

# UK BALLAD ASSOCIATION

Newsletter Spring 2026



*Stephen Dow in Madrigal of Saltash on the start line in Strangford Lough, Northern Ireland.*

## Chair's introduction

By Catherine Noakes

Dear Ballad Enthusiasts,

As we look forward to the start of British Summer Time and hopefully say goodbye to the wind, rain and greyness that has covered most of the UK for months, we will also be getting ready for our lovely yachts going back into the water for, what I hope will be, an enjoyable and full sailing season in gentle breezes and sunshine. As I write this Chair's introduction to the newsletter our own Ballad, Shara of York, is due to be craned in at Saltash Sailing Club this coming week on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> of March. We have just about managed to complete winter maintenance and antifoul her bottom amongst wind, hail and rain and I hope all of you are well on the way to being ready for your launch.

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Thinking about sailing this summer and the Ballad Rally being hosted by Yealm Yacht Club over the weekend of June 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, made me think about the various Ballads we have come across as we have sailed our other yacht (most of you may know we have an elderly Swan 431) around the coast of France, Spain & Portugal. There have been three instances where we have come across a Ballad yacht that I thought I would share with you.

In Camarinas, in a ria in the northwest of Spain, we moored on the same pontoon as a blue Ballad, which was being cruised by her British owners with their black labrador dog. Their yacht had been fitted with a full cockpit tent/cover from the sprayhood to the stern and which they said really extended the accommodation in both warm and wetter weather. We had seen some of the Ballads in the Baltic with this type of cover when we took Shara to the "Ballad Worlds" in 1992.

The next Ballad, yet another blue one, that we came across was in Peniche on the west coast of Portugal, south of Porto and north of Lisbon. We did not manage to meet the owner, but the boat looked as if she was used regularly. The interesting thing about this smallish town was the old fort which had been used as a prison during the country's time as a republic and was now a museum to that time and the Carnation Revolution which overthrew the dictatorship and led to the current democracy.



*A Ballad spotted abroad...*

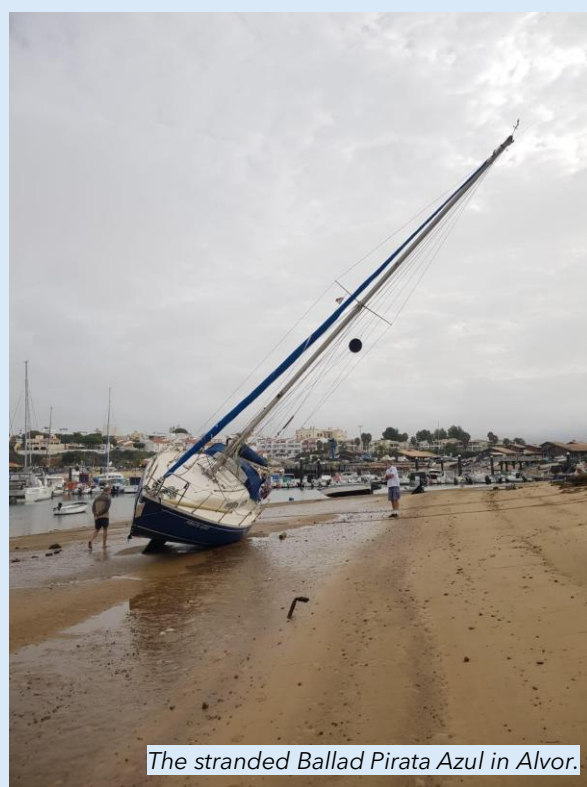


Our most recent Ballad sighting was in Alvor, just along the coast from Lagos on the Algarve. This is a small, sandy harbour at a river estuary and there was another blue Ballad sitting prettily on a mooring in the warm sunshine. We dropped our anchor and went ashore for a meal returning to the boat for the night. However, the wind got up during the night and we had to move, re-anchoring safely nearby. Morning came with little wind and plenty of sunshine, then we noticed the Ballad over on the far beach lying on her side. We tried to talk to harbour authorities, but there were none, the only authority was to do with the fishing boats, and no-one was interested in this stranded yacht. So, when the tide came in and she re-floated, we went across in our tender and, with the help of another yacht owner, we towed her back to her mooring and re-moored her. The shackle that attached the original mooring line to the buoy was still on the line, but without its pin. We strengthened the mooring line and put a larger shackle in place. We could not have left a Ballad (or other yacht) to be washed further up the beach and onto rocks when we were able to help!

