

laden with enough booze to level an armada of drunken sailors. The refusal to compromise on a good drink seems universal!

As the starting whistle sounded over the radio we set sail north from Bodrum to Gundogan, accompanied by referees and paramedics, full of fire and expectation.

The yachts of all sizes and designs, some looking like toys as they darted between their gigantic competitors, were divided into seven categories according to size. Most were built in the last 25 years, but one, very like a pirate ship incongruously flying a Union Jack, was 109 years old.

The race was divided into four legs of between 15 and 25 nautical miles. But, true to form, the winds were either too heavy or too light and headed us in whichever direction we pointed.

After the stimulating start the northerly winds strengthened to a lively Force 5-6. Our smart white team T shirts were soon covered with fleeces and all-weather gear and the mainsail swapped for a smaller one, as we clung to the topside. Six hours later we arrived in harbour to find only 39 yachts had finished on time and several had suffered torn sails and broken rigging.

Whereas couples aren't generally a winning combination when sailing together this is one occasion when it actually works. You can leave the crew to make the crucial decisions in a nerve-racking start, change the sails in choppy seas and pick up the remnants of kitchenware after it has crashed into the cabin while you chat and enjoy your surroundings completely free of admonishment! As a result we were free to watch two turtles and a dolphin as it played beside the boat.

SCIC cruises are renowned for their fantastic cuisine and attentive service. But we were warned once the racing started lunch would be sandwiches on the hoof instead of a relaxed round-the-table extravaganza. But even at the height of the Force 5 to 6 Soner took advantage of the shelter of an island to fry up some delicious hamburgers and Oktar kept the drinks coming thick and fast in between hauling in sheets, as Tifil rose and fell.

And even after a hard day's racing, a delicious three course dinner was freshly prepared within two hours of mooring up.

The second day was an exhilarating six hour passage against a Force 4-5 head wind. Our moorings were in Didim's spanking new 650 berth marina, the second largest in Turkey, with a super shower block and boating facilities.

Although it had been open three months the owners had saved the grand opening to celebrate with the yachts in the Bodrum Cup. And grand it was, with all the razzmatazz of a celebrity-style opening. A hundred hurricane lamps lit an open air arena, tables were laden with food, and a fashion show, fancy dress competition and pop band performed on stage.

With the homeward and longest leg to Gümüşlük of 25 nautical miles ahead of us we



"And even after a hard day's racing, a delicious three course dinner was freshly prepared within two hours of mooring up."

had been looking forward to Tifil performing well on the run. But the wind had other ideas, and not only swung 180 degrees but dropped as well! After milling around on the start line for an hour with 66 other yachts some crew took the opportunity for a cooling dip at sea – we were directed over the radio to motor an hour to Yalıkavak where hopefully the wind would pick up.

It did not and the race was abandoned. The fleet motored in company into the beautiful natural harbour of Gümüşlük. To us visitors on board this was a bonus. We had a whole afternoon to laze on the quiet beaches, explore the shops, try out the bars, and even wade across the causeway to Rabbit Island, while one crew aboard a tiny boat (relatively speaking) next to us used the time to spear octopus and catch swordfish for supper.

Once again there was a band and dancing at a beach bar which attracted locals, young and old alike, as well as competing crew.

On the last leg back to Bodrum we enjoyed our best sailing with a fair Force 3 southerly. We got a great start and enjoyed some good racing tactics, arriving back late afternoon. A rock concert and lengthy prize-giving in a local night

club rounded off the week. We had a respectable place mid-fleet.

SCIC offers guests a week racing in the Bodrum Cup for the same price as a cruise at that time of year. The difference is you get all the excitement of racing alongside some magnificent yachts and are still treated like royalty. So longer legs, more sailing and more excitement by day – and still amazing dream cuisine at night. No wonder the crew needed an early night!

Information:

Sailing Cruises in Comfort (SCIC Sailing) owns a small fleet of boutique classic wooden yachts with en suite shower/toilets in each cabin. Air conditioning is being added this winter.

From April to November 2010 SCIC offers 15 different itineraries to the Greek islands and north and south Turkey with optional on shore excursions.

It also offers – themed cruises, including a culinary one with a celebrity chef, yoga/meditation and golfing cruises. You can either charter a yacht for family and friends and pick your own itinerary and theme, or be accommodated with a mix of other people. Special deals are available such as four for the price of three on certain dates.

A week's sailing is typically 490 euros each and 334 euros for meals, drinks and snacks on board. Normally passengers have dinner at a restaurant ashore twice a week.

www.SCICSailing.e.u

Flights are from Stansted and Gatwick airports.