

The start of the 2008 Azores Challenge shows three typical challengers (from left): Mike Winter's Cheverton Caravel 23, Roger Taylor's Corribee 21 and Bill Churchouse's Westerly 22

Jake Kavanagh



# Seamanship without showmanship

The Jester Challenge 2021 is a series of offshore sailing events for single-handers. Event founder Ewen Southby-Tailyour takes up the story while on page 34 regular PBO contributor Jake Kavanagh prepares to set sail

In the late 1940s and early 1950s few outside the secretive British military establishment would have known much about the wartime heroism and endeavour of Herbert 'Blondie' Hasler and his daring raid on Bordeaux in 1943.

The 1955 film, *Cockleshell Heroes*, is based on Hasler's Operation Frankton, a submarine-launched kayak raid in stormy December seas off the French coast that saw a number of German ships damaged, but also led to the deaths of ten British marines. Hasler was critical of the film for being creative with the truth, but it revealed his military genius and appetite for adventure, which is still in evidence on the North Atlantic to this day.

Hasler's great passion after the war was offshore racing and he was well known for his participation in the fledgling Royal Ocean Racing Club events in the English Channel and beyond.

Then in the summer of 1960, Hasler devised, organised and participated in the



**RIGHT** 'Blondie' Hasler's original junk-rigged Folkboat *Jester*



Eileen Ramsay / PPL

**ABOVE** Herbert 'Blondie' Hasler in 1960

**BELOW** The huge 236ft four masted schooner *Club Méditerranée* skippered by Frenchman Alain Colas, slips out of Plymouth towards the start line. This type of vessel wasn't quite what 'Blondie' Hasler had in mind for the OSTAR

Roger Lean-Vercoe/PPL



Jonathan Eastland/Ajax

## 'All starters reached Newport in good order – the only time this has happened so far'

inaugural OSTAR (*Observer Single Handed Trans-Atlantic Race*). Hasler sailed his modified Nordic Folkboat *Jester* on which he had developed his own windvane self-steering system. He finished second in 48 days to Sir Francis Chichester's much larger *Gipsy Moth III*. All five starters reached Newport in good order – the first and, interestingly, the only time this has happened, so far – and the other three participants all sailed boats under 25ft LOA.

Seventeen boats entered the 1964 race and four years after that there were 35. However, Hasler was worried its success 'contained the seeds of its own death.' He cited 'excessive competitiveness' and the

famous images from the 1976 event – yachts of 128ft and 236ft overall – did little to change his mind.

Fearing a demise, Hasler planned a considerably scaled down transatlantic race to begin in 1980. Yet for a variety of reasons Hasler's 'Series Two' never occurred.

Hasler died in 1987, but the race, now firmly dominated at the top end by heavily sponsored trimarans, continued to allow small boats to participate.

Then, after the 2000 edition of the race, officially known as the Europe 1 New Man STAR, the organisers, Royal Western Yacht club (RWYC), decided to separate 2004's professional, high-profile race – the Transat – from a Corinthian event in 2005

called the Faraday Mills OSTAR. However, the rules were also changed so that no boat in 2004 could be less than 30ft (although not banning the smaller vessels, the regulations made compliance difficult in formal events) and in the 2005 event a minimum boat length of 27ft was imposed, which excluded seaworthy yachts from a race that had at its very heart the 25ft *Jester* herself.

Things had come to a head. Owners of seaworthy designs such as Twisters, Folkboats, Contessa 26s, and even the diminutive Coribee 21s were, quite suddenly, disenfranchised from one of the most recognised transoceanic races.

Yet even if size had not been a limiting factor then the entrance fee most certainly now would be (£1,800 for the virus-cancelled OSTAR 2020) along with some impractical safety regulations and a 40-day time limit.

Thus we decided to create our very own quirky, eccentric, rather British solution. ➔





**Jester Challenge founder and 'non-organiser' Ewen Southby-Tailyour fires the starting gun, a blank cartridge behind a barrel full of Johnson's baby powder. The nearest competitors set sail smelling like newborns**

The 2006 Jester Challenge was set up along the lines of the event proposed by Hasler for 1980 to allow yachts under 30ft to compete on friendly terms with no entry fees, no time limit, no inspections and with negligible fuss. Instead, there were just a few guidelines and minimal interference.

It was, and remains, a nautical challenge like no other: a contest that has at its heart what the *Jester* skippers have nicknamed a collection of 'non-rules', yet it is a challenge that requires plenty of seamanlike decisions from its growing family of participants.

'The only arbiter of safety at sea is the sea itself,' wrote Hasler. 'Not a health and safety-orientated committee with slide-rules and copious regulations'.

Hasler believed that a higher percentage of under 30-footers would reach Newport, compared to a similar number of larger vessels. Rightly as it turned out: the only class in the OSTAR 2005 with no retirements was the Eira class of the smallest vessels.

I believe that the skippers alone, and not sponsors or nautical 'nannies', should bear the responsibility for what vessels a skipper should sail and what equipment that vessel should carry. Indeed – only the skipper can decide whether to sail or not.

### The non-rules

Blondie Hasler's original 'non-rules' are the basis for the Jester Challenge and needed very little editing in my view. His proposal for the 1980 event (that never was) included: 'The race will have no sponsor, no organising clubs, no rules, no official acceptance, no prearranged facilities no festivities at either end, no entrance fee, no handicaps, no disqualifications, no race numbers, no official finishing order, no prizes and no official dinner...'