We have now travelled further east along the Spanish Andalucian coast and are currently moored in La Linea on the Spanish side of the border with Gibraltar. We are heading out there shortly to continue east into the Med. No doubt we will come across some more Ballads, but even if we do not, we have very happy memories of both cruising and racing Shara which spurred us to move on to a bigger boat and more distant cruising. However, we are still enthusiastic about racing and occasionally cruising Shara locally and, with that hat on, I would like to encourage you all to join the Rally in the Yealm to share the camaraderie of Ballad owners and crew along with admiring these beautiful yachts.

See you there,

Catherine



*The stranded Ballad Pirata Azul in Alvor.*



*Shara of York on her second evening sail of 2026.*

# Channel Dash 2025: The view from Vivacious

By Tim Clark



It was Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> of May at 11:14 when Vivacious slipped her mooring in Newton Ferrers for the start of her latest adventure. The wind was westerly, Force 6, but the sea was slight to moderate, and the plan was to sail for Salcombe to get some miles under our belt and to wait there until the expected 'weather window' opened for our 'dash' across the Channel to St. Peter Port, Guernsey. Ideally, we would have liked to have made the crossing the following day, Thursday, to join in the first events of the Channel Dash, but discretion remained the better part of valour and the best 'window' opened on Friday morning, promising fine weather, but lighter winds.

Vivacious sailed for St. Peter Port at 04:45 with a south-westerly Force 3 to 4, and we were soon bowling along at 6-7 knots. There was a biggish swell, but little in the way of wind waves. Sadly, it was not to last! By midday the wind had died away to light airs so, reluctantly, the engine was started to maintain a motor-sailing speed of at least 5 knots. The wind remained light, and our 'dash' had become something of a crawl! We sighted Les Hanois

lighthouse a little after 16:00, but with the tide now against us it took nearly four more hours to reach St. Peter Port. Vivacious berthed at 20:35 starboard side on B pontoon in Victoria Marina after a 75-mile passage at an average speed of 4.7 kts. Vivacious joined a number of other club yachts, including Seascape, Susan Ayu, Reserve and Wing Commander and, as it turned out, was the last to arrive because the Solent contingent was stuck in Yarmouth, Isle of Wight. Ironically, this overall event started as a Southwest initiative that morphed into a whole-club affair, before circumstance returned it to its roots!

Over Saturday and Sunday participants enjoyed a varied programme in continued fine weather. This included a visit to the adjacent island of Herm, a tot and pontoon party and a rotating dinner on Saturday. Sunday was a lazy day before the highlight event of the weekend, which was dinner in the Bangladeshi Dhaka restaurant, which was a huge success. Also on Sunday, those boats intending an early start home the following day, including Vivacious, moved out of Victoria Marina to the Swan pontoons to escape the tidal restrictions caused by the Marina sill. Vivacious also refuelled before re-berthing on Seascape.

Knowing that our weather window would begin to close from around 18:00, my plan for Vivacious' return passage was to depart at first light in order to arrive in Newton Ferrers just



*The Skipper at the chart table, planning the passage.*



*Approaching St. Peter Port at sunset.*



*Vivacious with two fellow travellers in St. Peter Port.*



Departing St. Peter Port at dawn.



before sunset, and so we slipped at 04:34 in light airs and motored! I had hoped to make an ETA of around 20:00, but it was not to be! Once clear of the Little Russell, going south-about, we adjusted to a north-westerly course. Les Hanois was abeam at a distance of around 1 mile at 07:00, and the wind remained light and on the nose until late afternoon, so we motored on! At 08:00 our first of several 'escorts' of dolphins joined, frolicking and clicking around us. Always a joy to behold!

