

The Log of the S/V Eitan

Canet-en-Roussillon to Athens

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From Canet-en-Roussillon to Athens

It started out with a phone call from my colleague Yaniv on Saturday night asking if I'd like to join him for the delivery of one of the new club boats which was sitting in Canet-en-Roussillon in the south of France. Since this was an area I had never sailed in, and also would give me the opportunity to go through the Straits of Messina, which was on my "sailing port of call bucket list," I agreed after receiving reluctant approval from the Admiral to chase my dreams.



Canet-en-Roussillon

Tuesday, March 3 Tel Aviv to Barcelona to Canet

We boarded a flight this morning from Tel Aviv to Barcelona and after a 2-hour transfer, we arrived to the marina in Canet-en-Roussillon, France. This is a huge marina and seems to be quite a sailing center for the area. There were lots of yachting services including a manufacturer I believe, and many new yachts were being commissioned before delivery to owners. Our yachts had been

commissioned by Eyal and Avishai and were basically ready to sail once we provisioned her. So, after a visit to the local Carrefour with some of the crew from the Lea, we returned to the boats with our carts piled high with groceries and a few other needed supplies. Avishai gave us a briefing on the boat's electronic and safety equipment and a tour of the boat itself. I've never delivered a brand-new boat before and have heard all the warnings about doing it: untested under varied sailing conditions, lack of certain equipment, possible equipment failures, etc. I must say that all of these are valid, but in the end thanks to our commissioning crew (Eyal and Avishai), the boat was well provisioned and adequately supplied, and she sailed beautifully.

Weather? We landed to a beautiful sunny day in Barcelona, but I knew from checking the forecasts, something different was awaiting us two hours eastwards in France. Arriving to Canet the weather turned cloudy and colder with a light drizzle which turned to a steady downpour. After a welcome dinner onboard the warm Lea we retired to a welcome sleep upon the very cold Eitan. I was very glad to have brought the down sleeping bag which made the cold boat tolerable. The forecast was for a windy passage south towards Sardinia and that's pretty much how it played out.

Wednesday, March 4 Canet to Olbia, Sardinia

Awaking early, we prepared to shove off on the first leg of our voyage. Following a couple hour delay because Yaniv forgot to pack extra pants, we finally departed Canet at 1115. The weather was cold with a light drizzle and overcast with winds of Force 3 and were flying a full main and jib heading SE. Leaving the snow covered hills of the coast behind we fell into a routine which would take us for the next few days on our way to Sardinia.

Since the boat was brand new and new to us, there was a bit of a learning curve to on how to sail her most efficiently. The boat's manual was written in Spanish but luckily, we were able to download an English copy which came in very handy during the trip. First of all, she had a strange mainsail sheet arrangement with a bridle which apparently is called a German mainsheet. I've never used this type of mainsheet and to top it off, the two sheets were lead aft to the pedestal electric winches next to each wheel. I can't say we ever really got the hang of it but managed to trim the main as best we could during the trip. The mainsheet furler also had a strange setup with the outhaul being the only line on the starboard side, and without a winch but rather a pulley wheel which lead to the winch on the port side. This port side winch was not electric so we kept our biceps in shape with a lot of grinding. Sadly the boat hadn't been equipped with a preventer and we were unable to set up a proper one without an extra block to put on the rail. Fortunately we had never had the wind more than about 150 degrees on the quarter, so accidental jibing was not a big worry. I would've felt a lot safer with a proper preventer, but in a pinch, I would've run a line from mid boom down to the rail. In addition, the jib was self-tailing on an athwartships traveler forward of the mast. I really hadn't worked much with self-tailing jibs before, but she proved adequate to the task although not allowing the best sail trim on the jib. When winds went light at night the clew made a very noisy slamming sound as it went from side to side, requiring furling the jib which was not really needed anyway but was a good wakeup call for the sleepy person on watch (me) and gave me something to tend to at 2 in the morning.



Deck plan with German mainsheet

Had an interesting encounter with a ship at sea this afternoon. Container ship named Gulf West appeared on the AIS on a collision course with us in about a half hour. Since our AIS only received, I raised them on the VHF and announced our position and that we were a sailing vessel. The helmsman very courteously offered to change course to 60 degrees to starboard which allowed us to take his stern safely.

There was little ship traffic the rest of the day and night. We averaged SOG of 6-7 knots under either motor sailing or only sails conditions heading SE with winds of Force 3-4.

