

To the Finish—
On Board 'Spirit of Bermuda' with Laurie Fullerton



The final 48-hours on board the 118-foot 'Spirit of Bermuda' saw the vessel leaving the Gulf Stream and settling down into a more comfortable sea-state for the final stretch of the voyage to Bermuda. With the three-watch system giving the crew time to sleep between watches, the last 200 miles to Bermuda offered simply beautiful sailing for all on board.

Clipping along at 9 to 10 knots with a reefed main and jib, gave every crew member the chance to experience pure sailing that one can only glean from songs or stories. This day and night offered everything from Bermuda long tail sightings, flying fish, moons setting, stars appearing, sea spray and blue water.

Coming together as employees of Butterfield & Vallis through the encouragement and support of CEO and president Jim Butterfield and COO Spencer Butterfield, the crew who sailed on this vessel were immersed in a sail training experience that taught them a lot in a remarkably short time. The group also included His Excellency the Governor George Fergusson, famed navigator Larry Rosenfeld of Marblehead, Mass. and a few others including two members of the 'Bermuda Oyster' team who had joined the crew at the last minute.

"I've seen and heard about sail training and the concept of the schooner program is great, but it is very different to see it in action," said the Governor. "Seeing it in action is more of an intense experience. It has given many of us the chance to gain confidence in our abilities and bond with people we had not known at all before. Additionally, the crew has a good touch between being serious, encouraging and fun."

With the capable and kindly guidance of Captain Stuart Birnie, the group did work well together in an inclusive way. The captain said he was most impressed by how this group of employees from Butterfield & Vallis came together – many having no prior sailing experience and he said that one of the key things that it takes is adaptability.

"There are very few programs that place people in such close proximity where the situation they are in is a pressure cooker but that pressure cooker can produce incredible results," said Spirit of Bermuda captain Stuart Birnie. "Learning that you

can adapt to uncomfortable or difficult situations and engage and handle it, is a real life-lesson. Being out on the boat, you experience far greater extremes. ”

With the watch rotation continuing over the course of the last day and night of racing, the ideal weather and wind conditions gave the participants a chance to really get their heads out of the boat and soak in some of the best an offshore experience has to offer. By the time the final watch came on deck for the 4 a.m. to 8 a.m., they were able to see the end of the race in sight and know they had come a long way – together.

“In the last 48 hours it has been delightful to see how everyone pulled through and worked together and enjoyed themselves,” said Jim Butterfield.

As the morning broke and the ‘Spirit of Bermuda’ drew closer to the island, the navigator Larry Rosenfeld had the vessel heading toward the finish line. Because of the position of the line, Spirit had to tack twice and build up her speed again, losing third place to another vessel that had passed ‘Spirit’ storming for the finish line. While wrapping up the race in fourth place, the ‘Spirit’ was the only vessel of its kind in its division, but was able to finish well and finished faster than she had on any other prior race from the U.S.A. to Bermuda.

As ‘Spirit’ entered Hamilton harbour on Tuesday morning and docked at the Dinghy Club, cheers were heard all around for the 24 people on board the Spirit who not only came together as a team, but also came to know what blue water sailing is all about. Many plan to start sailing more often, and others plan to simply savor an experience that cannot be easily duplicated. Others plan to take on more challenges.

“I was one of the last people at work to sign up for this,” said Dennis Bean of the accounts department who had never sailed before. He was able to steer the boat at the start of the Marion Bermuda race. “I was thinking of it more as an experience. It went way beyond my expectations. It became way more than what I thought it would be.