



my sailing journey

I did have some stressful moments and ALMOST capsized immediately after boarding the boat until I could figure out and manage all the lines, tiller and my weight all at the same time ... oh, and until I realised I needed to put the daggerboard down. That solved the problem immediately and *Allegra* sailed away from shore very graciously. I sailed for few hours and did not think about returning to the shore. I bored all my companions who were standing on the coast and watching/video taping, it took me so long. Then finally they convinced me to come back to the shore. It was getting dark.

I agree with those people who said before me; nothing compares to a pleasure of sailing a craft that you built with your own hands, and observe its agility and grace on the water! At that moment I was the happiest man on earth. And



Newest crew member up the mast. (above right)

Showing off the bronze medal. (right)

part two

father was the proudest! My mother and sister did not say anything ... they did not believe in this project very much in the beginning, but now they had to acknowledge and congratulate us on our victory.

You would think that was the end of the trouble now that I had a wonderful little sailboat, but no. After I finished my boat and wanted to enjoy endless hours of sailing, I was constantly frustrated by the lack of sailing and recreational infrastructure in Georgia. The so-called 'Yacht Club' at the Tbilisi lake was too exclusivist and not really open to people from outside. And going wild and launching the boat from the shore not belonging to the yacht club was too complicated

by IRAKLI KUTSIA in the Republic of Georgia

My father and I launched our Firebug, *Allegra*, on a beautiful August day. The breeze was steady but not strong. Everything was perfect.

and inconvenient due to the terrain, there being no normal launching ramps. Plus I did not have a trailer and always had to rooftop the FireBug which constantly put me in need of a few friends, and not everyone was available as often as I would like. So my sailing practice stalled a little bit.

It's sad that people are not interested in sailing in Georgia. The only way to promote sailing and make it a popular sport, at least in the future, is to train little children and get them interested. In the long run this will make sailing more popular and make more people involved. In my spare time I often amuse myself dreaming about creating a small sailing club, not exclusivist, but open and affordable for everyone. I would build a small flotilla of FireBugs and start from there. Well I might do that some day. But first I will have to get a professional sailing instructor's license, so I would need to go to another country for that.

One of the pleasures of sailing is that when you enjoy it so much you want to involve family and as many friends as possible so that they also enjoy it and you have company every time you go. It is quite a pleasure actually introducing new people to this wonderful sport and pastime and seeing their enthusiasm and energy. I taught my sister and some friends how to sail and they're just loving it.

Gradually I started thinking of bigger projects and bigger sailboats. Competitive sailing has always interested me. My lucky moment was when I met a sailor at Tbilisi lake, Paata, who was also renting out sailboats. That's his job. We quickly became friends. He has trained since he was 10 and has won several national competitions in Soviet times. He invited me to participate in the regatta in summer. They needed one additional crew on a 7m Polish Conrad. I was exultant with the offer and gladly accepted. And so our week long adventure began.

First we did a passage from Batumi to Poti, which is about 32 miles. We had no wind for three hours right when we were just a mile away from our destination, and then according to the Murphy's Law our engine also failed. It was a real seamanship that brought us finally into the port at 2am that night. And



FireBug launching and teaching friends to sail on Lake Tbilisi.

in that moment I clearly understood what the sailors of old times felt when they finally reached the land after an exhausting sail. Everyone was tired, but we were so happy to reach the port. This was my first sea adventure!

That night I slept very happily in the cockpit, wrapped in sails and facing stars. Unforgettable.

The next day we did the flotilla sailing to the town called Anaklia for the grand opening of the new yacht club. We saw dolphins jumping out of the water very close to our boat and there were a lot of fish splashing on the surface. It felt like paradise. And nothing compares to the chill of water when you jump right from the boat to escape the heat and sun on the



Racing the Black Sea. (top)

above left to right: Sleeping under the stars. Dnner in the cockpit. Sun sets over Tbilisi Lake.

cockpit! We returned to our base in Poti the same day.

The next three days were dedicated to races. There were eight boats racing, most of them Polish Conrads. We won one of the races, but overall took third place. There was an official ceremony at the closing of the seven day event, and we were awarded our medals. We loaded all the boats on trucks and headed back home to Tbilisi.

This adventure was a real sea christening for me. Now I really feel like a sailor and am ready for more exciting adventures and longer distances.

Right after we got back to Tbilisi, Paata and I dug out an old abandoned 470 Olympic boat at the Tbilisi Sailing Club that we now plan to repair and sail. The owner of the club promised to send us to competitions abroad if we get good enough so we'll be trying hard.

I am very happy with this new passion of mine. Sailing life clicks with my heart so harmoniously. I am dreaming of the day when I will be able to build my own bigger sailboat and go cruising to far away lands.

Well, so long! All the best from the beautiful country of Georgia.