

NOT WHAT TAM O'SHANTER EXPECTED

Neil Hegarty

(Tam O'Shanter, a *Chance 37*, was built by Wauquiez in France in 1972 for Mungo Park. She was a member of the 1973 Irish Admirals Cup Team and was the first winner of the Gull Salver, presented by the Irish Cruising Club to the first-placed Irish yacht in the Fastnet Race. She passed to Jimmy Butler of Great Island, Cork Harbour and then to the Kenny family in 1987. In 2010 Anne Kenny converted her to cutter rig. Since then Tam O'Shanter has been cruised from St Petersburg in the east to the Azores in the west, while also spending six very enjoyable years in the Baltic.)

Following a successful charter in the Canaries last year – see *Cruising the Canary Islands, Off-Season* in *Flying Fish 2023/1* – Anne and I considered a charter again to attend the Irish Cruising Club's *Saoirse* Rally in Madeira. I tried charterers in the Canaries, the Azores, the Portuguese mainland and Spain but none would allow us to sail so far from their base. We also considered applying for berths on the *Ilen* to attend the rally. Then, over dinner in October 2022, Anne's son Ian informed his mother that he planned to leave *Tam O'Shanter* in the Azores for the near future and that she might like to use the family's yacht to attend the *Saoirse* Rally. I emailed Séamus O'Connor informing him that we had a boat and entered *Tam O'Shanter*. We invited Tralee-based friends Mary O'Sullivan and John Carlin, both of whom are experienced yacht owners, to spend four weeks aboard with us to attend the rally and they agreed.

I asked my daughter Patricia, who lives in Paris, to help Anne with provisioning. She first experienced doing this as a young teenager preparing our *Impala OOD 28 Beagle* for its first voyage from Crosshaven to Castlehaven to join the ICC's 50th Anniversary Cruise in 1979. We still remember the wonderfully organised sunflower raft in Adrigole and the difficulty of getting fuel during the oil crisis. Patricia had left her rain gear, often needed in the Azores, in Baltimore. I went to collect it on 26th May and also attended the launch by Pat Lawless of Kevin O'Farrell's book on the building of Fred Kinmouth's replica *Saoirse* at Hegarty's boatyard. Pat was Ireland's only entrant in the 2022 Golden Globe Race and he answered questions from the floor about his adventures. It was good to see the new *Saoirse* afloat at the pier and *Ilen* at anchor off it for the Baltimore Wooden Boat Festival.

Anne and I took a bus from Cork to Dublin Airport at 2300 on 17th June and then an early



Neil manoeuvring out of the marina at Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira

flight next day to Lisbon, where we met Patricia who had flown in from Paris. On arrival in Terceira we picked up a hired car. *Tam O'Shanter* was afloat in the Angra do Heroísmo marina and Ian was aboard to hand over the keys. It was Patricia's birthday, so we celebrated in our favourite Angra restaurant, Tasca Das Tias. Ian returned home to the Channel Islands early the next morning. Over the next five days we went through our list of essential and TLC tasks for *Tam O'Shanter*. Anne made friends with two young men who were running a glass-bottomed boat for tourists from a nearby berth. She persuaded them to do our heavy lifting and they put the liferaft, dinghy and outboard into position. The bunk cushion covers went to a laundrette for cleaning and I arranged to have the engine oil and the filters checked by the owner's son at NáuticoAzores. Wednesday was a very wet day so my trip to Baltimore had not been in vain. Thursday and Friday were shopping days. It was a good shop and essentials such as bottled water, UHT milk and fresh butter just lasted the four weeks of our cruise.

On Saturday 24th June Patricia left to return the car at Lajes Airport and fly home to Paris via Lisbon. She was going out on the plane on which Mary and John flew in. Next day we filled with fuel, put on the dodgers and were able to hoist and check the sails in the marina berth as there was absolutely no wind. I started a discussion with John Leahy on the Cruising Weather WhatsApp for advice on our passage to Madeira. The Azores high was not in its normal position and strong easterlies were developing. Our original plan had been to overnight in Santa Maria and reduce the length of the final passage to Madeira, but in the prevailing conditions that would have resulted in a passage of 450 miles on the wind.