As expected, in the late afternoon the wind ticked up a little and shifted slightly to west-north-west; we hoisted the main and our speed through the water increased by one knot to 6.4 knots, but we were already behind schedule. At 18:00 we could see Bolt Tail clearly, but our weather window was inexorably closing; the wind had already freshened to a steady 17 knots from the west. Within an hour the wind was over 20 knots from the west-south-west and the sea was rising. With the last of the light and the wind now 25-27 knots gusting 30, at 21:30, we entered Wembury Bay and lowered the main. With my local knowledge and familiarity, the tide approaching high water and therefore slack, a half-moon, a powerful flashlight at the bow, and the two lit port-hand buoys marking the entrance, I decided that it was possible, with care, to enter Newton Ferrers in the dark and, at 22:30, Vivacious passed the first, and larger, of the two buoys. Making the initial approach, I noted that the second port hand light seemed to be flashing irregularly which

was of concern, because it marked the turn onto the next leg. I realised that it was the waves causing Vivacious to bounce up and down which meant that the small light was often obscured as it flashed. We took it slowly and, without bumping into anything, and after four attempts at manoeuvring in the strong and gusty wind, at 23:30 Vivacious was safely secured to her buoy. We should have cracked open the single malt, but instead a profound weariness descended...!

You might be interested in some points of note from this night entry:

- Do not rely on moonlight, the moon was obscured!
- Make the entry at slack water, and preferably high slack water, because there is more safe water and moored boats have minimum swing.
- Do not attempt it single handed, you need someone to wield the flashlight at the bow and to hook the picking-up buoy, especially in strong winds.
- Riverbanks and fixed or moored objects seem much closer in residual light.
- Beware tired eyes playing tricks!
- Make sure that your deck light is functional.

Wishing you safe sailing!

*The crew and skipper smiling!*



*The Skipper.*



# Ballad No. 6 - where is she to?

By Chris and Katie Jackson

Marysol's artwork in the Azores.



Onboard Sixpence, now Marysol.



Ballad no.6 lifted out.

Well, the Ballad formerly known as 'Sixpence', at the time of writing, is on her way to the Caribbean from her home port of A Coruna, Galicia under a Polish flag with a Spanish owner/skipper and with the name Marysol.

Sixpence, as many Ballad owners know, we bought for me (Chris) to take part in the solo adventures of the Jester Challenge. The last of which was the 2018 Jester event from Plymouth to Newport RI in the 49<sup>th</sup> county of the United Kingdom (aka the USA). Sixpence did not quite get to Newport, but after a knockdown and some breakages, knackered batteries, headed to the Azores instead.

This was the beginning of a love affair with those islands.

We sold Sixpence to the delightful Ricardo in July 2020. And I sailed Sixpence to her new home port with Ricardo, who by his own admission had never sailed a yacht before, and who overcame chronic seasickness to survive a classic Ballad beat across the Bay of Biscay.

He clearly loved her with the same sort of passion that we did. And we got lots of pictures and clips of her under sail as he got to know her.

Then I had one of those 'phone in the top pocket of my shirt moments' and the phone disappeared into the murk at the bottom of the Rubicon Marina, Lanzarote. All my contacts disappeared including Ricardo's, so we lost contact. Ok, so at least we will be able to track her on Marinetraffic... but not if you spell the name wrong (Marisol).

Well, we thought we had lost contact with Ricardo and Sixpence. Had he sold her? Was she sitting in a yard somewhere being neglected? We did not know.

