

Puffin Goes To Garda

Question -What makes two Fisherrow dinghy sailors drive their 'reasonably priced car, towing a reasonably priced dinghy' a ridiculously long way to the Mecca of dinghy sailing to take part in one of the most prestigious dinghy sailing events of the year?

Answer – It beats sitting on the sofa watching the square box in the corner and watching other people have fun.

It began over a year ago when Tim and I bought our first RS 200 and sailed at Royal Forth Yacht Club. A well known local sailor Stuart Robertson suggested we did it and just treat it as a holiday because although there were usually over 80 RS200s on the start line at least half were just on holiday having fun. The seed was planted and by Christmas we'd booked the ferry just in case we decided to go and it was a bargain anyway!! As January turned to February and then March we really had to make some decisions – will we, wont we? Google Garda... Wind sounds awesome. Something called the Ora kicks in at 1pm every day and if you have the bottle to take the route down the cliff side of the course you end up on the 'elevator.' Sounds fun. We are beginning to get swept up in the enthusiasm but will we be totally out classed and be a leg behind all the other boats and look a right pair of? Several RS400s are going and hear we are considering going so start emailing us and saying to get our campsite pitch booked. Its crunch time.

After much nipple greasing and bearing replacing on the front lawn, bottom polishing, cleat and shackle checking we transfer our attention to the camping kit and get the car serviced. The front room gradually fills with camping kit, sailing gear, spare sailing gear, first aid kit, breathalysers for driving in France, chairs, table, spare wheels, duvets 'cause the forecast says it's going to be cold at night and a general mass of stuff we probably don't need but might! Oh, and the newly purchased electric cool box. The room is full and it is definitely bigger than the car.

Tues 17th July – 3 hours spent packing the car and chucking out half the stuff we can't fit in! Hitch the boat up with far too many spare sails in it. How many spinnakers does a girl need my helm asks? How many spare wheels does a dinghy trailer need and how many tool boxes do we need?

6.30am, Wed. 18th July – Dept. Edinburgh. Only 1250 miles to Garda. Lesson no. 1. How do we work the Sat. Nav? 1st stop, 10 hours later at a nice hotel near Dover. Bar meal in front of final days of the Tour De France. Wiggo still looking good.

3.30am, Thurs 19th – Up early and off to the ferry. Get lost at the first roundabout. We really need to learn how to use the Sat. Nav. and give it an appropriate name. Pull up in ferry queue beside an RS400. Nice couple but really do seem a bit more pro than us. After a nap and breakfast we're off the ferry and on our way. Within half a mile we are lost. A disagreement ensues between the 3 of us. We now have Fred the Sat Nav with a sexy female voice giving an opinion. Rather uninteresting drive through rolling countryside to Stuttgart. Fred gets us there fine.

8.30am, Fri 20th. Late start, last leg to Garda. More uninteresting Autobans where I'm only meant to drive at 50mph. Not easy with a heavy right foot. Suddenly the scenery changes.

Fuelling up in Austria.



Head over the Fern Pass and the Brenner Pass. Fantastic scenery, mountains, ski resorts I skied in as a wee girl and finally the temperature hits 32C and at 3.30pm we're through the final tunnel and we're in Riva del Garda.

Drop the boat off at the sailing club, some young rather professional guys tuning and tweaking their 200s look at us as if we have 2 heads or is it because we are old enough to be their parents. Oh dear what have we done. Off to find the campsite up the valley. Wind blowing like stink. It's hot and dusty and getting the tent up is a nightmare. It's 7.30 by the time we finish. I'm hot, sweaty, dusty, tired and very hungry. Off to the campsite shop to find food. Meet one family of Scottish RS400 sailors and find its free pasta night at the campsite. Beer, pasta, social and all feels a lot better. The sky is getting very gloomy and a storm looks likely. Well what a storm. I have never seen a lightning display like it. The tops of the mountains were completely edged in a deep yellow glow. We sat outside the tent watching an incredible display until the large dollops of rain sent us inside. For most of the night the wind blew, the thunder crashed, the lightning flashed and the rain was torrential. Not a lot of sleep then! But at least the tent didn't leak. One small problem though. We'd bought this lovely new electric cool box but no cable to plug it in with.