I ignored just two of the above points for the Jester Challenge: the festivities and



Jake Kavanagh

**Two ends of the size range for the inaugural Jester Challenge in 2006: the engineless Corribee 21 *Mingming* being towed out of the marina by the 30ft Beneteau Figaro First *Sterren***

the official dinner, on the understanding that such social occasions would help to bring together what I hoped would become a growing Jester family.

'Each skipper takes part in the race on his own responsibility as an ordinary seaman making an independent and legal passage,' Hasler's rules continued. 'The design, condition, equipment and handling of the boat being entirely his own affair. No search and rescue operation will be mounted. Any skipper who is unable to remain alive by his own efforts is expected to die with dignity.'

And so there we had Hasler's reconstructed prototype. In effect, Jester skippers compete against themselves and the ocean with all arrivals at a safe haven – even if it is not the 'official destination' – being regarded as a success.

And so that is what the skippers do, without having the pressure of sponsorship nor the need to massage images and reputations of either themselves or their backers.

With no public glory – and no sponsor – waiting at the finish, the highest standards of care tend to be exercised.





Jake Kavanagh

**Ewen Southby-Tailyour's 'committee' boat (there is no committee, but there isn't really an alternative term) tows *Jester* into position for the start. Previous owner Mike Richey, seen standing by *Jester's* mast, was aboard the modified Folkboat 26 as he helped current owner Trevor Leek to complete preparations**

**'The race will have no official acceptance, no organising clubs, no rules...'**

### Good track record

The Jester Challenge was, inevitably, not without its critics but after 14 years, a lifeboat has only once been called out and that not by the skipper but by a third party (the skipper herself was making her way to her chosen destination in perfect safety). One yacht has foundered following a dismasting with the skipper taken off by a passing merchant ship in a textbook evolution. There are, sadly, bound to be further incidents but so far common sense and good seamanship have held the day. Compared to other



Jake Kavanagh

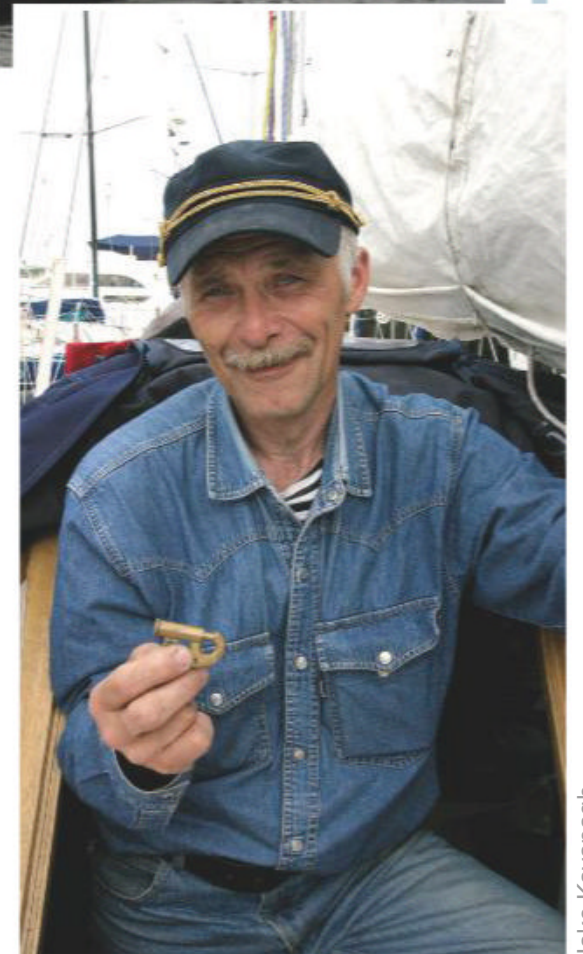
### Jester alumni

A good many Jester skippers have gone on to far greater things and while I accept that it is invidious to name a few of the many, I have to praise Roger Taylor in *Mingming* who has ventured twice into Arctic waters in his 21ft junk-rigged Corribee.

Meanwhile Russian Igor Zaretsky, following his success in the 2010 Jester Challenge, then entered the Golden Globe round the world non-stop, single-handed race.

One of the more remarkable Jester skippers is another Russian, Alexei Fedoruk, sailing his home-made vessel *Fason*. He found the battered rotting hull of a Dragon, bought it and took many years rebuilding her from the garboards upwards then fitting her out for long-distance, bluewater sailing. With no ship-chandlers he even had to make his own spring hanks, nails and screws before he could start! Following his arrival in the Azores in 2008 he sailed on to Newport. A real Jester and one whom I am certain would find favour with PBO readers!

A good many others, too, have enjoyed new leases of life and gone on to greater adventures.



Jake Kavanagh

**Russian Alexei Fedoruk sailed his rebuilt and heavily modified Dragon 26 non-stop for 21 days to reach the start from St Petersburg. Unable to buy chandlery in Russia at the time, Alexei used a local engineering workshop to make his own brass screws and spring-loaded hanks**

events where keels fall off, crew fall overboard and vessels run onto reefs (despite state-of-the-art navigational systems) we consider our record to be pretty enviable.

The Jester Challenge fills a gap and satisfies a desire. The non-committee overseeing the very few non-rules is just one non-organiser. No-one has a duty of care to the competitors other than the skippers' duty to themselves, their dependants ashore and their fellow seafarers. The only formality before the start is for each skipper to sign a

document (the 'blood chit', as I call it) that states the responsibility for taking part is the skipper's, and the skipper's alone.

