



Lagos - Portugal

rob@rusailing.com jules@rusailing.com

+351 918 828 085 +44 7747 100030

The time had come for my Yachtmaster preparation and exam....

Having spent many hours sailing, particularly on our yacht - Annecy, completed all the theory and practical courses and also crewed on Yachtmaster exams for some of our students I felt in a position and ready to be tested at Yachtmaster level myself. I had taken my Coastal Skipper courses with students Tom and his girlfriend Sonya in August 07 so when Tom enquired about Yachtmaster prep and his exam for August I knew I had found the ideal opportunity to have a sparring partner!

Tom had made what we considered to be a very sensible decision and opted to spend a full 3 weeks on the boat to ensure that he was as ready as he could be for the day. The first week was specifically designed for settling in; we enjoyed some great sailing whilst Rob taught another student his Day Skipper. We even time for a swim here and there! The experience was ideal as not only did we get a refresher on some of the basics as they were being taught to the other student but we also realised just how experienced we actually were. It was a great way to boost ones confidence for what was coming. For weeks 2 and 3 the pace ramped up and just the two of us received 1:2 tuition. We spent the days sailing and practicing the skills and exercises we could expect to be asked to do on the exam day. In the evenings we had our theory tested by working through passage plans and looking at the IRPCS and flip cards for sounds, lights and day shapes. The time was going fast and I was so glad that I had also taken the 3 weeks. In the final days of prep, MOB's were going in in difficult surroundings and when concentrating on that Rob would perhaps ask what sound signal a certain boat would make in the fog!! Throughout the whole time Rob was patient beyond belief and I know that I tested him as much as he was testing us!!

The day had finally arrived and although very nervous, we knew that we were well prepared and as ready as we ever would be. We met by the local examiner, Martin Northey, who began to settle our nerves. He began by looking through our log books to gauge our sailing experience and checking our qualifications to date. After a brief talk about the day and his expectations we went back to the boat to work through a theory question that he set. That all done and checked off, Martin told us that I was to be skipper for the morning and then Tom for the 2nd half of the day. It was going to be an intense day. After a safety brief my first task was to take Annecy out of her berth and down the river - all very, very familiar to me by now. Faced with a Southerly wind as soon as we had gone through the bridge the fenders were in and our main sail was up in the confines of the well protected river. The Southerly wind had caused quite a sea to develop. When I saw waves breaking over the breakwaters as we approached, I was happy in my decision and I started to realise that I could do this!

Faced with fairly light winds and 2m waves produced by the preceding weather, sail trimming was so important just to get the boat moving and keep her sailing. I was asked to skipper us over to the local and active port of Portimao and when there pick a suitable place to anchor under sail. On passage Martin kept a watchful eye on proceedings and threw a variety of questions at me. His manner of examining is excellent, never causing undue silences or inducing nervousness as some of the examiners I've heard of. Just West of Portimao near to the

breakwaters and on a broad reach in went the 'man over board' fender. Remembering to come up wind before I hove-to, round we went, the fender was on the starboard bow but in the light winds progress was slow. I remembered the technique that Rob had shown us just the day before and asked for the headsail to be eased through a little before hauling it back into being hove-to again. It worked perfectly to get the boat moving forward the small amount needed. The headsail was furled away and the main de-powered, the fender was just there and Tom was able to retrieve it – what a relief. On with the next tasks!

We sailed into the breakwaters and I spotted what I thought would be an ideal anchorage spot tucked away from the swell. Just a matter of some close quarters tacking between all the other yachts anchored there! All went to plan, the anchor was down and set and the easily forgotten anchor ball up. Time for lunch, not that I really felt like eating!

After a fine lunch Martin asked us both to go down below where he produced his flip cards to test us with. We had done them so many times in the weeks before that they were very familiar which was a great confidence boost. That out of the way it was over to Tom. I was still on examination and being watched but it did feel that some of the pressure had been lifted.

Tom had the task of sailing us off the anchor and then tacking back through the boats to the breakwaters and back towards Lagos and home. The anchor was up and we were heading out when in went the man over board again! Right amongst the anchored boats. Quite a test of skills given the tidal effects of the river and light winds but almost funny as Rob had done exactly the same thing a day or two earlier! Tom made an excellent job of sailing back and the fender was soon on board as if it were nothing of a task. We tacked our way out amongst the fishing boats and continued our journey in the bay. Tom asking us to set and trim the sails as required. We all enjoyed the sail back with some more questions and exercises to tackle as we went.

Just one more task – get Annecy back in her berth. I prepared the lasso and Tom did a fine job of reversing her in. All safely tied up we were both delighted to be told that we had passed. Relief was almost tangible and my main thought was to find Rob to pass on the news! All the hard work we'd all put in had been worth while.

Tom summed up his time with us – 'It was an intense few weeks of learning. Rob was right to push us hard, so for the exam itself it really did feel like just going out for a nice day of sailing! There was a good mix of theory, practical training and some fun built into 3 very full weeks. The weather was perfect during the Prep weeks, with plenty of wind and waves and lighter weather too. But on exam day, because there was so little wind, we had to focus on sail trim to show off our skills. The days that we had spent learning tricks to get the boat moving faster paid off. The examiner was very fair - he gave us opportunities to demonstrate everything we learnt and he also gave us some chances to mess up so it could have all gone wrong but for our training...!

Rob's technique of always wanting to push us to be as perfect as possible meant that we had extended our skills as far as we could ready for the Big Day, rather than ever settling for just good enough. In the end, all the effort paid off.'

The fact that Tom and I gained our qualification meant that rusailing has continued a 100% pass rate at both Coastal and Yachtmaster exam level. Although we can obviously never guarantee success and have to be realistic – so far, so good. Similarly excellent news is that after conducting many exams for us, Martin Northey is now recommending rusailing, out of all the RYA schools on the Algarve, to his clients who require Yachtmaster preparation. Result!

Jules – September 07