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BLUEWATER BABY ONBOARD

Coastal cruising with a toddler can be demanding enough, but how does family life work on a bluewater passage? Tim Good and his wife, Emmie, sailed from the UK to Madeira with their four-year-old daughter to discover the answer



LEFT Porto Santo, Portugal

THIS IMAGE Celestine
enjoying life on board





You may recall that we wrote a few pieces for Sailing Today between 2018-2020, as we sailed around Norway and then down through Brittany, Portugal, The Canary Islands and the Azores. This was the beginning of a planned circumnavigation but our best laid plans were scuppered by Covid and the dreaded Brexit double VAT issue. We were also trying for a child so, if you add all these uncertainties together, it seemed prudent to come back to the UK, which is what we did after the first lockdown of 2020. Fast forward five years and we're off again, but this time with little Celestine, four years of age, sailing non stop from the UK via Madeira in August 2025. The next stage will be West Africa to cruise Senegal and Gambia, so keep your eyes peeled for that article soon! But let's rewind a little. The boat had been laid up in Cornwall since 2020 with just

a couple of cruises to the Isles of Scilly. We still planned to circumnavigate but times had changed. We now had a child aboard and the boat needed some upgrades. We started with CopperCoat. There are too many horror stories involving Copper Coat so we felt it was best to take control of the process and do it ourselves. The hull was dry after being out of the water for a year, and we then had the yard sand-blast off the old antifoul. In hindsight I think I would have manually scraped and sanded it off to give a better finish. Five to six coats were then meticulously applied after watching every Copper Coat YouTube video of others both succeeding and failing. We also spoke with Copper Coat UK regularly, who were always available to talk at a moments notice. Credit to them. Three people working continuously for six hours did the job. It was a long hard day and I'd recommend

ABOVE LEFT
Up, up and away with the code zero

ABOVE RIGHT
Celestine takes a dip in the ocean during a becalmed period in the Bay of Biscay

BELOW LEFT
The Lifepo 4 Lithium batteries were a straight swap for the old Trojan wet lead batteries

BELOW RIGHT
Approaching Madeira

four people if possible. We also made the leap to lithium batteries which was much more painless than I thought it was going to be. The new Fogstar Lifepo4 batteries slotted right into the existing boxes and our existing Inverter/charger was perfectly compatible. Older chargers for lead batteries are generally fine providing you can change the charge voltage settings. On top of that we replaced our 360w solar for 900w bifacial panels. More on that later! A new standing rig from AllSpars, a new Hood mainsail, a furling code zero and lots of other smaller upgrades, completed the refit.

Madeira bound

We launched the boat in May and then moved aboard in early August 2025. We knew too well how August can become unpredictable and tempestuous in the north Atlantic so we departed immediately on the nine-day passage to Madeira! We decided to go direct and skip Galicia for a number of reasons.





Firstly is the Orca threat which, in late summer, is not negligible along that coastline as the pods move from the Straits of Gibraltar up to Biscay. We kept a close eye on reported attacks on Orca.PT and Whatsapp groups, and it made sense to keep west of the shipping lanes, around 50nm off the coast of Galicia. Some would argue the threat is limited but having child aboard, and having spent a lot of time dropping and reconditioning the rudder over summer, I was not willing to risk it. Another reason is that it takes time to get into the rhythm of offshore sailing and doing so with a toddler aboard makes it all a little more tricky, so we decided not to break the routine by stopping at Coruna. The passage took around nine days, with only about 15 hours of motoring, navigating around a couple of small depressions to keep smiling. The new code zero sail made a big difference to our heavy Seastream 43 which likes a blow to get moving. We were now seeing 5kts of boat speed in 9kts of wind which, for a 17t boat, was great. We can now appreciate the power of apparent wind! We even

left the big cruising chute at home, hoping the code zero would do it all. The biggest advantage is how easy it was to furl away and leave hoisted as conditions changed. In fact, for those who like to get technical, it wasn't a code zero in the literal sense which requires a mid girth of about 75%. Ours is actually a very large lightweight genoa of around 70sq m made from 2oz polyester. This makes it light but still strong. An additional layer of 2oz fabric is sewn along the leech and foot, acting like a UV strip. A Karver Furler is then used to furl the sail with ease. This all works without a bowsprit as we had just enough space ahead of our main forestay and headsail. We now have three headsails! That said, our real workhorse was a twin yankee set-up for downwind sailing, hoisted on a single furler. Not having a mainsail hoisted makes downwind passages much more pleasant. There is no chafe on the spreaders, no gybe risk, it's simpler to reduce sail and offers better directional stability. We filled our days with painting, playing games like Twister, fishing and even a mid passage swim when becalmed.

