

Return to Blue Water: The Best of the Dorade Blog

In 2010 my husband Matt Brooks and I purchased the Sparkman & Stephens flagship *Dorade*, a 52' foot wooden yawl designed and built by Olin and Rod Stephens in 1929, when they were just out of their teens. *Dorade* was a Stephens' family project, funded by the boys' parents and grandparents, and when the narrow white boat won the Transatlantic and Fastnet Races in 1931, it helped launch S&S as one of America's greatest boatbuilding companies.



Dorade in Newport Harbour

Before *Dorade*, Matt and I had little prior experience in competitive sailing, let alone ocean racing, so we relied on a seasoned team to help us restore the boat and return her to blue water. Over the last five years, *Dorade* has sailed more than 22,350 miles on her own bottom, racing 111 days in 27 events, and reaching the podium in all but two of those events. She has repeated all of the early ocean races where she was victorious in the 1930s -- the Transatlantic, Newport-Bermuda, Fastnet, and Transpacific -- in each case bettering her elapsed time performance. In the Transpacific, she was the oldest boat ever to compete in the race, and won the race overall, 77 years after winning it the first time.

Dorade could never have made this journey without folks like Greg Stewart and Joe Loughborough, Kyle Dufur and Ben Galloway, Matt Wachowicz and Kevin Miller, John Hayes

and Eric Chowanski, Mike Toppa and Brad Read, Jamie Hilton and Hannah Jenner, Jens Lange and Nick Bellico, and many more too numerous to list here. From the greenest of nippers to hard-bitten ocean racers, everyone who stepped aboard was clearly touched by *Dorade's* beauty and resilience. She's an old lady, but one who never lets us down, and she has won the enduring love and respect of a whole new generation of sailors, as you will see in these excerpts from *Dorade's* online blog (www.dorade.org), written by those who made her return to blue water possible.

Our Mission and Matt's Crazy Idea

December 2, 2010 by Matt Brooks, Owner

My idea is to enter *Dorade* in all the races where she was victorious during her early years including, but not limited to, the race across the Atlantic. To accomplish this, we must assemble and train a crew with the right skills, chemistry, and experience to race *Dorade* and win in trans-oceanic races. We also need to toughen-up *Dorade* herself, readying her for the kind of long-range sailing she hasn't seen in decades, keeping in mind that while she may be game, she is also an eighty year old lady. With the help and support of her crew and keepers, *Dorade* is heading off on some magnificent sailing adventures. I am privileged to be one of your shipmates.

After just three days' sailing aboard *Dorade* in the summer of 2010, she went into Joe Loughborough's yard in Plymouth, Rhode Island for a year-long refit. Our goal was to preserve the classic essence of the boat, while preparing to sail her hard across the ocean. The work list was hundreds of items long. After her refit was completed in October 2011, *Dorade* was shipped down to the Caribbean for a series of coastal regattas -- sea trials leading up to our first ocean race, the 2012 Newport-Bermuda Race.

Boats.com's editor John Burnham is a veteran sailor who learned some unexpected lessons

while sailing aboard Dorade for the first time.

Dorade Log No. 2: Like Dating Marilyn Monroe March 11, 2012 by John Burham, Tactician

You learn about a boat quickly when the wind blows above 15 knots, and that's what happened in St. Maarten over four days when several of us had our first sail aboard *Dorade*. But even before absorbing the dozens of sailing lessons the 82-year-old yawl had to teach us, we quickly discovered that we'd first have to get used to sharing this classic Sparkman & Stephens design every step of the way with the paparazzi.



Balanced nicely, *Dorade* reaches at 9-knots-plus in the Anguilla Channel. JAH photo

Maybe it's not quite the same as dating Marilyn Monroe, but from the moment we tied up at the Saint Maarten Yacht Club dock before the 32nd Heineken Regatta, all cameras were trained on our slender 52-foot starlet. While *Dorade* was looking good all weekend, she taught us plenty of other lessons. We learned how to handle the loads on the halyards, sheets, topping lifts, and running backstays, which tend to multiply on a boat rigged with two masts that can reach with five white sails flying at the same time. We got the hang of reefing and unreefing the main quickly. We discovered where some re-rigging or beefing up might be required, such as the base for the mizzen sheet winch, which came off the mast with winch and winch handle in my hands at one point.

