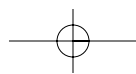
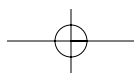
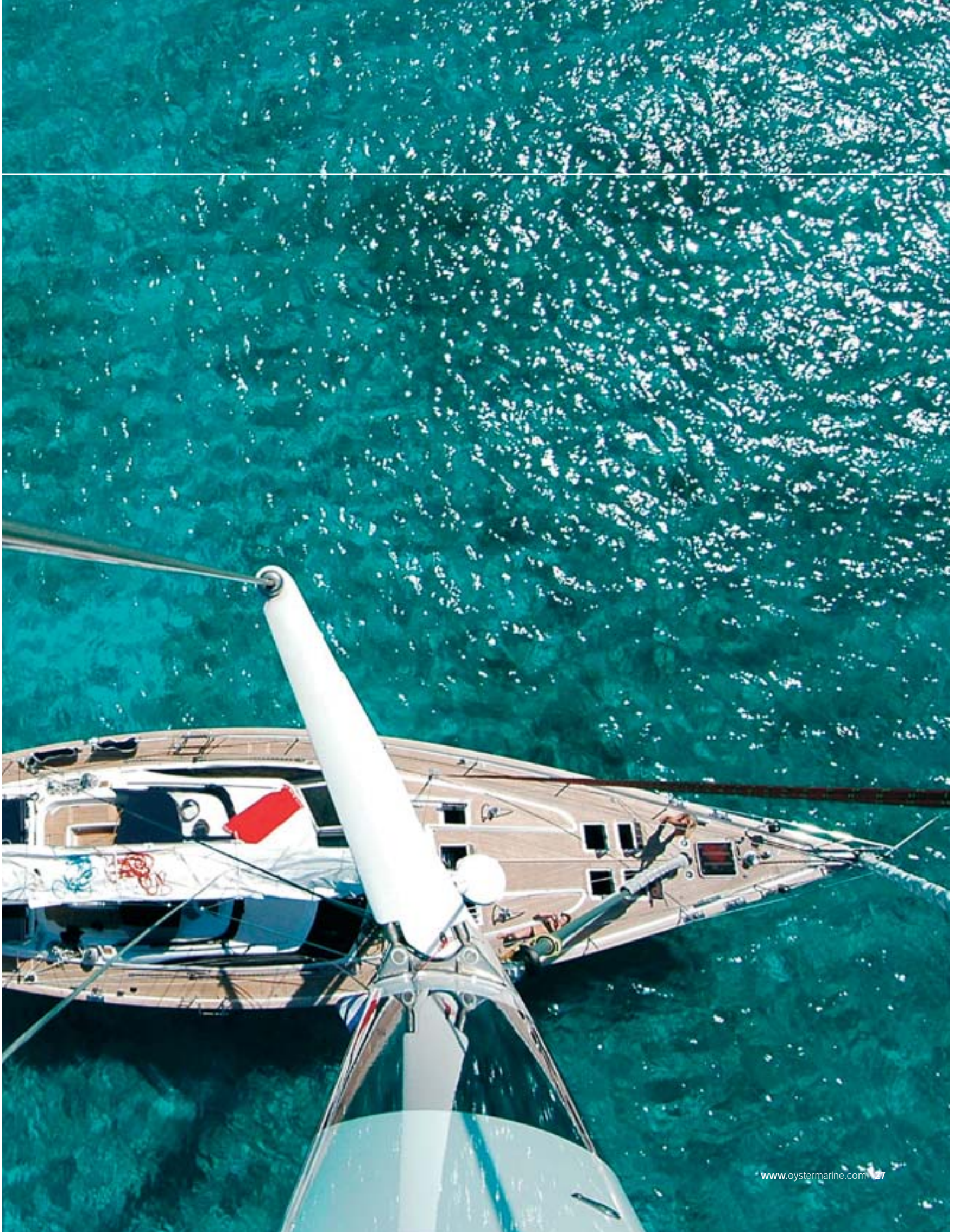
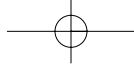


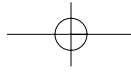
# Billy Budd's Maiden Voyage

By Kali Kahn, First Mate, Oyster 72, *Billy Budd*

"I don't want to go to the Caribbean" replied Cristina Rapisardi, owner of Oyster 72 *Billy Budd*, in response to the suggestion for a maiden voyage. Our aim was to get to Patagonia and Antarctica but there was insufficient time to get there for the current season, given the boat's November 2005 launch. "How about Cuba?" Richard asked Cristina. "Cuba could be interesting", came the answer .







FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Cajo Largo. Raising the Cuban flag before our arrival in Santiago de Cuba. Everytime we stopped curious police or officials arrived

This answer led to our being berthed in Santiago de Cuba, on the south east coast of the island, early in March of this year. Only four months after launching.

Cristina and her husband, Giovanni Cristofori met Richard Haworth when they chartered a yacht to go to Arctic islands of Svalbard. They talked of ideas to have a boat for cruising remote areas. Cristina and Giovanni dreamed of going to Greenland, Alaska, Antarctica and South Georgia, adventurous places which are a little off the beaten path. Richard's company 'High Latitudes' prepares boats for the worst. They acted as the owners' representative during the construction of *Billy Budd* and prepared the boat to make the couple's dreams possible. The company continues to manage the boat.

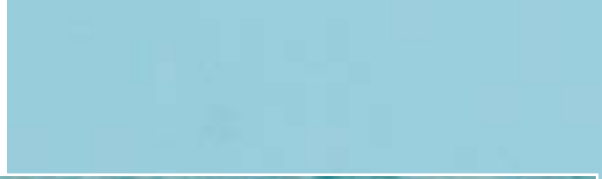
On arrival to Santiago de Cuba, we were directed to moor stern-to the end of the jetty, as our 2.9m draught prevented us from going alongside. Arrival clearance involved a succession of 11 officials visiting the boat. The Port Captain followed by a vet, a doctor, a hygiene officer, three customs officers, a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture and two immigration officials. Most presented fees, which were paid and we were in return given official receipts. Each had their job to do, and did them thoroughly and politely. The customs officers performed a supervised search throughout the vessel. This was consistent throughout all ports we visited in Cuba and sometimes involved dogs trained to locate drugs and explosives. The whole process took a mild four hours! Later we spoke with people for whom the search itself had taken that long! Commonly, vessels entering from Jamaica were given the most rigorous treatment.

The marina is a 20 minute drive out of the town of Santiago de Cuba. Major work was being undertaken on the city's water supply, so there was no water, and electricity was intermittent. What the marina lacked in services however was made up for by the helpfulness and friendliness of the staff who worked there. Wherever we went in Cuba, people appeared cheerful, friendly and helpful.

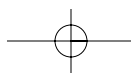
Security was high in all marinas we stopped in. Cuban rules restrict Cubans from coming into the marinas, except Havana's Marina Hemmingway, and from stepping aboard any boat. Tenders are not permitted to be used outside the immediate vicinity of the docks, and are required to be raised out the water after dark. A country of many restrictions was one impression. Explanations proved hard to come by, and exceptions were almost never granted.

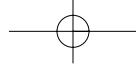
Whether the rules are to protect both Cubans and foreigners was hard to understand. The effort to try to keep foreigners and Cubans separate is strongly felt. Police may stop you on the streets of Havana if you happen to be with a Cuban acquaintance, or fines can be given to local, unofficial taxi operators who run an old beat up 1950's Chevy or a horse and cart. These people will usually give you a ride and either charge a bit more in case of getting caught, or they avoid central, touristy areas and drop you a block back from the main square.

While gathering provisions in any place the most help came from taxi drivers. They directed us to a combination of small limited supermarket stores, street produce markets and a few extra deals from private houses, so we could get the things we wanted during our two month stay. In Santiago de Cuba we

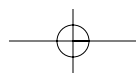
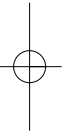
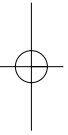


Moored off Cajo del Rosario Iguana Island





OWNER REPORT



## OWNER REPORT



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Going ashore in Cajo Largo. Fun with dolphins near Cienfuegos. Lobsters in exchange for wine and beer.

bought olives, wine, chicken breasts, and ice cream from official stores and paid in Cuban Convertible currency (1.1 to the Euro), and found brilliant tomatoes, bananas, peppers, lettuce, sweet potato, onions, garlic. We got limes and oranges from two of the larger street markets. The taxi driver found us eggs, illicit fish and shrimps.