These single-handers are unlikely to enlist onshore navigational and meteorological help and – in a parody of Blondie's views – we don't expect them to give a fig about level playing fields. But we do expect them to behave like gentleman as far as numbers on board and the use of an engine are concerned. Jester skippers are simply content to reach their destination safely, taking their own finishing times to then compare routes, ➔





Jake Kavanagh

**In the Jester Atlantic Challenge of 2010 Rory McDougal's diminutive 21ft Wharram catamaran *Cooking Fat* (right) finished just two hours behind Igor Zaretsky (above), Russia's Yachtsman of the Year, on his Peterson 25, *The Grand***



rigs, equipment, clothing, sleep patterns and diets. Jester skippers help each other as friends with a common cause and not as adversaries.

In the beginning some suggested I insist on oil lamps, towed logs and sextants. I disagreed. While the Jester Challenge is for small vessels (many on very tight budgets), some of which may well have been built in pre-GPS days, there's nothing Luddite about it. Satellite navigation predominates as well, unsurprisingly, as wind vanes. With no nanny regulations, Jester Challengers can carry – or not carry – whatever safety equipment they like based on personal experience. I rely on the maturity and knowledge of each skipper to make up his or her own mind as to what suits their vessels and their own mentality.

There is no vetting system other than my own gut feeling and no-one will ever know how many obviously unsuitable applicants I have turned away!

The original Jester Challenge to Newport was marked by the first arrival being a Frenchman – the calm and amusing Eric Andlauer. This is a result which, considering that the French tend to dominate the OSTAR, would have added much to Hasler's pleasure: a rather satisfying conclusion.

At Newport we were introduced to the more-than-hospitable and helpful Newport Yacht Club and the indomitable Norman Bailey who became our unofficial, one-man reception committee. Then and now nothing has ever been too much trouble for Norman.

And there we have it. Skippers from eleven nations have taken part; this year's 'non-starters' to the Azores included four from France, two from Norway, and one each from Australia, The Netherlands and Germany. Not bad for an event that has



Jake Kavanagh



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**The first two arrivals in Newport on the inaugural race were Eric Andlauer (left) and Pete Hill (husband of Annie Hill, PBO contributor and author of *Voyaging on a Small Income*). Pete's Kingfisher 20 was as basic as it gets, and his lack of long-range weather forecasting meant he sailed on completely unaware of the storms passing by either side of his track. Other, more informed, yachts had turned back.**

never been advertised, that relies purely on word of mouth and reputation. The lack of a £1,800 entry fee and no regulations is also probably a great help!

### Looking ahead

So what next? I am taking potential entries as far into the future as people are prepared to commit while we shall carry

on much as we have done so far with no half-witted regulations, no financial charges and no unrealistic time limits but with the most amusing, adventurous, friendly and seamanlike skippers one could ever hope to meet.

Let me know if you are interested at [tailyour@hotmail.com](mailto:tailyour@hotmail.com), for great, challenging fun awaits!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ewen Southby-Tailyour OBE is an author, yachtsman and former Royal Marine, retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel. He saw active service in several theatres, and in 1978 was stationed in the Falkland Islands. On his own initiative he sailed the islands and produced over 100 pages of comprehensive pilotage notes. This won him the UK's Yachtsman of the Year award in 1982, and his work proved highly useful in the subsequent Falklands campaign. He took part in**

**the operation as the inshore navigation advisor and was later awarded the OBE and recommended for the DSC. Now the author of 17 books on military history, including one that reached number seven in the Sunday Times best seller list, Ewen is the leading 'non-organiser' of the Jester Challenge and a passionate and award-winning high-latitude explorer.**





Jake Kavanagh



**Jester is a replica of Blondie Hasler's original Folkboat that was sadly lost during the 1988 OSTAR – though fortunately without fatality**

## The Jester Trust

My involvement in the story began in earnest following the loss at sea of 'Blondie' Hasler's original *Jester* during the 1988 OSTAR. I helped form the Jester Trust with a group of friends to build at our own expense a facsimile of this famous boat.

This would allow Michael Richey, who had bought her off Hasler, to continue taking part in the OSTARS.

Richey eventually retired from transatlantic voyaging in 1997 after celebrating his 80th birthday at sea, so *Jester* was put on the market. I recommended Trevor Leek to the Jester Trust as a potential new owner, as he had offshore experience and declared that he had no intention of modernising *Jester* and would leave her precisely as designed by Hasler.



**The team behind an attainable OSTAR: (from left to right) Trevor Leek, the late Mike Richey, and Ewen Southby-Tailyour**

Jake Kavanagh

## Jester Challenge timeline

### June 2006 Jester Challenge

The inaugural event follows the same route as the original OSTAR: Plymouth to Newport RI. This continues to run every four years, but additional challenges proliferated to the point where we have an event every year.

### 2008 Jester Azores Challenge

This event (also every four years) was designed to give those who did not wish to bash all the way to the Americas. They had the chance to cut their teeth on a long-distance voyage but with a destination close enough from which to return to the UK before the hurricane season.

### 2013 Jester Baltimore Challenge

Later still Tony Head – an enthusiastic skipper, invaluable helper and wise mentor – suggested that even the Azores might be too far for those who really were beginners. Instead, every odd year we sent them to Baltimore in the Republic of Ireland.