... Perhaps the number one lesson we picked up

was that if we sailed her reasonably well, *Dorade* will still perform against a younger crowd. But like Marilyn, she has her moods, and most of them can be traced to what she's wearing and how smoothly her entourage keeps her on the straight and narrow.

Corinthian Sailing in St Barth

April 10, 2012 by Nick Jeffreys, Dorade Publicist
Having read some of the crew profiles, with championship wins galore, I was a touch apprehensive joining *Dorade* mid regatta... especially as they'd already scored firsts in each race. Continuous sharing of information and ideas was the order of the day, in a quietly professional manner, while sails were set, trimmed, reefed, dropped, bagged, set again, reefs let out and put in again. ...

"Insanity!" Matt Brooks replied when I asked why he went for a classic rather than a modern sailing yacht. The post-race debrief -- including an explanation of the weather by Jess who was also using the regatta as an opportunity to calibrate equipment -- again emphasized communication as the key. Even items such as getting snacks and water to crew on deck efficiently were brainstormed. A team dinner at the villa in St Barth, with partners and family, continued the ongoing bonding. It probably sums up what Les Voiles de St Barth is all about too -- competitive Corinthian sailing and fun for all the family ashore too. ...

With *Dorade* gaining admiration wherever she sails (I witnessed two of the world's largest superyachts' crew come out on deck, with binoculars and cameras, as we tacked between them off Gustavia) and her crew enjoying mental and physical teamwork, the purchase and restoration of *Dorade* to go offshore sailing seems anything but insane.

Our crew always included a ship's nipper -- a young sailor assigned to help the boat's captain. Max Lewis was the first, arriving at the boat in Newport in the summer of 2012 not sure what to expect. After the Bermuda Race, he joined the

delivery crew back the Newport.

Life as a Nipper

August 15, 2012 by Max Lewis, Ship's Nipper



Whether it was a technical skill, or just a life skill, *Dorade* has taught me a lot. ... During that trip to and from Bermuda I truly experienced what the yachting world was like, from going up the mast moments after my arrival at the RBYC, being part of the race crew, to long crew dinners and ending with my first true open ocean experience. That month of June made me realize how special a boat *Dorade* is and how lucky I am to be a part of the program, and that is the only the beginning of the summer. ... After all the places this summer has brought me I feel as though I can confidently say that this has been the best summer of my life so far.

In the fall of 2012 *Dorade* was trucked to San Francisco to begin preparations for the 2013 Transpacific Race. Our first official event in San Francisco was the Leukemia Cup, with an all-star, all-women's team recruited to sail against a fleet that included Ted Turner at the helm of *Santiana*. *Dorade* won her class, and was the top fundraising boat, making this a fitting return to the Bay. Paige Brooks remembers the pre-race show.

Sailing Aboard Dorade in The Leukemia Cup October 25, 2012 by Paige Brooks, Crew Member
One reason I think I will have a lifelong love affair with sailing is there is always something new to learn.

My first lesson this weekend was the sails

necessary to make a classic yacht go fast. Looking back on my job on the bow, I realized we hoisted one sail per person - a total of eleven sails.

The San Francisco Yacht Club's Leukemia Cup event planners invited only 5 classic yachts to this event, *Yankee*, *Yucca*, *Santiana*, *Dorade* and *Copperhead*. ... Around 11:30 [we] cast off our lines and headed to the start just west of Angel Island, only to find flat water and teeny zephyrs. So we waited. And waited.

My second learning item: Classics have cannons. Small cute little things, cast in bronze of course, and easily mounted on a winch. Laurel, who knows the boat backward and forward, pulled ours up from somewhere down below and mounted it while JJ steered over toward *Santiana*. ... We all saluted after our shot across their bow, and just as we did, *Santiana* hit the mallet against their cannon and off it blew in our direction. Liz promptly returned fire. It was enough to get us all laughing, then the wind started to fill and we got serious.



