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A Transpacific To Transform Lives

TAKE A ROWING MACHINE, TREADMILL AND EXERCISE BIKE, PLACE THEM ON A 47M MOTORYACHT WITH 3,200NM OF OPEN OCEAN STRETCHED OUT AHEAD, AND THEN ADD A BUNCH OF 15 ENERGETIC, ENTHUSIASTIC ATHLETES FOR 13 DAYS. THE RESULT? SOME FANTASTIC EXPERIENCES, HILARIOUS PICTURES AND OVER \$53,000 RAISED FOR CHARITY.



M/Y *Slojo* has been supporting YachtAid Global (YAG) for over two years, delivering much-needed goods to remote communities and donating thousands of dollars from tips to the grassroots charity. So when the threat of listlessness and boredom loomed for owners, guests and crew of *Slojo* over their approaching transpacific crossing this December, inspiration struck.

Following *Talitha's* charitable and athletic lead from earlier in the year, on 11 December, *Slojo* set off from San Diego, bound for Nuku Hiva in French Polynesia with a plan to continually run, row or bike for the duration of the journey. Dubbed the *Slojo* Transpacific Triathlon YachtAid Global Challenge, many followed on Facebook and their website or through TheCrewReport.com to see how the team was doing.

TCR spoke with *Slojo's* owners Jim and sujo as well as her captain, Bruno Herregods, and YAG's founder, Captain Mark Drewelow, to find out what inspired them, their favourite parts of the challenge and why the charity has kept them engaged for so long.



The team before setting off from San Diego with their yacht aid laid out

THE OWNERS: Jim and sujo



When did you first come across YachtAid Global and what is it about the charity that has kept you working with Mark for over two years?

Both: Mark has been and continues to be a first-class person to work with. His vision and passion alone keep us interested and moving forward.

Who came up with the idea for the Challenge?

Jim: I think originally it was our Captain's idea. The guests we invited enjoy exercising, so they were every bit as excited to do this challenge as we were. It was a nice combination of accomplishing a common goal during a Pacific crossing while staying fit.

Which was your favourite shift and why?

Jim: Everybody was assigned a specific shift; mine was from 0830 to 1000, then from 1515 to 1600. Our friends had similar shifts. I liked the early morning hours because that gave me a chance to practise celestial navigation. In addition, we all stood three hour lookout watches with an OOW.

It is clear you got stuck into the spirit of the challenge; what did you think of the traditional equator crossing ceremonies on day nine?

Jim: It's a rite of passage, and I love the lore and tradition of the crossing ceremonies. Of course, it was a lot more fun this year since I was already a "shellback".

How has sharing such a big experience with your crew changed your relationship with them?

Both: There's no question it was a bonding experience for everyone. Because it was a team effort, nobody was going to let the team down. It also set the tone that this was going to be no ordinary crossing, and it would be an experience no one would forget. We can't begin to tell how you proud we are of our crew.

Have the YAG deliveries in the Pacific affected your use of Slojo?

Both: YAG's motto of "changing the world without changing course" is perfectly in line with our cruising spirit. We certainly are more mindful of our destinations and are more aware of the possibilities of aiding those areas.

Have you been onboard for any of the deliveries?

Both: We did a delivery to a school in Mexico and one in Fiji; both experiences enriched our visits. They're not-so-subtle reminders of how lucky we are and how rewarding it is to give back.

In your opinion, why should fellow yacht owners follow your lead and get involved with YAG?

Jim: Unfortunately, I think the yachting industry and yachting owners in particular have an image and reputation of overconsumption, ostentatious displays of wealth and disregard for their surroundings. We arrive at our destinations, offload our trash, party at the dock and then leave. Deserved or not, the image is there, even if it's not a reputation deserved by all. That said, I think by having a purpose beyond using our yachts for leisure, we as yacht owners can go a long way to help change the image and change the world at the same time. Supporting YAG is a perfect example for taking the step towards doing so. The charity understands the yachting lifestyle, works with us on what we can or can't provide, and we know that every bit of the resource we do provide will go back towards the cause. In the end, owners, guests and crew will all reap the benefits when they experience the enormous amount of pleasure they'll get out of it.