### ...and a second startline

Another Jester skipper – and the oldest so far – Roger Fitzgerald based at Pwllheli in north Wales, felt that two starts would make sense for the Baltimore challenge: one from Plymouth and one from Wales to avoid the Welsh starters having to sail south to Plymouth before sailing north to Baltimore. So he devised a route that was the same distance from each of the two start lines. These two routes (with the same starting times) were short enough to sail there and back, well within a normal summer holiday period. The first Jester Baltimore Challenge coincided, by happy chance, with Baltimore's Pirate Week so since then I have made sure that our dates continue to match theirs.

### 2020-21

As a result of the coronavirus the 2020 Jester Azores Challenge was postponed and amalgamated with the 2021 Jester Baltimore Challenge. This means there will be four Jester starts in 2021:

- One and two are from Plymouth and Pwllheli to Baltimore, which may be viewed as the warm-up event for the third start
- Baltimore to the Azores
- The fourth will be from Plymouth to the Azores (for those who do not wish to go to Baltimore)







# HOW TO 'JESTERFY' YOUR YACHT

The Jester Challenge is a single-handed event for yachts under 30ft, and in 2021 will have two destinations: Southern Ireland and the Azores. Jake Kavanagh finds out how the skippers prepare their boats

**T**he Jester Challenge has become a remarkable event. Described as 'The antidote to the nanny state' the idea is that ordinary people in ordinary boats can undertake a series of increasingly difficult long-distance solo voyages, culminating with a crossing of the North Atlantic.

Attend one of the fleet assemblies and you will see a collection of dependable, popular and inexpensive production boats along with the occasional home build or radical makeover. All the participants are self-funded, as sponsorship is usually discouraged, save for the occasional collection tin for charity.

In 2006, I was Practicals editor for PBO and covered the first-ever Jester Atlantic Challenge, which had just a handful of participants. The accessibility of the event and the simplicity of the yachts appealed to many amateur sailors. As such, for the 2008 Azores event, some 38 participants made it to the start at Plymouth on the UK's south coast. The skippers were mostly British, but were joined by Jesters from Russia, Australia, Belgium, Switzerland and France.

I have been fascinated by the upgrades and clever modifications on the Jester boats ever since, and since there are no prizes, the real challenge is against the

sea itself. This helps to bind the skippers together in a kind of self-help consortium.

Some of the ideas I've seen over the years have found their way into my own challenger, a 21ft junk-rigged Corribee. However, she has yet to see the start line, so like many others I remain a dedicated groupie. In the meantime, we can dip into the very active web forums to read the recommendations for taking a production boat off soundings and into the unforgiving ocean. We have trawled the Jester archives to highlight the most popular modifications, and you won't need the budget of a Vendée Globe contender to fit them.





Photos: Jake Kavanagh


The Jester forum on YBW.com (a digital marine 'sister' brand to PBO) was set up in 2006 and is still going strong

Jester veteran Bill Churchouse departing for the Azores aboard his modified Westerly 22

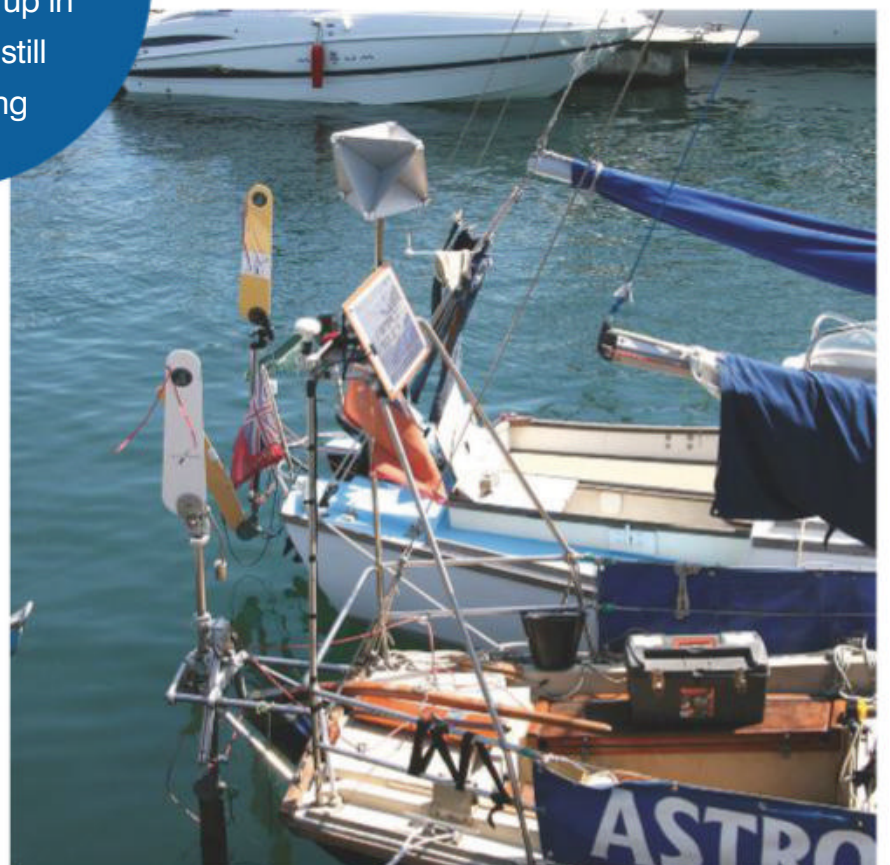
### Self-steering

All the skippers say the same. Self-steering is an absolute must. If you fit nothing else for the Jester Challenge, fit this.

