

## Interview with “Rubinero” Uli Tischendorf

The “Rubin” is a legend – and the same can be said of the men who sailed her. One of these legends is Hans-Ulrich “Uli” Tischendorf (86) – and we were fortunate to secure an interview with him. Uli was part of the Rubin crew for two of the German team’s victories. Andreas visited him at the Finkenau retirement home to ask about the “old days”.

**Andreas:** Uli, I’m absolutely delighted to find you here in good health – it’s been many years since we last met. It’s fantastic that you’re willing to share stories from the glory days of Rubin and her crew! How would you describe the team spirit and cooperation on board Rubin? Were there any special rituals or routines?

**Uli:** We were simply a close-knit team; you just belonged together, everyone was on equal footing. Everyone committed themselves to the common goal without complaining. And our skipper, Hans-Otto Schümann, was always polite and approachable, and listened to our concerns. But he was also – in true Hanseatic entrepreneur fashion – very goal-oriented and knew exactly what he wanted. And what he didn’t!

**Andreas:** What was the greatest challenge you and the crew had to overcome during the Cup?

**Uli:** That was, of course, the hurricane during the 1979 Fastnet, in which so many sailors lost their lives – it was truly tragic. But it must be said that there were no casualties among the Admiral’s Cup participants. Only smaller yachts were affected, which took part in the Fastnet Race but not in the Cup. We weren’t afraid and always had the situation under control. There were four of us young lads on deck, Jochen Wiese and myself; I’ve forgotten the others. We sent Hans-Otto below deck to his bunk. He was a lot older than us and our skipper – we couldn’t afford to lose him. A man overboard manoeuvre would have been a real challenge under those conditions.

**Uli:** We had already rounded the Rock when the hurricane suddenly struck, and we were running downwind in wild surf towards the turning mark off the French coast. The mark was so small that it was very hard to spot. Luckily, I managed to see it between the waves, and we were able to round it and, with the storm abating, tack back to the finish in England. You could say we demonstrated excellent seamanship, which is why we came through safely.

**Andreas:** What was the most fun?

**Uli:** The downwind legs in a good breeze, when “Rubin” started surfing on the waves. The speedo was often off the scale! IOR yachts weren’t designed to surf,

and when they exceeded their hull speed, it was very wet and spectacular. And of course, it was always great fun to cross the finish line first!

**Andreas:** Were there any technical features or innovations on board Rubin that, in your opinion, made a difference?

**Uli:** Our skipper was keen on optimizing the ratings and you can assume that, with his boats – in whose design he was actively involved – he was always pretty close to the optimum. In fact, there was a new boat almost every year (editor's note: there were 16!) incorporating the latest findings, some of which came from towing tank tests at the HSVA. There were no computer simulations back then. We never really had problems with boat speed.

**Andreas:** What were your tasks and responsibilities during the races? Was there a particular position you were especially suited for?

**Uli:** I handled the spinnaker. I would always be on the windward side at the widest part of Rubin, working the sheet and coordinating the hoisting and dropping. If you see someone standing there in the photos, that's always me.

**Andreas:** How did you experience the competition and the international field? Were there particular rivalries or friendships?

**Uli:** It was a very international event, with teams from Great Britain, France, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, and so on. Naturally, we were all competitors, but in the evenings we'd sit together over a beer and talk about the day's events. Of course there were rivalries – everyone wanted to win. But I don't recall any serious disputes – it was always fair and respectful.

**Andreas:** Are there still connections to Cowes and the RORC?

**Uli:** We always rented the same house for the Cup and were regulars there. The owner's family would move out for the week; that was common, and many crews lived like that. Hans-Otto had a large, private bedroom there. We've lost touch with the family; it's all so long ago. Hans-Otto was well known and extremely popular in Cowes.

**Uli:** The English even created the saying "my Motto, Hans-Otto" in his honour. There were even stickers!

**Andreas:** Was there a weather event or conditions that particularly stuck in your memory?

**Uli:** Well, we've already mentioned the '79 hurricane... that's something you never forget. But having a good knowledge of the tides was also crucial; the tidal streams

in the Solent are extremely complex. There are navigation marks and turning points where the current can change from one moment to the next, so you need good local knowledge and a capable navigator. If your navigator made a mistake, you could end up watching the rest of the regatta from a sandbank.

**Andreas:** How did the Admiral's Cup victories impact your life and sailing career?

**Uli:** My sailing career began on Pirat and H-Jolle dinghies on the Elbe and Alster. I joined the HSC early on, and Ernst Lehfeld (editor's note: HSC member, designer of Puschen, Zugvogel and Korsar) was my "uncle by name". My first offshore experience was on "Suca" with Willi Kurth (BSC), but I soon joined the Rubin crew. Professionally, I'm a lawyer, and I was a senior inspector and senior legal officer in the civil service. I eventually gave up that career and became Hans-Otto's private secretary.

**Andreas:** Looking back, is there anything you would do differently? Are there decisions you would make differently today?

**Uli:** No, I think I did everything right. I had a fantastic time on Rubin. We didn't just sail in the Solent, but also competed several times in the Sardinia Cup (editor's note: previously alternated every two years with the Admiral's Cup off Porto Cervo), which we also won twice as a team.

**Andreas:** Life on a racing yacht is wet, uncomfortable, and exhausting... what motivated you to put up with it?

**Uli:** We were all pure amateurs – there was no money in sailing back then. We'd always get together in winter to plan the next season. We'd already stopped sleeping on the boat. Accommodation and travel costs were always covered by the Rubin budget. Sailing is simply my sport, and that was always motivation enough for me.

**Andreas:** What advice or experience would you share with young sailors today who dream of similar successes?

**Uli:** Find yourself a good boat, with a good crew and a good skipper, build a solid foundation, always be fair and loyal, and stay true to your team. The rest will fall into place.

**Andreas:** Last question, then I'll let you be... Do you still wear the typical red "Cowes trousers" (editor's note: red chinos with the crew shirt were (and still are?) the leisure dress code for offshore sailors)?

**Uli:** Yes, I actually still have a pair of those red trousers, which I like to wear. Back in the day, at evening events, almost all of us wore that “uniform”; it was also an expression of team spirit and togetherness.

**Andreas:** Uli, on behalf of your HSC and its board, thank you for this wonderful conversation. I wish you continued health and all the best. We would all be delighted to welcome you back to the club sometime!