



ANTIGUA TO RIO

BY PAUL MAY, OYSTER 45 *TABOO*



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“WHY DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE THE CARIBBEAN?” WAS THE QUESTION MY WIFE AND DAUGHTERS ASKED WHEN I TENTATIVELY FLOATED MY PLAN TO SAIL OUR OYSTER 45, **TABOO**, TO BRAZIL. “SO WE CAN ALL GO TO THE RIO CARNIVAL” WAS MY REPLY.

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After two transatlantic crossings and nearly eight years in the ‘windies’, we had enjoyed some great sailing and holidays. The list of our most memorable occasions is extensive, but highlights have to include: over 500 nights at anchor – often by beaches and bays inaccessible from the land; two green flashes and far too many rum punches; some rough weather including 59 knots in Tropical Storm Olga, which **Taboo** handled comfortably; taking part in all the Oyster Regattas in Antigua and the BVI, and coming 6th place overall in one of them; winning the Concours d’Elegance, and receiving a special ‘Spirit of the Regatta’ prize in 2009.

Once we had made the decision to head to Rio, **Taboo**, together with my sailing friends Martin, Graham, Tim, Karen and Roger, left Antigua on Tuesday 5th January 2010 as the sun was close to setting. We headed south on port tack, and remained on that tack for the next 950 miles.

We passed south of St Lucia at dawn on the 7th January and watched the Pitons disappear astern – this was to be our last sight of the Caribbean and any land for two weeks.



Long, regal ocean swells of 2 to 3 metres became the norm, interspersed with a mixed bag of smaller waves from various easterly directions.

The wind was predominantly 25 to 30 knots from north of east interspersed, on a regular basis, by squalls with gusts of 40 to 50 knots. **Taboo** performed comfortably, as usual, and kept up speeds of 7 to 11 knots.

We treated ourselves to DVD film nights in the cockpit on several dry evenings. The highlight for me was 'The boat that rocked!'. Most mornings we breakfasted on fresh baked bread, rolls or pancakes. Even in squalls and sailing close-hauled through lively seas, the galley was in constant use.

On most days throughout the journey, we sent entries and photos via our satellite phone and email to our blog, which was run by my daughter, Louise, up until we reached Recife when Louise joined the **Taboo** crew. After that, my PA Marcella, kindly kept the blog up to date. The responses from our blog visitors were a great source of humour and support.

Bill Lewis, a sailing friend and fellow Oyster owner, emailed us two or three grib weather files each day to assist our understanding of what Mother Nature had in store for us.

As usual on a long passage, food became the major topic of conversation with an increasingly competitive cooking environment. Freshly caught fish gave us the opportunity to try new recipes including sushi. Throughout the journey, we followed the tried and trusted 'on passage' alcohol policy of a beer at Happy Hour and one glass of wine with dinner.

Our watch system worked well, with three watches of two crew doing three hours per watch overnight. This gave everyone the opportunity of a good long night's sleep even during squalls.

At night-time we often found it useful to sail with the storm jib, hoisted on the detachable inner forestay, and a partly reefed genoa. As a major squall approached, we could 'de-cutter' by furling away the genoa (and taking a reef in on the main). Our speed and direction were kept sure and steady with this routine, and the off-watch more able to sleep undisturbed. On Saturday the 16th January, we had a significant wind-shift, which caused us to come off of the port tack we had been on for 1,036 nautical miles! We also changed the 'ship's time' to only three hours behind the UK.

At 2am on Sunday 17th January we crossed the equator and at breakfast a modest toast was proffered to Neptune.

Despite a full professional inspection of the rig in Antigua, we lost our baby stay with a 'ping' and a temporary solution with a couple of blocks and a spare halyard was rigged swiftly and safely. Oyster After Sales quickly and helpfully despatched a replacement via one of our crew flying from the UK to join us at Recife where it was promptly fitted.

Dolphins visited us on a regular basis, often in groups of up to 30 or more. One pod of insomniacs even frolicked around us in the dark. Oil rigs, supply vessels, fishing boats and 'stick and flag' markers began to appear in our path as we closed the coast towards Fortaleza. On Wednesday 20th January, we again tacked on starboard after a mere 500 miles or so on port tack, we were now some 150 miles from our landfall in Brazil. Along the coast, electric storms became a feature of most nights, with sheet and fork lightning illuminating the sea all around us.

On Thursday 21st January, we docked stern-to at the Fortaleza 'marina' and endured a tedious five hours of form filling at three different official offices. Once that task had been completed, believe it or not after leaving the Caribbean 3,000 miles to the North, we went to a night-time beach concert... of reggae music. Bob Marley's original Wailers were playing and so we danced almost until dawn to the best Caribbean music in Brazil.

Slightly hungover the next day, we re-fuelled **Taboo**, in temperatures of nearly 30°C, via a bowser towed by a 1930's Ford pickup truck to the nearest petrol station. We left Fortaleza for Recife knowing we were to encounter a stiff head wind and an adverse current of 1 to 2 knots.

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After three days of determined motor sailing, we arrived at Recife at night. We anchored away from the main quayside and waited until dawn before docking at the Cabanga Yacht Club marina, which is only accessible at or near to high tide.

Having said goodbye to our crew, Roger, in Fortaleza, we now had to bid farewell to Martin and Graham. Fresh new crew had been waiting for us in Recife for a few days (my eldest daughter Louise, her friend Jamie, and old **Taboo** hands Mark and Geoffrey). We all set about prepping **Taboo**, helping with repairs and provisioning.

On Friday 29th of January, we re-fuelled, direct from a fuel tanker (that usually replenishes petrol stations), and set off on high tide to Salvador, our next destination, some 260 miles South.



Happy Hour arrived as we emerged in the late afternoon sunshine from Recife harbour. And then, succulent steak sandwiches, salad and a glass of Merlot set us up for the night watch. A full moon with steady winds overnight of 18-22 knots capped off a fabulous first day for the new crew.

Dawn on the morning of Monday 1st February saw us entering the magnificent bay on which the city of Salvador sits on the northern shore. The bay could provide a full season's sailing on its own, but we were on a tight deadline and limited our exploration to walking the streets, squares and churches of the city that had once been the capital of Brazil.

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While we were ashore, the national cocktail, the Caipirinha, was sampled most evenings. Made with a shot or two of Cachaça, lime wedges and some sugar over ice, the drink lived up to its name as 'fire water'! Interestingly, we learnt that during Brazil's discovery, the explorers would use the Cachaça spirit as fuel for their lamps when their lamp oil ran out – strong stuff.

We departed Salvador for Buzios, a popular cruise ship destination about 100 miles East of Rio de Janeiro. Anchored near the local yacht club, we watched the cruise ships ferrying their guests to and fro, sometimes in short, choppy seas. On one day four ships were at anchor to seaward of us. The town and its beaches, similar to a Greek island in geography and hospitality are delightful places to visit on a non-cruise ship day.

On the 8th February, we continued to Rio where we arrived mid-morning the following day and were met by my wife Diane and our younger daughter Lizzy. The Yacht Club of Rio de Janeiro anchorage, between the statue of Christ and the Sugar Loaf, became our base.

After nearly 5,000 miles, **Taboo** had brought us safely to Rio, ready to explore the city and see the famous Rio Carnival, which was stunning. Over 25,000 dancers and infectious samba rhythms – a really great experience.

Photos: **Taboo** Crew

