

The incredible saga of Naga...

The 11.5 m trimaran whose story we're going to recount is a living legend! A single-handed racing boat from the 1980s, it is now being used by its builder – owner and his partner as a cruising – expedition support around the world, a permanent residence and the headquarters of the couple's professional activities. Who said that Newick's multihulls were spartan and fragile?

Text: Philippe ECHELLE - Chrissi GERINI and Jack PETITH



NATIVE, my love

The study for NATIVE, (no. 37 in the architect's list of plans) was signed on 11th September 1977; it prefigured a 42-foot development (CREATIVE) which saw the light of day in August 1980. This design by Dick Newick, the wizard of Maine, is breathtakingly elegant; the brilliant intuition of the sculptor of a new shape of multihull (a 'wing') had here come to maturity and allowed him to free up sufficient interior volume. Combined with the dynamic efficiency of the hulls, it gave credibility to the cruiser – racer definition of

these models. In 1977, the design of future winner of the 1980 Ostar (Moxie) was 15 years ahead of its time; 35 years later, NATIVE is still avant-garde! The patronymic suggests the idea of a 'natural' gestation: not at all! Only the reserve, Newick's 'understatement', transforms the perseverance and demands of a constant creative effort into sham artistic spontaneity. NAGA is the chimera in a serpent's body from Hindu mythology; Vishnou rests on him between the end of one world and the appearance of another. This trimaran was built in 1979 by Jack and the team at Bill Cooper's

■ Jack Petith, from Ste Croix to south-east Asia, from the biggest ocean races to blue water cruising, always with the same passion for his boat...



■ Aboard her monohull, Chrissi fell firstly for the superb trimaran which was overtaking her, before then falling for its skipper...



At the start of the 1984 English Transat; NAGA is a racing trimaran sailed skilfully by its skipper/owner/builder... (photo Christian Février)



Today, the pretty trimaran is cruising around the world...quickly! Here, being scrubbed off in the Vanuatus.

Designed by Newick, NAGA was built by Jack on a beach in Massachusetts...

boat yard in Woods Hole (Massachusetts), then assembled on the beach. The story had begun...

Laurels in the Rhum

As soon as it was launched, NAGA shone in the events in this difficult oceanic region. It smashed the Newport – Bermuda record, previously held by ROGUE WAVE (also a Newick, but 60 feet long and belonging to Phil Weld !), by 22 hours, and took seven first places in the eight events it entered (including two trade wind races)! Jack Petith lived at Saint Croix (American Virgin Islands, which Dick Newick left for Martha's Vineyard) and took part in the development of nautical activities and charter. He even became one of

the associates of the local Gold Coast Yacht boat yard. He knew the story of Mike Birch's victory in the 1978 Route du Rhum, and this event probably played a role in the decision to start building NATIVE. It was Michel Etevenon, the founder of the race, who helped Jack to be at the start of the Rhum, by proposing his candidature to M. Boisseaux (owner of Patriarche wines and the Kriter brand), for whom he was also the advertising adviser. In 1982, the mixing of amateurs and professionals was still in operation. The recent la Rochelle – New Orleans had established the Frenchmen, Fontaine-Follenfant and the diabolical Joubert-designed boat inspired by a Californian speed catamaran: CHARENTE MARITIME. The conditions in the 1982 Rhum were difficult, to windward

as far as the Azores; despite everything, Marc Pajot, aboard ELF AQUITAINE I, only had a 120-mile lead over the little NATIVE after a week at sea! Many boats abandoned, and a lot of the big names threw in the towel: Chay Blyth (BRITTANY FERRY), Eric Tabarly (PAUL RICARD), Rob James (COLT CARS), Daniel Gilard (BRITTANY FERRY BAI). Olivier Moussy picked up Ian Johnson who had capsized his Crowther trimaran (RENNIE ex-TWIGGY) for the second time in the season! Eric Loizeau's GAULOISES IV led for a moment, and finally three leaders crossed the

line in 18 days (M. Pajot, B. Peyron and M. Birch). Jack had a fantastic race and finished sixth, ahead of Michel Malinowski's huge, 22-metre ULDB (KRITER VIII)!

Destination Saint Croix

Jack really wanted to race in the 1984 Transat; he knew that this edition would be the last in which this family of multihulls could shine. Despite Phil Weld's splendid victory in 1980, no help was forthcoming from the USA! He was ready, NAGA was itching to go – alas, there was no budget at all. Under the influence of the Norwegian

This little trimaran at anchor is a real ocean racing legend...





