

FAST FRIENDS IN ST MALO

A chance to exercise entente cordiale en famille while weighing up Vivier's Stir-Ven 19 and 22

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS **NIC COMPTON**





Caption asdgsrg sd fg ser sr sdfhs dfh sery ser serhysef gersd gsdg sdfg df g sdgs
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It was off the southernmost tip of Sweden, in a land that doesn't even exist on some maps, that I first noticed François Vivier's Stir-Ven design. I had joined the Blekinge Archipelago Raid and, after a week of idyllic sailing along the southern coast of Sweden, we were headed for our penultimate destination: the island of Utklippan, no more than a large rock with a lighthouse, a youth hostel and a small harbour. A strong southerly wind was blowing, however, and the organisers had decided that only the most seaworthy boats could attempt this exposed leg; the rest of us would have to be transported by various vessels loaned by the Swedish Navy. Just 6 of the 26 boats talking part were allowed out that day, including both Stir-Vens. And so it was that I witnessed at first-hand

how incredibly seaworthy these boats are (despite previous comments by John Perryman in this magazine – see classicboat.co.uk for those, and Vivier's reply). It was a gruelling enough crossing in the 30ft (9.1m) motorboat I was on, yet the 22ft (6.7m) half-decked Stir-Vens seemed to take it all in their stride. Their crews arrived at Utklippan drenched but, in my eyes, true heroes, and I've been wanting to sail a Stir-Ven ever since.

Thirteen years later, I finally got the opportunity when my I headed out to St Malo to try out not one but two Stir-Vens built by Vivier builders Grand-Largue. The idea was to head off to the island of Cézembre for a picnic with yard founder Pierre-Yves de la Rivière and his family aboard the slightly scaled down Stir-Ven 19, and my family and I on one of the original 22-footers.



Caption asdgersg sd fg ser sr sdfhs dfh sery ser serhysef gsergd gsdg sdfg df g sdgs gsrsgd gsg s dsgs sdfhse
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It was glassy calm as we headed out of St Malo, however, so we decided to head to the nearer Fort de l'île Harbour, once owned by French film star Alain Delon.

After a short motor, we rafted up for lunch and exchanged bottles of wine – I had brought a bottle of our local Sharpham Estate white wine all the way from Devon, which Pierre-Yves and his wife, Claire, politely tasted and declared to be good (though whether they were just being polite...). A breeze sprang up after lunch, by which time our daughter, Betty, had made fast friends with their daughter, Sybille, who joined us for the return trip.

As we scooted back across the bay, I finally experienced the Stir-Ven's fantastic sailing abilities for myself and also discovered her secret. As well as being endowed with considerable inherent form stability, she has an extremely

heavy centreboard: 190kg (420lb) compared with just 90kg (200lb) on the 22ft Romilly I then owned. Indeed, Pierre-Yves told me the whole boat was designed around that centreboard. The result is a fantastically steady yet fast ride in the moderate breeze we had that day, and a boat that, despite her low freeboard, will cope with the kind of weather we had sailing to Utklippan 13 years ago. The drawback is in winching it up at the end of a trip, much heavier work than the relatively effortless Romilly set-up.

As we sped across the bay, I had no compunction about leaving Pierre-Yves behind on his smaller boat and enjoying our sail to the full. Good manners are all well and good, but it's not every day you get to sail such a wonderful boat in such perfect conditions. The entente cordiale could wait till later. 