

CANNES ROYAL REGATTA 2014

Sailing with Rose' Colored Glasses

by S/C Brad Avery

Every now and then a dream becomes reality, maybe even more so. Sitting in my office on a Tuesday morning in early September last year, I received the following email:

Hi Brad—We are looking for a helmsman on Dorade for the upcoming Classic regatta in Cannes. We will sail from the 20th of this month to the 27th. The event is called the Regatta Royal. Let me know if you're interested. Best, Kevin

I don't play the lottery, but this felt like a Mega Jackpot notification. Or maybe Kevin Miller, who runs the North loft in Ventura, was writing to his other friend Brad. Regardless, my next move was to book a flight to Cannes even if I was hallucinating.

stewardesses as they went up the narrow passarelle in tight formation, each carrying a case of Chateau d' Esclans Rose' without breaking a sweat.

Sailing aboard *Dorade* was a thrill and an honor, given this iconic yawl's place in American yachting history. Owners Matt Brookes and Pam Rorke Levy are dedicated to her legacy. This not only revolves around the sharing and caretaking of such a treasure, but also to the goal of winning every regatta she enters. After purchasing *Dorade* in 2010, they promptly rebuilt her. The boat came out of the yard faster and stronger than ever, with new spruce masts. Kevin Miller, along with Greg Stewart from Nelson Marek Yacht Design optimized the boat, rig, and sails. Early on, Matt decided to campaign *Dorade* with the goal of repeating *Dorade's* famous wins in the early days of her career including the Transatlantic, Fastnet, Bermuda, and Transpac races. In 2013, *Dorade* won the Transpac overall, 77 years following her win in 1936. She won her class in the 2014 Bermuda Race, and then was shipped to the Med for the classic racing season.

Along with Matt, Pam, Kevin and Greg, *Dorade's* Med season crew included bowman Eric Chowanski and trimmer John Hayes, both pro sailors with long resumes. Rounding out the crew were full-time boat captain and offshore racer Hannah Jenner, and shipwright/dinghy sailor Nick Bellico.

I came aboard in Cannes to allow Greg some time home after *Dorade* had completed regattas in Italy and Corsica. Finding *Dorade* stern-to next to similar sized boats, her low freeboard and narrow beam were striking. The young Olin Stephens had been designing six meters as his first commissions in the late 1920's, so his first offshore "cruiser/racer" for his father was heavily influenced by the international rule. It is said that midway in the Transatlantic race Olin wished for more beam and stability. *Dorade* won overall, continued winning, and became the yacht that ushered in the era of small offshore racing yachts with amateur crews.

We sailed one practice day in light air, just to check a few things out, and allow me some time on the tiller. Matt steers *Dorade* much of the time. Pam also steers the boat well, and has sailed her in several regattas with all-woman teams. But with so many boats around I think they preferred to let someone else deal with avoiding nightmarish situations. It's one thing if two Farr 40's come together. It's another if the most revered yacht in American history gets run down by a huge Alden schooner. My primary goal was not to fail in this regard. Growing up sailing my father's 1907 Fife 8 meter helped in judging distances and time needed.

Returning to the harbor from practice, I was initiated into *Dorade's* après race routine. Once securely stern-to, *Dorade* was washed, chamoied, and transformed from racing yacht to Med cruiser, complete with passarelle,



photo by James Taylor

The Cannes Royal Regatta is the best classic regatta in the world, with about 100 big spectacular yachts racing off the Cote d' Azur and afterwards rafting med-style in historic Cannes Harbor. The huge race village created by sponsor Panerai is party central every night. This event had been on my bucket list a long time.

The fleet in the 2014 Royal Regatta represented yachting history from the end of the 19th Century through the 1960's, showcasing the art of designers from William Fife to Alan Gurney. There was also a "Spirit of Tradition" fleet, highlighted by the schooner *Elena*. This stunning 180-footer is a replica of a 1910 Herreshoff schooner once owned by Cornelius Vanderbilt. My favorite memory of *Elena* is not her cloud of sail as she glided by at 15 knots – it was later in the harbor watching three of her 6-foot-tall blonde

awning, cockpit table, cushions, and hors d'oeuvres. Even her famous *Dorade* vents reappeared, in their original 1929 form. Finally, chilled bottles of Rose' were handed up the companionway, just as the crew gathered around. This routine was repeated aboard most of the fleet. Later I took my glass forward to take in the forest of wooden spars, the pastel colored waterfront, and the surrounding Esterel mountains. A sip of the dry blush stuff seemed just right.

We sailed four races over four days in light to moderate air. There were 12 boats in our class, including *Rowdy*, a Herreshoff New York 30, *Mercury*, a 52 foot Sam Crocker cutter, and *Eileen*, the sponsor's 70 foot Fife ketch. Our main class competition was *Skylark*, a 53 foot S&S yawl which sailed under the NHYC burgee in the 1950's when owned by Don Ayres Sr. Now owned

air we were early and gybed away in the middle of the line. Holding the tiller hard over, the huge amount of room below us slowly disappeared until the bow of *Dorade*, pointing DDW, swept a few feet from the topsides of an elegant Alden cutter as her crew cursed through their quivering cigarettes.

We won all four races in our division, with margins between 35 seconds and seven minutes. There were a few close calls, tight mark roundings, and a few protests. *Skylark* was often nearby, sometimes too close for comfort. With Kevin calling tactics and sail changes, and John on trim, all I had to do was listen and steer.

Most of the time *Dorade* was settled down and going fast in the right direction with clear air. The boat had new (Med classic circuit required) Dacron sails, which looked great. The mizzen was optimized with a quiver of running and reaching sails. Big rake in the mainmast makes the boat balanced and quick upwind. The crew work was nearly perfect, reflecting a team that knew the boat well.

Flying home, I thought about how much time and effort it takes to put a winning program together in any boat, but especially in one that demands the maintenance of a classic, and travels like *Dorade* does. Matt and Pam have put together an impressive program with people who are fun to sail with.

Regattas tend to blend together over time. Not this one. There were so many great moments, such as going upwind with good pace when Kevin said calmly, "you need to duck this J boat..." It took a few seconds for me to realize

he was talking about *Shamrock V*, and not a J 125. Another moment had us going upwind along the cliffs on the west coast of Cannes Bay when I looked up before tacking and gazed upon an Italian villa tucked in a grove of Cypress trees. That beats the upwind view of the Huntington Beach steam plant.

The Cannes Royal Regatta is a full portion for those who appreciate classic boats and beautiful French towns on the Cote d'Azur. The Med classic events remain on the bucket list. My fallback this September isn't too bad though. I'll headover to Catalina on *Galatea*, pour a glass of chilled blush and gaze at the hills above Moonstone. ▶



photo by James Taylor

by Tara Getty, *Skylark* is in beautiful condition, and is a regular on the Med classic circuit. A number of yachts have classic motherships, but it was fun to learn that *Skylark's* mothership had a mothership. The fully restored 110-foot Watson classic motoryacht *Bluebird* looks up to the 261-foot classic motoryacht *Talitha G*.

Also in our class were two more yawls, both S&S descendants of *Dorade*, the 62-foot *Manitou* (JFK's yacht during his presidency) and the 57-foot *Argyle*.

Sailing with a dozen other beautiful lumbering classics lead to cautious starts. Even so, it was not easy to keep away from others. Before our first start in light