

Rather than reef the mainsail as the wind freshened, I dropped it altogether, and the jib too, and set the square sail as I'd practised in Santa Cruz. Then we were off on a helter-skelter ride before the NE trade winds.

Under the square rig for the first time, *The Aegre* surged forward smoothly down each wave with a roar from the bow. A little duck and a curtsey by the stern whilst another wave top broke out to leeward with a gentle roar. Then a slight easing when you could hear the hiss of the foam, so close you could put your hand out to touch it. Then you could feel the boat building into another surge forward, then another surge, then another, all guided, hour after hour, day after day after day by the wind vane's invisible hand on the tiller.

Blowing from astern, we had more than 20 knots of trade wind and an endless succession of big rolling swells with their tops gently breaking. Ahead, flying fish took off in huge swarms, trying to escape the silvery blue and green dorado now streaking beside us as we bowled along night and day. We'd bought a small illustrated book in London on ocean fish of the world and would thumb its pages identifying fish like the dorado that we'd never seen or heard of before.

With the mast braced aft by the mainsheet hauled to the top of the mast and the sheets all cleated firm, the line to Bob Macinnes's old log out astern was taut, the log spinning the miles away, getting the run of its life as we headed for Barbados, 2,700 miles away. This was sailing. This was living. *The Aegre* was in her element. The self-steering windvane would blow near flat one way, then the other, hauling the tiller back and forth, somehow keeping the boat on a near steady course.

The harder it blew, the faster we went. We tore along effortlessly. Our best day's run (24hrs) was 103 miles, but most days were almost as good. It was a good speed for our little overloaded boat, so deep in the water and with less than a 6m (20 ft) waterline length. All we had to do was keep everything working and hang on.

Big seas would come sliding up from astern or on the quarter, towering above us. Sometimes as they approached, we would see a line of skipjack tuna or dorado swimming in the front of the wave as if surfing, then *The Aegre* would be off, accelerating down the face of the wave, and so it would go on and on, for hours, for days.