



LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE

Pete and Tracey Goss chose *Pearl*, a Garcia Exploration 45, for their round the world adventures

ROUND THE WORLD RACER PETE GOSS DREAMED OF CRUISING WITH HIS WIFE, TRACEY, AND BOUGHT A YACHT TO SAIL THE WORLD. HE LOOKS BACK AT THE DELICIOUS UNFURLING OF LIFE AT A MORE GENTLE PACE





Above: a grey crossing of Biscay...

Above right: when you're in no particular hurry the sun is bound to come out sooner or later



ut of the blackness a breaking crest makes itself known with an alien glow of tumbled phosphorescence and roars past. This is not what we expected when we set off on the glamour leg of our circumnavigation from Lanzarote to Antigua. Friends of ours set sail a month earlier and all their pictures are of the bimini up, sundowners being enjoyed, and fishing.

Be clear about this, I'm not complaining. As an army sergeant once said to me: "If you're looking for sympathy you'll find it somewhere in the dictionary between shit and syphilis – get on with it, son."

I'm very conscious, as I write, that we're on a dream trip, sailing an amazing yacht called *Pearl* in celebration of our 30th wedding anniversary. The kids have left home and we want to grab this window, before grandchildren arrive, to explore the world. Having hung up my competitive boots it's time to have a look at those amazing places I have rushed past while racing.

Another wave lifts the stern. I can sense the bow is buried deep. It's that pregnant pause when all sorts of forces compete for control of the boat and the outcome is out of your hands. Your fate lies in the past, a designer's pen scratching out a concept, a build team that decided to make something to be proud of. A boat that, when a stranger walks past, their natural inclination is to run their hand along it in appreciation of the curves.

All the elements and bits of equipment that make up

our new yacht, a Garcia Exploration 45, just seem to sit together in harmony. There isn't that one angle or bolted bit of equipment that jars. She stops people in their tracks.

The moment is upon us and *Pearl*, seemingly docile, just runs with the wave, straight and true. The B&G autopilot doesn't need to labour as we surf off at 17 knots. The glow of the instruments gives me a sense of the cockpit and I feel safe but not lulled. I have done enough sailing to know these to be dangerous conditions but I also revel in the transformation in *Pearl* once the centreboard is up. All lateral resistance moves aft to the rudders and there is no keel to trip us up. As we race down that treacherous liquid slope, a broach couldn't be further from my mind. A smile spreads across my face, but then I hear a phone ring.

Coastguard calling

It's the Iridium Pilot and MRCC Falmouth calling. My immediate thought is that one of our EPIRBs has gone off. I glance at the main one but it's secure in its mount waiting patiently for that moment that we all hope will never come. Is it one of our lifejackets?

But this thought is swept away as the Coastguard officer explains that one of the Atlantic Rowing boats is in trouble. I give our position, explain that we have all the medical support they might wish for and they put us on standby as they explore options. I finish by saying that if the casualties are to windward they shouldn't tarry, for to fight back in this will be tough and take a long time. It brings back memories of the time when I rescued Raphael Dinelli during the 1996 Vendée Globe – it's a similar time of the year. I feel for those poor souls in a small rowing boat out in this night of nights.

