

Agena's Round The Island Race

Mark Randerson's epic Marcon Trophy-winning log tells of his second race around the Isle of Wight in a Trident

The last time I completed the Round The Island Race was in *Pollyanna*, my previous Trident. I achieved a record time of 17 hours, returning to my berth at 1am. I finished too late to even win the wooden spoon, but I did learn a little bit about night sailing.

To be fair the race that year was plagued by a lack of wind, but I was determined to do better this time in *Agena*. So I enlisted help in crew mates Pete Munday and my son Charlie.

Pete, the TOA South Coast representative, has helped me with everything Trident-related for a few years now, a true Guru. Charlie is a watersports instructor at the UK Sailing Association in Cowes and part of their Tuesday night keelboat racing team; safe hands.

With these two experts safely enlisted I was hoping for a better result, although any improvement on my last attempt would not be difficult.

Pete arrived in *Red Kite* in Cowes the day before the race even more excited than I expected. His excitement was unfortunately not necessarily linked to seeing me, but that he had brought a trump card for the race with him. Before long he emerged from *Red Kite* with a sail bag. It was a cruising chute!

Without delay we sorted some temporary rigging to the best of our ability and set off down the River Medina to learn how to use it. After a few tests raising and lowering, we sailed down the river with the chute, and were quietly impressed with our new found skills. We couldn't wait to use it in the race.

Charlie joined us after work in the evening and following a nice dinner we got an early night on board *Agena* and *Red Kite*, ready for an early start. Pete and I had studied the weather forecasts, all of them were predicting light winds, and I secretly feared another very long race, even with our secret weapon.

The morning of the race arrived, after showering we met on *Agena*. I went to collect our food pack I had ordered from UKSA along with bacon rolls and coffee. When I returned and put the food pack onboard, *Agena* sunk a little lower in the water. We had enough food for days; good to know in case anything didn't go to plan!

The weather was pretty drab, dark skies, drizzle in the air and a light breeze. We donned our wet weather gear, slipped our lines and headed out of the River Medina towards the start.



Charlie, Mark and Pete (L to R)

The RTI Race start line is always an amazing sight, with all the competing boats and spectators. Our race handicap meant we started in the last fleet of 200 boats, out of the 1100 that were competing. There was a terrific tide sweeping us towards the Needles, and we were all determined not to overshoot the start. We played it so safe we actually had quite a bad start, behind almost everyone. But we were not deterred; this was a long race.

The first leg to the Needles was a windward leg. It's *Agena's* least favourite point of sailing, but we were going to do our best. At least we had the tide with us!

As I helmed, Pete sat on the windward deck with his legs over the side, Charlie started discussing tactics, and we all had a smile on our face, we

were kidding ourselves we knew what we were doing!

The drizzle intensified, the visibility decreased and it was a damp wet slog. As we tacked our way up to the Needles we identified a Westerly ketch that was making similar speed to us. The race was on to reach the Needles first. As it slipped in and out of sight in the poor visibility we knew they were not making much ground on us. This pleased us greatly.

This leg was taking a long time though, at one point we were seriously concerned we would not make it to the west end of the Island before the tide turned. Luckily the wind strengthened and we made it to the Needles. We couldn't really gauge if we had made any places, or indeed were rock bottom last, as the visibility was so poor at this point. We successfully navigated the Needles, erring on the side of caution yet again, giving them a nice wide berth.

As we sailed past Freshwater Bay, the Westerly appeared alongside us, we took pictures of each other and waved frantically, each boat determined to reach the finish line first. Charlie had taken over the helm, and I went below to put sunscreen on. As I re-emerged and told Pete and Charlie it was a good idea, they both uncontrollably laughed at me as if I was some kind of nutter. Thirty minutes later, as if by magic, the clouds lifted, the sun came out and it was a glorious day. I took great pride in my foresight as my crew ate humble pie.

