

**SY Anahita. Cruise report no. 1.**

**5.6. - 28.6.09. Heiligenhafen – Simmrishamn, Sweden – Visby, Gotland – Riga, Latvia.**

**596 nautical miles.**

On 2.6. we dropped Anahita in the water and immediately undertook sea trials of the new engine installation, which not only proved trouble-free but also convinced us of the considerably quieter and more powerful new engine as well as the major improvement in manoeuvrability achieved by the newly fitted vario-propeller.

After 3 days fitting out and stowing of never-ending amounts of food, drink, clothing, boat kit and accessories, Simon arrived on 5.6. morning and taking advantage of a fair NW Bft. 4-5 wind, we immediately set sail for Gedser, Denmark. For the following 4 days the wind persisted from around NE at upto Bft. 6, the direction we needed to sail, obliging us to make slow progress at best and forcing us to spend 2 days in port. At last on 10.6., the wind shifted to the S and we had a cracking 73mile (ca. 135 km.) sail in just under 14 hours to the south Swedish small harbour of Skillinge. Forecast gale force winds convinced us to make a short dash to the nearby better protected harbour of Simmrishamn next morning, where we moored up on 11.6. mid-day to sit it out snugly and safely moored. Simon was yet again bugged by ill luck caused by the bad weather, but at least got in some good sailing between the gales and so left ship as planned, albeit some 100 nautical miles short of Kalmar, where the crew change was planned. As always, I much enjoyed Simon's company, his yarns of his varied experiences in the Royal Navy and his never-ending tolerance and good humour.

So far the temperatures were more akin to March than May, especially at sea, where even if the sun shone, which was none too often, the wind was chilled by the water of only 9-11 degrees C and the night temperatures dropped to single figures, chasing me out of the colder fore-ship berth, where I normally sleep, to sleep with Simon in the saloon, which is better insulated, but was occasionally less quiet!

On 14.6. Dieter, first time on Anahita, joined ship and we sailed on 15.6. for Kristianopel and next day past Kalmar to Sandvig on the island of Öland, making fast time in good winds. Dieter quickly found his sea-legs and his way about Anahita and so proved a valuable and most pleasant sailing partner. We both hardly knew each other before, having met only twice for about one hour. We sailed for Visby, Gotland, the next day, where we finally caught up with "X-Way", a fast, modern 43 ft. Danish X-boat, skipper Hendrik with crew (another) Dieter and HE (I have never found out what his full name is) all of whom are sailing friends from the Düsseldorf Yacht Club. (My) Dieter had a short half-day to see the sights of this fine old Hanseatic city, before we sailed on in pouring rain to Farosund at the N tip of Gotland, our staging point for the next leg, the longer crossing of the central Baltic to the coast of Latvia.

Next morning we set sail at 05.00 hours and soon encountering high seas east Gotland, shook out the reefs in the mainsail and genoa to gain speed, in order to minimize the risk of waves breaking over our stern and pooping the cockpit, and on a beam reach in a S wind of Bft 5-6 were sailing consistently at 6.5 to 7.5 knots, top speed for Anahita, partially surfing down the waves as they rode comfortably under Anahita's hull, to make an exhilaratingly fast, but strenuous sail of 87 nautical miles (160 km.) to the busy commercial Latvian port of Ventspils in 14 hours, arriving there

## 2.

only 2.1/2 hours after X-Way, somewhat to their surprise. Ventspils Port Traffic Control gave us a warm welcome on the VHF radio telephone, when I radioed them for clearance to enter port, a welcome change from the rather anonymous and cool professionalism of most port control officers.

We spent a day in Ventspils to relax and regain our strength after 5 long days of hard sailing and to see our first town in Latvia, an interesting mix of rather run-down late 19<sup>th</sup> century Jugendstil houses, interspersed with older more modest dwellings and the occasional modern post-soviet building. There remained little evidence of the 45 years of soviet occupation other than some derelict industrial buildings around the harbour, as the Soviets largely drained the country, but put very little into it. A lively Saturday market clearly evidenced the contrast between the poor elder population and the bright young things, clad in the latest fashions and fads of all young people anywhere in Europe. We enjoyed a good and inexpensive dinner in a local restaurant together with X-Way but only caught up on some lost sleep, rising early next morning to sail at 06.00 hours for the Estonian island of Ruhnu, in the Gulf of Riga, 67 nautical miles to the NE, which we visited last year and much enjoyed. It was mid-summer night and as it transpired, an Estonian festival at least as important as Christmas. The only café on the island which lies by the harbour, set up a powerful disco sound system, the local youth assembled, all twelve of them enhanced by a handful of visitors, and the dance began to an infernal volume which sent us rushing for cover under deck on board, whence we only resurfaced the following morning to sail the final leg to Riga, first high-point of the trip. This proved to be a fitting finale to Dieter's time on board as we set the blister (for those ashore, this is a very large area light balloon shaped sail for off-wind sailing) and enjoyed a long fast and exciting sail in a steady rising NE wind, arriving a day ahead of our plan, enabling Dieter to spend a day seeing the sights of this truly magnificent city, before flying home and before Susanne's arrival. Dieter and I both much enjoyed each other's company and vowed to sail again together next year.

All X-Way's wives and Susanne arrived in Riga together and so we spent the next 5 days partially together. What ever we had read about Riga before setting off on this trip, gave us no inkling of the true magnificence of this fine historical city which has at the same time fully found its way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Established by the Hanse in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, of whose presence there are still many fine old red-brick buildings, churches and former fortifications, Riga reached the peak of it's wealth, gained from trading and shipping, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, evidenced by a truly amazing number of finely restored Jugendstil/Art Deco houses both in and outside the old city. Riga abounds in restaurants, cafes and bars, many with outside terraces, where you can relax in the mild long-light evenings and be entertained by almost every style of live music, in particular jazz, rock and some country and western, played by local musicians of a very high standard who really turned on the customers, who even danced on the streets.

On our last evening we attended a fine concert in the cathedral topped off with an excellent dinner in restaurant in the old city, housed in a 300 year old former trader's residence. Tomorrow we sail north to several small Latvian harbours on the Gulf of Riga to reach the next cultural highlight, the Estonian town of Pärnu, of which more in our next report.

## 3.

3.

John Rowen  
SY Anahita

Riga, Latvia  
57 degrees 04.16 minutes north, 024 degrees 00.46 minutes east.

28.6.09.