ABOVE LEFT
Porto Santo anchorage

ABOVE RIGHT
Twin headsails set

BELOW LEFT
Celestine and Emmie enjoy time together doing craft

BELOW RIGHT
A moment to reflect in the middle of the ocean

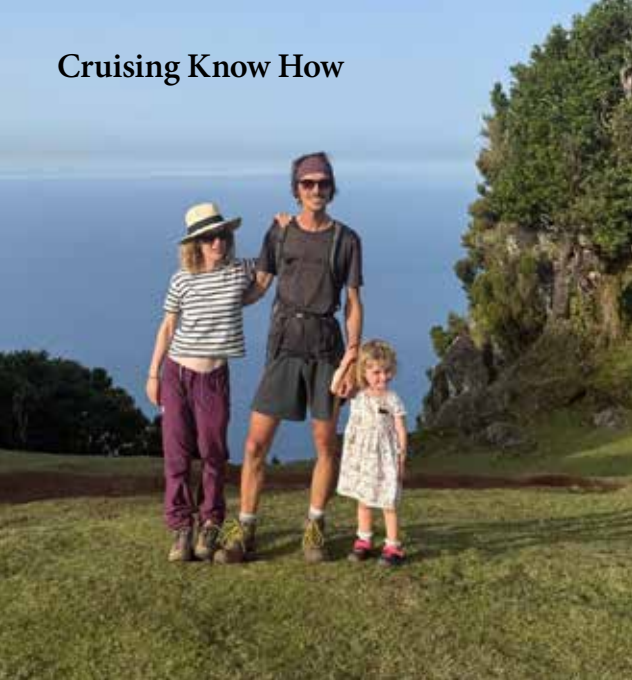
Amazingly Celestine jumped right in, aged three at that point.

Having a young child aboard does change things. You lose some of the things that make offshore passages special, but then you gain others. Sleep is tricky, since you can't just take a nap when not on watch, since you're on duty with the little one. Thankfully Celestine slept like a brick aboard. She'd go to bed at the usual time and sleep right through, regardless of conditions. You also get a lot of time together. There are few distractions so you can really engage in things together. Emmie, being an artist, would often sit quietly with Celestine as they got creative together. I did a short film about the crossing and posted it to [YouTube.com/ ChasingContours](https://www.youtube.com/ChasingContours)

Discovering Madeira

We made landfall in Porto Santo, the smaller Madeiran island. A sleepy harbour is the only anchorage as the rest off the island is a reserve. The yard there is incredibly good value, so a small, friendly community of liveaboards have made it there home. →





with no particularly pressing need to complete their refits. It is a small island which you can cycle around in a few hours but there are still some corners to explore and get away from the tourists that flood in from Madeira each day on the ferry. A day sail gets you to Madeira island. Once again the anchorages are limited, but mostly due to depth and seafloor type rather than it being a marine reserve. Another consideration is that Madeira attracts tourists interested in walking. So you can't venture inland to get some peace and quiet, like you can in the Canary Islands. In fact the deeper inland you go, the more tourists there seem to be! We were of course there during peak season but nonetheless, we were surprised at how busy things were. My advice would be to avoid the main well known trails and take some of the less frequented walking tracks. As with anything, 90% of people go to 10% of the attractions, and that's certainly the case with Madeira and the well known hiking trails. Once off the beaten track you can find some amazing scenery and trails to hike. Many along the aqueducts, locally known as 'Lavadas'. High on the misty slopes of Madeira, where the mountains rise steep and green from the sea, the islanders once faced a problem: rain fell in abundance on the north side, but the sun-drenched south was dry. To bridge this divide, they carved narrow channels, the levadas, into cliffs and through mountains. Over centuries, these levadas grew into a vast web, threading laurel forests, valleys, and villages. The men who