■ *NAGA giving a demonstration off the Saints shortly after the finish of the 1982 Route du Rhum, in which it finished in an incredible sixth place. (photo Ralph Davis)*

Vice Consul, a friend, all the NAGA fans came together under the banner DESTINATION SAINT CROIX. Despite the excitement created by this spontaneous cooperative sponsorship, Jack and Doug Van Zandt set off in haste on the afternoon of 9th May; only 18 days remained to reach Plymouth without a penalty! DESTINATION

SAINT CROIX left the port at 18 kn; it would have to keep up an average of 222 miles per day to reach the line. Its speed during this delivery trip was staggering for a small multihull; on certain days it covered 350 miles! 'The man whose boat flew' had the rare talent of knowing how to push a trimaran of less than 40 feet to the limit, whilst



■ *NAGA in the Vanuatus (photo taken aboard another Native, NINTH CHARM, by Fran Slingerland!)*

A few weeks later, Jack returned to Saint Croix after having completed an Atlantic circuit, racing against the clock!

remaining the right way up! The discovery of cracks in the hull the day before the departure was just an epiphenomenon which was promptly sorted by Van Zandt under the instructions of Walter Greene. The 1984 Ostar was full of incidents: Philippe Jeantot capsized in CREDIT AGRICOLE (picked up by Yvon Fauconnier), Poupon was leading, yet UMUPRO JARDIN was declared the winner after the committee deducted the time taken for rescuing Jeantot. Yves le Cornec came close to success with his CreativeIDENEK, but broke his daggerboard case 40 miles from the Ile Sable. Pajot, Tabarly, Philips, Gilard, Moussy, Peyron, Boucher, Luhrs, Levy, Martin and Gliksman came between the



■ *Welcome aboard the fastest sail loft on the planet!*

leading duo and DESTINATION SAINT CROIX, which finished 14th after having been in the leading group before heading south to avoid the threat of icebergs: "when I saw them I sailed due south ; my NATIVE is also my home!" A few weeks later Jack returned to Saint Croix after having completed a 10,000-mile Atlantic circuit, racing against the clock!

The night the boats flew.

Sunday, 18 September 1989, 9 PM: Jack and NAGA were caught out by hurricane Hugo, a real killer! The first class five in history caused 11 deaths in the Caribbean, devastating the West Indian arc and annihilating Guadeloupe. The climatic monster vented its anger on Saint Croix; the last gusts measured before the airport instruments exploded reached 185 kn! NAGA had



■ *NAGA in Telaga Marina (Langkawi): there really is a possible life after racing for these boats, which had us all dreaming...*

found a refuge in the mangrove up the Salt River; immobilised by a tangle of mooring lines, tucked away in the farthest corner of the best hurricane hole in the region. In the middle of the night, the atmospheric bomb methodically broke up the known world; after an assault lasting several hours, it attacked the last survivors who had not broken their mooring lines. EXIT, Terry's little Newick, somersaulted four times end over end! The cabin of VAROA KANE, an 18 m charter boat, was ripped off in a colossal gust; Tom and Stane were swept away, injured, over 100 m; their cata-

beaten tracks and with no timetable. They first visited the south of the West Indian arc, explored the Orinoco and the River Macareo, before a stopover at Carthage, in Colombia, and a return to Trinidad to equip NAGA for the big voyage. A trip to Europe (by air) allowed Jack to see his brother (who lived in Barcelona) again, then to head for St Antonin Nobleval, the residence of his friend and gastronomic Sherpa, Daniel Charles. This break on the 'old continent' was a springboard from which Jack and Chrissi gained the impetus for their wandering life together. In April 2004, they went

group (Tonga Islands) and then New Zealand for the hurricane season. They stayed in Opua Bay, where they made many friends. But after spending decades in the tropics, Jack and Chrissi were impatient to get back to the warmth and set a course for the Fijis. In the Vanuatus, they met a travelling couple aboard another Native, NINTH CHARM, with which John and Fran were roaming the Pacific (sandwich version with a rotating mast). The annual scrub off took place on an antique slipway. "In the Vanuatus, no money, no problems, no crime," Chrissi noted. After New Caledonia, NAGA discovered Australia with a stopover at Bundaberg on the Burnett River. Here the couple met up with some very creative multihull enthusiasts, then went to Brisbane from where the cycle tours started which would later become the mainstay of their land-based activities. To learn about the huge Indonesia, they took part in the 2006 Sail Indonesia Rally, which brought together a hundred boats at the departure from Darwin! The NAGA sail loft was working flat-out to supply cushions, covers, and lots of sail repairs. On the island of Sulawesi, NAGA raced with the Sandecks (ultra-lightweight, over-canvassed trimarans), taking the victory to the amazement of the local specialists were never thought it possible that a modern boat could be so fast. The crew succumbed to the charms of Guli Air (a small island close to Bali), visited the Malay rivers and finally Langkawi after 3000 miles of intense discovery. Since 2007, NAGA has been exploring Thailand and Malaysia alternately, with long cycle tours in the whole of South-East Asia.