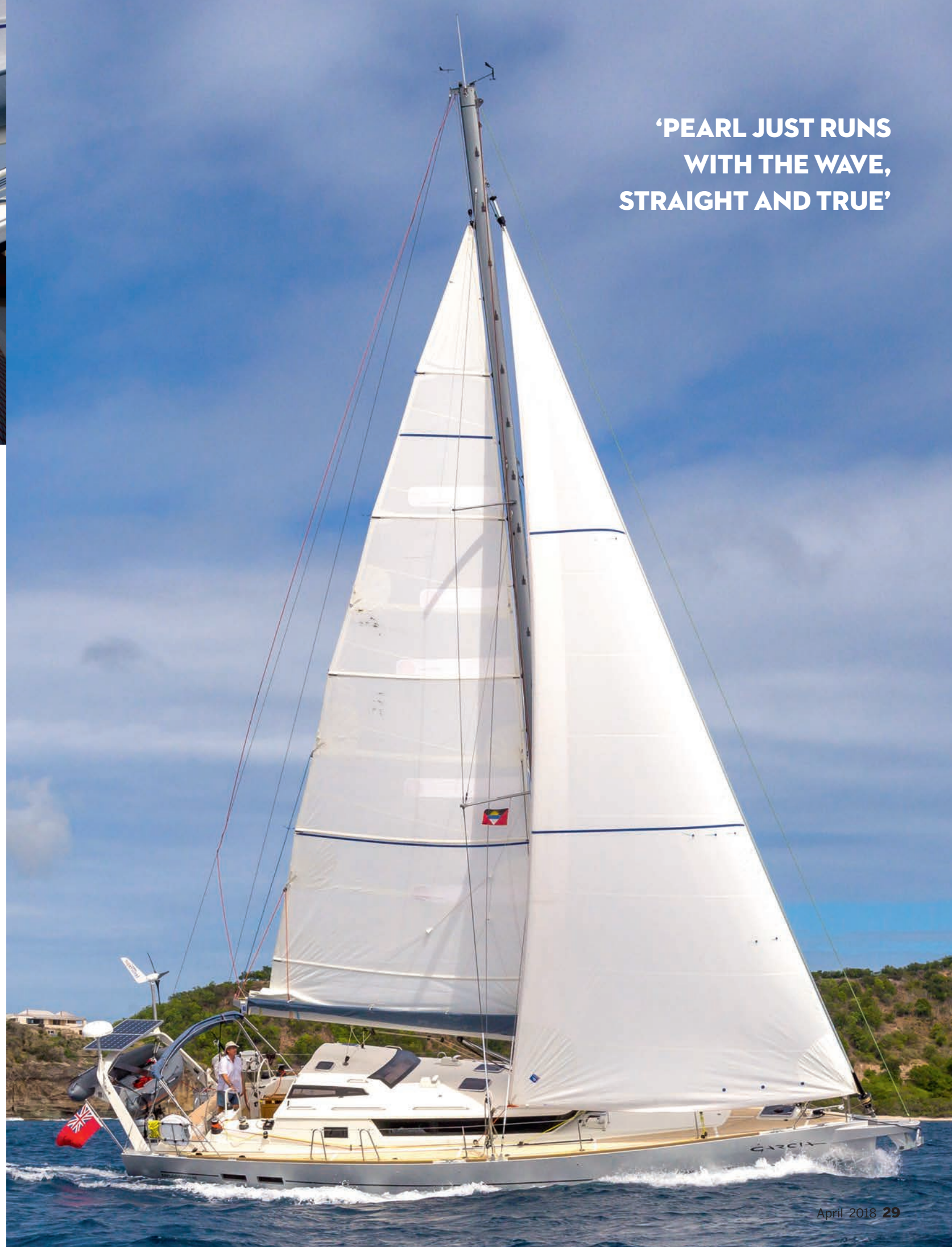
Tracey and I feel confident as we brace ourselves mentally. We spent a long time choosing *Pearl*. She is what we think of as a 'Land Rover of the Sea with a BMW interior', a blend of our differing expectations. Tracey has done little sailing: when we set sail across the Bay of Biscay in December she had only done two separate night sails. People ask if she is afraid, to which she answers: "I don't really know what to be afraid of so, no, I'll keep an open mind and deal with things as they come along."

Given this lack of experience her priority is for our



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**'PEARL JUST RUNS
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This is the life: sundowners for Pete and Tracey



Pete and Tracey at home in *Pearl*'s saloon, which proves ideal both for day to day living and world cruising

yacht to be a home, whereas mine is for a safe, functional platform. With *Pearl* I can sit with a glass of red in one hand and an inflatable globe in the other and know there is nowhere we can't go. We want to sweep up the tropical gems of the Caribbean and Pacific but we are also drawn to the rough diamonds of the extreme north and south. Places such as Alaska, the Chilean fiords and South Georgia all call in their own way.

Tracey loves wildlife and is excited by the opportunity of being able to see these places in the flesh as opposed to on an electronic box in the living room. We have a loose time frame of five years so *Pearl* really is to be our home; she has to do more than offer utilitarian function. She must be warm, pleasing to the eye below, have a double bed, a good galley and, above all, she mustn't be a 'cave', as Tracey describes most boats. Tracey just doesn't understand why you would design something to transport you to an exotic bay and then live down below.

