

12 YEARS, 3 BOATS, 3 CHILDREN

AND A FEW TENS OF THOUSANDS OF MILES

Having left as a couple in 2003 for a trip in a monohull, Matthieu and Soizic have had 3 boats, 3 children, and are currently still sailing around the world. The story of a happy and adventurous life!

Text and photos: Matthieu Fleury

How beautiful we were, on a warm 1st September 2003 (17°C – a heat wave in Quimper), on the deck of our pretty ketch. The boat – 38 feet of solid mahogany, 38 years old, and us – a young couple, under 30, finding it hard to believe that we had succeeded in making our dream come true, so early in our lives, which had hardly begun.

From this to believing that 12 years later, we would still be on the deck of a boat, a few thousand miles further on, seemed to us to be not even conceivable. And yet here we are.

It took the start of 2 fairly successful careers, to make us realize several things: that life flies by very quickly, and if we merely followed the straight and narrow, it would soon be over, and that it's best to empty your bank account before Alzheimer's makes you forget your PIN number. After just 5 years of professional life, we dispensed with the services of our employers, emptied our accounts and bought Hildi, a little gem from 1965, all varnished wood and teak decks, which was dozing in the Mediterranean, awaiting the arrival of two intrepid Bretons to set off on an adventure.

It took 8 months' work to turn this gentle coastal cruiser from the peaceful Calanques into a mile-eating ocean cruiser. 8 months which allowed us to get to know each corner, bolt, cable or pipe, which is very useful once you are on the

other side of the world.

The program was quite classic: round the world in 3 years, and we had promised our families that afterwards we would get safe jobs again, with pension plans, health insurance, the works... That

didn't stop the tears flowing freely, once the gap appeared between the quay and the stern, for the crew as well as the mothers remaining ashore, who saw their well-loved, barely pubescent kids sailing away from them.





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KATALI GUEST BOAT

In 12 years' cruising, we have realized that beyond the pleasure of discovering distant horizons, it is even more rewarding for us to share this pleasure with others, to introduce them to a holiday rhythm which is relaxed, sporty and contemplative. We designed the boat and its equipment so we could offer a complete family an exceptional holiday. Today we welcome visitors on the 'guest house' principle.

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But a program only exists to be modified, revised, corrected...and we quickly realized that we were going too fast. Too many stages hardly skimmed over, encounters shortened, anchorages hardly glimpsed, countries we had hardly visited... It took our good old Mercedes engine giving up the ghost with a terrible rattle between Panama and the Galapagos for us to finally decide to slow down, drop anchor, take our time, and start a family.

Yes, because strange as it may seem, this extreme freedom seemed too simple to us, the 3.16m beam of our cockleshell too wide, the oceans too empty, so we decided to repopulate our little world. Our initial project, at 20 years old, was to leave at 40, with numerous kids, on a good big boat purchased after relentless years of hard labor. We hadn't lost this wish, and now that we had no money, and no precise program, it seemed to us to be the best time to enlarge the family.

A few months in Panama, to give Hildi a new engine, and then in the Baie des Vierges (named the Baie des Verges (penises) by whalers in past centuries, because of the basalt pillars surrounding it, but chastely re-named 'des Vierges' (virgins) by the religious orders who came to mess up this little paradise), on the island of Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas, we went beyond the point of no return, with the conception of our first child, Lola, who was born in Papeete, Tahiti, 9 months later.

We were now in 2006. The 3 years of our original program had passed, and here we were, on the pontoon, in Taina Marina, Punaauia, Tahiti, not even half way round the world – everything was going well. Hildi and its tiny salon/berth/galley also became the office for

1 : Katali is our third boat and second catamaran. Here it is anchored at Tioman Island.

2 : Despite its age, our monohull Hildi sails in a breath of wind.

3 : Hildi's small saloon converted into a nursery / business headquarters...

the family business, laoranet, a network of wi-fi areas to give internet access to passing boats. This company, which we created from start to finish, was to be a superb adventure and a great success. In the end, 23 areas spread out over a territory as big as Europe, from Tahiti to the Marquesas, from the Gambiers to the Tuamotus, and hundreds of client boats, delighted that thanks to our initiative, they could keep in touch with the world from some of the most beautiful anchorages on the planet. For us, it was the way of continuing to mix with the round the world cruising crowd, and not lose the wish to set off again, and the thirst to see farther west.