On our return from the Caribbean in 2025 via the Azores (more of that in this newsletter), we spent a day on Faial and wandered around the quayside in Horta. Every square inch of concrete is covered in artwork from yachts arriving in the Azores. And, as we were looking for artwork of boats that we knew, a Ballad symbol caught my eye - 'Marysol June 2024'.

I plugged the correct spelling into Marinetraffic and she popped up, alive and well in A Coruna. Wonderful! And then, as if by algorithm, Ricardo's contact details reappeared on Whatsapp!

Taking aside the spookiness of that, it was great to be back in touch and to know that he had ambitious plans for Marysol - namely a transatlantic crossing, which he has just started. He has given me a link to his tracker so by the time of publication we should know that he is on his way.

# Seize the Day's Caribbean and North Atlantic circuit trip

By Chris and Katie Jackson



*Preparing for the journey.*

For those picking up a Ballad newsletter for the first time, I need to say that Seize the Day is not an Albin Ballad. She is a Moody 425 (42 feet) with centre cockpit, acres of space and... a washing machine.

Our move from the beautiful Sixpence to the spacious Seize the Day was prompted by our desire for extended ocean and offshore sailing and the undeniable shortcomings of a 30-footer in terms of comfort. Our 5-month cruise around Ireland convinced us of this.

Seize the Day is a very different boat from when we bought her. Now fully kitted out for extensive offshore or remote coastal cruising, she is an off-grid boat allowing us to spend weeks at a time away from marinas or harbours with facilities. All of the 'kit' comes at a price and with a price - namely the knowledge and skills needed to understand, operate and maintain it all. It would be no exaggeration to say that when we set off from Fowey in June 2024, there were numerous issues that were causing us a lot of anxiety. And coupled with that were some nagging doubts about what we were embarking on.

Our initial plan was to cross to the Caribbean from Cape Verde, taking in the Azores (again), the Canary Islands, before meeting Katie's brother Tim in Mindelo, Sao Vicente, to join us for the crossing to Grenada - then Panama and the Pacific.

We left the British Isles from Castletownsend, West Cork, with the aim of having a better slant on the Azores. The weather was not kind and we were vexing over the electrical charging regime (later sorted by Katie), intermittent AIS and an underperforming watermaker. And the nagging doubts continued. Did we want to be away from home for 3 to 5 years? No. Would we miss our family and friends? Yes. Will we miss our home in Polruan? Yes. What if our children decide to have children? (pregnant pause...).

So mid-way to the Azores we decided we would sail the Atlantic circuit instead, and return to the UK in September 2025. As it turned out this proved a very good decision as one son got engaged and then married in September 2024. And on our return, in the Azores, both sons announced that their partners were pregnant (in the same WhatsApp call!).

The first passage to the Azores was memorable only for the adverse weather. Well not quite, we must have seen at least 7 or 8 blue whales or at least their spouts. But we were very pleased to sight the familiar profile of Terceira, which we made our base for 6 weeks to visit Graciosa and Sao Jorge with visitors.

We needed to keep going, not least to get to Lanzarote for a flight home for the wedding. Our plan then was to get to the Cape Verde islands, stopping first at Fuerteventura and then Gran Canaria finally to clear out (before our 90 "Schengen" days in Europe expired). Those plans, or the timeline at least, were scuppered when our anchor windlass caught fire.

It took 5 weeks to get a replacement from Spain (the first one got lost in transit), and we ran out of Schengen time, though the border police were very understanding.



*The anchor windlass that caught fire.*



We set off at the beginning of November just as Tim arrived in Cape Verde. The nine-day passage there was uneventful, keeping just outside the very busy shipping lanes and the fish factory ships lurking off the West Coast of Africa.

One German sailor we spoke to said wryly - if the Canary Islands are Europe you will find Cape Verde is Africa. And to an extent that is true, though with a strong Portuguese influence both in architecture and the Cape Verdeans themselves. We would loved to have stayed longer but needed to get going, having successfully met up with Tim. So stocked up, did a rig check - found and replaced a missing split pin at the masthead forestay fitting (phew!) and made ready for the 2,600 nm to Grenada.

