

Trans-Atlantic Record falls

BY BARRY PICKTHALL

Robert Miller and this 140ft twin-masted racer *Mari-Cha IV* were odds-on favourites to take line honours in the 2,925-mile trans-Atlantic chase from Ambrose Light to The Needles, England. The *Mari-Cha* crew already held the outright record, set two years ago when they could pick their weather window – a time of six days, 17 hours, 52 minutes.



But, could they also break the century-old race record set by the 185ft three-masted schooner *Atlantic* skippered by America's Cup winner Charlie Barr. *Atlantic's* 12 days, four hours, one minute, 19 secs passage had stood since 1905, but in the end, *Mari-Cha* and three others passed Lizard Point, the traditional finishing point for record attempts, inside Barr's time.

The 22-strong fleet remained in port for the first 24 hours of this race, threatened by 50-knot winds, and when the New York YC did finally lower the flag, there was barely enough of the stuff to fill a spinnaker. Not everyone was in agreement with the race committee, but Jef d'Etiveaud, *Mari-Cha's* French navigator, gave them his support: "It is one thing to handle 50 knots of wind at sea, but sending 22 yachts towards this type of weather when a simple postponement can avoid it would in my mind have been a mistake."

Twenty-two hours after the start on Sunday 22 May, when what wind there was had clocked the compass at least twice, Roy Heiner, *Mari-Cha's* Dutch watch leader reported that they had barely covered 200 miles and had the new 100ft New Zealand yacht *Maximus* owned by Charles Brown and Bill

Buckley on their hip. The race was on.

New Zealand designer Greg Elliott was a helmsman on *Maximus* for the race and, as a designer of *Mari-Cha* as well, could virtually count on the first two places. He was clearly delighted with *Maximus's* performance in her first ocean race.

The winds finally came back the following Friday as damage to rigs and crews began to mount. *Mari-Cha* launched off a gigantic wave, to send a shock wave up the rig big enough to shatter the yacht's mainsail headboard car. Thirty-six hours into the storm, owner Robert Miller reported: "We have been sailing at around eighty percent with just the number four jib, a trisail and triple reefed mizzen, but now we have also damaged the mizzen luff track. Our plan is to continue racing with the sails that we have and as soon as the weather allows, we will start affecting repairs."

The *Maximus* crew pounced, but after taking over the lead, they also ran into trouble. The first casualty was co-owner Bill Buckley who took a fall and dislocated his shoulder. While the crew turned to run off-wind to ease the yacht's motion, veteran navigator Mike Quilter reported: "We got all the medical books out and there was plenty of discussion. We then lay Bill face down on a bunk and gradually dropped his shoulder over the side towards the ground and it slipped back in."

A day later, they, too, were fighting a rogue mainsail after it had torn up the leach from the first reef and ripped the reefing pad eyes from the mast. By Saturday, *Mari-Cha* was back in the lead – albeit by only 13 miles.

Another to be injured was Mal Parker aboard Peter Harrison's *Sojana*. The America's Cup crewman was helping to reef a headsail when his left arm was

Maximus won the Grand Prix division. Photo: Carlo Borlenghi. *Stad Amsterdam*, top, under full sail. Photo: Daniel Forster.



pulled into the winch, breaking it in two places. Harrison and his crew headed for the nearest land, the island of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, south of Newfoundland, from where Parker was flown to Montreal for an emergency operation.

Further down the fleet, the crew on Carlo Falcone's 67-year-old, Fifte-designed yawl *Mariella* were busy reefing and shaking in tune with the lightning-lit, 35-40 knot squalls, eventually losing the top of their mast. Sophie Luther reported from the boat: "With a fantastic gut-wrenching splitting sound, the staysail plummeted to deck for the second time today. This time it was due to the top of the mizzen mast snapping off above the spreaders. The broken top just hung there limply, swinging around while the three of us on deck surveyed the damage and woke the others. Luckily, all our communications seemed to be unaffected and we didn't have to cut anything away. We all realised there was nothing we could do until morning except strap it all down and have a nice mug of hot chocolate."

Jose Aguiaga and his crew on the 77ft *Ocean Phoenix* also suffered extensive rig damage and was one of three yachts to retire at this half-way stage.

Back in the 1905 race, *Atlantic* faced a similar storm and owner Wilson Marshall pleaded with skipper Charlie Barr to stop the boat. "You're paying me to race and race we will," the Scotsman retorted, before locking the owner and his guests in a cabin to pray for salvation. The following day, Barr's decision was

Tiara arriving in Cowes, one of four boats to beat *Atlantic's* trans-Atlantic race record, set in 1905.

vindicated by a record 24-hour run of 341 miles.

Similar feelings of triumph over adversity would have been shared right across this fleet when the winds finally turned favourable and the yachts picked up their skirts once more.

Chris Gongriep's 152ft classic schooner *Windrose of Amsterdam*, which suffered extensive sail damage, was one to actually match *Atlantic's* record. After sailing all day at 14-15 knots under a full main, foresail, staysail and code zero spinnaker, Captain Nick Haley reported, "*Atlantic* was a bigger boat, but we are happy because we have beaten our previous record by 20 miles." *Windrose* was leading her class ahead of the two Ed Dubois-designed 170-footers *Tiara* and *Drumbeat*.

Bugs Baer and William Hubbard, who chartered the 80ft Sparkman & Stephens maxi *Tempest* for the race, had also built up a lead in their class and were surfing across the Atlantic "Racing in 30knots is strenuous, but we haven't seen another boat for seven days," Baer said.