But Tahiti encourages pleasure, not to mention lust. And the Breton, (and his partner!) although made of granite when it comes to confronting a storm, weakened when faced with the temptation of a voluptuous night. And what had to happen, happened – Timéo, our second child, climbed aboard in 2008.

The situation was becoming critical: aboard Hildi, there was just one cabin. Slip some tired parents into it, as well as 2 bawling cherubs and the headquarters of an almost multinational company, stir everything on the waves of a Polynesian lagoon, and the result is an incredibly strong desire to set off again aboard a boat measuring up to this wish to repopulate the blue planet.

But which boat? At the origin of the project, we dreamt of a 50-foot monohull, with a wide stern, numerous cabins and elegant lines. For us Bretons, the only boat worthy of this name had, however you look at it, to resemble the family Vaurien sailing dinghy. The idea of attaching two boats with the help of beams seemed to us to be



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a strange heresy, except for building a bridge over the Rhine to get tanks across it, or for a pretty postcard of a proa with a background of coconut trees. But between a sporty sail with boozy friends one weekend in February in the eddies of the Fromveur Passage, back home, to a blue-water cruise for several years with the family, there is a world of difference – half way round the world, to be exact. And during this trip half way round the world, we had met them, the lucky multihull owners, whether aboard their production family caravan, a mile-eating Lerouge design in carbon, or a bodged-up Wharram with bamboo crossbeams. And despite their differences, they were all certain of one thing – that they would never again sail in a monohull. Because they all told us that if you try a cat you will be hooked!

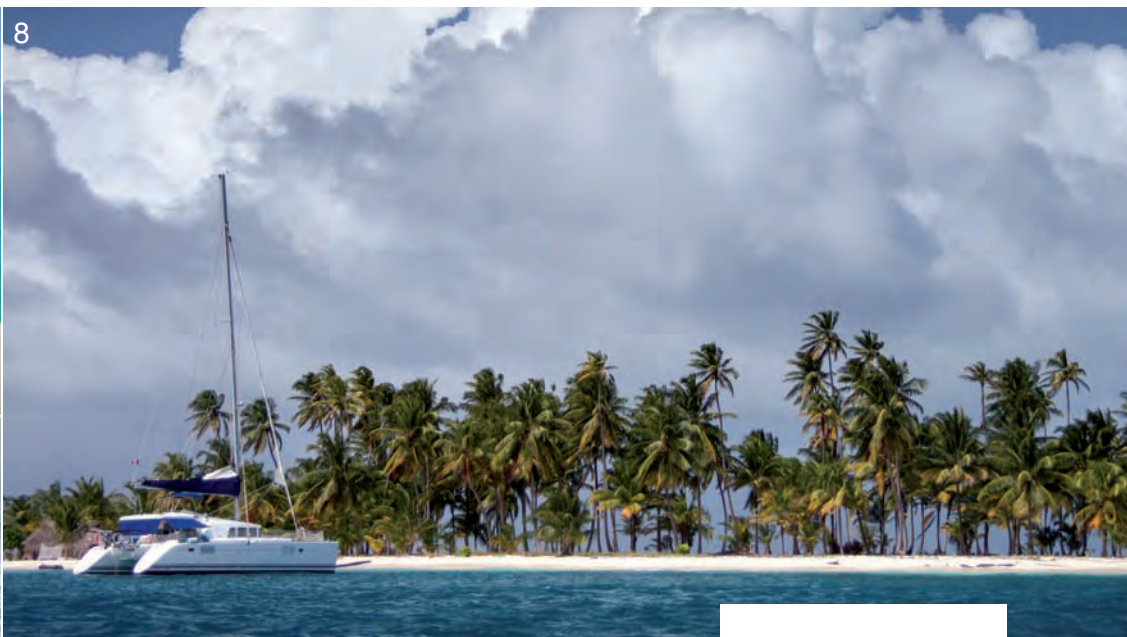
During a stopover in the Marquesas, we came across a superb Looping 54, designed by Patrick Lüscher. This boat, anchored next to our modest 38-footer, seemed to us like a monster; out-of-reach luxury, the ideal synthesis between a lightweight boat and a family platform. It remained in a corner of our minds, becoming seriously fixed when we saw other Loopings pass in Tahiti, all equipped with a smiling crew.