Compared with some sailors we met, our crossing was a smooth one, with fairly constant 15 to 20 knot breezes. Though the Sargassum weed clogged the Watt and Sea every few hours and needed constant clearing.

As we closed the coast of Grenada, our ETA was likely to be around dusk, so we decided to stand off and approach in the morning. This was just as well as only two of the eight channel markers were in place to guide you through the reefs into the marina at Le Phare Bleu. "IALA B! IALA B!" we chanted to make sure we left the two RED channel markers to starboard.



Chris and Tim checking Seize the Day.

Safely into the marina and later in the afternoon, we were dismayed to see the 65-foot Jeanneau "Nar" run onto the reef having left the two channel markers to port. The following day she was towed off, and with severe damage but floating, was lifted into Clarke's yard in the next bay.

Our sister-in-law Eve joined us for a week and we spent delightful days exploring Grenada - its rum distilleries, cocoa plantations and several wonderful tropical gardens.

When we are asked "so what did you most enjoy about the Caribbean", our answer always is the people. We found the islanders courteous (quite formal actually), friendly, helpful, and very well informed whether it was politics or plant life. There is no proper safety net, except perhaps in the French islands, and so you need to adjust your mindset to accept that someone will come up to you most days to sell you something. It might be produce or it might be the use of a mooring buoy. But a polite 'no' and a smile, and maybe a conciliatory bottle of beer, and no offence will be taken, and you will get a smile in return.

The islands are spectacular, particularly the lower chain of the Lower Antilles, with their mountainous ridges running North-South, and rainforests.



*Not all yachts made it past the reefs...*

*Closing in on Grenada, with waves breaking over the reefs.*





Beach bar at Tyrell Bay.

“But it is so expensive is not it?”. Well yes and no. Imported goods are expensive certainly. But rum is cheap! And lobster or fresh fish bought from fisherman was good value, and local produce like dasheen, christophene, and locally grown greens or fruit bought in markets were reasonably priced. Most of the time we are at anchor, and whilst our struggling watermaker continued to function, we were not reliant on marina stops except occasionally to fill up with fuel (a rarity as there is a constant easterly breeze).

We arrived in Grenada 6 months after Hurricane Beryl had swept across the Grenadine islands causing particular devastation on Carriacou (Grenada) where 200 mph winds were recorded, and Union Island (St. Vincent) just to the North. Anchoring in Tyrell Bay you had to pick your spot to avoid dropping the anchor onto a roof sheet, and the bay was littered with wrecks of yachts.

The main island of St. Vincent does not have a great reputation, but we had a very warm reception. Our first stop was Cumberland Bay with excellent beach bar meals served to us by Caz and his very laid-back team of helpers - marijuana is grown openly on the upper slopes of the hills and we seemed to be permanently wreathed in smoke.

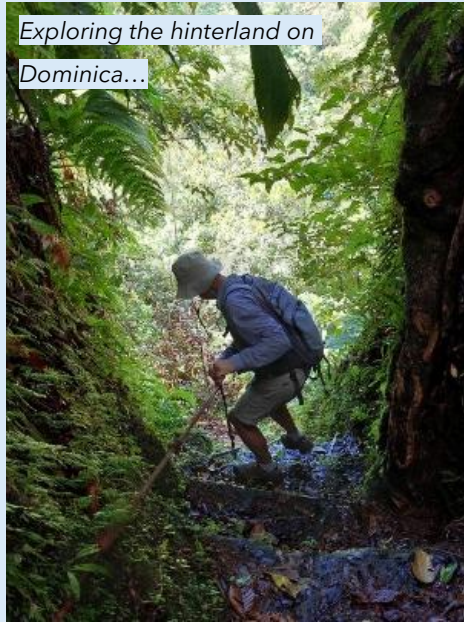
Quite convivial actually...

