well sheltered location and is somewhat of a paradise.

The following morning, after taking a nice walk around the bay we left for our next leg. Once again the wind charts were to determine our route. Jon and Edward saw that from the predictions we could either head to the tip of Sicily and hug the coast then cut across to Malta or else sail towards Pantelleria and straight on to Malta. Going to Sicily might have been more tempting since hugging the coast is somewhat comforting; however they predicted that if we did so we would probably have a headwind on our last leg.

With that in mind we left Sardinia at around 8.30am. We had to motor for most of Wednesday since there was next to no wind, and this luck lasted until Thursday morning, when the wind picked up slightly and we sailed for a few hours until we reached Pantelleria at around 11:00. Since it was a public holiday (March 19th) in Italy too, there was nothing much to do there. We fetched ourselves a quick lunch and bought some goodies and fruit and headed back to the boat.



We were gone in under two hours. By the time we left the wind had picked up heavily and kept on increasing slowly

until Friday morning, when we arrived at Jon's berth in Ta' Xbiex. The trip from Pantelleria to Malta was all on a reach, so the sailing was lovely.



Pit stop at Pantelleria.

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By the end of the trip we had sailed over 760 nautical miles in four and a half days (including the stop-overs). We covered the ground in just over a 100 hours – averaging 7.6 knots. We had learned a lot about the boat, Mediterranean weather patterns and most about each other. There were times during the trip when I wished I was warm in bed at home (the first and last nights were particularly harsh – both threw winds of over 35 knots at us), however at the end of the day if I had to leave again tomorrow I wouldn't think twice about it – I'd jump at the opportunity.

I really would like to thank Jonathan Gambin for making this trip possible. I also appreciate that in taking the less popular route, which meant less sightseeing, we gained a lot more time to sail and spent next to no time motoring along. From what I've been told, it is very rare to get any sailing pleasure out of deliveries, however thanks to our luck with the wind and Jon and Edward's foresight we managed to make a speedy delivery and have some real sailing in the process.