Self-steering (a term usually generic to wind vanes) or 'auto-pilot' (electric/electro-hydraulic) systems allow a single-hander to set the course and then grab some valuable rest. This is the bit that gets the detractors hot under the collar, as the collision regulations say that a lookout must be maintained 'at all times' when under way. The skippers counter this with a tireless 'electronic watchkeeper' instead, but more of that later.

There are a lot of self-steering systems available, but not so many for smaller craft. Even second-hand, a compact wind-vane system is relatively expensive – expect to pay anywhere between £500 and £800 for a reasonably good example. New ones can set you back twice that, or more. For electric/electro-hydraulic 

**The British-built Seafeather self-steering proved very popular among the smaller boats. These units are precision made in Devon and are remarkably robust**







**Larger vessels often have heavier systems, like the Hydrovane, which also doubles as emergency steering. Note the metal tiller arm attached to demonstrate this function**

autopilots, costs have come down and reliability has gone up, but for very small craft the choice is usually limited to tiller pilots. Not many Jester yachts are wheel steered, although those that are can benefit from a powerful servo that acts directly on the rudder quadrant. The advantage of an electric pilot is that it steers to a pre-set heading via a fluxgate compass, whereas the mechanical vane systems are dependent on wind direction. If the wind backs or veers, then the boat alters course to match.

Glance at the fleet assembling for an off-soundings event and you will see that almost every participant has got their hands on some kind of self-steering system, most commonly windvanes (servo-pendulum). One even bought a weird contraption for £130 from ebay, while a PBO reader made his own for £10 (no misprint – ten quid) from an old bicycle. (The inverted forks held the vane whilst the head race bearing allowed it to ‘weathercock’). In each case, these DIY versions failed a few hundred miles out, prompting the bike converter to ruefully realise that Mr Raleigh had never meant his products to go to sea. Even so, windvane self-steering remains the accessory of choice as they are usually highly dependable and need no electrical power. Repairs can often be done on passage using simple tools, and the stronger the wind, the more effective the steering.



**Self-steering gear can be bought at boat jumbles. This obsolete Navik by Plastimo was going for £500 – but obtaining spares for older models can be an issue**



**Graham Jewitt removed the original main hatch on his Kingfisher 22 and built a pilothouse over the void. This gave him full standing headroom. Note the rotating pram hood for a circular lookout hatch**

**Modified hatch**

You can often spot a Jester boat from the hatch modifications. Skippers see this as an area of inherent weakness in a storm, as well as a good place to keep watch on passage. A Perspex blister is also a good indicator of a potential Challenger.

There are two requirements for the main hatch: firstly, good access in and out of the cockpit to reef the sails or reset the steering, and secondly, the ability to ‘put the cork in the bottle’. An empty and firmly corked bottle won’t sink, no matter how



**Duncan Lougee built a watchkeeping seat for his Rustler 31. It drops into slots at the top of the companionway and allows him to sit in the main hatch. The sprayhood offers good forward protection in a head sea**

many waves wash over it. A Jester yacht will therefore usually have either a reinforced sprayhood, observation dome or windscreen to break up solid waves. The washboards are often reinforced against seas crashing in from astern and can be locked into place to prevent them falling out in a roll over. Some even set an escape hatch into the boards, with the added advantage that this gives good visibility aft. Several also modify the top step of the companionway stairs to double as a comfortable perch when sailing.



**Bill Churchouse has a similar step to Duncan’s (above) in his Westerly 22. It is detachable and allows him to sit under his astrodome for complete shelter**





**Bright hull colours are also a good way to get noticed, especially if you become dismasted. Here Pete Hill's Kingfisher 20+ sports a bright yellow topsides coat. His boat was one of only two that completed the 2006 Jester Atlantic Challenge to Rhode Island**

### High visibility

Orange is the new black. For Jesters, being seen by shipping is important, although most realise it's safer to show up on a ship's radar or AIS that will spot them long before a bored lookout. However, should the worst happen, a white, grey or pale-blue colour scheme will easily blend into a seaway.

This happened to Andy Lane in 2008, when his Jeanneau 21 *Amadeus* was dismasted and holed in rough weather very close to *Titanic's* last position. Without the mast, his small white hull was almost invisible to the container ship sent to find him, but smoke flares saved the day.

Jesters will therefore add orange or other hi-vis colours to mastheads, hatches and cabin tops to increase the chances of a visual fix.

While orange is favoured for mastheads, black actually stands out better when seen from sea level.

Wind farms, for example, are painted white so they merge into the sky, so a black and orange combo at the top of the mast is probably the best mix.



**'Safety orange' stands out well in a grey sea or sky. Here Bill Hockley has added some orange storm canvas to the sails of his Cutlass 27. This bright sailcloth also provides extra reinforcement when the main is heavily reefed**



**Scanning radar is relatively rare in a Jester fleet, but some small yachts still carry it. Ron Wescott's Hunter Sonata 23 is seen packing a scanner and an 'active' radar target enhancer. With power generation limited, radar tends to be used only when in fog or crossing shipping lanes**

### Radar and radar reflectors

Although modern sets are compact and quite frugal on amps, not many Jester boats have a scanning radar system installed. Budgets are often tight and radar still remains relatively expensive, so while it is a great asset to have many skippers rely on passive (echo enhancing) systems instead.