Instead I decided that we would leave from Ponta Delgada on São Miguel so, on Monday the 26th, after a good dinner, we left our marina berth at 2100 and in the excitement I omitted to check out. John, who was on watch at 0400 was careful to avoid the Banco Dom João de Castro as *Tam O'Shanter* motor-sailed close-hauled on port. Later we saw a ship going south on a collision course. It showed no intention of altering course, probably because of the nearby bank, so we altered course north to allow it to pass us ahead – I always recommend that crew not interfere with shipping as they are trying to make a living. All the while the wind was getting up and up from the east. John Leahy informed me that he expected the coming Friday would be the windiest day and that it would be windy right down to Funchal.

On Tuesday *Tam O'Shanter* arrived at the entrance to the Ponta Delgada fuel berth and 'check in', but we had to wait outside because a ferry and a large French yacht were ahead of us in the queue. Eventually I got alongside with difficulty. Because of the big scend and my January knee replacement I was not able to get ashore, so Mary made the jump and checked in for me. We also topped up with fuel because, despite the forecast, we still hoped to make it to the *Saoirse* Rally. *Tam O'Shanter's* violent movements in the scend caused two lines to be damaged. On going round to the marina it was very full and the berth we were given was exceedingly difficult



Anne enjoying life on the ocean wave



Safe access for living aboard in Ponta Delgada

to approach in the squalls. As I turned *Tam O'Shanter* the trailing edge of her rudder touched bottom. This shallow rocky area is shown in *Atlantic Islands** but there is no warning of its location by, say, a small series of red floating buoys, as is normal in other places.

After berthing I went to the marina office and found that I was far from the first to get into trouble in that area. They recommended José Viegas, a repair person who is also a diver, and arranged for a tow to the marina repair area at 0800 next morning for lifting out. When *Tam O'Shanter* was out of the water we could see that part of the skeg was missing, and though José went off to search for the missing piece in the shallow area he found nothing. We decided to live aboard during the repair, so José put up a timber stair for us with handrails on both sides. On Thursday he wanted us off the boat for the day while he removed the remains

José retrieves the broken skeg

of the skeg, which involved sanding fibreglass to get to the bolts connecting it to the hull. Time went by quickly, however, as it was a ten-minute walk to the toilets and showers and another ten minutes back. Great exercise for all of us and especially for my new knee! On Friday 30th, the windy day, we explored the centre of Ponta Delgada and by the time we returned José had the skeg off.

Mary and John had researched public transport, so we were up early next day for a long walk to the bus terminus to take a bus to Ribeira Grande on the north coast of São Miguel. It was a beautiful drive through the countryside, ending

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at a city first settled 500 years ago with a historic core around a large square and well worth visiting. On the way back we were able to get off the bus near the marina, avoiding a long walk back from the terminus, and discovered a small supermarket where Anne and Mary did some food shopping. I texted José, who informed me that he had done another dive and found the rest of the skeg after two hours of searching between our marina berth and the repair area. We were all delighted because *Tam O'Shanter* would be back in the water by the end of the following week, fibreglass taking at least four days to harden. Mary cooked a great pasta following which Anne and I retired while John and Mary went to the nearby casino, where Mary lost 20€ and John won 139€

On Sunday we again took the long walk to the bus terminus to catch the 1230 to Vila Franca do Campo and see if we could get out to the small island, Ilhéu de Vila Franca, where there is a *caldera* that opens to the sea.

Vila Franca do Campo was my final port of call on *Shelduck's* return to Portugal after the 2009 Azores Rally and my crew and I had enjoyed a swim on the island the day before departure for Cascais. I remember it as a wonderful experience, like swimming in a Roman amphitheatre. Sadly, one had to buy tickets by 0930 on the day of departure so we planned a return later in the week. Monday and Tuesday were days of rest and swimming in the nearby public pool. On Wednesday we left early by taxi for Vila Franca do Campo and took the boat out to Ilhéu de Vila, but it was not a beautiful day so Mary was the only one to swim. On Thursday we hired a taxi for five hours, which was excellent value for four, and did all the touristy things on the eastern half of São Miguel.