Dash is at your service...



Exploring the hinterland on

Dominica...



And leading you back safely.



Sulphur was another smell we came across quite frequently as many of the islands are volcanic, and some still active. We climbed La Soufriere on St. Vincent which last erupted in 2021. And the volcano on Monserrat, further to the North, devastated one half of the island including the capital, Plymouth - which is still buried under ash and you can only enter with a permit.

Dominica was a particular favourite. Here we moored first of all off the capital Roseau and hired a car to explore the hinterland. My pa was always known as Jacko, and we spotted somewhere called Jacko's flats and Jacko's steps. These were a Maroon stronghold in the central mountain ridge of the islands where escaped slaves held out against plantation owners and militia for many decades under the leadership of 'Jacko' who was born in Africa. Hardly anyone visited the flats. But you entered via a garden of Eden tended by the curator Eunice who you pay a small fee to. "Do we need a guide?" "Dash will take you" she said. And he did. And brought us back safely.

In all, we visited, 19 islands. Anguilla (a British Protectorate) was the Northernmost. We loved it, anchored in Road Bay with its pristine sandy beaches, and a fleet of fine-looking racing boats, with enormous mainsails, where the skipper and helm keeps up a barrage of yelled instructions to upwards of 15 crew.



Yacht racing in Road Bay.



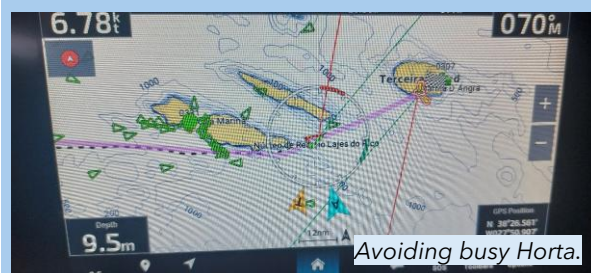
Jessica's home on Bermuda.

We set off from Dutch Sint Maarten to sail the 900 miles to Bermuda using the Easterlies to get North, before the long leg picking up Westerlies for the Azores. Bermuda was a very pleasant surprise with its brightly painted houses and roofs (for catching rainwater). We were royally entertained by Jamie, Jen and her mum Jessica; and given a grand tour of the island and Jessica's beautifully restored home set in eight lush acres.

The second longest ocean leg to the Azores was largely uneventful, with one day of 35 to 40 knot winds. Nearing Horta, we could see a mass of yachts on the plotter also heading for Horta, which is crowded at the best of times.

And so we decided to extend our time at sea for another 24 hours to arrive at the quiet and welcoming Angra do Heroismo to clear in. Which took all of 5 minutes and then a long chat with a GNR officer who had owned a Moody and was keen to look around.

We are in the central group of five islands, and spent most of our time in this group and mainly in Velas, the port and principal town on Sao Jorge. Friends joined us there for a very enjoyable week of hiking (superb on Sao Jorge), and a ferry visit to Horta on Faial where we discovered the artwork for 'Marysol', formerly 'Sixpence'.



Seize the Day in Angra de Heroismo.

Velas is always memorable (we lost count of the times we have visited), and this time for several events. Firstly, we met and made firm friends with a Dutch couple Jeroen and Louissette on their 45-foot aluminium yacht 'Saltash', named after the fictitious HMS Saltash in The Cruel Sea. And then in a family WhatsApp call, our two sons both announced that their partners were pregnant! Six weeks ago we became grandparents. The babies were born two days apart.

Nine islands make up the Azorean archipelago. We had visited seven of them. So, we headed for the last two, going to Santa Maria first. The marina at Vila do Porto is very busy, but we secured a berth for a few days and explored the island on a scooter. In terms of topography and climate, there are two distinct halves. In the South it is quite flat and very dry. But the central caldera and surrounding hills to the North coast are lush and green, quite like parts of Shropshire or Devon.