And then we had been in

contact for over 10 years with this Indian boatyard, created by a couple of French cruisers, which built one-offs – as they wrote to us in what proved to be a nice commercial slogan ‘boats we like, for people we like’.

We were then in 2010. After 4 years on a dock, it was high time to set off again. We sold Hildi and Iaoranet. The bank account was restocked, the Indian builder was still in existence, and our desire to set off again was still present. After a visit to the architect and the boatyard in India, we signed the contract for the construction of our Looping 50, for a launch planned for the beginning of 2012. We planned to arrive there 6 months before the launch, to be present and finalize the choice of interior accommodation, and the fitting of the imported equipment that we would have to order.

But what could we do with this year and a half, before moving over there? The solution was obvious – go cruising of course! Simple – let’s buy a catamaran in the West Indies, and sell it in Australia! And that’s exactly what we did at the end of 2010, after a short stay in France, during which we took advantage of the opportunity to get married (the only way, apart from our funerals, to get all our friends and family together)



and, the flesh being weak, to conceive a third child.

Bought in a week, equipped in 2, we left Saint Martin in November 2010, heading directly for Panama, aboard Barbarin, a Lagoon 440.

Everything went well during this year or so spent cruising; we rediscovered Polynesia with immense pleasure, and above all, we discovered cruising in a catamaran. Pure pleasure. The children could play with their Lego in 25 knots of wind, a mother could breast feed in the middle of the Pacific (ah, yes, Mael, our third child, joined us in Panama, and crossed the Pacific when just 3 months old), we could welcome lots of people aboard without tripping over each other...

Moreover we sold it easily in Australia, to a heart surgeon who will probably only take it out of the marina for 7 days a year, but that's his problem.

It was the beginning of 2012, and for us then it was like a cold shower in this flawless scenario: a visit to India with the architect, half way through the construction, revealed that the build was a long way behind schedule, and that its follow-up by the French bosses had become very approximate. The welcome we received was

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dreadful, the boss revealing his real nature, that of a gruff, aggressive moaner, who wouldn't accept any remarks (even coming from an experienced builder of this type of boat), any advice, any criticism. Now, as the boat was 90% paid for (such was the total confidence we had in this builder), we were bound hand and foot. The builder

was overwhelmed by the size of the project (the biggest boat they had ever built), its complexity and its demands.

This was why, when we arrived in India as a family in May 2010, we knew in advance that the months to come would not be serene. Because even in the opinion of the boss's wife: "Matthieu - it's a real pain working with you! Customers usually arrive on the last day, and anyway, they don't know anything!" That said everything, and our presence was seen by the yard as an inconvenience, which they made us feel on a daily basis.

And this went on not for 6 months, but for 2 years. A delay due partly to the ordering by us of the imported equipment (650 references from 52 suppliers) taking longer than planned, as our container finally only arrived in May 2011. But a delay above all due to the builder's blind optimism, thinking

that they would only need 3 months after the arrival of the container, whilst it actually took 1 year to finish the boat.

Katali was therefore finally launched in April 2014, after 43 months' work (compared with the 15 planned in the contract). The incredible journey of an Indian-style launch was quite obviously filled with incredible emotions, celebrated as much

4 : On our boats or those of our friends, we have passed through the Panama Canal 5 times. The most moving: the first, aboard Hildi.

5 : In the Galapagos, the sea lions occupy the sugar scoops, the cockpits, the decks... One night, one of them almost fell through a hatch.

6 : At 3 years old, Timéo started to drive the dinghy. Today at 7, he is completely independent, and sensible.

7 : In the San Blas Islands, Timéo and his cousin Milo embark in the Ulu (the pirogue) of a Kuna friend.