Unfortunately, in a seaway small boats can make a poor target for a ship's radar. Wood and fibreglass are microwave 'sponges' and circular masts and stanchions can scatter a return. The diminutive Jesters, averaging 25ft LOA and with quite short masts, are also prone to vanishing into background 'clutter'. The answer is to ramp up the echo: the cheapest way is with a purpose-built 'passive' aluminium radar reflector, hoisted into the rigging or riveted high on the mast. The open octahedral versions should be placed in the 'rain-catching' position to be most effective.

Better still is a powered target enhancement system that produces a bold return on the interrogator's screen. As a bonus, some systems, such as the Echomax Active XS, will give an audio or visual alarm if swept ('painted') by an external X or S band radar. The Echomax can indicate if there are single or multiple radar scanners at work, so doubles as an early warning that something big is close.

Some Jesters have even lined their cabin-sides or rear bulkhead with a layer of tin foil and then covered it with foam-backed vinyl. This gives the twin effect of a thermal barrier and a good radar return, although the foil will need an air gap to be an effective insulator. Owners of boats with hollow wooden spars have occasionally put crumpled aluminium foil into the mast cavity to aid radar detection in steep seas.





Once out of phone and VHF range, some Jesters rely on small satellite communicators to send text messages to anxious relatives. One of the latest versions is the Zoleo, the namesake of an Iridium subsidiary. The Zoleo was launched in 2020, and switches automatically between satellite, cellular and wifi for the cheapest and most reliable connection

### Better comms

Single-handers leave loved ones behind who will wait anxiously for news of their safe arrival, which could take up to three weeks to the Azores and six weeks to Rhode Island. While a VHF radio is fine for line-of-sight transmission, long-distance radio comms (MF and HF bands) become costly and power hungry, plus you need to pass a professional exam to use them.

A solution several Jesters have discovered is the comparatively low-cost satellite alternative. A small handheld device allows short text messages to be sent daily for a fixed, affordable tariff, and also doubles as a distress beacon. The screen and software on models like the Delorme (Garmin) InReach or Iridium Go (via a phone app) can even be used as a GPS navigator, and a long battery life makes it ideal for use in a liferaft.

### AIS

The Automatic Identification System (AIS) is a remarkable addition to safety at sea and works by using a dedicated VHF channel to constantly interrogate transponders in nearby traffic. The data is sent back to the yacht from any AIS-equipped vessel, which is compulsory for passenger boats, trawlers (16m+) and ships over 300 tonnes. Their information appears as a graphic on an LCD screen or chartplotter. At the same time, the yacht's own transponder is alerting local shipping with its identification (name and type) position, course and speed. The data package also includes the Marine Mobile Service Identification (MMSI) number allowing a targeted call to a specific ship rather than a general broadcast. You can literally dial up the ship bearing down on you and remind it you are there.

AIS systems are compact and affordable, simple to install, relatively easy on amps and intuitive to use, so it's no surprise most Jesters will fit one. An added advantage is that the AIS can double as a watch keeper and alert the skipper if an AIS-enabled vessel wanders into a pre-set guard zone.



Junk rig is remarkably easy to use from the safety of the cockpit. Here Roger Taylor demonstrates how *Mingming's* halyards are operated without ever going on deck. He later took this 21ft engineless Corribee deep into the Arctic. (See 'Voyages of a Simple Sailor' review on p40)

The latest generation of beacons, such as this model from ACR, will soon have the ability to let the survivors know that help is on the way. Battery life is also being extended



mariner had was a light saying the EPIRB was active.

"Second generation alerting technology now being introduced includes the Return Link Service," explained ACR's Mikele D'Arcangelo. "Currently it is only authorised in a few countries and approvals are still pending. Later this year, an RLS-equipped beacon will be able to provide the beacon owner with a confirmation light and/or message on the display that their emergency has been received."

A prerequisite for all voyaging mariners is to ensure the information held by the country of registration is kept up to date, especially if the device has recently changed hands.

### EPIRBs

Jesters hope for the best but are fully prepared for the worst, which is why their safety record is so good. In today's modern world, however, SOLAS (Safety Of Life At Sea) requires the nearest vessels to go to the assistance of one in distress.

There have been some big improvements in EPIRBs and PLBs in recent years, including longer battery life (ten years instead of five), more satellite coverage and the capability of two-way communication. This is an indicator that help is on the way. Previously, all the



Older generations of EPIRB have a five-year battery life and can only indicate that an alert has been sent. There is no receipt notification.





**Prime Suspect's** Bill Hockley has placed his liferaft container right by the (modified) hatch of his Cutlass 27. It's in the right place for an emergency and its size halves the volume of the cockpit, giving the drains a fighting chance if swamped



Everything secure. This stowage bag has been physically attached to the bunk via a strap. Note the screws in the floorboards. Non-essential access boards are secured, and hatches over seacocks are fitted with turnbuckles for quick inspection



Skippers can go flying too. Many wrap protective foam offcuts around objects that have the potential to brain them in a seaway



Placing boards over the cockpit not only minimises the volume of shipped water, it also gives extra stowage – and a nice place to sunbathe



**Golden Dragon's** bunking arrangements under its new pilothouse. Note the rolled-up green lee-cloth, the white waterproof bag to keep the sleeping bag dry and the good visibility from the standing position. The old hatch edge acts as a hand-hold

## Easier handling

Modifications for single-handing make boats easier to sail short-handed too, so will aid family cruising. Several Jesters have converted their Bermudan sloops to junk rig, and what is lost in windward performance is more than made up for in ease of sail handling. All lines lead back to the main hatch from where reefing can be done in seconds. Standard Bermudan rigs can also work on the feed-back system, minimising a skipper's time on deck where they are most vulnerable. One skipper even ditched his roller reefing and reverted to a set of hanked foresails instead. He also added a temporary inner forestay for emergencies. "I didn't want the roller drum to fail when it was needed most, such as shortening the sail in a squall," he said.

