

Atalanta

1993 — 1994



ATALANTA OWNERS' ASSOCIATION

35th Edition

1993-1994 BULLETIN INDEX

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Commodore: Charles Currey Esq

Hon Secretary: Colin Twyford Esq

Hon Editor: Michael Roberts Esq

Frontispiece: *Johara at First*

THE COMMODORE'S MESSAGE

Charles Currey

The interest in Atalantas remains very healthy indeed; the Class is all set for the next century.

There is a boat afloat in excellent working order at the Bordeaux Maritime Museum along with approximately eighty six other craft.

At home a record number of boats have changed hands, the standard of the restored boats improves every year, and the owners' phone calls for advice continue to increase at my home. These I enjoy and find most rewarding.

The Cowes Classic Regatta in August this year after Cowes Week, I believe, did not feature an Atalanta. Maybe the Solent owners should organise a rally to coincide with this very successful event.

I very much look forward to seeing you all again at the annual dinner to catch up with the new owners and the past years' cruising news.

EDITORIAL

First and foremost, many thanks to those of you who sent in articles and photographs for the Bulletin. I enjoyed them all, and although this Bulletin is an expansion on last year's, I hope everyone will feel that the extra expense was worth while.

Secondly, congratulations to Piers and Josie Beckett on their new crew member. He obviously finds the forecabin of "Echo" an extremely comfortable cradle.

Lastly there is a Fulmar for sale, F19 Valis. Owner's name and telephone number are in the Register.

Happy sailing in 1994 and if you can keep the accounts of your adventures within three to four thousand words, it would help me enormously.

THE 1993 WEST MERSEA RACE

By Simon Cooper AROSA (A104)

Saturday 21st August started badly on board Arosa - no milk for breakfast; the owner got the blame. After the abbreviated breakfast, we slipped and stopped off at the pontoon to swap wife for brother: last words to wife, "Expect us back about lunchtime".

At the start line the weather seemed pleasant enough except there didn't seem to be too much wind - we had no hesitation in choosing the genoa.

The first problem arose before the start: the realisation that the racing instructions were sitting at home! We drifted up to Kookaburra (A168) and explained our predicament to the brothers Dorrington and without hesitation a copy of the course chartlet was tossed across to us in a tin can. The second problem was which course: no-one seemed sure and from the far end of the line it was impossible to make out the course letter on the committee boat. However the previous class started to the west into a light westerly wind so at least we started in the right direction. Six Atalantas came to the starting line. Besides Kookaburra and Arosa were Touch (A171), Baby Seal (A137), Amber Ellen (A161) and Rakia (A141). Unfortunately absent were the Secretary's Hiran (suffering from ingress of ocean) and the Stearns (both walking/floating wounded).

Consulting others on the first leg, the general consensus of opinion was that the course was No 5, the same as in 1992. Approaching the windward mark it was apparent that the 12 metre 'Crusader' had found water of restricted depth a few boats' lengths short of the mark and was stationary. The rising tide soon lifted her off and to a cry of "We're not under command", she paid off into the massed fleet rounding the mark to the accompaniment of multiple clonks and cries of anguish.

The second leg was a fetch over to the Bradwell shore and the third a run against the flood tide east along the shore past the power station. This was a good leg for the Atalantas to demonstrate their advantage over the more conventional boats by raising their underwater appendages and cheating the tide close inshore. Arosa was in the lead, but, without a spinnaker, was worried by the gaggle of Atalantas coming up astern. The wind was becoming very light which necessitated some nifty anchor work approaching the third mark: there was certainly ground to be gained by spotting negative progress early.

The fourth leg continued along the shore to the next mark, during which coffee (black) was served on Arosa. After reaching the fourth mark, the next mark was not visible and boats headed off in all directions. Baby Seal, steering a more northerly course than Arosa, found her own private wind and caught up Arosa, closing what must have been almost a half mile gap. Arosa drifted over to Baby Seal to try and share her breeze, which promptly vanished. Noticing that she was being overtaken by an anchored fishing boat Arosa dropped her hook and Baby Seal slipped steadily astern.

When the wind reappeared it was from the South East - having changed almost 180 degrees - and was found by Arosa much earlier than by Baby Seal. Thus when the fifth mark was finally located and rounded Arosa had re-established her lead. The next leg was a beat to seaward, and on Arosa it dawned on the crew that it was well after lunchtime and no eating arrangements had been made, it having been confidently assumed that the race would be over by lunchtime. For a few minutes Arosa's race

was in the balance until a jar of bloater paste and some sliced bread were located.

The seaward mark was finally reached and Arosa headed homewards, finding that the tide had now turned, so she was still fighting a foul tide. The finishing line was crossed at 1640 making it nearly a seven and a half hour race for Arosa: Baby Seal finished almost an hour later. All the other Atalantas had the good sense to pull out before things got really tedious.

On returning to the moorings, Arosa's crew spotted two lonely figures on the pontoon which had been so crowded when Arosa departed in the morning. The wives looked a bit fed up ...

In the evening the traditional supper given by Major General and Mrs Odling at Gun House was a pleasant conclusion to a rather unsatisfactory day. Not having had the pleasure of meeting the Stearns on the water it was good to see them at the supper as well as the Secretary, Colin Twyford, the Parkers (Hon Secs ret'd), and Mrs Mourant (Hon Auditor).

JOHARA AT LAST

By John Greenhough (A148)

Autumn 1992 saw the firm of Gelstrip in the region and willing to see if they could remove the built up coats of paint on the hull. We agreed a price of £160 and the operation took about two hours with the owner and Adrian Baker, ex SP Systems, using the planer by turns. It was not 100% successful because of the screws in the wood which kept blunting the tool and roughing up the finish. When they had completed it left a lot of sanding still to be accomplished but this was light work compared to the previous stripping of the topsides and the bottom. The plan was then to apply four or more coats of clear epoxy. We started in a barn in December but were nowhere near finished when the farmer needed his barn for cattle. While this was going on Jim Reid stripped out the stem which was rotten inside due to fresh water leaking in below the stem head fitting. Fortunately most of the apron was sound and the small piece that was not could be scarfed. Hoghton Timber produced a beautiful piece of English oak for the stem.

I was just congratulating myself that all major repairs were completed when the January gales blowing against the full boat cover stove in a port side stanchion and ripped it from the deck. We now needed a large piece of Agba to effect a repair and strengthen the deck. It took over three months of writing around to find some Agba. Ultimately Kirolite, 107 Southwick Road, Boscombe East, Bournemouth

found a piece in the Midlands but cutting it proved a problem and I have some sheets of Agba surplus to establishment, but all one quarter inch thick. This part of the operation cost £323 but John Randall of Kiolite could not have been more helpful. During this difficult period I had been soaking the port light screws in WD40 and removed them without disaster. These I sent to Marsh Walters, 10-12 Port Hope Road, Birmingham, who restored them like new for £292 including new perspex and absolutely no leaks. We can see out now. At this time, while Jim Reid was back at work repairing the areas where the stanchions had been ripped out, both stanchions being bent, we finished the epoxying and varnished the hull. The weather was no help and one coat of epoxy had to be sanded away; it just would not "go off" properly. StJohn has also reorganised the electrics and here we are in August without once sailing. If all goes well and the weather is kind we hope to sail in North Wales late August. Johara has become like the legendary yachtsman who said that yachting was like tearing up pound notes, or something like that. In the Ribble Cruising Club they make snide remarks about boats being intended for sailing! A comment which has some relevance. We started epoxying with SP Systems but halfway through the local chandlery ceased stocking it and SP didn't want to supply direct; instead we swapped to Wests which seems to have made no difference. The debate on the propellor size and shape for those using Yanmar 10 engines continues. We have a ruddy great rooster tail when going 3/4 throttle and no further acceleration takes place advancing it further. As I said last year propellor design does not seem an exact science and if any one has a solution to improve performance without remodelling the exit for the shaft we would like to know. Perhaps Michael Joughin will tell us how he did it.

After Note:

Now returned from a circumnavigation and a half round Anglesey (we went through the Swellies four times), here are some further observations. Launching at the ex-boatyard at Port Dinorwic cost £30 including leaving the Land Rover and trailer under cover for two weeks. The slip is adequate and StJohn, Bertram, aged 12, and the writer can launch in three hours although it takes longer to recover. Johara handled impeccably and we had some strong winds. Wherever we sailed she attracted attention with the rudest remark being "A nice cigar" from some old salt in a decrepit ketch with a freshly broken bowsprit ... but not by me! The Royal Anglesey Yacht Club must be the most welcoming yacht club in Britain and they let us use their visitors' moorings twice. Everyone in North Wales seems particularly well disposed and we found the Marina at Conway and Holyhead Yacht Club also helpful and friendly. Generally we anchored in out of the way places but most often in walking distance

of a pub. The motor performed well and on one occasion when we were late for the tide going through the Swellies it struggled manfully with the flood. We now reckon that we get five knots but cannot prove it as we never trailed our log. In all, we ranged from Conway to the Lleyn Peninsula.

There was a lot of really cold weather for August and our heater was welcome at night. We have had this since our first cruise in the Clyde in 1989 when the weather was despicable. Our problem, as with all two-cabin boats, was to find a way of delivering equal amounts of warm air to both compartments. I bought a Drymaster Boat heater at the 1990 Boat Show. This works from the Gaz supply and ducts hot air into both cabins in a very sophisticated manner. We have used it every year but it was never more in demand at night than this, what with the Northerlies and North Easterlies which blew with cold contempt throughout our holiday. It uses very little fuel and our whole holiday including all our cooking did not use one 6lb cylinder.

We have another extravagance (where does this chap Greenhough get his money from?) and that is a Navstar Decca 2000D with cockpit repeater. We bought it from Cruisermart, Southend on Sea, at a bargain price last year and we can navigate to within two cables. But with a crew of one 12 year old and one 73 year old we could not afford to let StJohn fall overboard without some reference to where he could be found. Additionally we wear safety harness at sea if we go on deck. The importance of this was very evident to us when we lost an oar from the towed rubber dinghy off Puffin Island in a force 5/6 blow. The sea was particularly disturbed as it often is at the entrance to the Straits and although we could get to within touching distance of it we could not reach it from the cockpit. Shades of boy overboard. In the end I had to climb down into the dinghy and StJohn went round twice before we managed to recover it. It certainly brought home our safety harness piece of wisdom.