After a winter and spring spent tweaking the boat and preparing the crew, *Dorade* embarked on the 2013 Transpacific Race from Long Beach to Honolulu. She was the oldest boat ever to race in the Transpac, and within days of starting the race the crew had a feeling this might be one for the history books.

Transpac Race Day 5: July 13, 2013 by Matt Wachowicz, Tactical Navigator
This morning is a big morning for *Dorade*. We still

have over 1300 miles to go, and a lot of racing left, but at this very moment, *Dorade* is queen of the sea. We have moved into first place in class, and first overall. It will be a monumental task to maintain this position for the remainder of the race, but we will endeavor to do so. We have sailed 890 nautical miles and we have roughly 1300 to go. We have been averaging about 8.5 knots with about 12-17 knots of wind speed. We have finally passed *Westward* in the late hours of last night, and now we are stretching our lead on her. All is well, spirits are high. We push on.

Transpac Day 9: July 17, 2013 by Matt Wachowicz, Tactical Navigator
Stress level is factor 10 on the boat. We have just received the daily position report, ... and not only have we maintained our position at the top of our division, but we have jumped from 12th overall to 4th overall and are in contention for the Overall win. This makes the tension on board so thick you could cut it with a knife. It is still a long 3 days to Hawaii from here, and anything can happen, but we are putting the hammer down and pushing as hard as we can for the finish. As of this morning, we still have 650 miles to go before the finish at Diamond Head. ... We will, as always, persevere.

Transpac Day 10: July 18, 2013 by Matt Wachowicz, Tactical Navigator

If even possible, the stress has increased. This morning's position report has launched us to 1st in class, 1st overall. It will be a herculean task to hold onto this spot, as the fleet behind is charging towards Hawaii, and the competitors around us are also sailing hard to knock us out of first in the division.... We have not had the expected shift, however, and this is troubling, as we have leveraged the right a bit to sail towards the expected change in Wind Direction. If we get the shift soon, we will be OK. Otherwise, we will lose out a bit to the far right boat.

Transpac Day 12: July 20, 2013 by Matt Wachowicz, Tactical Navigator
We are charging for the finish. The gybe last night was perfectly timed and sealed the fate of our nearest competitor. ... We are 26 miles to the

finish. Three hours from now we will be at the finish line. Latest Race Standings show the *Dorade* still as 1st in Div 8 and 1st in Fleet with Corrected Time.

Dorade has returned to Ocean Racing July 22, 2013 by Eric "Chewy" Chowanski, Matt Brooks' Watch Partner

What Matt Brooks envisioned and what we've done here at the 2013 TransPac will become a part of *Dorade's* legacy and the history of sailing long after we are all long gone and forgotten.

Without crazy visionary projects, nothing in this world would amount to much. At some level, this is the most fundamental aspect or facet of *Dorade* and what she can teach us - that a crazy, visionary project combined with the hard work to see it through - and a little luck - can change history.

Dorade shines as a boat that places more value in fundamentals, in the solid construction of seaworthiness, and in the delicate balance between visionary and traditional. While she is in fact quintessentially beautiful, that facade is but a happy coincidence to her underlying beauty: a race boat that can be pushed hard, and with a little luck, win.

Dorade has returned to ocean racing.

After *Dorade* won the Transpac, we had two years to go before the big finale of our campaign - the Transatlantic and Fastnet Races held in the summer of 2015. To keep the boat and her crew in racing form, Matt filled the calendar with events - the Caribbean 600 and a repeat of the Newport-Bermuda among others - and then we crossed the pond for the first time, where our new ship's nipper Nick Bellico was one of the first aboard, preparing the boat for racing in the Med classics.

Nipper's Blog July 18, 2014 by Nick Bellico, Ship's Nipper
After arriving here in Mallorca... I could not wait to get to work on *Dorade*. The excitement and inspiration of *Dorade* seemed to overcome any jet

lag I was expecting. Finally Monday arrived and the long anticipated work had begun. Through the week the beautification process began, the rigs received their coat of varnish, topsides were being painted, teak deck planks were being prepared, and the stairway to heaven got prepped for new varnish. I learned this week that every minute I spend with *Dorada* she teaches me something new about her soul and I fall deeper in love. *Dorada* pulls inspiration out of me. I found that, just like grandma's cooking, (grandpa in my case), the more love I put into my work the better it comes out. A much-loved boat is a happy boat, and a happy boat is a fast boat!