'The night the boats flew', NAGA pivoted on its starboard float, flew about 15 m, and landed upside down in the mud

maran capsized. At two in the morning, NAGA pivoted on its starboard float, flew about 15 m and landed upside down in the mud. VAROA KANE (60') flew in its turn, and fell on EXIT's float. Terry, Stane and Tom, Jack's friends, sheltering in the central hull, nearly received 13 tonnes of catamaran on their heads... it missed them by 3 metres! Jack had a spinal injury, but succeeded in righting his NATIVE and rebuilding it. The name HUGO has been removed from the lists used to name hurricanes.

A Phoenix's round the world trip

In January 2001, Chrissi Serini and Jack set off from Saint Croix to sail round the world, off the

through the Panama Canal, headed directly for the Marquesas (4000 miles in 25 days) and fell under the charm of the region...within the limits of the three month visa granted by the French (Ua Huka, Nuku Huva and Uapou). Chrissi was hypnotised by the volcanic landscapes and the sailing replicas of traditional catamarans and dugouts. In the Tuamotus, NAGA met François Forestier and Charlie Capelle's ex-LEJABY RASUREL, then TRUMPETER, Phil Weld's first trimaran. Chrissi became infatuated with the Suvarov atoll (Tom Neale / Moitessier); Jack sensed the 'danger', and decided to set off to collect some urgent messages in Pago Pago! The American Samoas didn't detain them; NAGA headed towards the Vava'U

Sailing with Jack is like poetry...

**NAGA and me, by
Chrissi...**

I was making the passage from the British Virgin Islands to St. Martin on my 34' Melody sloop. It was an uncomfortable beat to windward with no spray dodger and no auto pilot, and every other wave was slapping me in the face. I looked to port and saw a white trimaran heading the same direction as me, effortlessly flying over the waves and making 3 times my speed. I pointed out this miracle of sailing to my seasick girlfriend and she agreed- what a beautiful boat. I didn't know it then, but Jack was looking at us thru his binoculars saying to himself "ooh, girls!" This encounter on the waves was the beginning of an amazing relationship between both me and Jack, and me and Naga. 7 years later I sold my little sloop, and Jack and I embarked on a round the world adventure that has been a dream come true.

His sailing is like poetry, I can watch him for hours as he looks up to the sails, eases a sheet line, trims the main. It's as if his boat were a part of him. He sits quietly for a few moments watching it all, then tweeks a sheet again or some other small adjustment, always feeling the boat and how she is performing. He does the navigating, the weather planning, and all those tedious jobs that keep Naga safe and seaworthy. When the weather gets rough he is out there fighting it, and he is on deck for all sail changes. He is never in a hurry to add more sail, and never in a hurry to reef down. I love sailing with him because he makes me feel safe,

and he can make Naga fly. My role aboard is a comfortable one. I do the cooking and cleaning, I stand my watches and do most of the foredeck work. Until I injured my back I was the anchor windlass, but now that too is Jack's job. He gave me the aft cabin to use as my work space, and in port it serves as a canvas and sail loft. Jack is amazingly understanding about the thread and fabric remnants constantly clogging the drain holes, the stacks of cushions taking up valuable living space, the piles of sails blocking access to the cockpit. Usually he is removed from this chaos, his work space is in the forepeak where he sits at his computer, undisturbed until I run the foam saw on the deck over his head or start pounding grommets.

When I first came aboard Naga, she was very spartan, much like when Jack raced the boat with a minimum of comforts. Now she is decorated in colorful silks, embroideries and textiles from around the globe, she has beautiful deck canvas and comfortable cockpit cushions, and she even has a pantry now in space never utilized before. It was difficult to make these changes to Naga, adding the weight of even the spice rack sent Jack into fits. But now the boat is very much a home as well as a sailboat.

We live and work here aboard Naga, but the transformation from home and work space into incredible sailing machine is an easy one. I feel honored and proud to sail aboard Naga, she is often the prettiest boat in the anchorage, and on passages she eats all the other boats sailing our way. Although a

Press cuttings at the finish of the Ostar: when we tell you that this trimaran is a legend...



lot heavier now than in her racing days, Naga still sails with the slightest breeze and still dances effortlessly over the waves.

To me, Naga is a dreamboat with my hero at the helm, taking me to exotic places and wonderful adventures, and making my dreams come true.

My happy golden oldie home, by Jack

I suppose it could be considered my longest and most successful love affair, over 31 years now with NAGA. She's my trimaran home and I write this and repose here quite happily in her silk-clad warmly glowing wood bosom, quietly

anchored in this Malaysian bay near Thailand. She's been home all these many years, almost full-time, and the times have been graced with innumerable adventures and no let downs or betrayals. 31 years? That's a lot better than my record in affairs of the inter-personal kind! NAGA has always been reliable and trustworthy, a reasonable home, a sailor endowed with qualities that sometimes seem almost spiritual. She's been "ma maison de course," as I used to call her, and a champ. So Naga has proven to be a real Golden Oldie's Golden Oldie!