So many people have rung to ask how we got our Yanmar 10 below the cockpit floor that I am including a drawing showing how we did this. To date this has been without problem and it does mean that one can use the old shaft. Except for getting the parts made we installed it ourselves and it only took a day and a half. We were able to use the original engine bearers which we increased in width with wood from the platform on which the engine was delivered. It was exceedingly hard wood which we couldn't identify, but most suitable for the job. The area below the engine is very clear and we have room in the engine compartment for a host of things like two kedge anchors, chain, anchor rope, spare fuel and lubricants and two buckets. We have enclosed the propshaft to prevent any of this tackle from getting involved.

SOLVENDO A BIT FURTHER

By Geoff Beaumont (A108)

SOLVENDO. It just has to mean something to do with weather! It certainly has some influence on it anyway. Since Solvendo arrived here in Wakefield the weather has broken records for the coldest May, the wettest June, the lowest August temperature, and now the highest rainfall in September.

I have spent considerable time checking out the meaning of Solvendo. I feel sure other boat names must be equally intriguing. An article on their origins and meanings would be interesting. (any offers? Ed.)

Solvendo is still not in the water. I have to keep reminding myself that this is a hobby and a joy, and no timetable exists, nor will it. In the good bits of weather the hull, to the waterline, has been fully stripped and sanded; every screw head exposed, primed with resin, filled with epoxy filler, and coated with three coats of epoxy resin. An interesting job, and after initial tests it proved most successful to use 4 inch dense foam rollers - the long handled radiator type applicator, allowing each coat to dry and sanding before applying the next coat. All old screw holes, ie keel seals and centre keel strip fixings, were drilled and dowel plugged using thickened resin. That took till mid August.

After discussions with International and West Systems (both very helpful), yacht primer was applied to the sanded final epoxy coat and now it is ready for the antifoul. The fore and aft decks have also been treated with the epoxy three coats method with filler between coats as required. This will have a yacht primer and non slip deck paint finish.

Two skin fittings, the exhaust and loo inlet, which for some reason were not removed earlier, proved a proper b..... In fact the bronze exhaust had to be sawn into pieces to avoid damage to the transom. The original SL toilet has been refurbished with a service kit from SL.

It is September 13th now and my birthday, with gale driven Easterly rain, so it's decorating time. I'm hoping October will be kinder to allow the exterior to be finished.

"Solvendo"! The name must have some connections with the sun, Spain etc!

Well, with a chance contact with Alan Collins (A 15) I was able to contact the original owner, John A. Davison Esq., to whom I am most grateful for plans, information and the history of Solvendo (maybe another area of interest for the editor to follow up in a past owners section. I'm sure this would prove fascinating.)(Maybe - Ed!)

September 27th and as I write I hear it is the coldest September day on record!

"Solvendo", John Davison reveals, is the Roman for "Solent".

Some questions - has anyone

- a. Fitted 316 Stainless keel pins?
- b. Fitted O ring seals to keel pins?
- c. Done any work on an anode location?
- d. Got a wooden mast for sale?

BUILDING AQUILO II (A184)

by Maurice Donovan

When Colin asked if I would be prepared to do an article on building my Atalanta No. 184 I had to hesitate as it was ages since I began the project. However, fortunately I still had the file I kept while building Aquilo so felt it was perhaps safe to accept the challenge.

While I was looking through my records after Colin had spoken to me I discovered his call turned out to be within a day or so of the day 30 years ago that I wrote to Charles Currey to say I had at last decided to proceed with building an Atalanta from a kit. I say "at last decided" because the decision was only taken after a terrific lot of procrastination involving various kit options, visits to Fairey Marine, much loss of sleep and finally the need to build a huge garage to house the brute. I had, by the way, built a Bell Seagull (Aquilo I) previously, so was not completely green; even so, I was afraid I might be being too overconfident in taking on an Atalanta which was nothing but compound curve carpentry.

Mr Sibley, the General Manager, and Mr Macintyre the Production Superintendent at Fairey Marine, were a terrific assistance in helping me decide how much I could realistically take on, bearing in mind my level of experience and the facilities I had. They soon convinced me that I should, at the very least, start at the stage with the diagonal bulkhead, keel boxes, cockpit structure and foredeck moulding fitted, as this would ensure the boat would be true having been correctly jigged in the works up to this important stage, which of course made good sense. This lot cost £661, £485 of which was for the hull and all the mouldings. I don't have a cost record of the 90 odd full size drawings which I also bought and which I still have.

I have to admit I was particularly fortunate as I must have started Aquilo just about the time Fairey Marine decided to stop making Atalantas, for soon after I got going I began to be offered all sorts of bits like windows, rudder assembly (£110), keel mounting assembly and jacks (£128), and many other bits besides, at what seemed favourable prices: you might say knockdown prices by today's standards.

After being told they would have to get keels specially cast for me I began to panic. However, the day was saved when a very rusty pair appeared miraculously from behind a shed somewhere on site; cost £66. Can you imagine that happening today. The company accountants would have rallied round, burnt all the wood parts and spirited the metal parts to the scrap yard in their company cars and I would have been told, "tough luck".

Many months later, when Fairey Marine really were in the throes of actually closing down, things did start to happen at a rather more dramatic pace. General Odling was able, in the nick of time and with customary dash, to obtain Directors' approval for the A.O.A. to have all the Fulmar, Titania, Atalanta 26 and 31 drawings.

Then, one night, I received orders from General Odling to proceed with all speed and meet with Young in the Drawing Office at Fairey Marine, to collect the drawings and secure them in a safe house.

Looking back, I can now imagine what thoughts must have been going through Young's mind as he saw me disappearing with all these drawings which he must have spent so much of his working time at Fairey Marine producing.

Having got them safely home I then spent many hours going through literally piles of drawings heaped on the floor of our dining room. I selected those I thought would be of use to A.O.A. members, catalogued these and had them microfilmed. I then sent all the original drawings on to the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich for safe keeping where, hopefully, they may still be found. I am not sure when all this happened, but I suppose it must have been about the time I finished Aquilo.

Returning to Aquilo, another tip Mac advised was to use Silicon Bronze fixings, even though they were more expensive than brass. Screws made from it do not shear as easily, and do not degrade from corrosion like brass. I used Si Bronze screws throughout, boxes and boxes. Alas, Si Bronze fixings are not made in the UK any more and have to come from the USA. I discovered this when I was restoring a Firefly for my daughter this summer. I also found that each screw now costs about as much as a box did when I was building Aquilo. I think Mac told me Fairey Marine only used Si B screws below the waterline to save money.

Again on Mac's prompting I went the whole hog and used Resorcinol glue throughout. This also costs an arm now. For Aquilo I used 30lbs altogether which cost £10.3.6. The 1lb tin I bought to do my daughter's Firefly in May cost a bit over £15.

On Mac's advice I sealed all screwed sea water joints in the cockpit - engine bay, keel box tops, gunwale rubbing strake and keel hoist boxes using Selastik, which never sets. He explained it had been found on earlier

boats that, where glue had been used in these regions, glue lines could crack due to working of the boat's structure. Such cracks in turn can lead to tracking type water leaks, which are extremely difficult to trace and cure. I was thus very fortunate in having all Fairey Marine's Atalanta experience to draw on and build in the answers to problems before they could occur.

Mac also gave me some very sound advice which I often repeat to myself, and indeed to others as well, about doing DIY jobs of this magnitude. He said "Finish each part that you start, don't flit from one bit to another, that's the mistake most people make and the result ends up a mess". As the job progressed I used to go down to Fairey Marine to consult with Mac before I tackled any major part.

I remember particularly the nightmare prospect of fitting the coach roof to the foredeck moulding. Just think, this is a continuously changing compound angled joint line. As the Chinese say "You can draw a string a thousand times but only cut it once": in this case, there were two strings, the fore deck and the coach roof. Once again Mac saved the day; he told me to laminate the member that forms the corner support piece between the coach roof and the deck using the deck as the laminating jig. This, I might say, was far from simple even using the deck as the base for the jig.

After laminating and shaping the corner member to match the deck came shaping the corner to mate with the coach roof. Goodness knows how many times I lifted the coach roof on and off, all I know is that I spent the whole of one Xmas hols doing this, followed by numerous dry assemblies before I plucked up courage to glue and screw it all together.

Then came the question of an engine. Remember, there were no natty compact marine diesels in those days and the choice of proper marine petrol engines that could be fitted under the cockpit floor of an Atalanta were few and far between. Also, the era of flexible engine mountings had not dawned so the next Chinese string trick, namely accurately boring the hog for the devilish long stern tube began to dominate my every waking hour.

I finally chose the 021 Albin, a very nice twin with a dynastart, magneto ignition, prop and silencer. Cost £213.17.0. The stern tube assembly I bought from Stuart Turner for £27.11.0. The photo shows how neatly the engine fitted into the space under the cockpit floor. The grating at the front was found to be an especially useful plate rack when washing up, though it wasn't made that way with washing up in mind.

I will not go through all the trauma of setting up for and boring the hole to take stern tube; suffice it to say, I had a six feet long bar welded to a one and three quarter inch diameter machine drill which I fed up through a pre-prepared hole in the skeg. The skeg was temporarily fixed

to the keel to act as a drill guide while, with the aid of a slow running power drill, I chipped away very gingerly indeed until the bit appeared spot on in the right place in the engine bay. I still have this drill!

I am sure everyone will have experienced the relief which follows completing some critical operation such as I have described; one gets on to a sort of high before and during it which is difficult to describe. Actually, as I have been writing this I have been reliving every moment with a great feeling of relish for the satisfaction I got from doing it, but thankfully without the attendant anguish.

Most of the rest of the woodwork was reasonably straight forward except perhaps for the toe rails. I had to abandon my first effort of laminating these from Afrimosia which I found was horribly prone to splitting when bending in the foredeck region. Thankfully this problem was overcome when I changed to mahogany. Actually I have to admit I had to enlist the help of Valerie, my wife, on this laminating lark because I found I could not be at both ends of the boat at the same time.

I don't seem to have the same detailed recollections of the painting and decorating stage as I have of the construction. All I know is it was one long grind of preparation, rubbing down between painting and varnishing until it passed inspection. I am sure this all took as long as the building, if not longer. The total time I took over the building and fitting out was some 2500 hours, spread over about two and a half years.

I launched Aquilo in 1968, sailed her locally in the Bristol Channel for the rest of that season. I completed fitting life lines and some better internal facilities in the winter of '68/'69 before setting out in the following May on a cruise to the South Irish coast. Thereafter, I based her on the River Dart from where my wife and our three young daughters sailed her on many memorable holidays and weekends visiting the many delights along the lovely South West coast.

I hate to think what an Atalanta would cost today if the replica of Blondie Hasler's Junk rigged 26ft Folkboat cost about £56,000, so look after your Atalantas chaps.

"ECHO" IN THE BRISTOL CHANNEL.

