



CAPE TOWN TO

Miami

Jason Grout and four of his mates had the opportunity of a lifetime to sail the state of the art 76' Matrix yacht "Zingara" from Cape Town to Miami. They lived off the sea for this period. Here is the story of how Jason experienced it.

Words and pictures by Jason Grout





Unbeknown to me, a sudden phone call on Christmas Eve of

2005 was about to change my life. I was presented with an opportunity that I just could not refuse, even though my yachting career had recently taken a back seat. I just could not turn down a 7000nm sail on a new build.

With a total of 29 days, and 6821 nm from the docks at Cape Town to the marina in Miami, the journey had reached the summit

I was in regular contact with Mark, and I was up-to-date on the latest developments at Matrix Yachts in Cape Town. I felt like I already knew the boat because of the constant updates and pictures I received. However, I was

certainly not prepared to find myself standing onboard "Zingara", Matrix Yachts hull number two.

The magnitude of what had been achieved with just 76 feet of length and 38 feet on the beam was nothing short of breathtaking. This would be my home for the next month at sea. With time running out to make the Miami Boat Show deadline, this was going to be a tough sail. Most of the five man crew were complete amateurs.

The time came to leave Cape Town. It was a cold and windy afternoon, and the waterfront was lined with friends, family and also many onlookers who came to

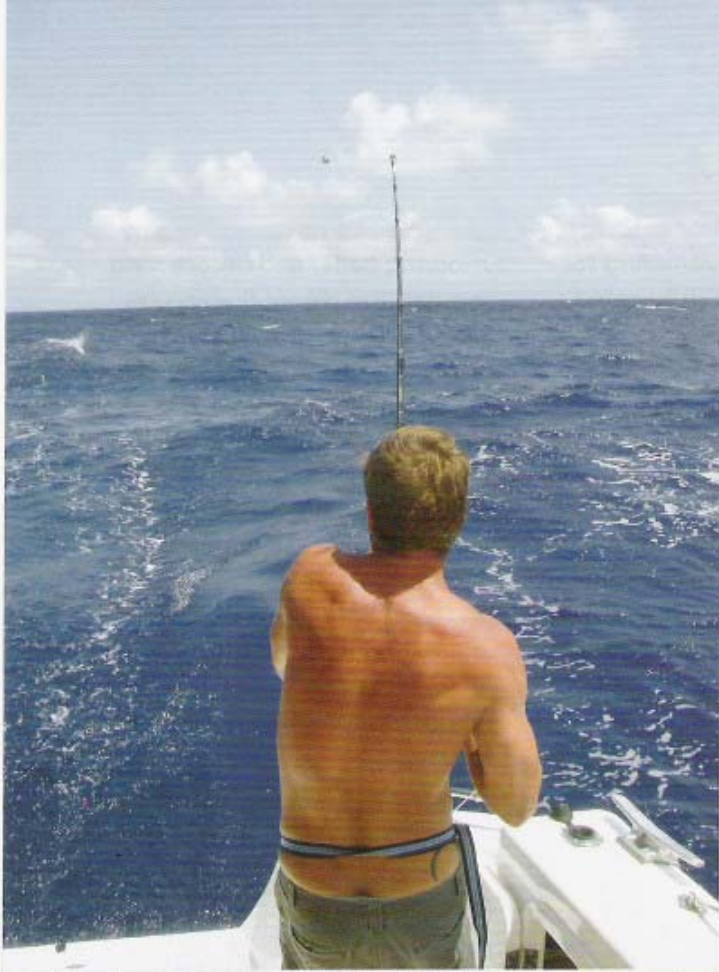
watch us as we glided out of the harbour.

On the other side of the breakwater, wind speeds increased unexpectedly. The main sail was being extracted from the in-boom furling, with a push of a button the jib was

out, and with total ease, Robben Island soon became a spec on the horizon. Daylight faded and the temperatures dropped, the swells began to pick up. We started experiencing some hair raising moments while surfing down 16 foot swells at 18 knots. The boat handled these conditions with ease. The weather helm is minimal and tracking is so precise even when the speeds left the teens and entered the twenty's.