Equator-crossing antics

THE CAPTAIN: Bruno Herregods

interact.

There were two teams onboard vying to lose the most weight from the challenge. Which won and who was crowned Biggest Loser?

The winning team won by half a pound. The total amount lost between the two teams was 40 pounds. As a joke, the owner gave the winning team a \$100 gift voucher to a fast food restaurant. (Luckily) I was on the losing team!

How did it feel discovering the fundraising total while crossing the finish line in Nuku Hiva?

I never imagined that we would raise the amount we did. We were all blown away by the support, which made the whole event so much more rewarding. We are really grateful to everyone who followed us on Facebook and donated to the cause.

Who suffered most at the hands of King Neptune (owner Jim) when you crossed the equator?

I would have to say that it would have been Debbie, a friend of the owners. The owner was Neptune so he spared no mercy when it came to handing out punishment to his own friend. This time-old tradition is another great experience for the owners and crew to

What has been your best YAG memory so far?

The Lau group in Fiji was unbelievable; their unconditional welcome to us was an eye opener. In these islands, a simple soccer ball or five gallons of diesel are riches beyond their imagination, and they're all so appreciative.

Out of all the South Pacific cruising destinations, Fiji still stands out for everyone. Every destination has something specific to offer but the people in the Lau Group made you feel welcomed.

None of the villages that we visited was forewarned that we were coming, so that made the welcome even more genuine. The donations from YAG were also a surprise to them and not expected, which made the whole event so much more exciting for all of us.

Is there much organisation needed to do a delivery? What does it entail for the yacht and its crew?

There is a lot of organisation that goes on behind the scenes to make a charitable delivery. But the beauty of YAG is that they coordinate all the logistics for us and customise the level of involvement to fit our agenda.

There have been YAG projects that a couple of our crewmembers were involved in and there have been YAG projects that were an "all hands on deck" scenario, otherwise known as the *Slojo* YAG Challenge.

I know that a yacht crew has more than enough going on in their daily lives to keep the boat in tip-top condition, and they don't need the added stress. But, Mark runs a great organization which makes it possible for us to deliver the items to the communities without that added stress.

Once a destination has been chosen, Mark and his team coordinate the whole performance; from purchasing the supplies to hand-delivering them to the boat. All that is required from our crew is to stow the goods onboard and deliver them to the final destination. There are times when a location does not permit Mark and his team to provide this level of service, but we still find that there is time to go out and purchase the supplies and stow them ourselves. We enjoy doing it, and it's not often we get the opportunity to buy games and toys for the kids.

Who decided on your "no tip" policy so all gratuities go to YAG?

I brought up the "no-tip" policy when we joined *Slojo* during the build; the owners listened to my argument and agreed. Since we're a private yacht that does no charters, we certainly don't want to put the owners' guests in an awkward position of tipping. We kindly accept donations on behalf of YAG instead. It has been a great way to raise awareness for what YachtAid Global does while building a fund for us to accomplish more YAG projects in the future.

Your creative online updates kept the donations streaming in and supporters glued to your Facebook page and website; how did you stay so motivated and enthusiastic over the 13 days?

We all love photography onboard and therefore had more than enough pictures to share. We had a few private onboard competitions to also keep the group motivated. I set one up for the person who ran the farthest and expended the most energy on the bike during their 90 minutes. The prize was a Suunto watch to the value of \$300 and I donated the equivalent amount to YAG. For each of us, the 12 days flew by.

What's the next *Slojo* Challenge?

That's a good question! There are so many communities that need support. Seeing the need will eventually spark an idea for our next challenge. Right now, we are going to deliver this very big stock to a community centre in Moorea, and then we are going to continually work with YAG to find locations that are on our route that we can help.