## Avoiding UFOs

UFO has two meanings – Unwelcome Floating Objects, and Unwelcome Flying Objects. The floating objects include a wide array of debris such as baulks of timber washed off ships, or tree trucks washed out to sea from rivers after a storm, although the semi-submerged shipping container remains the most feared object. Robert Redford's film *All is Lost* probably hasn't helped.

The only defence against striking submerged objects is to have a plan to stem the flooding. Nav warnings often advise of their whereabouts, but if a GRP hull smacks into a container, things can get pretty lively.

Some boats, such as the Sadler models, have built-in foam buoyancy and can float fully flooded. On other designs, Jesters reinforce the hull, add collision bulkheads and build in buoyancy tanks of their own, although this can take away valuable stowage space.

Flying objects, meanwhile, are mostly found on board and include everything from tins, cutlery and even floorboards in rough weather.

Many skippers ensure that floorboards and other loose objects are all properly secured to prevent them bouncing around the cabin and possibly causing an injury.

## Cockpit infills

When cruising with family or friends, the cockpit is the place to be, but on the Jester it is often seen as a wave trap. The average cockpit could receive half-a-ton of water in just one wave, dropping the stern and making the boat vulnerable to more as it recovers. As such, Jester skippers often fill in the cockpit to varying degrees, either by covering it over, or by making

temporary lockers that make use of the leg room. This greatly reduces the volume of water the cockpit can hold before the drains can clear it.

## Bolstering the bunks

Sleep deprivation is more of a problem in coastal waters, which is why the Baltimore Challenge is such a good shakedown. Skippers can test their limits when still relatively close to a bolt hole and many use a kitchen timer to give them a regular 20-minute wake-up for a horizon scan.

Once away from the shipping lanes, sleep is a bit easier, but skippers still set up their bunks to allow for a quick rush to the hatch. Most skippers use the bunks in the main cabin, with a lee cloth that can be dropped very quickly for a leap to the window or hatch.



A simple kitchen timer allows skippers to cat-nap for 10-20 minutes at a time, depending on traffic. This gives them a reasonable chance of spotting a fast-moving ship in between





**Roger Taylor filled his cockpit with his series storm drogue, which is pre-attached to strongpoints on each quarter. To deploy, he reaches out from the hatch, pulls open the white canvas covers and feeds the drogue overboard. Note the bridge deck and sealed-up companionway to reduce volume**

### Storm drogue

Jester Challenge events are timed for the most benign weather, but even so the world's climate can throw the occasional storm at the fleet. An accessory many Jesters pack but hope never to use is the storm drogue or 'sea anchor.' This is either a long line with lots of small cone-shaped pockets on it, or a larger parachute arrangement.

In extreme weather, deploying this anchor allows the yacht to lie to the waves in its most comfortable orientation, or to run with the storm without broaching. You can read about one being used in anger in Roger Taylor's excellent book *Mingming and the Art of Minimal Ocean Sailing*.

### General modifications

Although production boats were only meant for leisure cruising, most adapt well



**LED lighting, in bulbs or strips, helps conserve limited battery power**



**Chartplotters placed on DIY swing-out mounts are very popular**

for deep sea voyaging. Many of the common modifications are inexpensive and help to give the skipper greater peace of mind.

We've only touched on some of them here, but others would include beefing up the rigging, fitting solar panels, swapping filament bulbs for LEDs, and having a proper storm jib.

Obviously liferafts, lifejackets, EPIRBs, flares and other safety kit should all be in date and serviced where necessary, and skippers should ensure they have spares of all their personal essentials, such as any medication or pairs of spectacles.

After that, it's up to the individual to plan their own trip, and to share the experience with other Jesters.

So, if you have a seaworthy boat of under 30ft, why not join in and see just what you can both achieve?

## Further reading

The following books will help you gain some more insight into what makes a successful Jester Challenge:

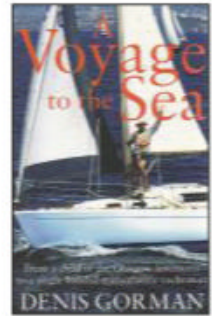
### Jester Challenge and beyond

Written by septuagenarian Basil Panakis, the author expands on his interview with PBO in February 2015 and gives an in-depth narrative of equipping and sailing his 25ft sloop *Jaba* in no less than three Jester Challenges. He went on to take her to Madeira, Cape Verde and the Caribbean. ■ £12.99 Published by Austin Macauley [www.pbo.co.uk/BasilPanakis](http://www.pbo.co.uk/BasilPanakis)



### A Voyage to the Sea

Falklands veteran Denis Gorman describes the events that led him to buy and equip two consecutive boats and set off with the Jester Challengers to the Azores in 2008, and later to the US in 2010. Contains plenty of narrative about the experiences of other skippers he met, too. ■ £9.99 Published by Matador.



### Voyages of a Simple Sailor

The first of five books by Roger D. Taylor, this series begins with his entry into the first ever 2006 Jester Atlantic Challenge, in which he changed the destination and sailed to Greenland instead. Contains plenty of detail about equipping and piloting an engineless, junk-rigged boat. ■ £8.99 Published by Fitzroy Press.



