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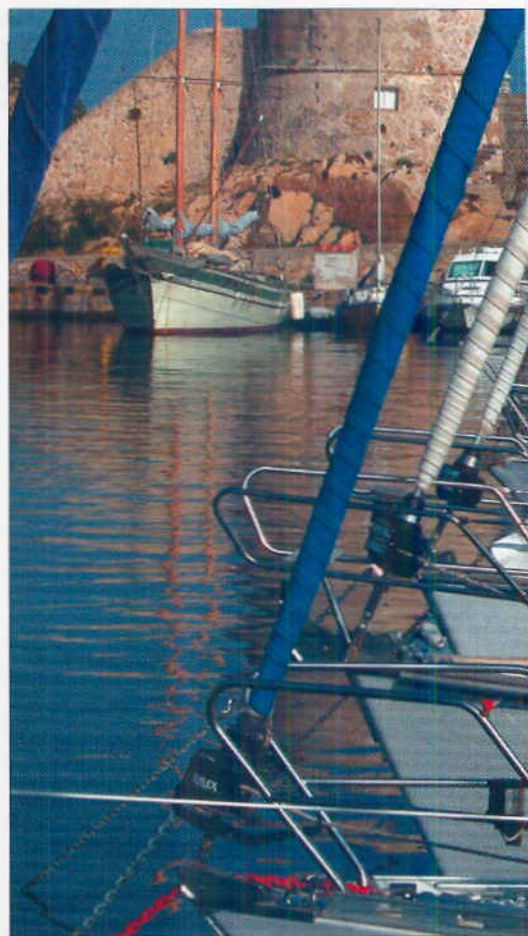
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Bareboat round **Elba**

The island of Elba is the largest of Italy's Tuscan islands; it also looks an ideal destination for a charter cruise.

Duncan Kent checked it out and put it to the test



An unearthly 0630 flight meant an 0300 start for our trip to Pisa. We already knew that the cost of a cab to the base would be € 200, so we planned a relaxing train ride down to Follonica, just 7km from the Kiriacoulis Etruscan marina base. The train departed from the airport, taking us to Pisa central station, where we changed for Follonica. Unfortunately, we managed to select the only carriage with faulty air conditioning and by that time all the other carriages were packed. Instead we resorted to standing in neighbouring carriages to cool off, taking it in turns to be the sweaty baggage minder. Despite the heat the journey is a bargain at € 6 each.

At Follonica we downed several cooling drinks before provisioning for our 10-day trip to Elba. In addition to my wife Helen and me, our crew comprised regular sailing partners Simon Bettin, and Terry and Paula Hill. Simon and Helen minded the baggage while we caught a taxi to the nearby Co-op, arranging for the driver to pick us up after an hour. Having spent € 275 on basic provisions, including drinks, plus enough fresh fruit and veg for the first few days, we quickly

realised that we weren't going to fit five people, our luggage and all our supplies into only one cab. So we called a second to pick up Simon, Helen and our luggage. Some € 60 worth of cabs later, we arrived at the marina at around 1600, to discover that our boat wasn't yet ready and we were left standing in the hot sun with our foodstuffs. There was no shade and with a wedding in progress at the adjacent hotel, it was pointless looking in that direction. Instead we shaded the perishables with our luggage, while the sun heated up everything else – beer, wine, water – and, of course, us.

An hour later I managed to persuade the base manager, Enzo, to let us put our food into the fridge before it spoils completely. Finally after another hour we were allowed on board after completing the paperwork, paying € 80 for cleaning (in advance) and a € 100 insurance waiver in cash.

After stowing the provisions and checking the inventory it was gone eight and we were completely exhausted, but mustered enough energy to walk 15 minutes to the nearest pizzeria for a reasonable meal and a few pitchers of cold, fizzy white wine.

During the night the temperature

dropped and we slept like babies, waking to another stunning, sunny day. We headed for Elba soon after breakfast, the wind providing us with a perfect 6kn close reach. The hot sunshine and inviting blue water felt like a taste of paradise.

DOWN SOUTH

We chose to visit the south coast of Elba first, to allow us a wide choice of sheltered anchorages should the weather blow up. The bay of Porto Azzurro on the southeast side offers a selection of pretty anchorages with a choice between deserted beaches or busier tourist areas. At the head of the harbour is a small marina that can take around 30 visiting yachts, but we chose to anchor close by and take the dinghy ashore. The town is attractive with plenty of delightful shops, a supermarket and a variety of bars, ice-cream parlours and restaurants, many of which specialise in fresh fish and seafood. We ambled through the quaint streets and alleys, stopping for a cooling beer at a small bar in a busy square, and watched stylish Italians enjoying their evening promenade.