Piers Beckett (A128)

Last year we took delivery of a new crew member, very small, very noisy, name of Stephen. In June he was seven months old, and we decided it was time for a gentle cruise; no long hauls and preferably no adventures. In the end we did 290 miles around the Bristol Channel in 16 days.

We left Solva on June 19th against a brisk South-Westerly and big swell; I cut my finger on the roller-reefing, the kit fell on the floor when the boat heeled and the baby went to sleep with a contented smile.

North Haven. A delightful little slot on the south side of Skomer Island, carpeted with puffins. During the night the wind turned North and we lay in perfectly sheltered peace. In the morning the same northerly wasted us down the South Wales coast past the silent guns of Manobier (if they're firing they divert you miles to the south) and through Caldey Sound.

Tenby. Hard, firm sand at the head of the tiny harbour where boats are so closely packed it looks as if you could walk across them from one side to the other. The next day was the year's longest, and fortunately so because I messed up the tides in a big way and crossed the channel by a very scenic route.

Ilfracombe. Carefully maintained visitors' moorings in the outer harbour so the visitor does not need to brave the congestion and flying tripping boats inside. Pleasant and friendly with a lovely yacht club where the members have worked hard to provide an excellent bar and shower. We wandered around showing Stevie the sights, catching shrimps and enjoying the weather. I wouldn't like to be there in a stiff North-Easterly, though. After three days we headed off down channel.

Lundy. This time deliberate. In many ways the rugged little island is the key to the entire channel. Tides are fierce, overfalls fearsome but it's hard to avoid the place. We did a six-hour stopover anchored off the Rattles while the flood poured inland. With the crew asleep I had a magical sail down channel through a short June night. Bright stars, ships visible miles away and the distant blur of the North Cornish coast slipping by far away to port, and at dawn, when the tide ran out, I was hove-to off the mouth of the Camel catching mackerel and waiting for enough water to cross Doom Bar.

Padstow. A splendid new yacht harbour which you lock into and then stay afloat. Clean and comfortable and, at £5 a night, cheap. Padstow is a cheery little place, lots of nice shops, good pubs and plenty of people coming to stare at the boat. ("What IS that" hush, we've been this way before.) The young master gyrated in his bouncer slung from the boom and held court to a wide circle of admirers. Josie and I worried about sunstroke. Again we dawdled and it was another three days before the slightly goldfish-bowl sensation caused us to move on. We put the baby to sleep, emerged from the Camel and I was left alone in the cockpit to sing silly songs to myself through the night.

St. Ives. Somehow one gets the feeling that yachts aren't completely welcome here. Odd, really, since they make enough revenue out of the bits of string stuck in the sand that pass for visitors moorings. Never

mind, I love the place, particularly a rather anonymous fish and chip shop in the third street up where they perform absolute miracles with a haddock. We were now within striking distance of the Scillies, but opted for a peaceful life instead, so on 30th June we re-traced our steps to the Camel, enduring horrible overfalls off Trevoise Head on the way.

Rock. There is a magnificent yacht club here, built out over the sands of the Camel, and the Steward told us of Atalantas in bygone days which had anchored in Porthilly Cove. We followed his advice and plonked ourselves in the middle of this delightful spot for three days of loafing, shrimping, shopping and drinking. Most of the time we were aground on hard sand, an easy walk to anywhere we wanted to go. We took the bubble up to Wadebridge and all three of us covered ourselves in ice-cream.

Lundy. Hard to find this time because shrouded in murk and the South Rock RDF beacon doesn't work any more. After a quiet night we motored homeward across glass and ran out of diesel off Skokkolm Island. Unforgivable, I know, but the little thing uses so little juice I forgot it used any at all. It was nice, in a way, because a tiny breeze wafted us up to Thorn Island. This is a Palmerston folly in the entrance to Milford Haven and well worth a visit, both for the view and the hospitality. Replenished, we spent the night at Dale.

Vile journey back through the Jack against a Northerly, with huge standing waves crashing the length of the boat and down our necks while small bright eyes laughed at us from the comfort of the cabin. He likes rough water much more than we do.

BABY SEAL'S (A 137) SUMMER CRUISE

By Peter Davies

Early in the year the decision had been made "to go foreign". I am not at all sure why, other than that a friend of mine, Bill Ellis, in the boat yard at Heybridge Basin thought that he would like to go foreign. His boat, 26 feet of deep keeled, flat bottomed, French skimming dish designed purely for racing was not really suitable. It is definitely faster than the Atalanta up to about F4; above that and it just does not go out. Unlike the Atalanta it rolls to every wave, heels excessively, plunges up and down burying its nose at every opportunity, and generally terrifies everybody on board.

It seems that going foreign was something Bill felt he should do before advancing years (not yet 60) precluded the opportunity. Our first thoughts had been the Cherbourg Peninsula but somehow difficulties arose and he recommended ever shorter and shorter crossings. When we got to

the Dover/Calais crossing our planned itinerary lengthened and over the months, and rather like a depression, the plans drifted slowly northwards until they came to rest on the Frisian Islands.

My friend Bill is a precise and cautious man; he once worked for the Meteorological Office and now teaches mathematics. He wanted to plan every detail of the trip; I was content to let him. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I never plan anything, but my experience has taught me that it is much easier to let the boat follow a natural course rather than to try to force it down a predrawn pencil line on the chart. However, this was not Bill's way of doing things and he spent much time considering the planning of all things navigational and meteorological. In the event it seemed that he had been considering planning rather than actually planning, and we still sailed from a starting point to a destination via the route that suited the boat and the prevailing weather. However, he did draw a nice line on the chart and we did enter a number of way points into the Decca; as it worked out we were never in quite the right place but we always knew where we should have been!

My planning took the form of boat preparation. The first thing was to get rid of the octahedral radar reflector which was now really rather bent and battered as well as coated with a somewhat scabious deposit of aluminium oxide. It probably scattered radar pulses rather than reflecting them to their point of origin; it was replaced with a splendid new Firdell Blipper well up the mast. Should anyone else consider doing the same I can offer valuable money saving advice; make your own brackets. They are simple pieces of bent stainless steel well worth 10% of their price. Even worse, they come without screws, rivets or bolts and do not offer clearance on the Atalanta mast without the addition of spacing washers.

Martin Bennett had warned me some two years ago about problems which were arising with the Atalanta lower rudder pintles; I took his advice and drilled into the boss and found good solid aluminium right down to the stainless steel pin. The blade had been replaced some three years ago, as had the uphaul and downhaul wires, so I was confident that we would not experience the all too familiar problems of rudder failure which beset the Atalanta. Seldom has confidence been so misplaced.

Headsail reefing had been installed during this year's refit so I took the opportunity of converting one of my twin forestays to an emergency forestay for a storm jib. Unfortunately all this was done whilst Baby Seal was still in the yard with the mast down. Not until it was craned in and the mast erected would it be possible to check that everything was in the right place and ready to work. Most of it was; however, in the event it is doubtful that the emergency forestay would have been much use had we had to set the storm jib upon it. The sheeting lead was hopelessly wrong.

The final part of the refit prior to relaunching was antifouling. Last year saw a new sort of growth, tufts of weed about six inches long growing from one inch diameter bases at intervals about six inches apart. The areas between were thoroughly crusted with small barnacles (which probably served to stop the weed covering the entire hull). This year special care was devoted to cleaning off the hull. New technology came to my aid. There is a new mousse bathroom cleaner which, according to the advertisements, sticks to things and makes baths sparkle with no effort at all. They do not mention that it also removes mud and barnacles when accompanied by very vigorous scrubbing with a wire brush. It is to be highly commended, as is Janice's scrubbing. She wore out a new wire brush in a single day but the hull was cleaner than I can ever recall. The mousse also removes encrusted grime from the hands, oil and grease stains, even paint and antifouling. It does this by removing the skin to which these pollutants normally adhere. I don't think that the manufacturers ever envisaged anyone working with the stuff for eight hours at a stretch. However, it left the hull perfectly clean and the antifouling went on without problems. So far as I was concerned the boat was ready to go. All that was needed were a few shakedown sails over the weekends to finish off those jobs which can only be done when the boat is afloat.

As I live over two hundred miles from my boat time is always very limited. Consequently the boat was returned to the water just before the Spring Bank Holiday with the intention of a shake down cruise over that weekend. Launching early also maximised the chances of a free weekend or two later when the tides were right and the weather suitable.

Baby Seal was duly craned in over the sea wall (a procedure I prefer not to watch as for some reason she seems to be just at the limit of safe working for the four and a half tons SWL derrick). She was then moored on the inside of the old, stee, Thames barge which Stebbens Boatyard uses for mast storage and the like. More significantly, this barge is also used as the access to the pontoon moorings.

For some reason which I now forget I was unable to get to the boat at the Spring Bank Holiday. In any case the weather was not good and my intended cruise was deferred for a week. Sunday evening brought a call from Adrian who runs the yard. Another boat owner had attempted to carry a 25 hp outboard engine along the side decks of the barge. He had tripped over a rope and fallen off the barg dropping the outboard, skeg downward, onto the starboard side of Baby Seal. Apparently, the hole "was not very big". After some discussion it was arranged that she would go to Arthur Holt for repair; and that was where she stayed until 31 July.

What a beautiful repair. I had never seen the original hold and when I finally got down to my boat it took me at least ten minutes before

I could find the approximate boundaries of the area. Arthur had even managed to match the paint, inside and out, so that the repair was virtually invisible. On the outside this was not too difficult as it was new paint, but the inside had had a few years use and had acquired a slightly greyish tinge. The new length of toe rail was the give away that gave the clue where to look. Truly a beautiful job and one for which it was well worth waiting. I was, however, glad that I was not paying for such craftsmanship.

Unfortunately nobody had known about the chart storage area sandwiched between the chart table top and the sliding sink. Nor had anyone checked the tool locker outboard of the keel box. When I opened the chart table all the charts and pilotage books were black, soggy, and mouldy; the tool locker was another disaster area. The waterproof bin with which I had lined the locker to keep "bilge water" away from the tools was now full to the brim with rain water which had accumulated during the period. For the benefit of puzzled readers who know that the Atalanta bilges never accumulate water I will explain that I think that the "bilge water" originates from three sources. Firstly there is some minor spillage from the sink, secondly drips from the tap, and thirdly sea water can get in past the plastic slides in the keel jack boxes and drain into the lockers when the boat is sailed rather too hard.