On Friday 7th *Tam O'Shanter* was relaunched and berthed on a nearby pontoon without going back into the main marina. All ideas of going on to Madeira were long gone so I phoned the marina at Vila do Porto in Santa Maria and secured a berth for the following day. It is one of the few islands in the North Atlantic that Anne and I have never had the pleasure of sailing into, separately or together.

As we prepared to leave the pontoon at 0630 next morning I noticed another unmarked rock just ahead to starboard, so used the bow-thruster to avoid it. As *Tam O'Shanter* headed south we met a large sperm whale heading north remarkably close by, but it passed us so quickly that we did not get a photograph. We berthed at Vila do Porto marina at 1445. The *Shelduck/Yoshi* artwork of 2009 on the marina wall was still in fair condition and the night was wonderfully quiet, the first since we'd arrived in the Azores 20 days previously. In Angra loud dance music went on near the marina until 0500 or 0600 and until nearly as late in Ponta Delgada. (It is, however, worth all the noise to be in the Azores during the June/July festival season.) During the afternoon we took a four-hour taxi tour of the island with a lovely driver who spoke little English, which did not diminish our enjoyment. That evening we dined in Clube Naval de Santa

Maria where Anne and I had met in 2009 after lunching on the deck. This time we dined inside.

On Monday 10th the alarm went off at 0600 and by 0625 *Tam O'Shanter* was away for the 200-mile passage to Horta, Faial. As we rounded Ilhéu da Vila we set the full main, but by midday the wind had gone noticeably light so I started the engine to motor-sail. At 1900 the engine stopped. John and Mary topped up the fuel to no effect. At 0330 on Tuesday morning I decided to alter course back to Angra. It was dull and cloudy with the wind dropping throughout the day and we arrived back in Angra at 1900, having to paddle with the dinghy oars to get to the reception berth. It was 36½ hours since we'd left Vila do Porto. When I went to reception to check in the smiling official said that there was no need to check in as I had not checked out! He also gave *Tam O'Shanter* permission to stay on the reception pontoon for the night to allow a visit from marine engineers NáuticoAzores which I had arranged for 0830 the following morning.

The engineer reported that there was dirt in the fuel tank and arranged a lift-out for 0915 the next day. After the engineer reported we moved *Tam O'Shanter* to a berth in the marina



Mary on the helm

as the wind strengthened. That evening a bull was due to be let loose in the streets, but only John and Mary made the long uphill walk. Anne and I had seen it before so we relaxed and enjoyed a drink in the main square in a very gusty wind. Suddenly I was out of my chair and on the ground when a strong gust flattened a large umbrella and me. It was my first fall since getting the new right knee in January but I was not damaged.

On Thursday *Tam O'Shanter* was craned ashore on what turned out to be a very warm day. During the morning we used the marina laundrette and then enjoyed brunch at a beautiful and efficient café. Anne and I stayed in the cathedral avoiding the heat for about two hours, while Mary and John went separately for massages. I returned to the



Being lifted out in Angra do Heroísmo to clean the fuel tank

engineer's workshop to find that launching was scheduled for 1530. The engineer had added 80 litres of clean diesel to the tank and we topped it up from the cans we had filled for the passage to Madeira. I planned to leave for Horta at 1930 to make the passage between Pico and São Jorge in darkness. I had made this passage five years earlier in *Tam O'Shanter* and it was incredibly beautiful as the stars competed with the twinkling of lights on the islands. I hoped my present crew would experience that. Anne and John came on watch at midnight with the wind increasing to 18 knots as *Tam O'Shanter* rounded the east end of São Jorge, but sadly we saw few stars as there was heavy cloud cover.

On arrival near the reception area I headed for the end of the pier where *Tam O'Shanter* had berthed when we arrived in June 2018 on the OCC Pursuit Rally, and found a space around the end on the south side. When I went to register I was told that *Tam O'Shanter* could not stay where she was as the berth was too large and anyway, there were many yachts at anchor on a waiting list for berths. As our passports were being checked I threw in a comment about the new knee and we were kindly offered a nearby pontoon berth. The kind gentleman at reception was José Lobao whom I heard later had been the first employee when the marina opened for business 37 years previously. During the afternoon we hired a taxi to drive along the south coast of Faial and spent a couple of hours in the excellent underground Interpretation Centre at Ponta dos Capelinhos, built on the site of a major volcanic eruption which began in mid-September 1957. Anne and I had been there before but we both enjoyed the visit, as did Mary and John.