Thursday, March 5 Offshore on the way to Sardinia

Night and morning watches were uneventful with clear skies and moderate winds but very cold out on deck and down below. Not in the mood for cooking I enjoyed the packaged fish dinner which was prepared in boiling water. Early morning had a beautiful sunrise and we were next to Lea and followed each other until we passed her in the late morning.

Weather was clear with moderate winds and a light chop, but this was sure to change as the day progressed. The barometer started a downward descent from 1015 to 1005 and winds rose to 20 knots gusting to 30 from the SE. We took advantage of the fresh winds under sail alone with two reefs in both the main and jib. The boat handled great and it was an exciting if bumpy ride on 2-meter waves. Yaniv was not feeling great and dozed in the cockpit but took his watch when it was his turn.

At 2145 there was a 10-minute downpour and the wind changed direction and died. We followed Lea on a course towards the passage between Corsican and Sardinia. We really didn't want to attempt this part of the passage at night, but we were already there, and the winds were very strong by now. Heading south would mean we would have to go around the bottom of Sardinia and then head north to go across the Tyrrhenian Sea towards Italy. The winds built as we approached the passage and started gusting at 35-40+. We were heavily reefed and motor sailing to keep control and sailing without the autopilot. We screamed through the passage at 8 knots with me on the helm and Yaniv glued to the Navionics screen keeping us on course to avoid the islands and rocks along the way. It was a very exhilarating part of the sail and required complete concentration which reminded me of the downwind California to Mexico races which I sailed on back in the 70's. I would grade this as the highlight of the whole passage.

Having safely passed through the passage and the northern part of Sardinia, we were able to head south towards Olbia as the sun rose. We arrived in Olbia around 1000 followed by Lea who we had passed during the passage in the middle of the night. She had actually sailed part of the passage in reverse to keep the speed down. We tied up in front of the Olbia Marina fuel dock and filled up with both diesel and water. I had mentioned to Yaniv that it would be great to get one of the four crewmen off the Lea to join us for the rest of the passage. This would take off some of the load on the watches and give each of us a bit more time to sleep between watches. He agreed and Guy let Ezriel join us for the rest of the passage.



Olbia Marina in Sardinia

We spent the rest of the day having the engines get their 50-hour service by the local Yanmar service and passed a couple of hours at the nearby mall for lunch and good Italian coffee and Yaniv was able to find some much needed pants. We departed Olbia Marina at 1730 with the destination Messina.

March 7 Olbia, Sardinia to Lipari

0145 SOG 7.5 COG 120 Wind 13 knots from the south. Beautiful chilly night with following sea under a reefed main and jib leaving beautiful Sardinia behind. I only got a small taste of the island but vowed to come back with Nancy and tour it properly.

March 8 Olbia to Lipari, Italy

The night passed quietly motor sailing with light winds. Had a parade of dolphins at sunrise along with the beautiful sight of Stromboli on port with a light cloud showing she was still an active volcano. At around 1200 pulled into the Aeolian island of Lipari and waited for Lea before proceeding. Well Lipari proved to be a beautiful stopover point with a very picturesque harbor and safe spot to tie up to along the harbor wall. This was the first point where we started to feel that the Corona virus was starting to be felt in the region. Although it was a Sunday, there weren't many people out walking around. The children who helped us dock told us that the schools were closed due Corona. All businesses were closed along the harbor but that was probably due to it being Sunday. The largest restaurant would only serve us takeaway, but the nearby café called La Vela served us a wonderful lunch.

Well we waited several hours for Lea to get into radio range but finally were able to reach them on the mobile phone. They actually had passed by a few hours ago and were on their way to Messina. So, we spent the night at the dock in Lipari to get a good night's sleep and planned to depart at daybreak.



We spent the night onboard in Lipari and departed at 0530 and set sail for Messina. SOG 7 knots and COG 100. Under sail with reefed main and full jib. Clear skies and light chop with wind of 14 knots from the East. Giant thunderstorm at 0700 with torrential rain on the way to Messina and the wind died so fired up the engine. We had made a mistake on the current tables of Messina and at 1100 we reached the Straits of Messina just when the tide was going out. So, with a 3-knot current against us we entered the straits and began our

search for diesel. Crossing the Straits of Messina was always on my sailing bucket list and I'm sorry to say was a bit disappointing. I had imagined the straits as being narrower and more treacherous as was related in all the old Greek myths of Ulysses. In fact, there was quite a distance at both ends with the narrowest part in the middle. This is where the 6 headed monster Scylla lied in wait for sailors to pass and plucked them from their ships as they passed by. Luckily, we avoided this ordeal but the search for diesel proved to be an ordeal. Searching online for a fuel dock proved quite fruitless and I was very sorry we didn't have a pilot book for Italy at this point. After making several calls to supposed fuel docks we just pulled into the Neptuna Marina in Messina and asked them where to find fuel. Eventually we learned there was a fuel dock about a mile from there which was attached to a gas station on the main street next to the water. So, we decided to go to the grocery and stock up on some bread and milk before heading off to Greece.

