

Cruising in Company

A unique benefit for ICOYC club members

I feel that many of the ICOYC member clubs are missing opportunities with their cruising members and share some thoughts on this subject. One conclusion is that the ICOYC Cruises provide an easy opportunity for all the members of the yacht clubs in the International Council to take part in a unique event. Taking part could provide a starting point for future cruising initiatives back at home.

I have learned that different clubs have quite different attitudes towards cruising. During the talks on cruising events at the Commodores' Forum in Seattle one delegate was heard to ask 'why are we wasting our time on all this', adding that his club's only interest was in racing. More recently, while exploring the plans for a future ICOYC Cruise, I had the reaction from another club that 'our cruising members do not fit in with the rest of us, they go their own way'. These comments surprised me as my own experience with both the UK clubs in the ICOYC has been that the cruising sections have many members who are fully involved with club life. Both the Royal Thames and the Royal Southern YC's have an annual 'Cruising Dinner', and in each case it is one of the busiest evenings in the club's calendar.

Most clubs have many cruising members and unless the only objective of membership is to develop racing, their interests need to be considered or they will drift away – except when they are held in place by the availability of a mooring. In any case, if they are not looked after, the club is missing a significant opportunity to develop another aspect of its community spirit, which is vital in today's world when there are so many competing pressures for an individual's time. The cruising members can also help the racing side with committee boats, mark-laying boats and rescue boats, all fully crewed and free of charge.

There will always be some cruising sailors who are pure individualists. These are the ones whose only dream may be to go and rediscover the North-West Passage, or to anchor off a solitary Pacific island, and their main contact with the club is when they win the cup for the best log of an extended cruise, assuming they have been able to get to the ceremony. However, in my experience, the majority of cruising sailors are quite 'clubbable' and they enjoy interacting with their fellow members. The club's opportunity is to give them a reason to interact, to give them events and shared experiences that they can discuss over an enjoyable drink in the bar.

A problem for many sailors is the shortage of hours in the day. Those in good jobs need to devote time and effort to their work and have holidays that are all too brief and valuable. Clubs can meet their needs for shared experiences by arranging short cruises with specific objectives, often with families on board. Others who have retired or face less job-pressure can go away for longer and cover greater distances, and in many cases they see the advantages of sailing in company. If the club, usually through a cruising committee, has made the arrangements, they are likely to value membership more highly.

There is also a middle way, an opportunity for those pressed for time to take part in an event that is just as attractive to other members who are time-rich, and possibly a good holiday for racing sailors. This is the long-distance cruise-in-company that can be joined by flying (or driving) and chartering a yacht at the starting point. There may already be some members on the spot with their own yachts, enabling everyone to share inside knowledge about the cruising grounds – the best secret anchorages and hostelrys, and where to avoid. Through group arrangements members can often enjoy discounted rates for chartering yachts, which has real appeal for those who are not able to enjoy a yacht of their own.

Both the UK clubs in the ICOYC have had strong cruising programmes along all these lines for years. They also attract the former racing sailors by including informal races during cruising events, usually with white sails so that a two-handed yacht can still compete. The handicaps may be adjusted to ensure that no one yacht wins too often! As an example, in summer 2012 the Royal Thames YC's programme has a very well supported cruise-in-company (a club 'Rally') in the Greek islands with a mixture of members' yachts based locally and others that have been chartered, with the crews flying in. The itinerary includes places owned by Greek members of the club, ensuring a good reception. The

Royal Southern YC has more short events around the Solent area – see their extensive programme on the website: <http://www.royal-southern.co.uk/On-The-Water/Cruising>.

Because of my experience with both UK clubs, and of the two ICOYC clubs in the Pacific North-West where cruising is also a way of life, I have been one of the champions of the ICOYC Cruises since 2008. We have already had very successful cruises-in-company in W Canada, New Zealand and NW USA. This year the ICOYC Cruise will be in Southern UK and we are very much looking forward to taking part.

One concern, however, is that the ICOYC Cruises have so far mainly been attended by members of those clubs where there is already a strong cruising tradition. It would be excellent if we could now extend the concept to other yacht clubs in the International Council. In any case, I urge all those in the ICOYC to review how best to serve the interests of their cruising members.

A good starting point is to encourage any member who can do so, both cruisers and racers, to come to UK in August/September and join the 2012 ICOYC Cruise. It should be great fun. Guaranteed.

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