

PHOTO: PETER HANS



**Svala enters the channel at North Meep**

PHOTO: ROYAL YACHT CLUB FRISA



*With low freeboard and slender lines, Svala is fast, but she's not dry*

# A blustery sail across the Waddenzee

## Gerben Bergsma gets to grips with his new boat on a rally from Harlingen to Terschelling.

Like many sailors, when the sailing season comes to an end and I can't get out on the water, I turn to trawling yacht brokerage websites. I wistfully browse through adverts, looking for something that is both beautiful and affordable. It's a pleasant pass time. In 2013, a photo popped up and caught my eye.

### Love at first sight

I saw a boat with stunning slender contours and a hull of yellow ochre; a low coach roof adorns the elegant hull. An extremely sharp bow, a slight tumblehome and a slipper stern, all in perfect proportion. It was clearly a very fast yacht, and I was falling in love.

I travelled to Korsor in Denmark for a closer look, and had soon put in a bid. Before long, the boat was mine. She is called *Svala* and is Safir 10-metre. On the water, she easily met my expectations, sailing extremely quickly in almost all conditions and on all points of sail.

Having got her home to the Netherlands and had a season



**Svala is a Scandinavian Safir 10-metre**

PHOTO: GERBEN BERGSMASMA

of sailing with her, I was keen to see how she would fare against other boats, and I entered the Harlingen to Terschelling race, through the Dutch Waddenzee.

On the day of the race, the wind was blowing a solid Force 5 to 6 from the north east. From the start, *Svala* settled down to a beautiful close haul, and we started creeping up through the fleet. The waves soon got up as the breeze built, with gusts up to 35 knots pushing whitecaps tumbling down the steep seas.

I put in the second reef as we crossed the Pannengat, still on a beat. Every now and then, a particularly violent gust hit the boat, and her rig shook like a leaf. The boat was getting tossed about in the rough seas, and somehow the fuel-line connector for the outboard engine tore off the fuel hose. We were now totally

## 'Now and then the foredeck disappeared completely underwater'

reliant on sailing well.

Spray was being thrown back over the cockpit, past the keel-stepped mast, and I quickly discovered that the cuff around the mast didn't seal properly, as water ran into the cabin below.

'I thought this boat was meant to be a dry boat to sail!' I yelled to my crew against the wind. Now and then the foredeck disappeared completely underwater as the bow sliced through another wave. The navigator lifted a board to inspect the bilges.

'Is there a liferaft on board?' he asked nonchalantly. My answer didn't reassure him,

but I did pass him a bucket with which to improve our chances of survival.

After what seemed like a lifetime at sea, we arrived at the North Meep channel in the lee of the island of Terschelling and sailed into the shelter of harbour, where we could drop the mainsail and drift alongside. There, we hauled out the sodden contents of our boat to dry out, though the navigator was all in favour of booking into the nearest hotel.

The next day was no less windy, but on a run back to Harlingen we all stayed dry. I was thrilled that we finished half way up the rankings, not a bad show of speed for a bunch of cruising sailors. ▲

## Gerben Bergsma

Gerben, 44, is married to Wini and lives in Leeuwarden in the north of the Netherlands, where he runs a consultancy and training firm in hospital- and home-care. He has sailed since he was five years old, and still loves messing around in boats.

He bought *Svala* in 2013. She is a Göte Berg design, of which around 600 boats were built in Sweden and Denmark. She's stiff boat with a beam of 1.97m and two-thirds ballast ratio. Gerben loves cruising her around the shallow Dutch seas.



PHOTO: MIENT HEIJDEMA