built them risked their lives, hanging from ropes to chisel rock by hand. Their work didn't just feed crops; it stitched the island together. You can now follow these veins of water which make for flat easy walks with a child and the constant excitement of playing PooH sticks! Then there is Funchal. Funchal was founded around 1424, shortly after the Portuguese discovered Madeira. The area was named Funchal after the abundance of wild fennel. It quickly grew due to exports of sugar and wine but as a result Funchal was frequently attacked by pirates and privateers and, in response, the Portuguese built coastal fortresses such as São Lourenço Palace and São Tiago Fort to defend the city. On a boat you need to decide if you're going to anchor outside the marina and endure swell, or get on the waiting list to enter the marina

ABOVE LEFT
Happy family
– Emmie, Tim
and Celestine

ABOVE RIGHT
Celestine cooling
off in one of the
aqueducts in
Madeira, locally
known as a Lavadas

BELOW
Map showing the
stopovers enroute

to be rafted up, paying top dollar for the privilege! You can't book ahead so it's a lottery really. You could wait a week to get in. We did. Either way the city is lovely, with a substantial old town to stroll around and the botanical gardens. My advice for the gardens is to arrive around 3pm when most visitors are leaving and have the place largely to yourself. The alternative is to go to either Calheta marina or Quitna do Lorde Marina which will almost certainly have space without waiting several days outside like you do at Funchal. You can also book ahead so you know there will be a spot. In these marinas you can also rent a car really easily and explore the island, coming back to parking spot near the boat. Not something which is easily achieved in Funchal.

Diving delights

For those who have diving equipment aboard, or can free dive to 12m, there is an interesting wreck not far from Funchal. The *Afonso Cerqueira*, launched in 1975 carried out maritime surveillance, search & rescue missions in Portuguese waters. On 4 September 2018, it was deliberately sunk off the coast of Madeira to serve as an artificial reef. Because Emmie and I can no longer dive together with Celestine aboard, we bought a floating hookah system called AirBuddy. It is effectively a floating compressor powered by a rechargeable battery. You put on a small jacket and a hose feeds air to you via a standard diving regulator. You can dive to 12m alone and it has been really great. I haven't felt





the need to go scuba diving since we started using it and it has the added benefit of making light work of scrubbing the Copper coat every few months! By this point we'd had a good trial of our new solar panels and batteries... and WOW. We were already used to making a reasonable amount of energy from solar but not enough to be free from gas and there was always a concern about using more than 50% capacity from the lead batteries and needing to fully charge them regularly. The new lithium batteries, apart from being much lighter, have almost twice the usable capacity. They can also absorb energy at a much faster rate from the alternator when the engine is running. This can sometimes be a problem as alternators can overheat when running at full output. As such we added a Victron DC/DC charger which is very easy to install and allows us to adjust the amount of power the alternator outputs, just in case it gets too hot. That said, the solar panels have been so effective we don't need the engine to charge the batteries. The panels are the new generation bifacial panels which accept sunlight on both sides. On a boat, with the reflection off the water, the benefit is tangible. Our panels are rated to 900w and we have seen them outputting 1200w occasionally. To put things into perspective, against other forms of power generation, these panels are a premium brand Trina, and they cost £110 in total. Unbelievable value. Our power generation has been so effective that I even worked out how to rewire the earth on the 1kw immersion heater

element (calorifier) to work from the inverter. The builder of the boat, quite rightly at the time, had a separate earth for the immersion element which prevented anyone using it from the inverter and accidentally draining the batteries. We now often turn the immersion heater on using the inverter when the sun is shining and we know we'll have more power than we'll use. A simple domestic timer switch prevents us from leaving it on for more than one hour at a time. In the galley, we also put our air fryer into the cupboard above the gas cooker. All I can say is that we rarely use gas now and the gas oven was used only twice in two months. I can now estimate one of our 4.5kg Calor gas bottles will last us about seven months at this rate. That really is a big

ABOVE LEFT
Diving on the *Afonso Cerqueira* wreck near Funchal

ABOVE RIGHT
Celestine on deck shouting "Land Ahoy" approaching the Salvagen Islands

BELOW
Solar panels on passage creating power and shade at the helm

win considering gas is inherently unsafe on boats, refills when cruising to different countries can be a real bother, and storing multiple gas bottles is just a pain.