Since we had plenty of fresh supplies and our cockpit offered us the best view in town, we ate on

board. After dinner we sipped delicious Italian brandy and rich espresso under the stars until we struggled to keep our eyes open. Soon the stresses of the first day were completely expelled as we slept soundly and the boat rocked in the gentle night breeze.

After a refreshing swim and a lazy breakfast the following morning we headed off slowly around the mountainous headland of Punta dei Riparti towards the large inviting bays along the south coast. The first is Golfo Stella, the largest, and offers the least shelter. We chose to stop in the next, Golfo della Lacona, with its busy beach but more protected anchorage, for lunch and a swim. Then, suitably refreshed, we headed a few miles further west to Golfo di Campo, which has several stern-to berths alongside a busy harbour wall, plus plenty of good overnight anchorage just outside, near the beach. After a hearty supper on board, we laid out another 20m of chain for the night as the warm wind was gusting F4-5. Unfortunately, a beam-on swell meant we all awoke at 0300 as everything on the boat clunked and rattled. Worse still was the incessant creaking from the bulkheads around the engine compartment as the hull



(Picture captions, starting on opposite page from Left to Right): Marciana Marina with its stunning mountain backdrop; Getting ready for a spell of heavy weather – Our Bavaria 44, *Gisu* strung up tightly against the ferocious 48kn Mistrale in Capraia; Drying out and drying off – visiting yachts stern to the town quay in Marciana; local use of colour – a couple of buildings almost swamped with beautiful bougainvillea flowers in Capraia town; An interesting mix of old and new in the scenic fishing harbour at Golfo di Campo

flexed. Terry, Paula and Simon who were occupying the after cabins were driven to distraction by the noise and decamped for relative peace elsewhere on the boat. By 0700, five exhausted and bleary-eyed crew gathered around the gurgling coffee pot, then set off early towards the chosen lunch stop in a small bay opposite the little town of Fetovia.

This spot is well protected from

anywhere but the S-SE, although a little swell always seems to work its way in when the wind is blowing hard. It's a quiet little cove with little ashore other than a few restaurants and bars for the numerous campsites. The beach is cordoned off for swimmers, so dinghies must be left at the smart little dock nearby. We lunched eagerly, took a brief siesta, followed soon after by a cooling swim in the clear waters of

the bay. Later we rounded the western tip of Elba for the small town of Marciana and its quaint little harbour. Because it was Terry and Paula's 25th wedding anniversary we wanted to eat ashore that night so chose to moor stern to the quay, which turned out to be free of charge. We refilled our water tanks for € 10 and used the showers and loos near the harbour office. Just along from the harbour the

beach offers a break for those who prefer to swim from the land.

The town by the harbour is a fairly recent development and actually called Marciana Marina, whereas the much older town of Marciana itself is higher into the mountains to keep it safe from the marauding pirates that frequented these islands in the 18th Century. A bus or taxi service is available to take you to the town, but there was



Simon, Terry, Duncan and Paula tucking into a typical tasty lunch on board. As you can see, the Bavaria designers take this sort of activity extremely seriously, which makes a great deal of sense. With fresh ingredients right on your doorstep – not to mention fine wines and Italian brandy – we often enjoyed them from the comfort of the cockpit. The company was great and the view was absolutely fantastic





The Boat

We chartered the boat from Kiriacoulis through their UK agent, Tenrag Yacht Charters (☎ 01227 721874 Website www.tenrag.com). Our boat was a three-year old Bavaria 44 with eight berths in four cabins, two heads with hot water showers, deck shower and in-mast furling mainsail. She was in pretty reasonable condition, but we felt it could have done with a bow-thruster as manoeuvring into tight spaces in high winds was somewhat tricky.

Costs

The Kiriacoulis Bavaria 44 Prestige cost £2,506 for the 10 days from 25th June, with outboard and spinnaker costing extra. Cleaning is

☐ 80 and insurance damage waiver (optional) ☐ 100, cash only. If you don't have the waiver you will be required to leave a deposit (credit card), returnable if the boat is undamaged.

Flights to Pisa were booked independently through Thomson Airways on www.thomsonfly.com. They cost between £49-£99 depending on how early you book. Note – it's perfectly possible to pick up the boat in Portoferraio, Elba, and fly directly to the island should you prefer, but only for one or two weeks.