The effect of the Corona on daily life was already quite evident. The supermarket was quite full of people who were stocking and trying to keep their social distance unsuccessfully. We stopped at a very nice Pasticceria on the way back to the boat and had coffee and a light lunch. The hostess asked me to keep a social distance when we entered and from there, we saw that something was evidently changing in the air. Returning to the boat we headed over to the fuel dock and were told it was closed today. But there was a foot bridge from the fuel dock which connected it to the gas station. We were really low on fuel so needed to get it for the leg to the Ionian. So, we used our jerry cans to fill up at the pump and walk back on the bridge to the boat and filled up the tanks. After 7 trips we were finally topped off and departed. End of fuel search ordeal and good to get back on the water. We probably should have gone to Reggio Calabria on the mainland side in the beginning but all in all it turned out ok and we were able to fill the tanks and continue

on. The view of Southern Calabria was very beautiful from the boat and I vowed to visit it someday from the mainland.

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March 10 Messina to Patras

Quiet night and next day sailing southeast towards the Ionian and entrance to the Gulf of Corinth. Mostly motor sailed with some few hours of sail only as winds were quite variable. Not much boat traffic with a ship here and there and especially as we got closer to the approaches to the Gulf.



Sunset on the Ionian Sea

March 11 Messina to Patras

At 0130 we were abeam of the west end of Kefalonia and for the last few hours we had been following the coast of Kefalonia, and at 0740 now changed course to port and eastward towards the Gulf of Corinth. It was a beautiful morning with very light winds and sunny skies. This was the warmest day of the trip so far and it was great to finally be on deck without a jacket.

1230: We arrived at Patras and docked in the main marina nearby Lea. We were able to take on fuel and top off the water tanks and planned to check into Greece here. Yaniv and Guy took off to the port police in the main port and some of the guys from Lea took off to eat. I was enjoying people watching in the lively marina, so stayed aboard and made some lunch from our adequate supplies. It was a warmish and sunny day, so it seemed like most of the city of Patras was at one of the restaurants on the waterfront at the marina. The Corona effect didn't seem to have hit them yet as there didn't seem to be much social distancing going on. Guy and Yaniv came back much later after having had a difficult time checking us in. We planned to depart at 2200 and cross under the bridge and head for the Corinth Canal.

March 12 Patras to Athens

At 2200 we departed Patras and got permission to pass under the bridge. We motor sailed through the night on the busy Gulf keeping a close watch for vessel traffic of which there were mostly fishing boats. Finally, at 0700 both us and Lea arrived at the entrance to the Canal. We waited an hour and a half for permission to enter the canal and finally at 0830 we transited the canal and departed the canal at 0900 heading towards Athens. I had a chance to walk around the Canal offices on the eastern side and it's really a beautiful spot with palm trees and grassy areas and a beautiful view of the Saronic Sea looking towards Aegina and Attica in the distance.



Corinth Canal

We had planned to finish in Lavrion south of Athens since there were not any spots at the marinas in the Piraeus/Athens area. Along the way we learned that Tashoot was able to get us a spot in Zea Marina in Piraeus which was perfect and also cut off 4 hours from what the voyage to Lavrion would have been. It was a beautiful sail into Athens with the wind at 20 knots and the boat speeding along at 8+ knots. I took the wheel for an hour and enjoyed the best sailing conditions of the whole trip. We entered into Zea Marina around 1500 and tied up finally next to Lea. We spent the next few hours cleaning up the boats and putting them in order for the next delivery crew who would bring her on to Limassol. The shopping area of Piraeus was jumping that evening as Yaniv and I went out for a souvlaki. The people of Greece were soon to get the message and all of these restaurants and shops were about to close.



Zea Marina in Piraeus



Me on the helm approaching Athens

We took an early morning taxi to the airport for our 0800 Ryan Air flight to Israel. The airport was very empty with the plane only boarding 20 passengers for the flight. Upon landing back in Israel, I had to enter the two-week required isolation at home which as of this writing, I'm still "enjoying."

Writing this today, March 23, it appears the Corona will sadly prevent the departure and delivery of the Eitan and Lea to Cyprus for a few months.