It was from the above combination of circumstances that we came to set out for Holland without any preliminary shake down. When the time came to sail it was surprising that very little went wrong. A preliminary trial of the emergency forestay revealed that it was going to foul the swivel head on the roller reefing gear, and that none of the existing sheeting positions were good so that new fairleads would be required. The stern gland had acquired a slow flow of water rather than a relentless drip, and the starboard keel stubbornly refused to drop. A heavy hammer and a block of wood worked wonders. It was later discovered that the new roller reefing drum fouled the anchor windlass handle with distinctly painful consequences, and that the chain fouled the bottom of the drum when the chain was hauled by hand. However, none of this was really novel. No matter how long I think about it, everything I fit to the boat turns out to be either not quite right or in the way of something else. There is something to be said for keeping things simple, but what it is I have yet to learn. Without any modifications one would have a bare hull, and any addition is always bound to compromise whatever was there before.

The first leg was to be from Heybridge Basin to Pin Mill, probably around forty miles. The wind was a nice F3 gusting F4 from the SW and we made good time. Bill complained of heavy steering. Usually Baby Seal is extremely light on the helm so I assumed that the blade was not

fully down; I pulled it up and reset it with a jerk as it often sticks on the last half inch as the down haul shackle fouls the cheeks of the stock. Resetting it seemed to cure the problem until we got well off the Naze about seven miles out of Harwich. Bill now reported the rudder jammed. My first thoughts turned to the cable runs in the back cabin. A quick inspection revealed nothing amiss, nothing was jamming the yoke nor any of the sheaves. A look over the stern revealed all; the rudder was swinging from side to side held in place only by the exceedingly taught down haul. The first thing was to get all the sail off; I appreciated the advantages of roller reefing as nothing ever got Bill onto the foredeck until it was time to tie a mooring rope to terra firma. As the sail rolled in I wondered why I had not fitted the furling gear years ago. We were now left rolling about on a good swell with no way on the boat and no steering. My first thought was to secure the rudder so I tied a line round the stock and made it off to a stern cleat. This prevented it dropping right off, but it was still swinging to one side and then the other. A few moments thought led to an improvement, why not tie the rudder to both cleats? Accordingly I tied a clove hitch round the stock, a very hazardous operation as the stock was banging about in and out of the wooden fairing pieces on the transom and trying its best to guillotine my finger ends as I poked the line between the metal and the wood. I then used the boat hook to push the loose knot down the stock to the narrow portion of the blade just beneath the pivot bolt. The knot was pulled tight and the ends of the rope made fast to the stern cleats. We now had a rudder that swung only an inch or so but which could not be turned more than the stretch in the rope would allow.

The engine was started and we proceeded in a gentle arc. What a splendid demonstration of the prop effect! However, it was quite clear that we would never make Harwich. More thought was needed. In the old days every sailing boat carried a sweep. My eye fell on the original wooden spinnaker pole which I had not had the heart to discard even though I carried a modern metal pole for poling purposes. At last it could be useful. A largish piece of plywood was drilled and lashed to the pole end; we now had a sweep. Putting it over the stern revealed that we hadn't got a sweep; the plywood merely swivelled round and round taking the line of least resistance. Reluctantly, thinking of the varnished finish, I nailed the plywood to the pole. This stopped the swivelling and made an effective, if slightly short, sweep.

The first thought was to use the improvised sweep for steering. I sat on the stern deck and struggled to hold it in position. It slipped, I sweated, the boat went first this way and then that. There was no way without a rowlock that I could control the sweep. Slowly a system of lashings evolved. Each addition counteracting one or more of the forces

acting on the end of the pole. First it was caught in a bight of rope between the stern cleats to provide the necessary fulcrum, then it was tied up to the backstays to keep the end in the water. By this stage I had really begun to appreciate the forces which act on the rudder blade. However, I was still trying to make the steering corrections with the sweep; it was another moment of insight when I saw a better solution. The sweep was lashed to counteract the prop effect and the limited rudder movement used for steering. We were now underway again and I was relieved from crouching on the stern deck pushing a recalcitrant spinnaker pole to and fro. However, we were only just in control and it seemed prudent to alert both the Coastguard and Harwich Harbour control to our predicament. We made it quite clear that we did not need assistance at the present time, nevertheless, we were somewhat limited in our ability to manoeuvre and were in no condition to get out of the way of big ships in the harbour entrance. Let it suffice to say that we made it to Pin Mill under our own power and picked up a buoy for the night. It is also fair to say that we could not have got away with this jury rigged steering system in any worse weather. We were very lucky indeed, the sea state remained moderate and we only had a swell and not waves with which to contend.

The following day we lay Baby Seal to the scrubbing posts on the hard and waited for the tide to drop so that we could inspect the damage. When the water went you can imagine my surprise when I saw the broken pintle lying on the mud directly under the rudder stock. That rudder had swung about for at least ten miles, the boat had swung to a buoy for over twelve hours, and the pintle only fell out of the gudgeon as the boat dried.

The cause of the problem was now clear. The straps had corroded under the filling used to fair the skeg. The actual pintle boss was quite solid, apart from the hole I had drilled into it to test its integrity, but it had been attached by a spongy mess of corrosion. Perhaps I had misunderstood what Martin had told me; I would certainly have found the problem had I examined all of the fitting and not just the bit I could see. However, we were now very fortunate as we had the complete broken fitting as a pattern. This was duly carried up to Webb's chandlery and boatyard where they agreed to effect a repair or fabricate a new fitting. As it was approaching closing time we had to leave the job with them. When we checked in the morning it turned out that fitting a new strap would be the more difficult option. Fabrication turned out to be both easier and potentially stronger. It also turns out that the external diameter of the pintle boss is critical if the rudder blade is to be fully lowered; we didn't know this at the time but the replacement was very slightly over size and thus prevented the rudder blade going fully down. An additional

strap round the original fitting would have been disastrous. As it was we knew nothing of this and accepted the new fabrication with great gratitude. It was bolted into place some twenty-four hours after the broken pieces of the old one had been removed. We were again ready to resume the trip to Holland. First, a good night's sleep to counteract the over long hours spent in the Butt and Oyster waiting on welding and for paint to dry!

Six a.m. saw us away. I am not at my best at that hour but the forecast was favourable and I felt sufficiently dead for the rest not to hurt. Bill is a morning person and it was positively painful to watch him bustle about. Come mid morning it was a different story. Bill was sleeping soundly as I followed his course up towards the Shipwash Lightship. From a local fisherman at Heybridge, Bill had learned that "you can ignore all those two metre shoals in a small boat. There is always more than two metres over them and in a boat like yours you can go over them anytime". Quite frankly I thought the sea was distinctly lumpy; what is more about a cable to my starboard side there was quite a lot of broken water and the occasional wave was clearly breaking. I decided that Tom's advice probably included some such caveat as "except when..". It would probably have been safe to cross the shoals but it would have been most uncomfortable. It certainly did not seem something to be done without a very good reason.

Given a very gentle SW wind which later veered NW 2-3 we did not make spectacular progress and only reached the NN Hinder buoy just on nightfall. Consternation!! There was a second very prominent buoy flashing away and this one was not on the chart. However, Decca confirmed our position and allayed our anxieties. If getting to the buoy had been slow then getting away from it turned out to be even slower. We were only just making over an adverse tide. At one point an hour after we had passed it we looked around for the buoy expecting it to be on the horizon behind us. It was behind us, but less than two cables away. For at least half the tide we virtually stood still or went backwards very slowly.

The early morning light saw us in proximity to the IJmuiden approach channel with several miles between each of the buoys. As progress was again getting tediously slow the engine was called into play and we motor-sailed resolutely on. Around ten o'clock we heard a most almighty thump and the boat shuddered. I was certain that we had hit something and took a quick look over the stern. Nothing was visible. A look below reassured us that the boat was not holed. Then we noticed that our speed was falling off. A few more revs seemed to be the answer. The engine speeded up, but the boat didn't. Had the prop fallen off? Had the shaft broken? Lifting the cockpit floor boards showed the shaft still to be in place but the flexible coupling sheered.

In itself this was not a major disaster; we were making some progress under sail and the weather was fine and calm, but it was fairly obvious that it would be a major inconvenience to be without the engine as we entered the harbour. Time for more repairs.

Reviewing the available resources, spare fuel filters, water pump impeller, and injector made it pretty obvious that I had not anticipated this particular failure. There was, however, a comprehensive stock of adhesives and miles of assorted twine and cordage. The solution seemed to be to jury rig the coupling. With the engine stopped the coupling was rotated by hand until the fractured surfaces mated, the shaft pushed back to create a half inch gap, and both faces liberally coated with Evostick. When this was ready the coupling was pushed back together to form a temporary bond. A complex lashing was then applied with a figure of eight around the corresponding bolt heads at each end of the coupling. After each figure of eight a full round turn was taken round the shaft itself before embarking upon the next part of the lashing. Finally each of the cross-over points of the eights was seized with a series of turns round the coupling itself. Just to finally tighten the arrangement this final lashing was tightened with a short tommy bar to make a Spanish windlass with the slack being pulled to the opposite side of the anticipated load in the forward direction. Thus the lashing would be self tightening under load.

I really believe that this temporary lashing would have worked. The engine, still warm, was restarted and the vibration was consequently not excessive. Gingerly it was slipped into gear. It managed about two revolutions before stopping with a terrific thump which made me fear for the gearbox. The temporary coupling still held. Clearly the shaft was jammed. A look over the stern revealed nothing, but repeated fishing with a boathook pulled up what looked like half inch thick cargo net. The prop was well and truly fouled. I had not anticipated fouling as some two or three seasons ago I had fitted a Spurs cutter and had never experienced any fouling since that time. It normally cuts with deadly efficiency, it takes anything from one's own sheets to other people's mooring pick up buoys as well as lobster pots and other bits of stray rope. The cutting operation is normally so smooth that you don't even know it has happened. I had great faith in that cutter, so much so that I had taken my trusty wet suit off the boat as I had assumed that diving was a thing of the past.

Suffice it to say that we now accepted the inevitable. We were going to sail into a busy harbour across a strong tide in light winds. We first called the Harbour Master of the Outer Harbour as we were about ten miles out. His response was that, "The tide is setting Southerly, the wind is North Westerly. Even the English should be able to sail a boat in under these conditions". We hastened to assure him that not only could we, but

that we intended to, sail the boat in. All we wanted was for bigger ships to know that we were not free to bang the engine on and get out of their way. At the appropriate point, some five miles out, we called the Master of the Inner Harbour. He was totally different. He enquired if we needed towing assistance, an offer which we declined. When we were inside the moles he advised us that he had requested the Pilot Boat to stand by during our approach. Sure enough, we had seen the yellow monster following us astern and had been hoping that they were not going to shout at us for being in their way. Instead we got a cheerful wave. Shortly afterwards we had the Pilot Boat on VHF suggesting that they tow us alongside and drop us off at a suitable berth. This time we accepted with alacrity as the wind was too light to allow effective sailing and it had become apparent that not only was the prop fouled but the rudder was turning in only one direction.