Area

There are several islands to visit in the bay of Tuscany, but Elba is the largest and will take a week of your

charter. Should you have two weeks then you can include the west coast of Corsica as well, although make sure you have the charts and pilot book before leaving the base.

Weather

As you might expect, in common with much of the Mediterranean it's reliably hot and sunny most of the time between May and September, but the seabreeze is commonplace and can blow up to F7 during the afternoon. Strong winds from the N-NW occasionally blow in this region, even in the summer, so ask the locals if you suspect something is brewing. Winds are usually light at night and from the southern sector.



little sign of the cabinovia, or aerial railway to the top of the mountain as suggested in our dated pilot.

ROAD CLOSED

The harbourside town is slightly touristy, but in a laid-back sort of way, and the only small road through is closed in the evening so pedestrians can amble along it and choose an eatery at their leisure. A smart-looking fish restaurant overlooking the harbour gave us an almost uninterrupted view of the blazing orange sunset. Our meal was delicious and served at the typical island pace – very slowly – but that gave us more time to soak up the wonderful atmosphere and digest our food before sipping a dark espresso on the dimly-lit patio while watching the twinkling lights from the fishing boats and yachts.

There are banks and a decent supermarket so we replenished our food supplies the next morning and later strolled around the lively, but mercifully shaded, back streets to see what else we might find in the way of local crafts in the numerous delightful shops.

We left this pretty little refuge late in the morning and headed for a suitable spot in the wide bay, immediately to the east of Marciana, to lunch, anchor and

swim. We potted through the three main bays, all of which had sandy beaches lined with neat rows of umbrellas. Boats are kept well away from these beaches by a line of red buoys, so the only areas left to anchor are in 10-15m of water, which requires a lot of chain for a brief lunch-time stop. We finally chose to tuck up right in the lee of the pronounced headland, Capo d'Enfola, but the holding wasn't good enough for a night stop. We swam much of the day to keep cool, then moved to a more protected anchorage at Golfo della Biodola to give us some shelter from the building SW wind. Unfortunately a swell built up again during the night, and the bulkhead creak came back driving us all to despair. When the wind turns into the north, as it inevitably did overnight, this bay offers little protection.

In the morning a steep chop had built up making it tricky to get the dinghy and outboard back onboard, but we wanted to have a good sail up to the off-lying island of Capraia without the hindrance of towing it. We set off under full sail at a cracking 6.5kn, close reaching into the northerly wind, but by halfway resorted to the engine as the wind died to nothing. Still, our batteries were well flattened by now thanks to

a power hungry fridge and anchor light, so at least the two-hour motor breathed some life back into them.

The small island of Capraia appeared out of the heat haze some five miles off and the only harbour on the island, Porto Capraia, was

“In the evening calm, a delicious supper in the cockpit was followed by a quiet glass of limoncello”

easily identified by its prominent white lighthouse on the headland. We dropped the hook just outside the harbour and prepared lunch, but were astounded when the ferry arrived and nearly wiped out a nearby yacht that had anchored close to his approach. Take care to give the ferry quay a wide berth!

As we ate lunch the wind started to build from the north. That's not unusual in the Med as the burning summer heat often causes a robust

sea breeze, but a rapidly falling barometer was giving me nagging suspicions, so I chose to go into the newly completed marina for the night. Berthing up in the small harbour was challenging, to say the least. Saildrives don't make 44ft boats particularly manoeuvrable in tight corners, especially when the wind is gusting down onto your beam at 28kn. By the time we grabbed the pickup line and tensioned it we were leaning heavily on the adjacent boat's fenders.

Finally tied up, we relaxed and took in our surroundings. The marina had obviously just opened and a proud, uniformed assistant informed me that water and electricity were on the pontoon and there were showers and loos opposite. It all seemed surprisingly efficient, until I came to pay the bill, when I realised why. The mooring fees were full, high season Med rates and everything else was extra. That came to ☐ 58.85 for the boat and ☐ 3 each for a shower. Just using the loo was ☐ 1 a time.