Sat. 21st July – Still raining. The place is awash. After breakfast off to the Italian equivalent of B&Q to find an electric cable and dodge the torrential rain as best we can. By lunch time the rain stops so off to the boat. Get the mast up, try to look really professional. Tune the rigging, do some tweaking and look like we know what we are doing! Meet the rather pro looking RS400 sailors from the ferry who discover their road trailer has fallen apart and probably has been like that since Dover. Timothy the spares man to the rescue. Our reward – new friends, beer and at last the atmosphere is shaping up. It's now hot and humid with cyclists from a mega huge bike event finishing just beside the club, cycling over their finish line, through the dinghy park and straight down the slip. A swim for rider and bike. The campsite has a beautiful pool so head up there for a well needed swim but the rain starts again so a siesta instead.

Sunday 22nd – Slow start and then off to the boat. Re-do rig tensions. Time to get out for a practice sail. There's a challenge. Now realise why they like you to launch by 12. In the morning it's light off shore wind. At 1pm the wind completely drops, it then comes straight down your mast off the top of the mountains and within 20 mins has turned 180 degrees to be straight on shore gathering speed as it comes down the lake. By the time we launch with our gradually accumulating group of friends its blowing old boots - on shore. It's almost impossible to launch off a narrow manmade slip with a sudden drop off. Jump in, start to power in the jib not realising that Tim can't get the rudder down because it hits the slip so we burl round head straight for the pontoon, crash, burl round again and take a second go at hitting the pontoon. This is an inauspicious start with a large audience!! Off at last up the beat towards the cliffs.

Into James Bond territory where they filmed Quantum of Solace in the tunnel.



Its windy and lumpy, put in some tacks, now time to turn down wind and get the kite up. New crew required. She's rigged it wrong again but redeems herself by re-rigging on the water. I now get called 'Supercrew'. Put in some passable jibes before the wind starts to die, drops off the tops of the mountains again and then turns 180 degrees. It's really lumpy and the boat fills with water. We're convinced we've cracked the bow with our escapades at the launch. Get ashore, bend our saltire burgee on the trees, undo the bung to check the hull. Not a drop. Boat fine just bad technique. Starts chucking it down with rain again. Go for a beer and watch the finally leg into Paris of the Tour de France – Wiggo sets up Cavendish and the club erupts in cheers. Oh s... We left the tent open to keep it a bit cooler. Thought the rain had finished. So we get back to a flooded tent. Dinner, study the Race Instructions and Rules. Robertson's finally arrive at about 10pm.

Day 1 of the RS Euro Cup starts. Stuart and Sarah Robertson from Royal Forth Yacht Club finally pitch up with their 400 and their 2 lovely daughters in their 200! Gossip in the dinghy park - Who are these guys. We've never heard of them, they role up an hour before the first gun, throw their mast up and get 2 bullets. As for the rest of the racing. The Ora doesn't kick in as normal so we spend ages sailing 3 miles up the lake following our Committee Boat –Poppa 2. Race 1 we're not last – yippy! But don't get too excited we were near the back. The wind then changes so we start to sail back up the lake to the revised start. Get the kite up, helm has a siesta, go swimming but get to the start in time. Doing nicely up the first beat but get a bit over zealous and launch the kite on the spreader. Not a good move. Hit a yellow boat. Do our 720. Cross the finish line 3rd last. We'd spent 5 hours on the water. Pasta and beer on the terrace, ice-cream and bed.



Day 2 – Kite fixing pulls out of deck. Tool box Tim to the rescue. We are assured it will get windy so set boat up for heavy wind. Set off in light wind. Long sail in light wind to the start and then have a terrible start. Tim full of the cold. Bad day at the office. Last over the line. Wind shifty, goes cloudy and cool. Spray tops go on. Postponement flag up, down, up, down and up again with some other flag. By the time we work it out the storm has almost got to the end of the valley where our tent is and we are about 4 miles from the slip. The storm looks vicious. Like a dragon with fangs spurting out the side. The RS500s on the other side of the lake are hit first. Everyone of them is knocked over, then the 400s are hit, 4 go over, the wind is building, Tim shouts to release the jib from the cleat, we're going to bear away. The wind and rain hit full force. The boat takes off. We are going faster and faster and faster. How long have we got before we hit James Bond's cliffs. There is water everywhere. The crew takes the force of the water. I can't see anything. We'll have to tack soon. There's a boat to leeward so we can't bear away when the next gust hits. He bears away just in time. Pass several boats upsides down. They are just sitting out the storm. The wind drops a bit. Right, lets go for a tack before we end up in 007s tunnel. Slow and controlled. We'll leave out any attempts at a role tack. We're round and off we go again.