8 : Barbarin at anchor in the San Blas...



with tears as with (Indian) champagne. But once the boat was launched in the port of Pondichery, we fell into the hands of the local fishermen's mafia, which demanded a weekly sum to 'protect' the boat. Despite payment of this considerable sum, they had nothing better to do than remove the mooring lines from the boat, to apply pressure and increase the price of their racket. This very tense situation reached its height the day before our departure, when the fishermen began proceedings against us for 'non-payment' (we thought we were dreaming), the head of the Pondichery customs openly demanded an nth 'bakchich' to allow us to leave, and the immigration services, who had come down to the quay specially for us, packed up and left when they saw that the situation with the mafia was not 'normalized'.

We finally left Pondichery in a mental state situated somewhere between elation, madness and depression on 18th July 2014, heading for Thailand, which we hoped to reach in 6 days' sailing. But that was without taking into account the numerous problems a new boat suffers during its first few miles, which for us, were sailed in 25/30 knots of wind, during the first 4 days... We had to shelter in the Nicobar Islands, on our route, for a few repairs. Indian islands, of course, and prohibited, of course! Confined aboard for 4 days, not allowed to set foot ashore (or very little), and seeing a procession of everything that India called administrative services aboard (including the secret service!) – this at least left us the time to repair our breakdowns and let the heavy weather pass.

No need to tell you that our arrival in Thai-

land was not only a relief, but also a release. A release from the tension of this Indian adventure and its malicious players; finally free, at sea, with no one to block our bows.

Today, Katali has been in the water for 1 year. 1 year of happiness on our boat, which for us is ideal, as we put so much effort into making sure that the accommodation would suit us perfectly. Both lightweight (we have reached 18 knots), very comfortable at sea, and suitable for accommodating large families, it has allowed us to discover Thailand and its wonderful scenery, to sail down to Singapore, and today to be ambling along the east coast of Malaysia, the Seribu Islands, the Perhentians...before soon heading off towards Borneo, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Raja Ampat... Katali has also proved to be perfect for our activity as a 'guest boat', welcoming

9 : In India, we tasted the pleasures of riding a motorbike without too many constraints – it reminded us of the ocean.

10 : In India: rickshaw or boatyard – they are both open to all the winds.

11 : At Katali's launch, the truck broke down after 50 meters... India didn't want to let us go!

12 : On Tioman Island, in Malaysia, underwater it's an aquatic fairyland. We are finally enjoying our new boat!

13 : Mael 'I'm scared of nothing' jumps continuously from Katali's forward crossbeam.

14 : At anchor at Phuket and the first tests of the kayaks.

15 : The youngsters are regularly involved, as here for revarnishing Barbarin's teak cockpit.

16 : This new cat – we dreamt about it for a long time, and today we are enjoying it!

17 : Katali is well-protected: the super-heroes are keeping watch aboard...



THE BOATS

Longer and longer, wider and wider, more and more comfortable... As we get older, we become fonder of our creature comforts. From our first boat to the current one, the area of solar panels, the watermaker output and the area of the boat have all been multiplied by 5...

From 2003 to 2010: Hildi

- Classic wooden ketch from 1965
- Builder - Boudignon
- Length: 11.60m
- Beam: 3.16m
- Weight: 8.5 tonnes

From 2010 to 2012 : Barbarin

- Lagoon 440 from 2001
- Length: 44 feet
- Beam: 8m
- Weight: 14.5 tonnes

Since 2014 : Katali

- Looping 50 from 2014
- Length: 15.50m
- Beam: 8m
- Weight: 9 tonnes

families in need of a different kind of holiday, where deserted anchorages alternate with diving, good meals, and the children's joy when they find friends of their own age aboard. We are very happy to have the opportunity to share our experience of life aboard as a family.

We have also become primary school teachers, following daily (when we have no visitors aboard) the very full French home-schooling program. Because our 3 children (Lola, 9; Timéo, 7; Mael, 4) have grown up fast. Life aboard a boat as a family allows them to blossom far from the mirages of the consumer society, to open up to the world and to others, and unites the family rather than having each person growing up in their own bubble.

Always on boats, on the water, under the water, in the waves, facing the wind - salt water visibly works miracles on these little children of the ocean, who today are enjoying their lives to the full - lives which are certainly offbeat and atypical, but oh so enriching and fulfilling.

And this fulfillment has naturally rubbed off on us, the parents, who for 12 years have been able (not without difficulty and always sticking together and keeping the necessary energy) to realize one of our dearest dreams - to cruise as a family, for a long time, around the world.