Already a few days into the voyage and the seas hadn't subsided yet, the winds were also still holding steady. Even with only a few hours sleep, everyone was always well rested. Due to the clearance of four feet on the bridge deck, there was no slamming at all and having been on many catamarans, I know this has always been a cause for concern to most people traveling on them, or considering buying one.

It was after five days when the wind began to pick up to 26 knots true, up until then, the 3000 square foot, code zero, and full main sail was making certain our speeds were not dropping much below 15 or 16 knots. On this day we saw our speeds holding above 20 knots, with a top speed of 22.6 knots. The only sound was the wind whistling through the shrouds



and the sea stays cutting through the water- plus of course the shouts and cheering from the 5 of us on board as we watched everything from the fly bridge, fine tuning and adjusting, while the carbon rig was not showing any signs of being under stress.

On our approach to St. Helena, in the dark, we were guided in by the leading lights and a school of dolphins leaving their phosphorescent trails. It was 4am local time and everything was closed, so

knots had us scrambling for the fishing rods. It became a race against time to see who could bag the biggest fish. Before long there was a large mahi fillet on the barbeque, complimented with tuna sushi starters.

As a precaution we pulled into Ascension to top up with the fuel. The conditions were not in our favour. The swell that was running would have made a surfer lick his lips with excitement, but we weren't

mooring balls, and before long we had the diesel flowing on board. Three hours later we were off.

The next point was Trinidad, and on the way there we would pass the equator. We were near single digit latitude degrees with its blistering heat and non-existent wind. In these conditions even sleep becomes an effort. The air is so still and thick that it almost seems claustrophobic.



3 hours later, we hit the proverbial road, not feeling as refreshed about seeing land, as one usually does after being at sea for a length of time. With the main and code zero in full flight, we were making great speed again, but unfortunately it was short lived. The wind died and we were forced to motor, the prospect of traveling at 10

there to surf. We had to refuel with a 200 foot length of hose that was lowered 20 feet down off an outcrop of rocks and retrieved via the tender.

Due to the 4 foot draft, and some very skillful movements, the anchor was dropped as close to the beach as possible without being caught by the surge rolling in. A few spinnaker lines were used to secure us to surrounding

As we started approaching the coast of Brazil the winds rose, and so did the squalls and thunder showers- our speeds were back to normal and so was our sleep. We had finally left the ocean area with temperatures equivalent to that of the Sahara. We were able to pick up four knots of current daily, which lasted four days, and kept lifted our average to around 250 nm per day. We passed the green waters of

the Amazon and the prospect of being in Grenada raised the spirits of the crew. Two days before we arrived in Grenada the wind became fickle, one minute it was gusting, then suddenly nothing. It didn't take long for Mark to join me. The wind whipped the water into that all too familiar washing machine effect, making for a bumpy ride, however, it did not alter our speed too much

our favour now, with the winds steady and on our beam. The entire leg, through to the end of the Mona Passage, took only 48 hours.

I still could not believe the distance we had travelled, and yet it seemed so quick. It was just two nights sleep, and we had passed the whole chain of islands, we now had the Dominican Republic on our left.

were bodies sleeping almost everywhere.

It was all systems go after we were rested up. Miami was about a day away. The remainder of the Bahama Bank was exquisite, and the deep blue water was replaced with turquoise as we cut over the bank and could see the sand and coral speeding



and we kept trucking along through the torrents of rain. Just before Grenada, the bad weather quickly vanished and the conditions were perfect.

Our stop in Granada lasted all of four hours, largely due to a calm sea and consistent breeze that beckoned us. A straight line across the Caribbean Sea from Grenada had us pass through the Mona Passage between Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic. The conditions were definitely in

The conditions in the Bahama Channel were very different. The wind was directly on the nose, and the swell was short and steep at around 10 feet. The increasing wind made it uncomfortable and visually intimidating. After getting beaten up for over 36 hours, and no sleep for nearly two days, caution finally gave way to valor and we were forced to seek out an anchorage off of Cuba. As the anchor took hold in the calm sea of the island, there

past below us. It was strange knowing it was our last night on this voyage.

At one stage we were counting down the days, and now it was about to end. The bright city lights of Miami confirmed our journey had come to an end.

With a total of 29 days, and 6821 nm from the docks at Cape Town to the marina in Miami, the journey had reached the summit. I have yet to hear of a cruising sail boat to have done it faster. The bar has been set. ◆