

A golden Fastnet

Alex Whitworth recalls taking part in the Fastnet Race 50 years ago

On a blustery 6 August, 1961, I started my first Fastnet Race. Time and a million breaking waves have blurred the details but I remember the start and, vividly, the gale that put us out of the race two days later. At the time, I was a naval cadet at Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, and we were sailing *Leopard*, a Morgan Giles 43, skippered by John Stocker, the Commander at



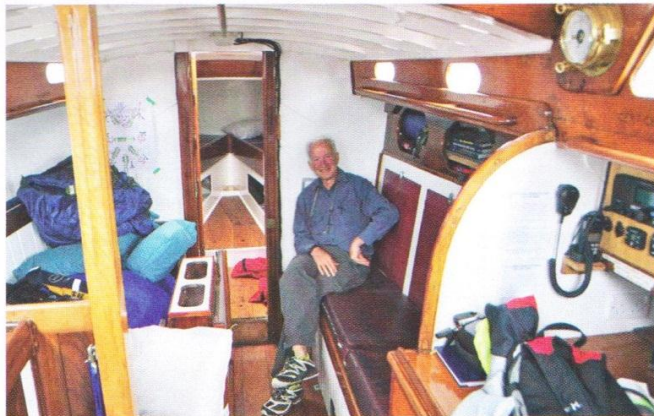
ABOVE: Alex on board *Leopard* in 1961. RIGHT: *Leopard* today, owned by the charity Sea Sanctuary



PHOTOS: ALEX WHITWORTH AND SEA SANCTUARY

'We received a gale warning on Day 2, and watched the barometer fall and the clouds build'

Dartmouth. Bill Anderson, now the author of *Yachting Monthly's A question of seamanship* series, was also aboard. We received a gale warning on Day 2, before reaching The Lizard, and watched the barometer fall and the clouds build. The gale caught us close to the Seven Stones at about 1900, with a black sky, heavy rain and a violent increase in wind speed. The gale is comprehensively analysed by Adlard Coles in all the early editions of *Heavy Weather Sailing*. I remember my corrosive fear, the



Alex visits *Leopard's* cabin 50 years after his first Fastnet Race

cold, the noise, the darkness and the water roaring past the cockpit. We had lowered the main but were unable to drop the genoa and were forced to reach away to the south-west to keep the boat under control. Even then, the rig

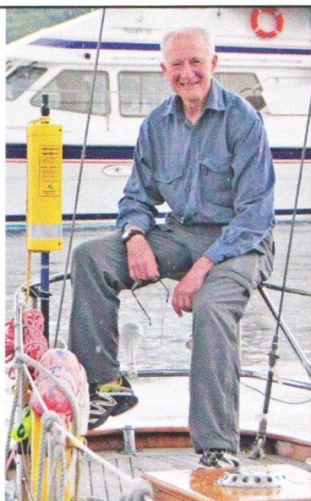
was threatened by every gust. I remember Bill going forward with a knife in the blasting rain with water crashing across the foredeck and somehow getting rid of the sail. There was a lot of water inside the boat and we had to pump constantly. In daylight, we found the stern gland leaking and the skipper decided to retire and head for the Helford River.

Leopard is now in Falmouth, refurbished and looking a lot better than I do after 50 years. She is working for a good cause and I found her in August and gave her a hug for old times. You can follow her at www.sea-sanctuary.co.uk.

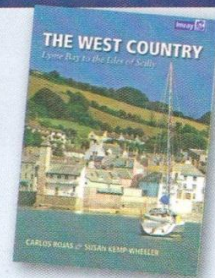
I was in Falmouth as part of another Fastnet, this time in *Jambalaya*, a J109. We were going well until about halfway across the Celtic Sea, when we tore our mainsail beyond repair. We soldiered on with the trysail for a few hours but with the wind dropping, retreated to Falmouth for Guinness and a bacon roll.

Alex Whitworth

Alex Whitworth, 69, grew up in England, learning to sail with his father. After leaving the Royal Navy in 1965, he emigrated to Australia where he worked for Adastra Aerial Surveys. In 1993, Alex and his partner Hilary Yerbury bought *Berrimilla*, a Brolga 33. Since then he has completed two double-handed circumnavigations aboard her, the first in 2004 via Cape Horn and the second in 2008 via the North West Passage, for which he received plaudits from around the cruising world.



CRUISING BOOKS



The West Country, Lyme Bay to the Isles of Scilly

Carlos Rojas, Susan Kemp-Wheeler

After years as the definitive pilot book on the area, Mark Fishwick's excellent *West Country Cruising Companion*, published by Wiley Nautical, has a rival. Wiley has not updated Mark's book since 2008, and Carlos Rojas and Susan Kemp-Wheeler, who live locally and have cruised the area, have written this new guide for sailors. Details on harbours, anchorages and passages are augmented with useful aerial photos by Patrick Roach. Some photos are annotated with channel markings. The book has useful road and town maps, highlighting places of historical and cultural interest.

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