The rain is chucking it down but the wind starts to abate.



Getting cold but not half as cold as those young girls who won the first day and are in wee yellow shorts and t-shirts. At least I've got on hikers, rash vest and spray top. Get ashore. Rain stops, sun comes out. To sum up Day 2 – rubbish racing for the Jones's but what a sail home. Best fun ever. Top marks to my helm.

As the week progresses we become braver on the starts, spend a lot of time on the water with the Ora only coming to play occasionally. Tim still choked with the cold. No. 774 bring him some pills.



Invited to other peoples tents for barbies. Keith's little children come to visit frequently and join us for breakfast. The campsite pool is lovely, the ice-cream shops a magnet.



An RS500 crew hoists her kite to find a marriage proposal printed on it. Thurs the Ora kicked in. Did well on the beat but forgot to soak on the downwind leg as having such a good time and lost load of places. Shame but never mind it was a lot of fun. Race 2 was a short sharp chop with lots of wind. Couldn't stop shipping water.

Ended up like sailing a bath. Its getting very very hot. Get the kite up, sun out and VERY hot. Rush the jibe and go for a lovely swim. Never mind. Felt a lot better after the swim. Wind drops suddenly and we float over the line. Getting bolder still on starts but it is so crowded that getting a transit is almost impossible. Usually it's halfway up the mountain. There are frequent general recalls and 720s. But they keep shifting the start line to get the perfect start. This is hard for us when we are only used to 6 at most on Fisherrow start line. Usually this event has about 80 RS200s but this year they only had 36 which unfortunately for us meant that it really was the top sailors there and few of the 'holiday sailors' so we really were fighting to not come last. The sailing was so tight that when we did finish 29th the other 7 boats all crossed the finish line within about 20 seconds of us. The finish line was very short and with the 400s bearing down on you and screaming for room it made the finish line feel like the start.

Last day of racing was another 5 hours with shifty wind and the start line getting moved repeatedly. After 5 hours and another start line move the crew demands a final visit to the ice cream shop instead of the last race. Good decision. They floated up the lake to the new start line only to have 2 general recalls and then the 'no more racing today' flag goes up with them all miles up the lake and us with our boat packed up and enjoying coconut and lemon double ice-cream cone! Wow is their ice-cream good.

So that was the end of the regatta. The Robertson from RFYC took 2nd place in the 400 class.



Winner of the 200s was a guy called Ben Saxton who is also the 720 European Champion. The Jones's had a ball and didn't finish last in most races!! We met some great people, made some lovely friends, ate great ice cream, had some good meals, saw some beautiful scenery, wandered around the charming old town and harbour of

Riva del Garda, had a great meal with the Robertsons amongst the lovely old buildings of Garda whilst being entertained by the sounds of a celloist, took a boat trip on a paddle steamer to the pretty town of Limone and then on to Malcesine where we wandered around the delightful town and market and visited another ice-cream shop, sat in the town square eating calamari with a nice cold beer and watched the world go by before returning to the campsite for a swim, drove a total of 2571 miles, spent a total of 6 days driving, camped in a lovely wee site in Germany on the way back where we finally used the duvet, spent the last night in a slightly tacky hotel in Dunkirk before a day sight seeing in Dunkirk visiting the Maritime Museum, the Operation Dynamo Museum and the War Graves before heading to the ferry back to Blighty, a long overnight drive to avoid the Olympics traffic and finally arrived home at 6.45 am 2 weeks later.

Would we do it again? Absolutely, but maybe not tomorrow!

Tim & Carol Jones

Nov. 2012