

Tall Ships

3 day match racing around Brixham

We stepped onto our vessel Stavros S Niarchos early on the Friday morning, and were greeted by our watch leader. There were three watches in total and I was a member of red watch. The Friday was a very full day; even though we didn't leave the dockside there was still so much to be done - we had to fit three days worth of training into one day. We started by going through all of the different calls that would be shouted at us over the duration of the four different races, and learnt how to coil ropes the correct way and to tie some basic knots. In the afternoon we went "up and over", a phrase used by the crew to explain the process of going up the rigging and out on to the yard arms. We initially just went up one side to the first crows nest, climbed over it, and then went back down the other side. We then went back up and out onto the yard arms themselves. It was very frightening stepping onto the yard arms even though we were in port, as I had never done anything like it before and was one of the most nerve-racking things I had ever done, but the buzz of adrenalin gained from it was tremendous. We were assured that it got easier the more times you went up, and indeed it did! On the third day I had to go up the rigging and secure the sail in a gale force six wind, it was an incredible moment for me dangling off the yard arm looking at the crashing waves below. It was even stranger when I got back home a few days later when my Grandma showed me a clip recorded from the local television news programme which had caught the actual moment when I was out on the yard arm!

We were onboard for a total of three days and three nights. I was in a cabin with six other boys aged 16 to 25 in my watch. We were given three exceptional meals every day which were all cooked onboard by the resident chef. In my opinion the food was brilliant - it ranged from the traditional roast to spaghetti bolognese.

The living quarters were very tight and I soon got to know everyone one in my watch and most of the people in the two other watches as well. By the end of the three days we were all quite close friends and even though some of them were not the kind of people I would usually choose to mix with, we all mucked in and got along. On the last day some of us swapped e-mail addresses in order to keep in touch.

The three days spent onboard the Stavros were some of the most enjoyable and fulfilling days of my life. Although I have done quite a bit of sailing, this was my first experience of sailing on a square rigger with a large crew and I had to adapt my knowledge to fit the new situation and learn new techniques. I felt that I learnt so much: from the communication skills I had to use talking to the other people on my watch, to the teamwork skills necessary to race the boat and in the end come up as the winners of the four race series.

I greatly enjoyed my time spent on the tall ship, but by the end of the three days was in great need of a good old sleep! Would I repeat the experience given the opportunity? You bet!!

Tom Seaton