Not only had the sun come out, but the wind had freshened. We were reaching down the west coast of the Island. *Agenda* was in her element, and we were flying along.

The only downside was the Westerly had not stuck to the coast and headed out to sea, but it clearly was gaining on us, before disappearing into the distance.

We were having a ball, we were sailing in conditions perfect for Tridents, we were eating cake, drinking tea and all taking a turn on the helm. Pete and I were quite content, but Charlie was thinking racing! He knew we were sailing well, and he was getting determined we could sail even faster. Discussions started between him and Pete about the utilisation of our trump card,



once we got to St Catherine's point, the southern tip of the Island.

So far this had been a fabulous day, Trident's really are fun to sail, *Agenda* was lapping up sailing round the Island, she was making great speed and sailing like a true thoroughbred. I had the best crew in Pete and Charlie, life was good.

My part of the log ends now, as I hand over to Pete to recount the second half of the race, his cruising chute, and our finish. It's worth me saying after all the glowing reports of sailing so far, getting through The St Catherine's overfalls is not the most pleasant experience in a 24ft boat!

Pete Munday writes:

We were romping along on *Agenda* with a nice beam reach she was clearly in her element and so nearing St Catherine's light a course change was soon to be laid in. Previous discussions with our ace tactician, young Charlie, his father and Skipper Mark and myself it was decided it would be the ideal time to play our ace card ... the cruising chute from *Red Kite*. We had practiced the set up the day before in the Medina and had rigged a quick release as none of us had a lot of experience flying these and myself absolutely none.

So the course change was made the chute raised and immediately the whole dynamic of the boat changed. In hindsight I

think there was a bit too much breeze but with Charlie and myself manning the sheets and a preventer put on the main we were flying at times making 10 knots SOG (probably 3-4 knots of tide behind us) but none the less still impressive and indeed kept this pace going for quite some time until the wind strengthened so we dropped the chute and goose winged still making a very respectable speed until

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we had to make our turn at the end of the Bembridge Ledge.

As we settled on our new course to windward we were getting shadowed by the land a little but *Agna's* pace was still good and we soon spotted Roman Abramovich's previous yacht (above), now when I say yacht it was a little different to our Tridents probably another 200 feet longer, with a handful of toys such as various ribs, jet skis and indeed a large Beneteau on the deck and of course the heli pad at the stern And I'd thought *Agna* was flash with her tiller extension.



Not long after this eagle eyed Charlie spotted the Westerly Longbow we had been having our own little private race with not making much of it going to windward ... the game was on, suddenly we focused a little more and after a short while had overhauled her and yes we did feel a little smug.

Shortly after this the Westerly changed course heading more to the north side of the Solent so the great tactical minds on *Agna* went into high gear: was she going to tack over from the other

side towards the finish line so she was on beam reaches and pip us at the post? Was she going to do a series of shorter legs and get us that way? As we were still going quite well we stuck with our present course and as we watched the Westerly she just kept going and after some time it dawned on us she had abandoned the race which was a shame. So much for tactical thinking.



So onwards we pressed making steady progress as were the rest of the fleet, as we neared the finish line there was a lovely old large sailing smack which was not going to give way to a little Trident so with Charlie and myself on the sheets Mark gave the order and we had to put in a couple of small tacks to cross the finish line. Now I'm not a racing man but it was exhilarating to cross that line and had been a fantastic experience with brilliant company and enough food to sink a battleship.

It turns out we did it in 10 hours and 49 minutes which knocked an hour and 10 minutes off the previous fastest Trident's time a few years back. Placed 221st on handicap (out of 1100 entries), we were well chuffed with our efforts.

Mark and I decided to dine on *Red Kite* so we had Cornish Pasties and beans accompanied by some Kraken Rum while watching the England game on Mark's precariously perched phone. Mark returned to *Agna* and after a full day of racing and the Rum I was soon asleep in my bunk.

A huge thank you to Mark and Charlie for inviting me along. It will go down as one of my all-time sailing highlights.