The F7 wind continued unabated, so we decided to eat ashore in one of several small pizzerias to give us a little respite from the dust storms emanating from the nearby unmade-up car park. The meal was average and we



Picture captions, starting on opposite page, from Left to Right: The entrance to Elba's main port, Portoferraio is in a large, busy bay in the north of the island; Sunset over Marciana Marina from our restaurant balcony; The interesting and unconventional floating restaurant is one of many good eating places in the pretty little town of Porto Azzurro; Real picture postcard stuff this – the quay in Capraia's main harbour, Porto Capraia; A Hobie cat skimming past in the early afternoon – Porto Azzurro has a large enough bay for everyone to enjoy; How's this for a view – the Borgo al Cotone Restaurant in Marciana where we enjoyed a delicious evening meal.

slept well initially, but the wind soon returned towards dawn, forcing us to add another shoreline amidships. By breakfast the wind was blowing 25kn and the sky looked a little peculiar. I had a bad feeling about the weather, especially since the barometer had dropped eight points in the previous 24hrs, so I decided to use the lazy lines from the spare berth on our outside to double up our holding power. No sooner had we done that than the wind started to screech through the rigging at 30-35kn. As the windward boat we were taking the brunt of the gusts beam-on. When it reached 40kn+ we added a further long warp from the bows to the end of the pontoon, giving us a total of seven lines, but even these were taking a hammering as the wind rose still further to 48kn. I hoped the marina builders had done a good job anchoring the pontoon, as by now, along with the 20 or so other boats on our pontoon, we were heeling at 25° despite dropping the bimini and spray hood. The wind was the renowned Mistrale and was likely to last for a couple of days. Once it dropped off a little, back to the mid-30kn range, we felt it safe to leave the boat again and Helen and I caught the bus to the delightful town a couple of miles

above the port. We strolled around the outside of the crumbling old fort and monastery as best we could, trying to shield our eyes from the flying dust. Deciding to walk back down to the port along the winding coast road gave us a good opportunity to see how the sea had built into a nasty breaking mess, literally foaming and steaming as each new gust tore down the hillside striking the bubbling surface. By the end of the day we were all pretty weather beaten and ready for a calming evening in town.

FANTASTIC FISH

We found a promising looking fish restaurant alongside the old fort on the hill overlooking the bay and revelled in the delights of the locally caught, fresh fish baked on slices of potato and tomato, all washed down with a deliciously cool Italian white wine. By the time we'd wandered down to the port for a coffee the wind had abated and the little port bustled with life before the last bus left for town at 0030.

Next day the wind had disappeared completely so, after settling our mooring fees, which, since it was now 1st July, had risen to an astronomical £88 a night, we set off under motor to Elba's capital town, Portoferraio, in a large bay at

the eastern end of the N coast. The wind picked up halfway across the 25-mile passage giving us a reasonable run across, and thoughtfully died away completely just when we arrived in the bay. We cruised around checking out the suggested anchorages in the pilot, and poked our noses briefly into the main town harbour, but decided to opt for a peaceful anchorage rather than the noise of the nearby roads and nightclubs. We settled for a spot in the eastern corner of the bay, opposite a smart hotel and a small beach, where in 5m of water our hook dug in well. Once the ferry traffic had subsided the bay settled to a mirror calm and supper in the cockpit was followed by a few quiet glasses of limoncello as the sun slowly disappeared leaving a pink glow over the hilly western horizon.

We slept well and woke to a refreshing early swim before breakfast. The girls wanted to visit the shops of Portoferraio but were persuaded it was more important to leave in time to see the air display off Cavo later that afternoon.

The harbour at Cavo is very small with little space to anchor off and is wide open from NE-SE, so tends to be on the receiving end of quite a swell, made worse by fast moving ferries. The night was

bumpy and sleep was reduced to forty winks between the graunching of the anchor chain and the ever creaking bulkheads.

Anxious to leave the roly anchorage and keen to get to the morning market in Rio Marina, we set off early for a short motor. The marina at Rio is small and the pontoons not particularly secure, but it was okay for a short stopover and the market was well worth a visit. We then returned to the first bay we'd visited nine days earlier – Porto Azzurro – where we looked forward to a refreshing swim. We were about to take the plunge, when we spotted numerous jellyfish floating by.

Looking around, we noticed that nobody on any of the other boats or the beach was in the water, so the problem obviously extended throughout the entire bay. It was disappointing for our last day, but the bay was still extremely pretty and provided a calm, safe anchorage. Just a short sail across to the mainland saw the usual last day's motorsail into a 24kn headwind with grey clouds on the horizon and incoming rain. We reached the base before the skies opened and headed off back to Pisa – this time by taxi. At £180 an expensive luxury but well worth it.