\*See opposite page for Jake Kavanagh's review of Roger D. Taylor's latest book *Mingming II and the impossible voyage*

### Videos

There are a number of videos posted online by Jester skippers, many shot in 'exciting' weather as they ventured out into the Atlantic. I have put some of my interviews with these adventurous souls on my own channel, Jester Groupie, and you can find the links on the PBO website.

## Some Jester facts

- **Smallest boat to take part:** Gus Davison's 18ft home-built cutter *Just Right*.
- **Smallest boat to first cross the Atlantic:** Pete Hill's 20ft Junk-rigged Kingfisher *Shanti*.
- **Fastest Atlantic crossing:** 31 days achieved by Frenchman Eric Andlauer in his 30ft Beneteau Figaro One, described as a 'racing dinghy with cabins.'
- **The oldest skipper:** Roger Fitzgerald, 82.
- **Furthest voyage to take part:** Russian Alexei Fedoruk, 1,952 nautical miles from St Petersburg in Russia to Plymouth in Devon in *Fason*, his converted Dragon 29

**Just Right has to date been the smallest competitor, but at 18ft proved too slow to finish the Atlantic crossing in the vacation time available. Skipper Gus Davison turned back, having already raised money for cancer support**





# Mingming II & the Impossible Voyage

Jake Kavanagh escapes to the wilderness with Roger D Taylor's latest book

If you enjoy long-range single-handed sailing on a budget, you'll probably be very familiar with the work of Roger D Taylor. His first book, *Voyages of a Simple Sailor*, described how he obtained his sealegs as mate on a sail training ship in New Zealand, becoming embayed and shipwrecked in the process.

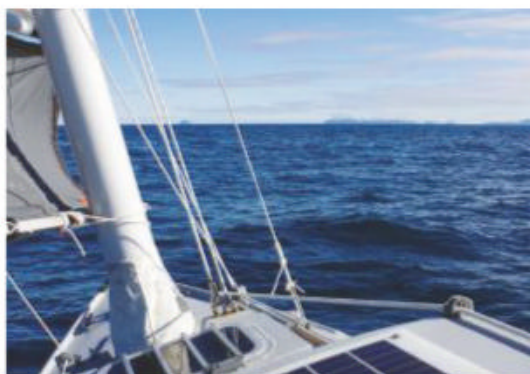
Unfazed, he went on to build his own tiny ferrocement sloop and, in 1974, successfully competed in the 1,280-mile trans-Tasman solo yacht race. In 2006, he took part in the first ever Jester Transatlantic Challenge in his engineless, modified 21ft Coribee *Mingming*. However, he deviated from the finish line at Rhode Island to penetrate deep into the Arctic. This wanderlust for the high latitudes has been Taylor's signature ever since and has given him a loyal following. In recent years he has swapped his Coribee 21 for a slightly larger Achilles 24, but equipped to the same proven formula: windvane self-steering, no engine, minimal electronics and an easily-handled junk rig.

*Mingming II and the Impossible Voyage* is the fifth in a series of books about his Arctic voyages, and Taylor admits will



**ABOVE** Taylor's *Mingming II* is a much modified Achilles 24

**LEFT** Arctic islands on the horizon



probably be his last. This time he departed from Scotland to explore an area of the Arctic that should be impossible to reach, the usually inaccessible islands of the Queen Victoria Sea. Taylor ruefully admits this was only achievable due to the retreating ice of recent years and wonders how much more of the north will soon open up, for better or worse.

A former English teacher, Taylor writes with an easy, flowing narrative that is sprinkled with humour and awash with keen observation. You may wonder how he can keep the reader captivated on a two-month, solo voyage where he only sees the desolate islands from a distance. (With no engine, he has to give them plenty of sea room). The answer is with the powers of description, and by sharing his love of this desolate wilderness and its hardy wildlife.

To entertain the reader further, Taylor throws in a few fictional characters that 'join' him en-route. These include the lonely Russian lady who calls him on the VHF and asks to be

rescued, a motley crew who threaten mutiny, and the captain of a destroyer keen to take out the intruding yacht as it sails close to Russian territory. Some of these exchanges had us laughing out loud.

The book is divided into three parts. The prologue offers a short but deep reflection of why we go to sea, especially our need to seek out solitude and reconnect with nature. The main narrative quickly changes pace and sees Taylor making his plans, equipping *Mingming II* accordingly, and setting sail to the north. During his 56 days at sea, he sailed a total of 3,480 miles, and never once donned his wet weather gear. The last part of the book is packed with factual data – a description of the boat, its rig, its supplies, some sobering ice maps, a statistical breakdown and other valuable information for solo sailors.

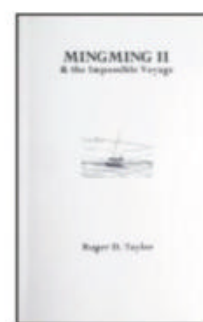
Arguably one of his finest works to date, this is an inspirational read, illustrated with a few freestyle maps, sketches and monochrome photographs, and bound in a simple white cover.

If you want to sail into isolation and explore one of our last great

wildernesses, this simply told tale will give you everything you need.

You can find more on Taylor's website [www.thesimplesailor.com](http://www.thesimplesailor.com)

■ £12.99, The FitzRoy Press



**Mingming II** has an easily-handled junk rig