Ours must have an all-round view, much like a catamaran.

I was looking for a strong, safe platform about 45ft LOA: big enough to go anywhere but small enough for us to sail two-handed with ease. We both wanted the layout to give us a private cabin with en-suite – we have done with camping on a boat. For privacy, this should be separated from a double guest cabin and separate heads by the saloon and galley.

I wanted a robust aluminium hull with watertight bulkheads, twin rudders, a centreboard to reduce draught and open up shallow areas but give directional stability off the wind. Drying out should be easy. She should have lots of stowage, a big capacity for fuel and water, and be well insulated.

Nothing quite fitted the bill and so I started a detailed design brief knowing that we were, once again, going to have to build our own boat. That was exciting on the one hand but from experience it's a much bigger undertaking

than most people realise, so we started to steel ourselves for a lot of work and stress.

Until, in Dubai of all places, *Yachting World* came to the rescue. I was delayed on return from a job in Australia, and treated myself to a copy of the magazine – and there was a Garcia on the front cover. She had something that immediately drew me in. Here was the culmination of Jimmy Cornell's lifetime of long distance cruising and 15,000 detailed surveys of others' bluewater lessons. Her DNA was impeccable and she fitted the picture in my mind. It was so exciting, I called Tracey to say that I had stumbled across the yacht of our dreams.

All this offered us comfort as I started to visualise the possible outcomes of a rescue. How would we pick the rowing team up? What if there was serious injury? Where would we make the sick bay? Would we have to divert to Cape Verde, and if we did it'd be a very rough ride. It might it be better to keep going to Antigua, trading time for stability.

And the pickup would be difficult. Hope we can wait for dawn. I wonder what experience the casualties have? They're amazing people, many launching themselves into the Atlantic with very little knowledge, but naivety can be both an asset and a threat. It reminded me of my early days of learning the ropes through lessons that no experienced sailor would countenance. Bravo to them and their zest for life.

But it transpired we were not called upon so we surge off into the night, relieved yet in some way disappointed at the same time. There must be help closer to hand than us, but you can't help thinking that it would have been good to help.

In at the deep end

We have a week of strong winds, big seas and thermals. I can't believe it, this isn't what I sold Tracey after the ordeal of the Bay of Biscay in December. We left Guernsey – had to – at a time when most boats are laid up and sensible heads are below the parapet. Production schedules dictated our launch. A grim night saw us off Ushant pushing spring tides, 30 knots of wind and rain. It was one of those forecasts you know will be a challenge but won't get out of hand. If we didn't bite the bullet we would be trapped by a fortnight of gales.

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We, or more to the point Tracey, would just have to suck it up in the interests of the overall plan. That was all well and good in the marina but it broke my heart to find her ill and in tears as I came below for a moment's respite in the early hours. This was going to be a single-handed night. I'm happy to carry the weight as she adapts.

The weather improves and we find ourselves able to have breakfast in the cockpit as we close Finisterre, albeit in thermals. Suddenly, it dawns on us that we have done the right thing, this leap of faith with no return. It takes us nine days to make Lanzarote and it's with some pride that we moor up and I initiate Tracey into the traditional ending of a long passage, namely a bar and a steak.

On reflection, it's been good and we look forward to sailing to Antigua. It takes five days to feel ready for the off and we sail into conditions that exceed the forecast until Christmas Day when it suddenly turns. Yet I hesitate to say we have hit the Trades. We're in shorts and M&S have offered up a shockingly good Christmas dinner with all

'I HAD STUMBLER ACROSS THE YACHT OF OUR DREAMS'

the trimmings. We open presents from the kids and have a lovely day which ends with a sundowner in the cockpit. Old Father Christmas knew what we were wishing for. We have made it through the rough stuff, we feel blooded, the three of us. Cheers *Pearl*; proud of you, Tracey.

It takes a while for a novice to settle into a long spell at sea. There's a key moment when they stop focusing on the destination and realise that it's all about enjoying the moment. Making the most of the little things that a simple life has to offer, real things. It's a truth that the rat race is keen to stifle with its insatiable hunger for consumption. We are out here to see the world but also to escape the madness of modern life. We want to spend our money on memories not things. But the transition takes time and at times feels alien. This is our life now. We're not flying home from Antigua. My diary isn't booked up years ahead. I have some writing and the odd job but its enough to be fun and adequate to help us along our way. As my Dad used to say: "You might think you own things" ➤

Right: plenty of usable storage means there's space for a couple of folding bikes
Far right: a detail from *Pearl*'s galley



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but you don't. The only thing you truly own is time. Now spend it wisely."