The hardest to find were flour and potatoes because they are ration items from the state. In the town of Cienfuegos, mid way along the southern coast, our local taxi man, with a nicely painted yellow and black old classic, helped to get a sack of flour and 40 eggs, but no potatoes. While buying limes from a young man in the market (at the time hard to find), we asked him about potatoes as a last effort. He returned ten minutes later and led Kali round the back of the building and gave her a bag with 5lbs of potatoes. She discretely transferred them to her backpack gave a handshake, and the cash, and another deal was done. Meanwhile the chef was left standing in the market, wondering where she'd gone. The local black market is strong. Most items prohibited from sale were found by asking around, having a bit of time for an adventure, and being discrete when needed.

**Billy Budd** doesn't look like your usual Oyster. Her big Stainless Steel arch on the stern sets her lines apart from any other 72. This was designed to support the Fleet 77 dome, necessary for Cristina to continue work from some very remote places. There are numerous other, more discreet modifications. For example a second seawater strainer for the main engine, should the primary strainer become blocked (whether it be with plastic bags or brash ice), an up-rated anchor and additional ground tackle, a Stainless Steel plate fitted at the bow protecting the paintwork from brash ice,

and permanent mast steps up to the first spreaders for making it easier to pick a route through reefs or ice. The mainsail is slab reefed, with the fourth reef smaller than any trysail would be, and the staysail is smaller than might be expected, allowing it to be left, un-reefed, in all but the harshest conditions.

The waters around Cuba are very shallow, and many of the attractive looking anchorages we had read about had a limiting depth of no more than two metres. With aspirations of deserted beach anchorages, with great snorkeling and diving, we had decided to cruise the southern coast of the Island, exploring the offshore reefs, then rounding Cape San Antonio and making our way eastwards along the northern coast to Havana. We had little idea what to expect but from reading the RCC cruising guide, so it looked like we were going to have to be creative in order to find enough overnight anchorages on our route.

When we got out to the reefs surrounding Cayo Largo and Isla de la Juventud, all our hopes were rewarded. We found them to be quite accommodating despite our draught. Night after night we found ourselves either hiding behind a reef which provided great snorkeling or anchored off a deserted beach.

The snorkeling and diving were superb, with crystal clear waters and an abundance of fish and spectacular coral. Around the middle of the southern coast near Cayo Largo onwards to the largest Cuban island, Isla de la Juventude, the sea bottom was a mix of sea grass, coral, and clear sand. Isla de la Juventude (Island of the Youth) got its name in the 1970's after there was a large immigration of young people from mainland Cuba. They set up a large number of schools from primary to tertiary levels. It was a

community effort by Cuba. Schools were used by Cuban and other Caribbean and Latin American pupils. It is charted as Isla del Pinos, the previous name giving credit to the island's many pine trees. Our stop in Isla de la Juventud was on the south western corner. A popular dive destination known as Hotel Colony, at Bahia Siguanea was our official clear-in and clear-out point.

The dive operation hired us out a few sets of gear and tanks (**Billy Budd** is yet to be fitted with a compressor and more than one set of SCUBA equipment) and we returned back around the corner to Bahia Frances where we had previously spent two nights on anchor snorkeling and beach walking. While heading back there we stopped at one of three wrecks for a snorkel. The wreck sits in seven metres of water with the best part of the bow protruding up above the surface. From a distance it looks like a stand alone building in the middle of the sea. We dropped anchor right next to the wreck and found an amazing array of fish in residence, including some very big and menacing Barracuda!

These cruising grounds provide all of the best that the more popular Caribbean Islands have to offer, without the traffic. Cayo Largo was the busiest place with a variety of cruising yachts and a Cuban/German bareboat charter group that operate between there and mainland town Cienfuegos (about five vessels!). Otherwise we found ourselves alone or in the company of one other yacht. We spent two periods of seven days without seeing another boat. This is what we hoped for and we would recommend anyone looking for similar cruising grounds to visit Cuba.

For further information on **Billy Budds** travels visit [www.billybudd.info](http://www.billybudd.info)