THE CHARITY FOUNDER: Captain Mark Drewelow



How do you decide what to put into the delivery shipments?

YAG follows a careful logical process to determine the contents of a delivery shipment (the YAG aid), who benefits from the YAG aid and who helps us facilitate the deliveries. We put a considerable time and effort into researching needy communities that lie on the intended route of a specific operation. If it is a community that we have not worked with prior, we reach out to contacts that we know and trust that may have a connection to the area and/or directly contact a school headmaster, politician, government official, etc. The research helps us determine if the community really needs the aid, which we then verify through internal means. Once a community is selected, we gather a prioritised list of items needed. We then measure the space available aboard the yacht and select YAG aid that fits the dimensions of the space. At that point, we also consider the logistics of what effect that aid has on the yacht operationally. This system has been tested over and over and it works well.

How many yachts have completed deliveries so far?

It's an extensive list; here are some to name a few:

Slojo (Easter Island, Chile; Puesta Del Sol, Nicaragua; Antigua; Bocas Del Toro, Panama; San Blas Islands, Panama)
Seljm (Pelican, Alaska; Puesta Del Sol, Nicaragua; Indonesia)
Ice Bear (Puntarenas area, Costa Rica; Golfito region, Costa Rica)
Rosehearty (Pelican, Alaska)
Beagle V (Kodiak Island, Alaska)
Georgia (Puerto Eden, Chile)
Big Fish (Robinson Crusoe Island, Chile)
Seven C's (Bocas Del Toro, Panama)
LTC (Bahia Drake, Costa Rica)
Janice of Wyoming (Various communities, Costa Rica)
Steadfast (Pelican, Alaska)
Triple Seven (Panama)
 And numerous additional high profile operations that we cannot name nor disclose details.

What if a yacht is not near San Diego, where you are based, but would like to do a delivery?

Yes, YAG is able to shift donations of supplies to superyachts from almost anywhere in the world to virtually anywhere in the world.

Can significant donations to YAG be targeted to benefit specific regions or communities?

A large part of what we do is incorporating the patron's preferences for giving back. Some give back because they have a tie to a particular cause or location while others do it for the sake of giving back. We had one patron who was in the Peace Corps back in the 80s and vowed to benefit the island to which she was once assigned. Decades later, she was eventually introduced to us and now we're helping to coordinate a shipment for her.

Which YAG memory stands out for you the most in the five years since you started the charity?

I have a keen memory and I'd like to say all the points along the way stand out. However, one in particular sticks out

What is YachtAid Global?

The charity was founded in May 2006 by captain-turned-yacht agent Mark Drewelow, who had spent 20 years at sea, mostly in Mexico, Central and South America, and south-east Asia. Once ashore, he felt a great desire to stay connected with the communities he had visited and so YachtAid Global was born. "Our tag line is 'Changing the world without changing course,'" he says. In 2009, YAG and the vessels that have carried supplies for it collectively won the International Superyacht Society Distinguished Crew Award for their charitable work.

in my mind. It started out as a simple shift of school aid from one location to another and manifested into a project that has ended up saving lives.

In 2009, *SY Vivid* delivered aid to a school on Komodo Island in Indonesia. During the delivery, Captain Tim Forderer learned that the school children were being stalked and attacked by Komodo dragons – literally! This problem could've easily been solved with a simple fence to protect the children but there were no funds to build one. That all changed. Tim became our YAG Ambassador on the spot, acting as our on-site representative. He provided us with a list of materials that was needed, came up with a budget and coordinated the manpower to essentially build this fence that would save these children's lives. Through YachtAid Global, it is indeed possible to change the world without changing course.

**Fancy taking up your own YAG Challenge or delivering YAG aid?
The charity is always keen to talk to yachts that would like to help.
Visit yachtaidglobal.org for details and contact information.**

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