



Spirit of Minerva's crew prepares to round a windward mark

Safe Passage to St. Maarten

For many of the crew—myself included—it was the stuff of dreams. Thundering past the committee boat was the Wally 82 *Highland Fling*. Off in the distance, the Reichel/Pugh 90 *Rambler* threw in a quick gybe as the R/P 75 *Titan 15* suddenly appeared from under our genoa, her razor-sharp bow slicing the cobalt waves. It was day two of the 30th annual St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. Skies were blue, it was blowing in the high teens, and life was good.

I was sailing aboard the Farr 65 *Spirit of Minerva*, courtesy of San Francisco-based SafePassageSailing LLC, a company that makes it possible for sailors of all backgrounds to get a taste of the “rock star” sailing life and have a great time in the process.

For this event we had about a half dozen Texans aboard, along with *Minerva's* regular crew from the training and chartering company Ondeck Ltd. We also had an exceptional afterguard—Olympic veteran and 2007 Rolex Yachtswoman of the Year, Sally Barkow, and America's Cup and Pegasus Racing Team veteran Sean “Doogie” Couvreur.

Unfortunately, things were pretty fluky on day one of the regatta. But by the time day two rolled around, St. Maarten's famed sun and wind were once again well established. The race committee started things off with a pair of hard-fought inshore windward-leeward races. After that came a coastal race around the west end of the island from Simpson Bay to Marigot—exhausting, but vintage Caribbean sailing.

Perhaps the best part of all came afterward, during our crew meeting in the cockpit on the hook in Marigot Bay. Summing up the day's events, Couvreur and Barkow complimented the crew on how well it had done despite having only been together a few days. The Farr 65 is a big, heavy boat and a challenge to handle, especially on an inshore course. As Couvreur put it, when the wind is up, boats like the *Spirit of Minerva* can bite back, hard.

He also singled out crewmember Dayna Bryant for her work in the pit. An experienced sailor and secretary of the Grapevine Sailing Club in Grapevine, Texas, she had struggled to make the transition to the big rig, but now had things well in hand. I, for one, was amazed. As I told Dayna afterward, she had me completely fooled. Up by the mast, jumping halyards and wrestling with the headsails, I'd assumed she'd been doing this kind of thing for years.

That, of course, is the beauty of an outfit like SafePassageSailing. Crewing on big boats ain't rocket science, but it sure can be tough sometimes getting a ride, especially at an event like the Heineken. By throwing in its lot with SafePassageSailing, *Spirit of Minerva's* crew was able to not only hone its sailing skills but create the memories of a lifetime. —AC