



ARC 2015

The 30th Atlantic Rally for Cruisers

In the marble floored hall of the glamorous colonial style Hotel Santa Catalina in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, almost 400 skippers and crew assembled on 21 November 2015, with 24 hours to go before slipping their lines for a 2,700nm ocean adventure.

Taking their seats, armed with notepads and sailing instructions, their chatter hushed to silence as they listened intently to Andrew Bishop welcoming them to the Skippers Briefing of the 30th edition of the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers.



Britican crew celebrate their arrival in Saint Lucia



Dockside preparations before the start from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

“
The first ARC in 1986 had such an extraordinary atmosphere. It was quite an adventure!”

Tim Aitken, Airwave (ARC'86)/
Braveheart (ARC'16)



The Opening Ceremony in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Flashback three decades and you find yachting journalist Jimmy Cornell arriving in the Canaries to interview skippers about their transatlantic passage preparations for an article commissioned by Yachting World magazine. The atmosphere amongst these sailors as they prepared for their voyage - the excitement, apprehension, and camaraderie - gave Jimmy the idea of organising a race across the Atlantic. Jimmy's event was to have an entirely different emphasis to set it apart from other ocean races. It was to be a race that focused on the fun of taking part and one that would increase safety and confidence, especially amongst those making their first long ocean passage.

"I read about the first ARC in Yachting World. It was a small article but it made me curious," remembers Manfred Kerstan, nicknamed Mr. ARC by the German press as 2015 was his 20th Atlantic crossing with the rally, more than any other sailor. "After the circumnavigation I'd recently completed, it seemed a good way to return to the Caribbean again." Over 200 other skippers agreed with Manfred and boats of all shapes and sizes answered Jimmy's call to sail as an organised fleet from Muelle Deportivo in Las Palmas. They probably didn't realise it at the time, but they were making history as the rally went into the Guinness Book of Records for the largest sailing rally in the world!



Manfred Kerstan - 2015 was the 20th rally for Mr ARC



ARC'86 veteran Chris Tibbs, sailed again in 2015 with his wife Helen on *Taistealai*

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria has hosted fleet for their pre-rally preparations and spectacular start, every year since. The city-scape and local services have evolved over the years, but the warm welcome that sailors receive and excellent facilities it provides for preparing for a transatlantic voyage continue to make it perfect starting port for the rally.

"The first ARC in 1986 had such an extraordinary atmosphere. It was quite an adventure!" reflected Tim Aitken who sailed his 47ft Wauquiez Centurion, *Airwave* on the first edition and returned in 2015 sailing with his son on his magnificent Hoek-designed Truly Classic 75, *Braveheart of Sark*. "It's really special seeing all the boats here in Las Palmas this year," he said shortly before start day, "I walked across to the northern breakwater where there's such a diversity of boats now. The rally has changed dramatically; the size of the boats, the size of the crew and there's obviously a lot of 'pro' crews, but when I walked over onto the main pontoons, it felt like I was back again in the days of the first ARC."

One of the early ARC sailors who has since become closely involved with the rally is ocean weather router Chris Tibbs, who sailed in 1986 on board *Moody 38, Meanmy*, owned by Geoff Pitcher. Chris was sailing on *Meanmy* as the professional skipper and he brought it down to Las Palmas as a delivery trip. They were at anchor when they arrived and then just drove into the marina berth as there was no breakwater in those days. He then went home to England but then

received a phone call the next day asking him to come back to join the crew across the Atlantic as they didn't think they had enough experience on the boat. Chris had just come back from racing in the Whitbread Round the World Race!

"I didn't know anything about the ARC because the previous year I was away on the Whitbread and then working in the Med, so I turned up and there's over 200 boats in the marina for the rally! There was still so much work to do on the boat though and I only had about three or four days to do it, so I just got onto the boat and worked." Chris certainly had a bit more time to prepare in 2015, sailing on his own boat this time a Wauquiez Centurion 40, *Taistealai* together with his wife Helen - herself a veteran of the ARC in 1989 - with William Yonge and Jeremy Wyatt as crew.

Delivering the weather forecast to the packed hall in the Hotel Santa Catalina, Chris Tibbs poignantly mentioned that since the rally began, "The boats are bigger, the boats are faster, and communications have changed and so has navigation. But the wind and the waves are still the same."

With that ringing in their ears, the hall emptied, and the crews returned to the docks. In the two weeks before, close friendships had formed over nightly socials and comparing preparation notes around the marina, but as start day loomed many were keen to get underway and start sailing. The Caribbean shores of Saint Lucia were calling.