By now, *Mari-Cha* was 390 miles from the Lizard, broad reaching at 20 knots across a 20 knot southwesterly with *Maximus* clinging on 30 miles astern. When *Mari-Cha* was 160 miles from the record line at the Lizard, the gap had extended to 40 miles. Jef d'Etiveaud reported, "We are pushing the boat to

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Bavaria News Bulletin



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From now until April 2006, all new Bavaria purchasers will automatically enter a competition to win a sailing cruise in Croatia on a Bavaria yacht. The prize includes return airfares to Croatia and 10 days on a charter

yacht. The yacht charter will be in conjunction with The Bavaria Yacht Rally that takes place in June 2006.

Auckland to Suva Race

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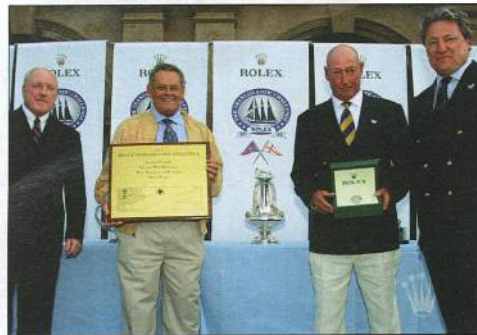
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From left: *Mari Cha's* Mike Sanderson, Robert Miller and Jef d'Etiveaud; *Maximus's* Bill Buckley and Charles St Clair Brown, Grand Prix division winners; *Drumbeat* at the finish. All photos: Carlo Borlenghi/Rolex.

her maximum, changing sails often to stay in the groove. This is no easy task on *Mari-Cha*: with its schooner rig we have a combination menu longer than a Chinese takeaway."

Mari-Cha passed the Lizard the following morning to set a race record time of nine days, 15 hours, 55 minutes, 23 seconds, an average of 12.61 knots and two days off *Atlantic's* time. Nine hours later, Robert Miller and his crew passed

the Needles finish to take line honours in the race. They could not save their time on *Maximus* however, which, despite giving 40ft away in length, finished just five hours later to give her Kiwi crew a share of the silverware.

Miller said: "This was my seventh trans-Atlantic and by far the toughest one. At times I felt the ghost of Charlie Barr looking down on us and enjoying every bit of hardship we were encountering. The competition has also been tough – *Maximus* and ourselves have spent the whole race running close together."

Another to feel that they had put the ghost of Barr behind them was Jerry Dijkstra, the Dutch designer and naviga-

tor on *Windrose of Amsterdam* after she was third among four yachts to break *Atlantic's* record. "That was important," he said emphatically after they had overcome a chain of calamities during the storm including dropping overboard and ultimately destroying their heavy furling genoa. That left *Windrose* unable to sail upwind and dictated their tactics for several days until conditions moderated enough to fly a blade jib as a replacement.

This diversion allowed the two Dubois-designed 170-footers, *Drumbeat* and *Tiara* to slip in ahead and take first and second on handicap in their cruising class. At the Lizard, remarkably, just one second divided the two yachts, though

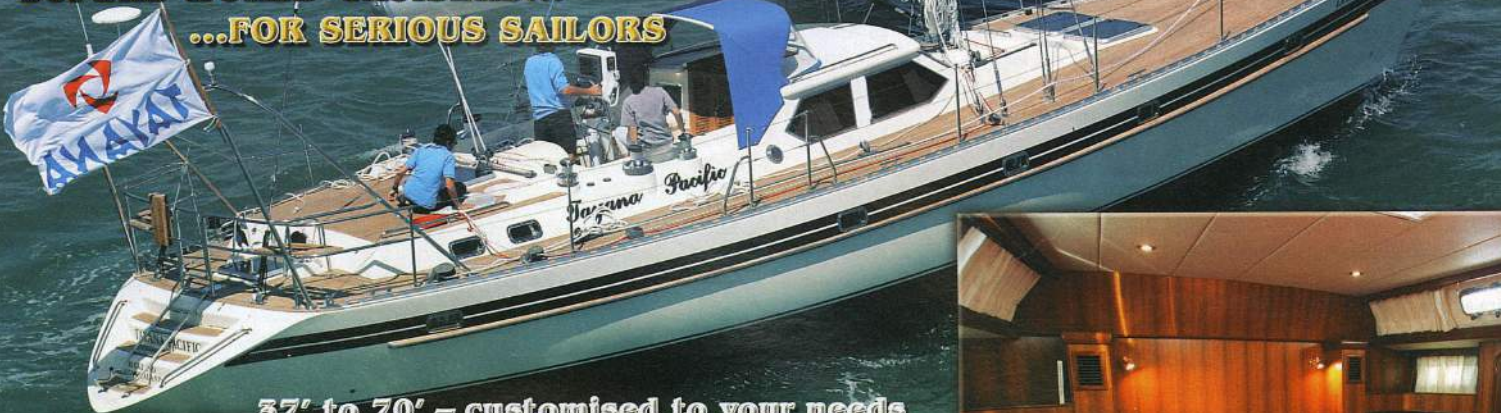
this was extended to almost five hours by the Needles finish after *Tiara's* crew suffered problems with their spinnaker.

Robert Miller and his crew are now set on breaking the trans-Mediterranean record this year before attempting to beat the maxi multihulls at their own game by making a tilt at the Jules Verne non-stop circumnavigation record.

Mari-Cha's best day's run in this race had been 508 miles. Jef d'Etiveaud reckons that a 600-mile, 24-hour run is possible, and on a round the world voyage *Mari-Cha's* long length and light weight would set her at a considerable advantage. ■■■

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