The tow alongside nearly proved disastrous. My fenders down the port side simply disappeared under the flare of the Pilot Boat's sides. Even when they put down two fenders about a metre in diameter there was still the occasional ominous clash of chainplates and shrouds against his lower rubbing strake. Bill's yellow wellies (blue actually) were used to great effect until the fenders were finally positioned. The limited rudder movement made it almost impossible to maintain a parallel course. Moreover, we still had full sail up with the wind virtually astern and so could not get it down. The Pilot Boat quickly realized our problem and turned into the wind which allowed us to untangle the mainsail from the spreaders. With great kindness they took us into the Haringhaven and circled it a couple of times before choosing a spot where we could be cast off to lie alongside a large ex German Customs boat now in private ownership. Without their help and local knowledge we would never have spotted a place to tie up. The Haringhaven is not full of little fishing boats but great battered monsters and associated factory ships. The Atalanta would not even have served as a fender had we parked it randomly. We threw the Pilot Boat a couple of large bottles of English dry cider in recognition of their kindness. One fell short, but as we fished it out of the drink they circled and came back for another, successful, go.

As soon as we were securely moored I decided to take a look and see just what our problem was. The water looked distinctly uninviting. It was an evil black with an iridescent film of diesel; strings of bladderwrack floated about trapping all sorts of rubbish ranging from dead fish to discarded plastic bags. Not only did it look dirty and uninviting, it also looked cold. Only the last turned out to be not strictly true; it was exceedingly dirty but it was only moderately cold.

I could not believe that I really had been stupid enough to take the wet suit off. Hoping against hope I searched all the likely, and a few

unlikely, places before deciding that I really had taken it off. Fortunately I had left the swimming goggles on board so I could at least protect my eyes from diesel and no doubt virulent bacteria teeming in the water. Thus it was that I climbed down the boarding ladder dressed in a Tee shirt, underpants, and swimming goggles. A brief inspection revealed a ball of net sufficient to completely cover the propeller, of which there was no sign, with a tail of net jammed up hard against the side of the rudder. The actual strands were about quarter of inch by one eighth of inch of plaited plastic. The cut ends which I had seen earlier had frayed out to make the strands look much thicker. It was discarded trawl net, not cargo net. I went back for a life line to help support me in the water and a selection of sharp knives. As I blunted each one I handed it up to Bill who was holding the lifeline. An hour or so of sawing away quickly removed the tail of untwisted net and blunted every knife on board. At least, the propeller blades could be felt, if not seen, and I knew we had not lost the propeller.

The following morning saw another dive but there was no real progress with the net cutting. The Spurs cutter seems to have exacerbated the problem by chewing a hole in the net and allowing the free net to wrap behind the cutter, and my improvised coupling had allowed the engine the extra couple of turns to wind everything exceedingly tight. In effect there was a solid ball of plastic about ten inches in diameter wrapped solidly round the shaft and the face of the propeller with a loose skirt of coarse mesh net trailing off the back of it.

The following day we set about tracking down a new coupling. As the engine is a Farymann 18W of German manufacture I did not anticipate much difficulty. IJmuiden is a commercial fishing port and not a yacht haven; fishing boats do not use Farymann engines! There was no supplier in IJmuiden. A friendly chandler took the trouble to go next door to an import/export business in order to get them to trace a supplier for us and came back with a Rotterdam telephone number. The only problem now was no telephone. The friendly chandler was quite adamant, he would not phone for us nor could we use his phone and pay him for the call. It seems that it was a local issue; people had campaigned for years without success for a proper public telephone and nobody would do anything which reduced the apparent need for the phone. He advised us to go to the Harbour Master.

Nobody could have been more helpful. First he supplied us with coffee, then the use of the phone, then with a fluent translation service to ensure that the order had been correctly noted down, and finally with a C.O.D. acceptance point for the coupling which was due to arrive by post the following morning. The latter involved him making arrangements with people in a totally different building as it seems that the Harbour

Master's Office has no proper postal address. We duly trudged around the quay to find a total stranger welcoming us in a most friendly way and cheerfully pocketing around £120 in Guilders for the postman. We need not have worried. In the morning when we set off to collect the parcel from the office we were met by the Harbour Master's van which he had sent round to the boat to deliver the package and the change down to the last five cent coin.

We next went in search of both local divers and tool shops. Fortunately we found the latter first, having discovered that divers were 'very expensive' and also seemingly scarce. The ideal tool, an American hacksaw made by Nicholson, was spotted on the shelves. It resembles a pad saw handle with an extension to support the back of the blade half way along its length. Buying it turned out to be a protracted affair. Nothing on the shelves was priced and everything had to be looked up in a series of ledgers and catalogues. I suspect that this particular establishment was really in the wholesale business and not into selling individual items for real cash. Back to the boat for more diving.

The saw cut beautifully but with each stroke I pushed myself away from the stern. I also became extremely tired in a relatively short time. I thought I could improve the situation if I hung a rope strop between the stern cleats to provide a foot rest and so save the effort required in swimming. Bill quickly improved on this idea and a bosun's chair was improvised out of a large piece of plywood. I could now sit up to my chin in water, lean on the life line, and saw away with only the occasional peek under water to check on progress. It would have been damned annoying to have sawn the propeller off by mistake! The next improvement came as a flash of inspiration; reverse the blade to cut on the pull. Suddenly I could apply full power to each stroke. When the blade really bit home I was pulled into the transom, thus bruising my upper arms and shoulders, whereas previously I had just floated away harmlessly. Even so I was soon too tired to continue. Most of the afternoon was devoted to dismantling the old coupling. This set off to be a half hour job, a break between diving. Instead it turned into a triumph of improvisation lasting several hours as it became apparent that the coupling had been fitted with two sets of bastard sized bolts different at both ends of the coupling. The heads and nuts matched no known set of spanners; even then, when something was found that almost fitted, half the spanners could not be coaxed into the spaces available. It ended up with two metric box spanners being cut down to short lengths, filed extremely thin, squashed a bit in the vice, and finally gripped by impossible combinations of tommy bars and telescoped box spanners to provide leverage. Even then, one set of nuts had to be slackened with a hammer and cold chisel as absolutely nothing could be persuaded to fit.

A character resembling Lawrence of Arabia suddenly turned up. He looked quite incredibly incongruous dressed in a long paint stained raincoat, a leather flying helmet, largish goggles and sporting several days of stubble on his chin. By contrast with his eccentric and disreputable appearance his accent was pure public school. Clearly an expatriot eccentric he stayed and chatted for ages as we struggled with the bolts. He even offered to go to Amsterdam where he lived and to bring us some more tools. To ensure the right size he wanted us to give him a nut and bolt as a pattern. Fortunate it was that we did no such thing, (we told him the range of sizes which we thought might fit) as we never saw him again. Anyway, once we had got one out we could clearly get the remainder, even if it was with difficulty. Still, I think he meant well but I am glad we struggled on with our improvised tools. The anticipated half hour job extended to four hours, thirty minutes for each nut and bolt.

A final spell of diving, and I do mean final as there was no way I could bring myself to go back into that cold and dirty water (it would have been a diver regardless of the expense), suddenly seemed to produce miracles. We had got both the tools and the technique worked out, and moreover I was relatively fresh. The saw bit into plastic and handfuls of net pulled away. Finally a big lump about a metre square was unwrapped from the propeller and we were free apart from a few wispy strands. Soon even they were removed. In all some five and half hours were spent in the water sawing at the net.

It was at this point that we remembered picking up the crew. Janice had wisely decided that she would use a big boat, in fact a ferry boat, and meet us in Amsterdam. She was even now on the boat train supposing us to be doing a little jolly in the free ferry from Sixhaven to the station. We were not even in Amsterdam but in IJmuiden. Furthermore, we had forgotten to reset our watches to local time. We had two hours to clean up a bit and get to Amsterdam station. We made it, but only just. As the train drew in we panted onto the platform to take up a position which turned out to be exactly opposite the coach in which she had travelled. Somewhat exhausted as we prepared to greet her, we expected sympathy and congratulations on our resourcefulness. Of course, she knew nothing of what we had been doing. Instead of telling us what clever fellows we had been, she had the nerve to tell us that she had had a long and tiring journey! (which of course she had had).

The following day saw us refitting the coupling which was a reversal of the removal procedure with the added attraction of torrential rain. However, having got all the improvised tools made, it really was not too long a job. By lunch time we were ready to venture into the Noordzeekanaal. Really there is little to say of the North Sea Canal. It is wide enough to sail, but one is not allowed to tack which rather limits

one's abilities. Like the square riggers of old it all depends on which way the wind is blowing. It is also alarmingly busy with large barges each with a motor car firmly lashed to the deck aft. Ferries seem malevolent as they wait quietly before sliding into action right across the bows. Never once did I spot anything which might constitute a warning sign. They just seem to run to the clock regardless of what else is happening. It is not necessarily good to be under sail, it certainly does not secure right of way and the engine gives a lot more manoeuvrability.

Sixhaven was full when we arrived so we tried De Ruyterkade outside the station. It seemed amazingly convenient, right where we wanted to be, but even before we got all the ropes out the horrendous wash of passing barges persuaded us that this was no place to stop. A mile or so out of Amsterdam we found a quiet mooring in the Hout Haven between commercial barges.

The next day saw us going to the IJsselmeer in a brisk SW wind. In the canal this was no problem, but as we cleared the lock we could see that most of the boats were reefing down; the remainder continued under engine. As we went to hoist sail something large and silver flashed past my head and sank with loud splash. There was an immediate scurry to locate our lighters; at least real tragedy had not struck, we could still light our pipes. However, it remained a mystery just what had gone overboard. It was a couple of days before I missed the large stainless steel shackle by which the gybe preventers are normally secured to the boom. Tragedy had indeed struck, it would cost about ten pounds to replace.

Well reefed, we sailed under the high tension wires and entered the IJsselmeer. The first thing we saw were distress rockets and a cluster of four or five boats looking very intent on something. As they were about a mile to windward, and plenty of them, we sailed on. It was soon apparent that one reef was not enough, nor were two. The wind was measured as steady F7 with gusts well into the eights. As we had not anticipated anything like these conditions a lot of gear was not properly stowed. An early casualty was the steering compass which crashed off the chart table to the galley floor. Anybody know a good compass repairer?