The savage Salvagem's

After perhaps a month in Madeira we were ready to sail down to the Canary Islands but I was keen to go via the Salvagem Islands. A small group of islands between Madeira and the Canaries. They are uninhabited apart from a research station and you need a permit to land. I'd intended to visit when I singlehanded from Gran Canaria to the Azores back in 2020 but decided to pass them by. With hindsight I should have made that stop since a day later I got caught in 50kt winds passing Madeira's acceleration zone which whipped up a dangerous sea and I ripped my mainsail in the process. It was a valuable lesson as I deployed my series drogue for two days. See *Sailing Today* November 2020 or our YouTube channel for a film regarding that eventful passage! Anyhow, the Salvagem Islands were worth the stop. Upon arrival, we were taken on a short walk by the rangers and shown the rare nest birds who, due to lack of predators, were entirely unphased by our presence. Very exciting for Celestine! The Cory's Shearwater is quite distinctive and can be heard at some of the anchorages with steep cliffs in the Canary Islands. They have a





PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK

distinct wailing or howling in the evening which has been known to unnerve sailors of old and scare some from ever going ashore. We were not permitted to scuba dive at the island but snorkelling from the boat was tolerated. Whilst we snorkelled we pulled Celestine along sitting atop her inflatable crocodile, only to realise that for some time we were being followed by a curious baby shark! Perhaps it liked the look of Celestine's little toes dancing around in the water.

Onward to Alagranza

After just one night at anchor we were ready to continue our passage towards Alagranza! "ALA... what?" You say! Alagranza is the most northern Canary Island and uninhabited apart from the owner – the grandson of the old lighthouse keeper – and the island remains privately owned to this day. Regardless of status as a protected reserve. Back in 2018, we got a permit to visit Alagranza and whilst anchored there we spotted a half naked man squatting on the rocks. I had to go and investigate. He was foraging for winkles in the rock pools and we got chatting. We were

PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK

invited into his simple home on the island and we have remained friends since. This was our chance to revisit him seven years later. He is a remarkable person who continues to use the rustic house his forefathers built from volcanic rock, and continues to make improvements. In fact I found myself helping to paint the roof within 24 hours of arriving. A fair exchange for such an experience in my opinion. Of an evening we'd all sit around preparing freshly caught parrot fish, picking winkles from their shells and cooking limpets under a clear night sky. The last thing I really wanted to do was retake a picture from a sea cave, but this time with our daughter. It wasn't so much a cave but a lava tube, with a collapsed roof, which extended into the sea. You can take a dinghy up the tube and into an underground lagoon. Back in 2018 we took a photograph of ourselves in a silly pose and we did the same again to compare versions. From there we sailed to Graciosa, a popular landfall for boats coming to the Canary Islands and wow the anchorage was packed full, which was very different to seven years earlier. Has

ABOVE LEFT
Shadowfax in the beautiful anchorage at Alagranza

ABOVE RIGHT
Back for more - retaking a photo taken in a sea cave, Alagranza in 2018 - with an important addition

BELOW
The harbour in Arrecife is a good place to leave the boat

cruising become that much more popular since then? I counted about 25 boats in the anchorage. After Graciosa we headed for Arrecife where we planned to pause our trip for a short while.

Journey's end - for now

This is good place to leave the boat since almost no swell enters the harbour. That is rare for the Canary Islands as most marinas suffer badly from surge and snatching lines. It also had two excellent chandleries and other provisions. The marina facilities are great too but the pricing is not high at around £18 per night. That's not as cheap as the state run marinas (Puerto Canarios) but not desperately expensive like it is in Madeira.

This is where this part of our journey ends. We returned to the UK for a few weeks to let our parents get their grandchild fix, and now I write this while traveling back to the boat in preparation for our next leg to Senegal, Gambia and Cabo Verde. Let the real adventure begin! I'll report back in a few months or you can follow our progress live on our Instagram @ChasingContours. ✦