Next day, Saturday the 15th, we took the ferry across to Pico. On arrival at the Porto da Madelina, as John and I were sitting waiting for Anne and Mary, we were approached by a taxi driver offering to show us the many wonderful sights of the island in his comfortable-looking SUV. As it was just 1130 we booked four hours. We stopped for lunch at Lajes do Pico and I saw how small the harbour is and how difficult it would be to anchor or get a berth in the marina, though I had planned to try on the aborted Vila do Porto to Horta passage. At the conclusion of the tour of so many interesting sites, the taxi waited for us to shop at a supermarket before taking us back to the ferry for Horta. The inhabitants of Pico are particularly proud of their island and have voted to restrict new development there. It has a reputation for producing the best white wine in the Azores and is well worth a visit. That evening, after dinner aboard, Mary and John went to Peter Café Sport where they reported a wonderful evening's music.

On Sunday I checked us out of Horta and at 0915 we left for the short passage to Velas, São Jorge. We set sail outside the harbour in a brisk wind on the nose, but were only able to sail until 1045 when the wind died with 15 miles to go. I called marina manager

Mary
and John
studying
the menu at
Peter Café
Sport in
Horta. Note
the well-
travelled
OCC
burgee at
top right!





Tam O'Shanter alongside the quay at Vila da Praia, Graciosa

and OCC Port Officer José Dias, and when we arrived at reception at 1400 he said the name *Tam O'Shanter* was familiar to him. I asked if we could use *Coromandel's* berth which owner Linda Lane Thornton had told me was vacant, but as it happened Agustin Martin's Beneteau Oceanis *Caballito de Mar IX* was in the berth though José told me Agustin was happy to have someone outside. *Tam O'Shanter* berthed at 1430 and was welcomed alongside by Agustin's wife Sonja Schroyens and guests Peter and Wendy Whatley. I discovered that Peter had taken part in the ICC/RCC Azores Rally in 2009 and with Sonja we remembered a party Anne and I had attended at her home at Puerto de Pasito Blanco in 2019. Later we met

Agustin at the marina entrance. Sadly we were unable to meet friends Linda Lane Thornton and her husband Andy who live on São Jorge because Linda was ill with a summer flu.

Tam O'Shanter left Velas at 0640 on Monday the 17th bound for Vila da Praia, Graciosa, another island we had not visited before. It was a pleasant passage and on arrival at the harbour entrance I decided to enter to see if we could berth, but instead tied alongside a yacht on the quay with help from the owners, a Swedish couple. Mary and John went off to explore the town and the Swedish couple went hill walking. At 1445 Anne and I had a visit from a maritime policeman, with excellent English, to tell us that the law had been changed by politicians in Horta five days previously and yachts were no longer allowed to use the port which was reserved for fishing boats only. He said that we should leave at once and anchor off. I pleaded the crew's age and my knee replacement and he allowed us to stay until first light the following morning. We were out of our bunks at 0530 to leave as promised, by which time many of the fishing boats had gone to sea in a flat calm. We motored the 55 miles to Praia da Vitoria on Terceira and took a marina berth for the night, another town for Mary and John to explore after dark. Next morning *Tam O'Shanter* made the short passage back to her berth at Angra do Heroísmo and we prepared to return to Ireland.

We had enjoyed our cruise very much, logged 515 miles and visited seven of the nine Azorean islands. There was, of course, disappointment that *Tam O'Shanter* did not make it to the *Saoirse* Rally but Anne recalled her father advising, 'Remember, Anne, when you think something is bad, in one way or another it will work out for the best in the long term'. I took the title from a remark made by Mary Curtin, who sailed with Anne and me in the Canary Islands last year. When asked about the cruise by a friend, she replied, "It was not what I expected".