Once we were properly reefed the sailing became very exhilarating with the shallow water creating a really nasty sea. Visibility was definitely poor and we were soon out of sight of land but in a clearly buoyed channel. Bill went below to navigate but spent his time hunting and consuming Stugeron. At one point he stuck his head out to suggest that we turned back as if we didn't do so while in the buoyed channel we would never find some buoy or another and we would be irretrievably lost. Clearly he had forgotten the Decca! (or had he? Perhaps he just wanted to get back into the Noordzockkanaal and make friends with his stomach again). In any case we didn't need the Decca. With the aid of a hand

bearing compass it was relatively easy to set the boat's head to a course and then to steer it in that general direction by external reference points such as clouds or boats on the horizon. It was obviously necessary to allow for such reference points moving but in the event we made his buoy within a couple of hundred yards without any problem.

We now set course for Marken lighthouse. A steel Dutch barge which had left the canal at the same time as us now appeared astern of us and under engine with the sails well stowed. They soon caught us and went ahead and inshore of us. We played it very cautiously and kept well off the lighthouse to pick up the marked channel. Bills's caution again; I was all for following the local and shortening the trip. Caution paid off. Time and time again the Dutchman went aground. I doubt that it would have caused us any problems, after all the keels lift but Bill is used to struggling around with nearly five feet of fixed keel. He never goes aground and could not comprehend that twin lifting keels are inclined to make one rather casual about temporary contacts with the bottom.

As we approached Marken the rain began, rain driven by what was now a full gale which was beginning to head us. The sails were brought down, Bill was brought up, and he was left to motor in wearing full waterproofs, life jacket and harness, and a pair of motorcycle goggles without which he could not see a thing. I joined the crew below; she was looking decidedly more comfortable now that the boat was upright and being propelled by something she understood. Janice has over twenty years experience of running her own motor boats; funny angles of heel make her very anxious!

We stayed in Marken for two days waiting for the weather to blow itself out. By this time the idea of the Frisian Isles had sunk without trace. Too many delays had cut our time and we wanted to be back for the West Mersea race.

From Marken we went to Monickerdam as we needed a chandler to replace the steering compass. We also bought the Dutch tidal atlases which are far superior to the British versions. From there it was back to Amsterdam and thence to IJmuiden.

The following morning, very early the following morning around 0400 am BST, the crew was escorted to the bus stop to start her journey home by train and ferry. The next job was to get diesel from the local garage which had some splendid automated card payment system which I could not use as I could not read the instructions. However, at 0700 am local time it opened and I trudged back to the boat with 10 litres of diesel. This put our range back to a full 50 hours at cruising speed. An ample safety margin for any eventuality. Bill had meanwhile made filter coffee but attempted to stir the filter. The resulting slurry was really rather horrible. By 8.00 am we were casting off and heading back out

of the forbidding entrance with its belching chimneys and sinister steel towers and storage tanks. The sea had a very substantial swell left over from some previous bad weather and a slight wind against tide chop was superimposed upon this. We made very slow progress as the bows repeatedly buried themselves. After a couple of hours we put on the engine, largely to help Bill's sea sickness which was getting quite bad with the uneasy motion of the boat. He went to lie down and was soon sleeping fitfully between little rushes to the lee gunwale. Five hours after leaving our mooring we were exactly eight miles off IJmuiden and motoring slowly. Bill was sleeping soundly by this time. Suddenly the engine note changed and a persistent whine could be heard. I had forgotten the stern greaser. Up came the floor boards, two or three quick turns of the grease cap. Still the noise persisted. I screwed the cap right down; I took it off and refilled it with grease and screwed it down again. The noise got louder and then the engine stopped. Bill slept on and it was a couple of hours later that I had the pleasure of telling him that we had become a sailing boat again. I think he thought I was joking. Only when he took it in did he suggest returning to IJmuiden so that we could fix the problem. However, by this time the sea had moderated and we were sailing well; we continued despite Bill's mild protestations. There seemed nothing to gain by returning, we would lose what he had identified as a relatively brief window on the weather, and would have to re-enter IJmuiden under sail alone.

Unfortunately the wind got lighter and lighter. Bill had wanted a window in the weather, what he had managed to find was really a hole (which continued right up to the West Mersea race which turned itself into a becalmed float about). We finally, after a totally uneventful day and night, sighted the Shipwash Light at 1530 of the second day. Before dawn we had been steering on its loom. With the dawn we lost the loom and it was hours before the superstructure began to show above the horizon. By mid morning it was more or less visible right on the horizon. From 1530 we could see it clearly but made such slow progress in the light wind that we were not off Harwich until 2300.

Without an engine and with barely steerage way I wanted the shortest route across the deep water channel. Consequently I went right inshore off Felixstowe and looked for ship movements. The VHF was monitoring the port operations channel. For some reason Bill was reluctant to go below to use the VHF to contact port control and he could not be left in charge of the boat as his night vision isn't good; he cannot tell whether a light is two yards or two miles off. Consequently we jilled about waiting for the few big ships we could see to complete their entry movements and provide a gap for us to drift across their channel. We did two or three 360 degree turns just off the shore. Suddenly the world was

ablaze with light. Two helicopters appeared and had us fixed in a cone of light from spotlights. One went off and patrolled up and down the coast, the other kept us fixed. By this time *neither* of us could see anything. The wall of brilliant light terminated in stygian blackness with twinkles of lights from buoys spattering the blackness here and there. We crossed the channel without incident although more by luck than management as a large boat did come out just as we got across. Mind you, they would have had no excuse for not seeing us as we were still in the spotlight. We got too far south, we worked our way back and very nearly hit the unlit harbour mole which suddenly loomed up about two boats' lengths in front of us. Having had their fun the helicopters went their way though they kept popping back every few minutes for another look. Around 0030 we finally anchored off Pin Mill. There was so little wind that I didn't have the steerage way to pick up a buoy. We got near several but could never quite make them. The return trip had taken 40 hours.

The following morning it was out with the bosun's chair and the saw. The water looked cleaner than that in Holland; however, it also felt considerably colder. When I reached under the boat I felt something soft and slimy. A quick look showed something resembling the shroud of a long dead seafarer. A few strokes of the saw and I was undisputed owner of a somewhat off-white English fertilizer sack.

A quick link call to the crew arranged a meeting at the Butt and Oyster. Another clean up and we motored, yes we motored, up to a buoy just off the end of the hard. Bill packed and made ready to go ashore. In due course the crew was collected and Bill returned to Heybridge and his own boat.

The rest of the time was given to gentle sailing up and down the Essex rivers trying to persuade Janice that all is not lost when the boat heels more than five degrees. Generally pleasant enough sailing but nothing worthy of mention. Even the West Mersea race was struck by the almost total lack of wind. Many more people in all the classes retired rather than stay to float around and finish their courses. Having had a lot of practice in going nowhere I sat it out and finally finished at 1705 long after the committee boat had given it up as a bad job. When will we get a course really suitable for the Atalantas?

Postscript: A month later, on the last weekend's sail of the season, the rudder downhaul shackle parted!

GELLIE'S 1993 CRUISE (T4)

By Michael Dixon

Introduction The 1992 cruise had been disappointing in as much that we

failed to meet many of our objectives due largely to the engine failure on the first day out.

The aims for this year were modest - a cruise in company from Stonehaven to St Andrews (planned months in advance); a slow poddle down to the Tyne; take part in a race up and down the Tyne; view the Cutty Sark Tall Ship's Race parade of sail; a leisurely trip back to Stonehaven.

Ron Duncan was to be the crew southbound, doing a swap with Terry Ward for the trip north. Coupled with a planned meet with family and friends on Tyneside, the scheduling had all the potential for a nightmare! So how did it turn out? Read on!

Saturday 10th July 1993 Ron had to work the morning so it was agreed I would do the last minute preparations ready for a lunch time departure. I was on board by 0630 to shift GELLIE across to the outer wall. Water and fuel tanks were topped up and last minute shopping completed.

Ron arrived at noon. There was no point in delaying our departure, so it was off with the lines, set sail and away. Well that was the idea. We did sail off the berth but only managed to travel about fifty feet before coming to a graceful stop as the keels eased their way into the soft mud. Nonchalance was the order of the moment; Ron continued to clear the decks, stowing fenders and lines whilst the skipper popped below, where, out of sight, the keels were wound up sufficient for us to get underway again. I don't think anyone realised, but then so what?

An hour later we were off Caterline and feeling rather more weigh in the wind. Down below was getting distinctly wet and I was a bit concerned to see water at the outboard side of the port, leeseide, bunk. Lifting the cushion and boards revealed six inches of water swilling about beneath the bunk. For'd of the main bulkhead the picture was the same. I pumped dry and set about finding the leak, eventually tracing it to th port keel pivot bolt. Despite new washers and plenty of grease there was a small-boy proportion stream of water coming in. Half a turn on the nut and the leak ceased - but it took a further hour to pump, mop out and re-stow the gear.

By 1600 we had a reef in the main but were still managing to do five knots close hauled. Ian, Jamie and Leslie in HEADWAY were well ahead and to windward, and we kept in touch by radio from time to time. Clearly we were not going to reach St Andrews in daylight, and whilst GELLIE might get in with the keels up, HEADWAY, with her fin keel, certainly would not.

After listening to the 1800 forecast, we agreed with Ian that Lunan Bay would offer a sheltered anchorage for the night, so we tacked inshore. By 1900 it was blowing force six, and GELLIE was going really well.

At 2000 we stowed the sails and motored up to the anchorage. The stove was flashed up and the evening meal was bubbling away in no time - but time enough to crack open the rum. All this and fresh strawberries for dessert. It was a pretty miserable sort of an evening - not one for getting the two crews together, so it was off to bed quite early.

Sunday 11th July 1993 It was a fine morning but calm! We weighed anchor at 0820 and motored across to HEADWAY to bid them farewell. Ron and I planned to head more or less straight across the Firth of Forth - once you head into the firth, you're faced with getting out again, hence St Abbs as the destination.

The morning passed pleasantly - reeving new sheets, tightening up the steering cables, renewing the main hatch hasp and so on, and before we knew it we were up to Bell Rock, the first time Ron had passed to seaward of this impressive lighthouse.

The early part of the afternoon gave us a bit of a breeze, sufficient to allow a brief respite from the engine, but by 1600 it was on again. Never mind though, we could make out the lighthouse high up on St Abbs Head.

At 1930 we were within a mile of the harbour, and whilst the approach and entry was interesting, the sailing directions are clear and we had no difficulty. One of the local fishermen invited us to berth alongside his boat which was much appreciated. He advised us that the harbour master was having a "wee bitty trouble getting about" and would we "away up to the house and pay our dues?" Ron said he needed the exercise, claiming he'd be back in ten minutes. It was nearer an hour later when he returned to a very well done supper saying he'd been quite unable to get away from the harbour master's blether.