Over the summer of 2014, *Dorada* sailed alongside many other classics designed and built by Olin and Rod Stephens - the so-called "Daughters of *Dorada*." In Corsica, Cannes and St Tropez she showed that Mother might very well know best, winning her class in 13 out of 15 races.

Nipper's Blog

September 12, 2014 by Nick Bellico

After winning the Corsica Classic regatta, *Dorada* and I have a huge morale boost. ... It is an honor to be entrusted to care for *Dorada* and to get to put my hands and mind to use. Port Grimaud is an amazing port, with beautiful sights around every corner. ... Living on *Dorada*, working on *Dorada*, traveling by boat, in Port Grimaud. Dreams do come true.

In the summer of 2015 *Dorada's* crew embarked on the biggest challenges of the campaign, beginning with the 2015 Transatlantic Race from Newport, Rhode Island to Plymouth, England, followed by the Fastnet. With the exception of Matt and Ben Galloway, most of the crew was new to *Dorada*, and the experience was unforgettable for all aboard.

TR2015: July 4-6 Log: July 6, 2015 by Ben Galloway, Boat Captain

The day before yesterday was one of my most memorable days of sailing ever. Zach and I started our watch at 0600 surfing the waves in between 18 and 23 knots of wind and under a lot

of sails (A4, spin staysail, main with one reef, mizzen jib and a mizzen); it was a challenge to keep the boat under control, and with every roll it felt like *Dorada* was going to round up or do a Chinese gybe, but I knew she would keep tracking straight, as I have done this many times onboard. Throughout the morning, the wind and waves slowly built, as did our boat speed going down them. Before long, we found ourselves hurtling down a wave at over 18 knots, in 27 knots of wind and decided it was time take down some of the sails. *Dorada* is a piece of maritime history that has defined the sport, so although it is a bit stressful to be pushing it so hard, it was at the same time extremely exhilarating.



We have some leaks below and our beds are wet and boots full of water. At times we wonder why we do this, but in the same breath we are having a blast. Right now, everybody is laughing on deck and Terry is cooking up a storm in the galley. Freeze-dry food never tasted so good. Today will be another long day with more wind in the forecast.

TR2015: Update

July 7, 2015 by Dave "Naval" Shilton

We have really pushed the boat as hard as possible. It's incredible how strong she is. ... Ben keeps saying, "More Rag Mate!" and Mike Giles is constantly asking for all hands on deck. I haven't counted how many sail changes we've done, but it's a lot! In the beginning, it was hard constantly waking up for watches, but now I'm

up in a flash. Your body just gets used to it. I have learned so much on this trip, about the weather, currents, technical sailing and how to race *Dorada* offshore. ... Racing *Dorada* in the Transatlantic Race really feels like we are stepping back in time. However, with the few new technologies helping us, it must be a whole lot easier now than it was back then. I don't know how they did it. They must have been some tough sailors. You get a real sense of history lying in these small bunks at night, listening to all the wood creaking, it's a great experience.



At the moment, we have a nice strong wind pushing us along. Won't be long now till we're having tea with the Queen.

TR2015: Update

July 8, Zach Mason

Last night was an epic one, and the northern Atlantic Ocean showed *Dorada* what it is made of, with breeze in the mid 30s making for quickly building swells and a leftover sloppy sea state. It wasn't until sunrise ... that we realized how big the swells had risen, with the faces of waves reaching fifty feet. Watching *Dorada's* stern rise with the top of each wave and then being onboard as she flew down it was quite spectacular and definitely got the adrenaline pumping. In our continual quest for top speed, Ben and I think there may have been a new record, but we didn't get a good reading, as even the mast displays were fully underwater. It sure was thrilling to see *Dorada* slip down the face of a wave that was far

longer than her, but for both her sake and mine, I hope to never have to see her do that again.



... In terms of *Dorada's* performance, I must say that sailing her can teach any sailor a thing or two. We have nicknamed her "Moses" (the boat that parts water) as when *Dorada* gets going the amount of water she displaces is incredible.