Finally, we went to the largest of the islands, Sao Miguel and the main port of Ponta Delgada. Just as we arrived, Jeroen and 'Saltash' were departing for Ireland and we waved him goodbye. Having secured a berth, we met up with our friends from Torpoint Alison and Jon on their Bavaria 36 'Nova Vita'.

Ponta Delgada is a buzzy city with fine architecture, and we enjoyed trips out around the island on the excellent bus routes, to walk some spectacular hiking trails up to and around the many calderas.



Exploring Santa Maria...



... and Sao Miguel.

Our final stop, to clear out of the Azores, was Praia da Vitoria on Terceira. We are very fond of the town and it is one port where you can anchor in almost all weathers, and for free. We were also there for the bull running.

In 2018, we had made friends with David, the owner/skipper of a Rustler 31. Then in 2024, we bumped into him in town, and after a moment of flustered effort at recognition, we got chatting again. He was pretty much resident in Praia, and partly for enforced reasons. Two years before he had walked around a street corner into the path of a bull that had just been released from its crate. David was thrown high into the air and suffered a multitude of life-threatening injuries and spent over a year in hospital. And the organisers of the bull running? Were they terribly apologetic? Nope! Just annoyed that they had had to delay the running for an hour!

So finally, we headed off in mid-July for our return to Falmouth. It was a 10-day passage enlivened in the final 24 hours by finding ourselves crossing the Fastnet fleet, in the middle of the night, on its downwind leg to Cherbourg.

As well as the entertainment of dodging these race boats sailing at 18 knots, there were the VHF exchanges between a French solo sailor, a Maersk skipper throwing his 1000-foot container vessel around to avoid the Fastnet fleet and an English fishing boat hauling her nets. You could almost hear the sighs of frustration as the two commercial skippers calmly and clearly communicated their intentions to get about their business.

Falmouth has to be our favourite port for a homecoming and we spent many idle days there before heading to Plymouth, and finally home to Fowey...



# Winter dinner

By Janie Smallridge



*An excellent turnout for the Ballad Winter Dinner at Saltash Sailing Club.*

As daffodils and spring began to emerge from the long wet stormy winter, crews from five Ballads enjoyed the annual get together for the Winter Dinner. As has become the custom, they were treated to a delicious artistic meal at Saltash Sailing Club. Discussions concerned dehumidifiers, antifouling, boat preparations and the first organised rally in a long time. Although there will be some 'fleet sailing', the aim is to gather as many non-racing Ballads as possible in the Yealm for the weekend of the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> of June.



*Duchess' crew enjoying their meal.*

# Notices



*Ballads at the start line during the 2009 Championships.*

## UK BALLAD ASSOCIATION RALLY 2026

Details of the summer rally in the Yealm from Friday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, to Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, will be distributed soon. There will be excellent dining at the Yealm Yacht Club and plenty of conversation revolving around our beautiful boats, with some sailing around the area. It is worth making sure that these dates are included in your summer sailing!

## GANCIA GIRL

Sean Smith's videos of his sailing on Gancia Girl, whom many of us remember, when she was based near Salcombe  
<https://www.youtube.com/@sailingatsixty>

## BALLADS FOR SALE

We receive occasional enquiries about Ballads for sale. Please do let Janie Smallridge (Hon Sec) know if your boat is for sale (and details of the new owners!), so that she can pass on the information. It is always worth putting details on the Ballad website (via Janie).

## UK BALLAD ASSOCIATION

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### CHAIR

Catherine Noakes (Shara of York)

### SECRETARY/TREASURER

Janie Smallridge (Duchess)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Ken Morgan (Shebeen)

Gemma Kulk (Duchess)

### NEWSLETTER

Gemma Kulk (Duchess)

### WEBMASTERS

Sarah Cole and Peter Smallridge

### WEBSITE

[www.ukballadassociation.org](http://www.ukballadassociation.org)