SKIP NOVAK

SAILING YACHTS MIGHT SEEM TO OFFER A MEANS OF TRANSPORT WITH A LOW CARBON FOOTPRINT, BUT DON'T DELVE TOO DEEPLY, SAYS SKIP

This column would not be complete without some focus on young climate activist Greta Thunberg. A high latitude colleague of mine contacted me in the spring knowing *Pelagic* was now in the northern hemisphere and he asked if I was interested in taking Greta across to the United Nations Climate Summit in New York. Although this would have been good for the CV, I never followed this up, more for practical reasons as we were then in Maine.

In any event, I could not imagine that my 30-year-old steel boat, with rust flowers in full bloom having just come up through the Atlantics, not to mention an engine with noticeable blow-by, could ever be the right vehicle for such a high profile project.

Anyway, there was also the time it would take plodding along at 6-8 knots, albeit with a well-appointed plumbing system for Greta and her father to enjoy, unlike the IMOCA 60 *Malizia* they did sail across on. (The bucket system works, of course, though I like to hang it over the side if there are no facilities.)

'BOAT OWNERS KNOW THAT THE WIND IS NOT FREE'

Malizia was a sexy and, indeed, correct choice – a quick passage with zero carbon footprint – but as soon as I saw Greta on board I rightly anticipated the criticism that the carbon footprint to build that boat far exceeded a simple plane ticket.

This was succinctly pointed out by a letter to the editor in *Yachting World*'s October issue. I think this reader would have been better pleased with *Pelagic* if his idea of a wooden boat with canvas sails had been unavailable.

Having said that, how would *Pelagic*, with all that forged steel, marine plywood from all those trees, and that engine in need of a rebuild that we would surely have to use to get across, compare to the miles of carbon extruded to build *Malizia*?

When you start looking at the details, it is one of those questions best avoided. Zero emissions on a voyage is a thing to strive for, but how the yacht came into existence in the first place is the awkward question.

Sailing superyachts and even motor-driven superyachts are certainly aiming to achieving low emissions solutions, as *Yachting World* has featured in its *Supersail* magazine many times.

It is of course desirable to develop energy efficient systems while on passage, but once again if you start to add up the carbon equations to build what must be considered vanity projects of scale it might be best not to delve into this too deeply either.

Greta's voyage was a superbly well-orchestrated piece of publicity and the main thing is that she got over Stateside to carry on with her important message.

Of note here is that we see how sailing and the 'wind is free concept' (a contradiction in terms to those of us who really know) continues to captivate the minds of the general public despite some unpleasant realities when the costs are considered. The wind is not free.

On the face of it though, sailing rather than motoring makes so much more sense. It is quiet, generally a satisfying experience, partly sport but also partly an intellectual exercise and certainly cathartic – or should be.

If we look into the statistics of power versus sail, or by simple observation start to add up how many motor boats and sail boats you see in any marina, you soon realise that sailing yachts draw short straws every time.

I tried to find some figures for this ratio but it is thumb-suck guesswork, with no raw data to work from. I do remember in America a study by a sailing academic from a Wisconsin University who calculated the power versus sail ratio at around 10 to 1. That was 20 years ago, and I believe the trend is getting worse.

If you don't accept this is a sad reality, consider the number of trailerable motorboats or, if you have more expensive tastes, visit the Monaco Yacht Show where there are now only a handful of sailing vessels on display within a sea of motor yachts.

The fascination of the motor (whether electric or fossil fuel-powered engine) seems all-prevailing and is getting more so. We now have motor-powered bicycles, scooters, skateboards, surfboards and all manner of toys to choose from – all manner of vehicles and toys we used to enjoy powering with old-fashioned elbow grease.

Carbon footprint? The hell you say! ■