TR2015: Update

July 9, 2015 by Mike Giles, Watch Captain

It's not often you get to do something this special. The past few days have provided us with some challenging sailing, interesting debates and great laughs.

Zach is fast asleep. He had an epic driving stint last night. I went up on deck to take over for him and it was completely dark out with no moon, making the water and horizon blend into one. The phosphorescence was the only light, streaming off the stern of the boat. Dolphins were diving around the bow and playing along side. They were like lighting flashes under the surface of the water, with the phosphorescence trail giving their position away. The occasional chirp would let us know that a bird was flying across the bow. It was truly a lovely evening sail, I had to pinch myself to believe that the setting was real. I took over for Zach and was happy to let Terry and Dave sleep in, as I was enjoying the tranquil setting.



As I type this note, the sun is out and the wind is blowing between 16 and 18 knots. Terry and Dave are on deck sharing sailing stories. ... Matt has given his thumbs of approval and words of encouragement. We have 900 or so miles to go with a few more weather challenges. We need to stay in our current placing, and make the most of these ideal conditions. In a few days, we will be in the UK and this amazing trip will come to an end. We all feel privileged to be part of this project. ... May the legend of *Dorada* live on!!!!

TR2015: Race Report
July 12, 2015 Terry Halpin, Watch Captain

I'll start with the facts:

We are approximately 180 nautical miles from the finish at the Lizard. ... Our primary competition for longer than I care to contemplate has been *Carina* and *Scarlet Oyster*; both very well sailed boats. At the moment *Scarlet Oyster* has about 20 nautical miles to go, which should have them finishing within the next three hours; when they do we'll have a benchmark time and know exactly when we have to finish to preserve our second-place standing in the class...

Now for the amusement:

It's been two weeks since we departed Newport, but it seems like a month has gone by. We have gone through several heavy air periods that truly tested both the boat and the crew. We've all lost count of the number of times we've had to reef and un-reef, but I'm sure it's north of 30. We have

changed all the other sails as well to suit the variable conditions; we currently have five sails flying. ... With only two people on deck during a normal watch there is a whole lot to look after. ...



Sleep is a rare commodity, something to be cherished looking forward... We have seven people in soaking-wet foul weather gear hopping into five saturated bunks. We've run out of our fresh food ... and are well into the freeze dry rations. The rocking and rolling of the boat through the waves compounds our normal daily functions. We've had only about 12 hours in total of smooth water the entire trip; outside of that, it's been a series of "hold on and hang tight" moments as we bash our way to the finish.

Looking Back: TR2015 Celebrations
August 25, 2015 by Dorade Team

We can't stop looking back on what a fun and exciting summer it has been. Here is the crew celebrating onboard *Dorada* on their way to Cowes after finishing the 2015 Transatlantic Race in Plymouth.

***Dorada* finished the 2015 Transatlantic Race in fine form, cutting more than a day off her previous winning time from 1931, coming in second in class and seventh overall.**

That was followed just weeks later by another stellar performance in the 2015 Fastnet, where *Dorada* was the oldest boat in the race and came in 7th overall out of 356 boats on corrected time, once again beating Rod and Olin's performance by a hefty margin.



The New Chapter

Aug 31, 2015 by Nicholas Bellico, Ship's Nipper
 After finishing the Rolex Fastnet race with very honorable placing, we continue to move forward. Ben and I took *Dorada* from Plymouth back to Cowes over the weekend. We then began our prep for shipping to Malta.

... The finish of the Fastnet race completed the Return to Blue Water Series. Not only did Matt materialize "Matt's Crazy Idea," he has completed it with outstanding results. I believe we all had a lot of help from Olin himself and I believe Olin is very happy with *Dorada's* accomplishments.

Now we move on to the new chapter in *Dorada's* life. And with Matt Brooks writing this new chapter... anything is possible. In the coming year, we look forward to continuing *Dorada's* return to blue water, taking her back to Newport and Maine for classic regattas, and then on to a new hemisphere, for the 2017 Capetown to Rio Race, blogging as we go at www.dorade.org.

Pam Rorke Levy
Dorada
 San Francisco