

A Few Notes for Potential Crew

Version 100702

Sumara of Weymouth

The Yacht

Sumara is a Jack Laurent Giles designed "Vertue Class" yacht. Jack Laurent Giles was one of Britain's greatest yacht designers and the Vertue was one of his renowned achievements. She was designed in 1936 but Sumara was built in 1990 by Terry Newman in Weymouth. Sumara is a small, long keeled, heavy displacement yacht superbly built from one log of iroko on oak frames with a lead keel. She is just 26ft long but weighs a hefty 5 tonnes. Her motion at sea is very kindly but she is very small so waves will often tower above her and from time to time crash down onto her! Conditions below are snug and dry but in the cockpit and on deck it can be wet and demanding. Sumara often runs with a lee rail under and it can make simple tasks quite hard work.

She is cutter rigged. Sails are hanked on with Wichard clips, there is no roller furling so reefing can be on a plunging wet deck. The main sail has three slab reefs which can be put in on either tack. I don't carry a trysail preferring a deeply reefed main but there is a storm jib.

To find out more about the Vertue Class the book "Vertue 35" by Humphrey Barton describes the first small yacht crossing of the Atlantic from east to west and their survival of a hurricane.

There is a Vertue Owners Association website with lots of information.

Routine

The crew ideally need to be well organised to keep the cabin tidy and their kit needs to be compact enough to stow at the end of the berth. Please avoid hanging your clothes from the grab rails in the cabin as it make the place very cluttered. We tend to keep three hour watches but the time starts from when you are snuggled up in your berth so you should actually get three hours sleep. If there are three crew, generally I will do one watch and the other two do a watch together. In calmer conditions we may do a watch each and benefit from a bit more sleep. I generally do the cooking because I have a complicated paraffin cooker. The crew wash up and tidy everything away. We have a big main meal at around 6pm followed by some entertainment (a radio play, puppet show or recitals!!!). After supper the watch system is re-established. There is not normally enough fresh water carried to be able to wash so sea water or rain water is used (or not!). In rough weather it can be tough going but the berths are as snug as any.

If you are prone to seasickness I would recommend that you buy a packet of Stugeron and take two pills a few hours before setting off and another after six hours. Afterwards you should have your sea legs. Stugeron is carried on board in case of rough weather. I won't mention it before setting off because talking about seasickness may be a self fulfilling prophecy. We avoid alcohol entirely at sea but make up for it on arrival.

Safety

Sumara has good quality Spinlock lifejackets, lanyards and jackstays, fully serviced insulated floor life raft, DSC VHF radio with excellent range, full AIS system which broadcasts as well as receives, Satellite phone, Furuno Navtex, EPIRB, flares, handheld radio, fire extinguishers etc. She has withstood weeks of gale force winds and sailed on in 55 knots (force 10) without any damage to hull, sails or rig. The rig is rigorously inspected each year. The rudder and hangings are storm proof.

Typical Passages

Sumara is no racing machine but in certain conditions she will embarrass many production boats. She will make great progress to windward in a force 3 when there is enough wind to move her without large waves. Once the wind gets over force 4 the waves begin to slow her down and she needs to bear off a point or two. At force 6 and above she will hold her own but make little progress if the wind is coming from the destination. With the wind on the beam however she will storm along at 6 or 7 knots in a force 4 to 6. Down wind she rolls like a pig and so sometimes we may put the wind on the quarter to calm things down. She will only move very slowly downwind in light airs. She has a 12hp Kubota engine which is used when the wind drops off. In calm waters she will motor along at 4-5 knots for a few hundred miles. There is an autopilot for when we are motoring and a Windpilot for when we are sailing. I hate motor sailing and will only consider it if the sea is very calm and the wind very light.

We have made some cracking passages like Faeroes to Iceland in a couple of days and we have had some gruelling ones like ten days returning from Norway last year. She crossed the Atlantic from Cape Verde to Barbados in 19 days. Passage planning is based on 3.5 knots and a little slower when into prevailing winds but it is hard to predict exactly. That said, Sumara has never arrived late, although she has left early to arrive on time!

If you get bored at sea and are keen to get into port quickly please keep it to yourself, the enjoyment of a gentle slow sail ghosting down along the coast can be entirely wrecked by knowing your crew is bored and anxious to motor into port as soon as possible. Just mention that you find sailing boring after we have moored up and try motor boats next time.

Sumara can be tracked on www.shipais.com

The Skipper

Although I like to plan and go on quite adventurous trips I am basically a rather cautious sailor. I will often go out around the headland race rather than take the “biscuit toss” shortcut. I will often stay in harbour until the weather has moderated, at least enough to get underway. I try to be reasonably kind to the crew who normally return for more (memory loss?) but I can get pretty fed up when the wind continues to blow from the destination for weeks on end when I will get a bit grumpy. I may occasionally shout but normally only to add a sense of urgency when needed. I have sailed Sumara for many tens of thousands of miles so I am pretty familiar with the yacht and life at sea. Qualification wise, I do hold a current Yachtmaster Ocean licence Commercially Endorsed to 200 tons but don't quiz me on the lights a dredger shows – I've some laminated cards to solve those tricky ones.

The Crew

You will need to accept the fact that Sumara is small, very small by modern standards, and so the cabin is snug and often paraffin lit. In the cockpit you will feel as if you are actually in the sea rather than sailing on it. Your hand will touch the water if you put in over the side and that's how we do the washing up. In severe weather you need faith in the strength and seaworthiness of the yacht. There's no shower, only enough fresh water for drinking. Seasickness may be a problem for the first day out or when its rough but recovery is generally fast. You will be expected to keep a ruthlessly good watch, scanning 360 degrees slowly to ensure everything is clear. Knowledge of the collision regulations would be useful. You will need to take the helm when we are not on autopilot or windpilot and will need to help with the reefing or do it yourself in moderate conditions. You will need to keep the log on your watch and be prepared to wake me if you have any doubts whatsoever. But at the end of the day, good company is the most important thing.

Try to learn three knots before you come, reef knot (for reefs!), clove hitch (for fenders and mooring) and the bowline (for mooring and attaching sheets to sails). I'll teach you if haven't managed it.

Sumara is a pure pleasure vessel. Crew are always friends so there is never any charge. We might have a kitty to cover food and to share diesel costs but that's it. You will have to pay your fares to get to and from the yacht (which can be expensive) and occasionally there may be some personal insurance costs for the more extreme legs.

Still Interested?

Great! I'll need an email address and mobile phone number. For foreign trips there will be a Crew Form to fill in with Passport numbers etc so I can fill in the necessary forms (Norway is outside the EU so there are more forms than usual). Depending on the leg, you may need to take out Adventure Insurance to cover air sea rescue costs (I will send you details). You will need oilskins and yacht boots (Wellys aren't great on board but better than nothing), thermals (merinos are great) a warm pullover and gloves plus a compact sleeping bag and not much else all in a soft bag – without wheels! Ideally bring a small technical towel like a chamois rather than a beach towel. I will issue you with a small towel loop to hang in the forepeak. Ordinary towels tend to fall off – sometimes into the heads which is a bit unpleasant. If you have a good knife, then please bring it otherwise I will lend you one. There are ipod playing facilities on board so bring yours along loaded with a good radio play for after dinner entertainment. There may be extra climbing kit needed for those on the Jan Mayen and Greenland legs.

My contact details

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Mobile 07931376140

Email while at sea (only downloaded while taking weather grib files so don't expect a swift response) alasdair@uuplus.net

Satellite phone 00881622445269 (not always left on but you can text or leave a short message). It will cost you quite a lot!