After supper we went in search of the only hotel, but after stumbling around narrow lanes in the dark, further research into Berwick Ale was abandoned in favour of a nightcap on board.

Monday 12th July 1993 A short trip was planned for the day - twenty miles or so down the coast to Holy Island. To make the best of the south-going tide, a lunch time departure was scheduled. What remained of the morning was spent carrying out a few tasks around the boat - engine hatch hinges, guard wire clamps and so on. Topping up the diesel tank gave a consumption of little over one and a half litres an hour.

We left St Abbs at 1230, initially planning to stick our noses into Eyemouth for water and fuel, but in the end decided against it as we were unsure if we'd get in or out at low water. There was little wind, but the weather was fine - warm and sunny. Lunch outside complete with wine - very civilised.

We managed to rise from our post lunch torpor and hoist the spinnaker - perhaps a little premature, as the wind died to a zephyr an

hour later. Sails handed, engine on again.

Meanwhile we crossed the border - another first (by sea at least) for Ron. The Navy in HMS BATTLEAXE were exercising off Berwick, hoisting out boats, making harbour approaches and so forth.

The visibility was excellent; Holy Island was in sight and even Bamburgh Castle high on its cliffs some miles further south was clearly visible. Just after 1800 we rounded the north-east corner of Holy Island at Emanuel Head. Twenty minutes later we altered course at the Ridge buoy to bring the first set of leads, the Old Law beacons, in line. With the flood under us it was only ten minutes before turning onto the second set of leads at the Triton buoy. The anchor was let go at 1845, sixty feet of cable in fifteen feet of water. The pilot suggests two anchors at springs, but we were there at neaps and the forecast was for settled weather.

Once confident GELLIE was securely moored, we rowed over to the pier at the west end of the Oose. Holy Island always was and still is one of my all time favourite places. It was twelve years since my last visit; thirty years since my first, and I was delighted to find that what changes had occurred were sympathetic and in keeping with the magic of the place.

We ate at the Castle Hotel, a welcome change from cooking and washing up. A couple of phone calls before taking a slow stroll back along the low cliff to the pier. We made it back on board without incident just as the tide was turning, and in time to watch the Swedish Baltic Trader HENVILLA ORVERO come up the channel and anchor a cable or so from GELLIE. The sunset was delightful - a fitting end to an enjoyable day.

Tuesday 13th July 1993 I wanted to catch most of the flood to take us down inside the Farnes, so we weighed anchor at 0700. It was a rare morning, hardly any wind but clear as a bell with not a cloud in the sky. TAIKOO had anchored just clear of the channel and as we passed close by, we exchanged cheery good mornings with the watch on deck and the skipper. LORD NELSON was anchored in the Goldstone Channel - the Tall Ships were beginning to converge on the Tyne.

By 0730, GELLIE was clear of the channel, shaping a course down towards Seahouses. Ron was keen to try out the sextant, and as there was a problem with the engine gear linkage, I decided to put into Beadnell Bay for an hour or so.

The engine problem was soon fixed, so it was navigation time. To quote the log:

"Ron's first lesson in celestial navigation - pretty impressive, but we're in Bamburgh Castle car park!"

We motored from the anchorage just before 1100, and once round the Newton buoy set sail, the wind had settled down east south-east, still light but freshening. We sailed close by Dunstanburgh Castle at 1145, and

even closer off Craster, where we were forced to tack offshore. To make life easier, we hove to for lunch (wine again - absolute hell!) before resuming passage south at 1245. The wind was a steady three to four by now and we had a splendid sail across Alnwick Bay towards Amble.

It was low water but we figured we'd make it over the bar with the keels well up, although we were somewhat perturbed to see KING'S RANSOME entering ahead of us and going aground right between the piers. We later discovered she drew five feet which was just as well because we entered anyway, getting alongside the fuel dock at 1645.

The evening was a repeat of the previous year's run ashore with Ian. Supper at the Sun Hotel in Warkworth followed by a visit to the Mason's Arms. It was a fine evening to stroll to Warkworth along the river, and Ron was suitably impressed with the old village atmosphere of the place.

Wednesday 14th July 1993 As we planned to go only as far as Blyth, we had a very leisurely morning restocking with provisions and catching up on one or two odd jobs.

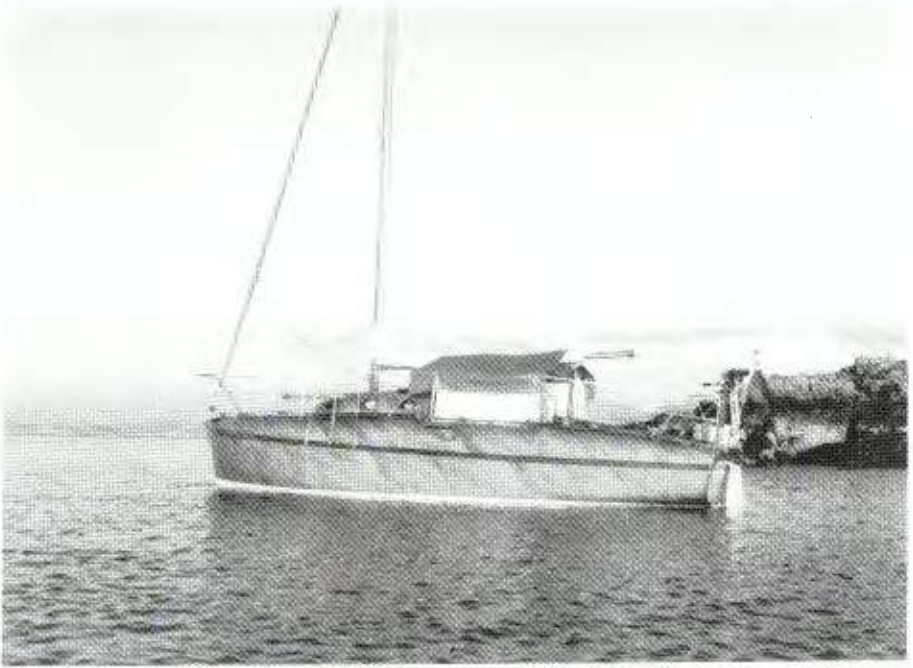
We left the berth at 1230, motoring out against the easterly wind until we rounded the north-east corner of Coquet Island. There was just sufficient wind to allow us to sail for about an hour and a half, but by 1500 it was engine time again rather than wallow in the fitful breeze.

The Sow and Pigs buoy, marking the wide shelf of rocks to the east of Blyth, was rounded at 1615 and we entered the harbour fifteen minutes later. Since last year an impressive line of huge wind driven generators has been planted along the east pier - an interesting diversity for the harbour commissioners.

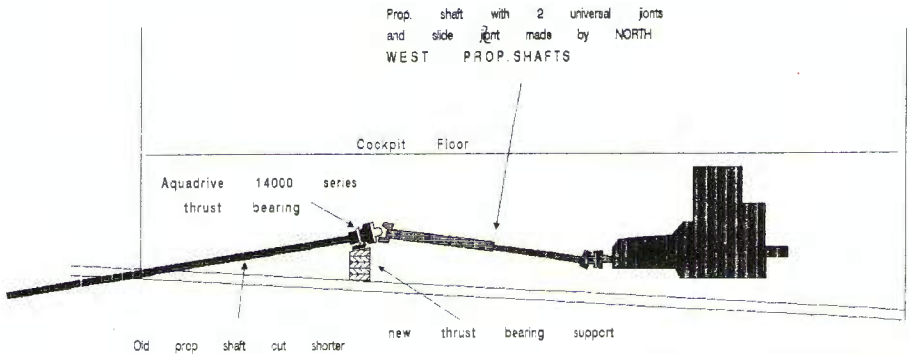
The south harbour, home for the Royal Northumberland Yacht Club, had several temporary pontoons laid for the East Coast Sailing Week. The fleet were absent having raced to Sunderland, so we were able to take our choice from the many available berths.

I renewed an old RNYC acquaintance, Bob Rankin. The last time we had spoken was 1962! At the time he was fitting out a wooden fishing boat hull he'd had built at St Monance. FLAPPER was her name and I recalled she had been unique in having radar fitted - almost unheard of in pleasure craft at a time when probably only fifty percent of commercial shipping had radar. It was good to see Bob again, now long since retired, but still keeping two large boats going - one at "home" in Blyth and the other for "holidays" on the Hamble.

The boat ahead of us was a huge sixteen ton displacement ferro ketch which had been towed in by a much smaller boat. The reward for the salvage had been a bottle of malt and a bucket of fresh prawns. Ron and I didn't get a sniff of the malt, but as the salvors didn't fancy prawns we became the grateful recipients.



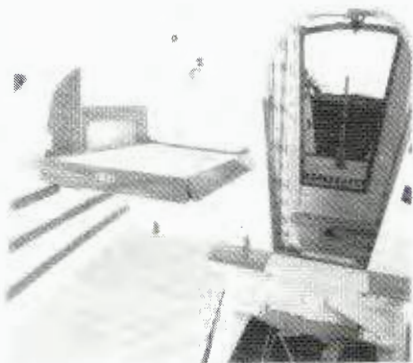
See "Jobara At Last"



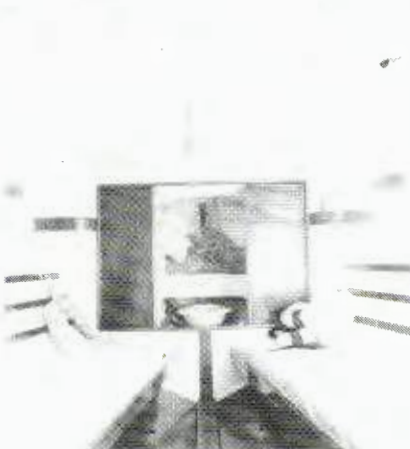
JOHARA

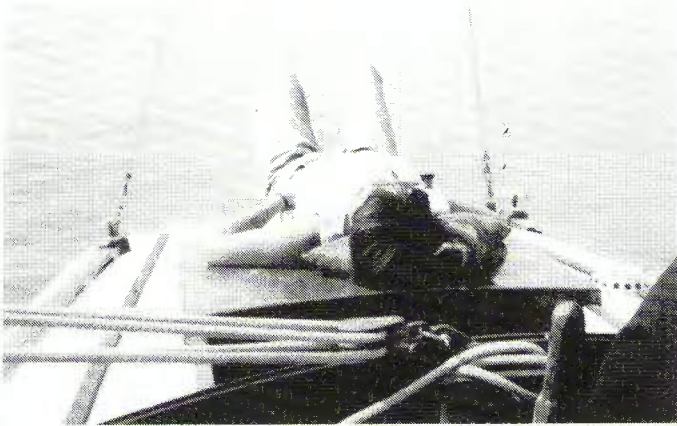
Engine layout with Yanmar MD10

Drawn By Sultan Garshogh



See "Building Aquilo II"





*The West Mersea
Race - as seen
from "Touch"
(A 171)*





Looks like a Job for John Searle ...