And so the days settle into an easy routine that makes the best of our strengths. Tracey still doesn't like the nights. She gives me a few hours' sleep after supper and I'm happy to cover until dawn with the odd cat nap. We always sit together with a cuppa for the sun rise and of course a sundowner at dusk.

Tracey's knowledge grows as I revel in the liberation of cruising. I don't have to keep the boat on the edge or drive myself to the limits. I can sit back, read, write, play Scrabble, chill out to music, have a hot shower. And I can't believe I'm saying this, but I can have an ice cream too!

A week out from Antigua the wind eases at 0400. It's time for a spinnaker. I leap into action and am about to give Tracey a shout when it strikes me that it can wait until



Pearl's maiden Atlantic voyage: Guernsey to Antigua

'DOLPHINS WELCOME THE DAWN AND WE HAVE A TERN CIRCLING THE BOAT'

dawn. Those last couple of hours' sleep for Tracey are worth more than the couple of miles we might gain. It really doesn't matter when we get to Antigua.

Restorative powers of the sea

I grab a coffee and watch the sun push the stars aside, feeling completely relaxed and at one with the world again. The ocean has restored me. It's taken a while to shake the exhaustion that comes with depleted batteries. You know that feeling: when you wake up more tired after a night's sleep than when you went to bed.

That was the reality when we set out, for leaving took more out of us than we could have imagined. Breaking away from a life is tough; many things need addressing that you couldn't foresee. They're often small things, but when added up they're significant and draining. Like Gulliver tied down in Lilliput, we are bound by thousands of unseen ties and they all need severing, emotionally and practically. The kids, parents and close friends are the fabric of our life. Are we being selfish? Our house needs to be sold. It all needs thinking about and squaring away. Although this is our trip it's also a family event, with the kids queuing up to parachute in. They can join this five-year adventure whenever and wherever they fancy. We will pop home for at least a month a year and, modern communications mean that it's not quite like my parents

had to endure when our family emigrated to Australia when I was a child.

It's another lovely day. Dolphins welcome the dawn and we have

had a tern circling the boat as it eyes up a perch but can't quite build up the courage to go for it. It has an aerodynamic beauty enhanced by a delicate streamer tail – we have a book on ocean birds and the time to read it.

Lunch is served and suddenly there's a big spout in our wake, close enough to hear. The thrill is off the scale and we dance about in excitement. It's a couple of 30ft minke whales. They're known to be inquisitive and are very nosy. They stay with us for a couple of days, coming to within feet of the hull and at times swimming with their heads out of the water as if checking out the topsides. The ocean isn't as lonely as you might think.

But come the end we're ready to stop so I shout "Land ho!" with great gusto as Antigua rises ahead of us out of the haze.

We've timed it perfectly. We arrive late afternoon and as we turn towards Falmouth Harbour we can smell the scent of an exotic island like perfume after so long at sea. We pick up a mooring, crack open a bottle of champagne, revel in the companionable silence, the stillness, the lifting of 24-hour responsibility. It's a magic moment as the sun sets behind the bay.

Special things in life must be earned and the toil has been a pleasure. Not a single cross word has been spoken. I think we'll take to this new life. And lying ahead of us now there is so much to see.



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Above: Pearl offers plenty of comfortable aft cockpit space for relaxation
Left: at anchor in Falmouth Harbour, Antigua



Pete's new office space aboard his Garcia Exploration 45



Pete Goss is a former Royal Marine and adventurer who has competed in the OSTAR, TWOSTAR, been a skipper in the British Steel Challenge round the world race, the Vendée Globe, Transat Jaques Vabre and the Route du Rhum. He built the lugger *Spirit of Mystery* and sailed her from the UK to Australia, and has kayaked round Tasmania, led four expeditions to the North Pole, and is an Associate Fellow Said Business School Oxford University. But most importantly, he says, he is husband to Tracey and father to Alex, Olivia and Eliot.