

# Gone with the wind – Maltese sailors on the frontline fighting COVID-19

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Story published on the Times of Malta – November 2020



*Dr Carmel Abela – From an across the Atlantic Ocean adventure onto the front-line fighting the COVID-19 disease and death.*

At a catastrophic moment like this, when the happy ending seems yet far away, who has the desire to discuss or refer to the good old days or to future exciting initiatives meant to give us all so much happiness and satisfaction?

Very true, but normal bright and cheerful instances in life cannot be forgotten or overlooked, and referring to them is like finding beauty in the ugliest days.

The Malta Cruising Club was set up 15 years ago, in 2005, by a group of boat enthusiasts who wanted to share their passion with the ever-increasing number of boat owners.

It was a time when sales of boats, both power and sailing, was booming and there were only three yacht marinas in Malta then; one in Ta' Xbiex for large boats, one in Gozo and another in Msida.

It was also a time when one would buy a boat and then learn the necessary skills and knowledge to handle it, as time goes by.

The progenitor of setting up a 'sailing club' was Professor Antony de Bono (1932-2020), a retired surgeon by profession and a keen sailing fanatic by spirit, together with two other 'intellectual' sailing friends; Professor Daniel Darmanin, a retired University Dean, and Prof Edward Scicluna, an Economist and current Minister of Finance.

Another founder member was the late Roland Darmanin Kissaun (1942-2014), also a fine yachtsman and owner of a yacht agency.

"There is no club that specifically caters for cruising rather than racing; the Malta Cruising Club is unique in this regard.

The club will concentrate exclusively on all matters pertaining to cruising: this will include a number of cruises both local and in the central Mediterranean; there will be events to help those with less experience by cruising in company.

"These activities will be supported by a series of talks and discussions during the off season of practical importance for cruising," was the mission statement declared by Professor De Bono.

The focus of the club has always remained from its onset to share boating information between members and to encourage the proper use of their boats around the Maltese Islands and beyond.

Over the years, the club has attracted a considerable number of members, mainly sailing boat owners, who meet regularly at organised sailing and social events as well as technical talks on navigation and boat maintenance, provided by the club.

Technical talks were, and still are, most popular and well attended by the club's members.

In fact, the first onshore activity held following the set-up of the club was a talk and discussion on 'Anchoring and Mooring', held at the Black Pearl, Ta' Xbiex, on Friday January 27, 2005.

Popular topics discussed in technical presentations in more recent times included 'Marine Diesel Engines – Care and Maintenance' by John Cini, 'Navigation – With Charts & Chart Plotters' by David Jones, 'Trimming of Sails' by Nick Sammut, 'Anti-fouling your Boat – new Developments and Challenges' by Andrew Magri Overend, and 'Care & Maintenance of Sails' by John Cachia.

Normally following these presentations, the evenings proceed with a dinner.

Undoubtedly, popular annual sailing events rank high in the club's Calendar of Events.

The Gozo Easter Weekend, which the MCC members happily share together with their friends of the Gozo Cruise & Crews Club, the International Siracusa Cruise, the Cruise to Scoglitti Licata and San Leone and the club's most popular Falken Sette Giugno Pozzallo Cruise, which this year should have had its eighth edition.

Here, the event is held under the patronage of the Comune di Pozzallo and with the collaboration of the Lega Navale (Sezione Pozzallo).

A relaxing onshore three days programme for all skippers, crew and their families in the Ragusa region is enjoyed.

Other annual appointments, which unfortunately had to be postponed, were the popular Quiz Night and the Hog Roast Night events.

A 'Talk on Cruising in Greece' was also scheduled.

Possibly the Commodore's Lunch, during which the Commodore's trophy of the year is awarded to one of the club members, could also be cancelled.

Referring to the dark side of the exciting programme of activities the club had to cancel, it is worth mentioning the successful adventure experienced in February, before the lockdown enforcement, by three members of the Malta Cruising Club.

David Jones, 66, a Master Mariner & Marine Surveyor, Dr Carmel Abela, 53, a doctor, and committee member Patrick Genovese, aged 49, an IT Company Director, sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, from Port of Mindelo on the Island of Sao Vicente, Cape Verde Islands (off the north-western coast of Africa), to Chaguaramas Bay on the Island of Trinidad, a distance of approximately 2,200 nautical miles, which they covered in 14 days.

Dr Carmel Abela's pleasant memories of his trans-Atlantic adventure were soon wiped out as the COVID-19 pandemic took over and he had to join his fellow colleagues on the front-line fighting disease and death.



*Len and Mary Nugent will be donating all the proceeds from Len's book on his life to a homeless charity in Sussex, England.*

An excellent example where “It’s up to you to find beauty in the ugliest days”, was given by club members Len and Mary Nugent who while held up in Florida (USA) during the coronavirus pandemic, Len put the lockdown period to good use by writing a book on his life.

He narrated “how this one-man humble start-up grew into a multi-million-pound group of companies operating in the Southeast of England”.

Len will be donating all the proceeds from the book to a homeless charity in Crawley (Sussex).

The key element of the success of the Malta Cruising Club, like any other club, is its ability to get members to meet up regularly and exchange information about their common interests.

### **Anniversary celebrations**

Unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic has destroyed this fundamental component. Our huge regret is that this year we intended to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the club with special commemoration, but we could not.

Yes in sports too, COVID-19 conquered the seas and land too.

Postponements and cancellations for 2020 in all types of sports activates and at all levels.

Events like the Olympic Games, the America's Cup World Series Portsmouth & Sardinia, the Monaco Yacht Show, the Rolex Swan Cup, and so many and many other prestigious events.

Well, the Malta Cruising Club is part of it all and unfortunately must join the crowd..... cancel or postpone for better days.... whenever these come back!

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