NAGA is the fastest little sail loft afloat these days but she's also

■ *Chrissi and Jack: the same passion, for NAGA and for the voyage...*



■ *Start of the 1984 Ostar, by Doug Van Zant, crew for the passage from St Croix to Plymouth. This photo, which has always been aboard NAGA, has been touched up by a professional in Phuket, on Jack's request, for the requirements of this article...*





been a winner of the Route du Rhum and the OSTAR as Kriter X and Destination St. Croix respectively. She's a record breaker in the Newport - Bermuda race by a huge margin and she was the scene of sheer terror when she flew in the screaming black night of Hurricane Hugo's more than 200 knot gusts- in St. Croix, Virgin Islands in 1989. (Much of this figures in my book *La nuit ou les bateaux volaient*. Edition No Un - out of print.)

We've had some good press from some of these racing adventures, but by far the biggest exposure was a bit of an embarrassment back in '85 when it resulted from a starting line brawl in which NAGA was hit by the 85 foot Fleury Michon VII when the big cat was dashing for the line at 18 knots! Naga, surprisingly, came out the better of the two in this incident, going on to take many honors along with substantial prize money in the Grand Prix de la Martinique, with Fleury Michon having to retire from the races.

Naga had come to some prominence in "the provinces" when she took all honors in the 1980 and 1981 St. Maarten Tradewinds Races, an 800 mile high-speed dash in three legs around the East Caribbean. Going on to take first place in the Multihull Newport to Bermuda Race in 1981 and breaking the record by 22 hours did not do her reputation any harm. And notice, all this was in a 38 foot trimaran that was (quite rightly) described as a cruiser/racer - not at all a racer - by her famed architect Dick Newick.

Then there was the startling '82 Rhum Race victory, winning class 5 and taking 6th overall, with the average length of the first ten boats being well over 60 feet, and every boat ahead of Naga being in class 1 with the exception of the winner of class 2. Then 1984 saw

a solid win in the British singlehander the OSTAR, taking class 3 and arriving 14th overall out of 91 starters.

Naga never did any serious racing after that, largely due to sponsoring difficulties with the Americans who seem so often to lag behind.

Naga had simultaneously been a great cruiser all over the Caribbean and up to the States and the Bahamas. Then in 2000 I met a young lady sailmaker back in St. Croix, our home port, and after

yes. I would. Sail her around the world.

Turns out that it's become my dream too. We sailed a lot in the Caribbean to new areas I hadn't known before - Cuba, Colombia, Panama - and finally left Trinidad in '03. The vast open seas of the South Pacific were a profound tonic for us, and with few exceptions we've loved and enjoyed almost everywhere between Trini and the Southeast Asian region we've been in for the last few years - Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand.

"In the Vanuatus, no money, no problems, no crime," Chrissi noted

enjoying each other's company for a while she announced that she had a dream. That dream was to sail around the world. And that sailmaker was Chrissi, the person who now runs an amazing sail loft out of Naga's relatively tiny aft cabin, doing sail repairs and every manner of lovely canvas creations in that space! Chrissi had owned her own 34 foot monohull for 13 years, but it was not the right boat for her dream. I had been all over the world as a merchant seaman and I was pretty happy just chasing women and drinking beer in Trinidad, so sailing around the world was NOT my dream. In fact, upon reflection, it seemed like I didn't have a dream. So when Chrissi asked if I would make her dream come true and sail her around the world, I told her it wasn't my dream, but that I would sleep on it. When I woke I had an answer: I told her I thought that even if it wasn't my dream, it might be a good idea to make someone else's dream come true. So,

And Naga still surprises me with the perfection of her sailing qualities - I'm just stunned how she can sail in so little wind in this area and how well she takes the crap when the crap comes.

Whether racing or cruising, NAGA has always been trustworthy and wonderfully reliable for over 31 years now. Even in terrible weather, Naga has always behaved well and predictably, almost never quitting for conditions and always coming through in good form. And that is perhaps the key to why Naga has become a kind of legend, first as a racer and now as a Golden Oldie that's a permanent home and a permanent world cruiser: Not only does she perform well, but she is reliable and well-behaved, with no ugly surprises in her sailing. Indeed about the only surprise I sometimes experience is just how beautifully she sails.

Newick really got this one right. Thanks, Dick.

Jack Petith

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS INCREDIBLE ADVENTURE, WE RECOMMEND :

"La nuit où les bateaux volaient" - Jack Petith Editions No1 (out of print, but available second-hand on the Internet.

NAGA web site: www.trimaran-naga.com

NINTH CHARM web site: <http://ninthcharm.multiply.com>