*... but he's
on his
way to
West Mersea
for the
Town
Regatta
in "Touch"*

I was still having a problem engaging astern gear; clearly it had to be sorted once and for all. Whilst I was curing the problem, Ron was serving aperitifs and cooking the supper. Once cleared away we strolled round to the yacht club to check our race entry for the following day and kindly be given a class pennant by Dennis. Ron went off to look at a Finnesse 24 - seduced by the gaff rig. I was long asleep by the time he got back on board.

Thursday 15th July 1993 We surfaced at 0630 to make sure of a good breakfast and to make the necessary preparations for the day. Leaving the berth at 0815, we passed the piers ten minutes later to proceed south towards the Tyne, some seven miles away. It was a poor morning weatherwise, dull overcast with the threat of rain and very little wind.

Meanwhile, frenetic preparations for the race went ahead without let up. The pennant was rigged!

Percy the parrot braved the elements to take up his perch on the backstay, where he managed to remain upright despite all the mayhem.

Passing ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLT at anchor, we entered the Tyne at 1000 to join the throng of boats waiting for the race to start. Class 1 boats (the really serious guys) went away at 1045, but ten minutes later were recalled on instructions from the harbour authorities. What drama! What excitement! What an anti-climax.

The start sequence was resumed and our gun went at 1125. GELLIE was first over the line! What glory! What skill! What luck.

The next couple of hours was interesting but frustrating. The harbour authorities had agreed, after two years of persistent lobbying, to allow yachts to race up to Newcastle and back, so taking part in the event was unique in itself. The frustration was on account of the weather, which saw the wind dying away to barely a two, not to be helped by the ebb tide coming away before we were half way to Newcastle.

In the end we followed the example of most of the yachts and handed sail, preferring to motor on up to Newcastle. The Tall Ships were moored on the north bank from Byker along the final mile to the Tyne Bridge. Small boat traffic in the river was heavy and we had some interesting moments with boats more intent on sightseeing than on seamanship. We had GELLIE above the Tyne Bridge, just below the Swing Bridge before turning and heading off downstream again. The rain was heaving down, but the ships still made a fine sight.

The trip down river was less eventful, and not so far, as the race fleet was to moor for the night in the Albert Edward dock. Once inside the dock itself, we were welcomed alongside BORDER REIVER, a large motor sailor acting as committee boat for the race series. Ron and I were invited on board for a drink - more lamp swinging about RNYC characters back in the late fifties and early sixties.

The social committee had organised a barbecue at Tynemouth Sailing Club and laid on a coach to get crews to and fro. By now the wind had picked up to south-easterly four and wet with it. Hardly barbecue weather, but the company was good and the ale fine. Returning on board at midnight, we just had to round off the evening with a night-cap before rolling into bed. All in all, a memorable day.

Friday 16th July 1993 All along we had known that this was to be a "fill in" day between the race and the parade of sail. Ron wanted to visit a book shop in Newcastle and view the Tall Ships more closely, which was fine. I was content to stay with GELLIE, as the quaysides in the lower reaches of the Tyne are not where you would willingly leave your boat unattended. But we had to go somewhere as the Albert Edward Dock, no longer in use, only locks in and out on the level.

1000 saw us lock out with the rest of the race fleet, about fifty boats in all, and motor downstream towards the fish quay at North Shields. When we got there, we moored alongside the CRISTAL SKY - they were taking stores on board ready for a group of passengers, but scheduled to leave about 1130. Although the berth was a bit exposed, Ron and I reckoned we could lie safely alongside provided we could find a long plank to span the vertical piles. Ron went off hunting for a suitable plank, returning twenty minutes later with a twelve foot scaffold board - obtained, he claimed, quite legitimately!

We moved directly alongside at 1140. Our shopping trip coincided with the fish and chip shop for lunch. After the heavy rain mid morning, the day had turned out bright and sunny, fine for Ron's trip up to Newcastle, and for my lazy afternoon on board. I sat in the cockpit listening with wry amusement at the snatches of conversations floating down from the quayside overhead. There was the usual, "They used to drop those from aircraft during the war you know," statement. Then young children asking of harassed parents, "Daa-aad, is that one of them Tall Ships?" and bemused parents and grandparents declaring they "wouldn't cross to South Shields in that tiny boat."

Wash from passing boats was a bit of a problem, and a close eye had to be kept on moorings, fenders and the plank. The RNXS provided the nautical amusement, manoeuvring with much bustle and clanking of telegraphs, every now and again taking large chunks out of the wooden piling.

Ron returned late afternoon having had a successful trip visiting book shops and ships. Once he had been supplied with the obligatory aperitif, he disappeared into the galley to work magic with the prawns. A superb dish, which we shared, visually at any rate, with the passers by, whilst we ate in the cockpit enjoying the early evening sun.

There was nothing to say we couldn't stay the night, but it wasn't

the most peaceful of berths, so I elected to return to the Albert Edward Dock lay-by. We could have gone up river to see the fireworks display at Newcastle but decided against it - mainly because of the large numbers of spectator craft expected. As it was, we safely berthed alongside a motor cruiser which had "driven" (!) up from Whitby in two hours. Whilst we were settling down, the HELGA MARIA came in - her single cylinder long stroke engine turning so slowly, it sounded as if each firing were to be its last. She had been in the news a couple of times, once when she left Whitby without a passenger certificate, and again when she ran out of food, water and fuel whilst returning back across the Atlantic from Newfoundland.

The oil lamp was lit for the first time, Ron played the sea shanty tapes and the level in the rum bottle sank before our very eyes.

Saturday 17th July 1993 This was parade of sail day - with traffic to be very tightly controlled by the harbour authorities and quite rightly so. I wanted to get a good vantage point, and as the wind was south-westerly, decided upon Herd Sands, inside the pier at South Shields.

I had arranged with our friends the Leggs that we'd pick them up from the ferry landing at 1030, so Ron and I had plenty of time for breakfast and to get GELLIE polished up.

We diverted via the fish quay to return the plank, managing to wriggle our way right up into the corner - I wondered when the last yacht had been that far up into the dock! Then back to the ferry landing for the Leggs and off to anchor at Herd Sands. We anchored there at 1030, and settled down for the afternoon's sightseeing. There was plenty to watch. Two Thames barges anchored close by and that was just the start; by the time the port was closed to traffic, there were 125 small craft moored within the south pier and a further 40 craft moored within the north pier. And the crowds! Tens if not hundreds of thousands of people thronging every possible vantage point. At noon, the Red Arrows gave their usual impeccable display of aerobatics over the piers.

The parade of sail started at 1430 and it was most impressive as always, to see these ships coming down river. Regrettably few of them had any sail set despite the following wind. With over a hundred entries, the parade took two and a half hours.

Meanwhile, more prosaic problems on board GELLIE! The heads had decided to pack up. Ordinarily not a major issue, but with six people on board and half a million spectators ...? I did have a spares kit on board, so most of the parade of sail was spent in the fo'c'sle overhauling the gubbins, sticking my head out of the fore hatch from time to time to watch the ships.

Bang on time, Terry was spotted on the beach so I took a break from the repairs to row across to pick him up. It was quite a pull against

the wind - but I did get a round of applause from the spectators when I finally made it to the beach.

The parade of sail was over by 1700, but we remained at anchor until 1830, before joining the inward bound armada of small craft who'd been out at sea watching the start of the race. The Leggs were safely disembarked at North Shields ferry landing and by 1900 we were moored once again in the Albert Edward Dock lay-by.

The dock is no longer in use and lies in a depressing industrial wasteland with absolutely no facilities or amenities. It's certainly not the sort of place you would want to go for a walk, even if you felt inclined to leave the boat unattended. So it was on with the skillet and off with the cork! Terry had the Macallan and oatcakes so there was no looking back!

Sunday 18th July 1993 Ron had to leave us to get home for work on Monday morning. It was decided the best jumping off point was the fish quay, so Ron took us down there, mooring at 0830.

Bidding Ron farewell, Terry and I left an hour later, passing through the piers at 0940 heading south for Whitby. It was good to be out at sea again after all the shenanigans in the river over the last three days. It was a fine morning, but there was only a very fitful breeze which eventually settled down in the south-east, which of course, was where we were headed!

It turned into a bit of a slog, but we decided to continue. We hoped to make Whitby before they closed the bridge between the lower harbour and the upper harbour where the pontoons were situated. We failed by twenty minutes, and were forced to moor alongside one of the inshore fishing boats QUEST.

Whitby is a fine spot - a bit tripperish perhaps, but with a cheerful optimistic air about it. We were far enough out from the harbour wall to avoid much of the noise and bustle, and we enjoyed a couple of drams in the cockpit, before going ashore in search of food. We had set our sights on Chinese cuisine for a change, but the only establishment in Whitby catered only for take-away trade. Nothing deterred, we returned to GELLIE with our purchases and had a thoroughly pleasant meal alfresco.

We had read that the Whitby fishermen were not too kindly disposed to yachts, and inclined to cast them adrift if they were in the way, so we thought it prudent to shift berth as soon as it became possible. So it was a relatively early night.

Monday 19th July 1993 The alarm went off at 0200, rousing us from deep sleep. We had ascertained that the first bridge opening was to be 0230, which would allow us access to the upper harbour and to the pontoons. It was a struggle to get up, but we made it! The bridge was contacted on the radio, and promptly opened for us, and we secured

alongside a true racing keelboat (with miles and miles of string) fifteen minutes later. Wide awake by now we nevertheless returned to the comfort of the sleeping bags.

Our second awakening was far more leisurely! To be honest there wasn't much of the morning left, but we completed the necessary stowing, watering, fuelling etc. and caught up with the dhobi. Having done all this, we had lunch and discussed options. We were "stuck" above the bridge until 1600 at the earliest, and even then, the forecast wasn't too bright, with the promise of northerlies. I was mindful of the pilot book's caution of Whitby bar in northerlies, so there was every chance of harbour rot setting in, despite our wish to make tracks back north and home! The remainder of the day was described by Terry's log book entry ...

"Played grockles and walked the town, even went for afternoon tea - missed weather forecast. Sampled Monsieur Therence's culinary delights at lunch and supper - skipper fell over as a consequence"

"Went to the Pier Hotel, wallpaper unrecognisable through nicotine stains, or was it supposed to be brown? Played count-the-number-of-lows on the BBC news and weather - wind from the north-west until Wednesday - but decreasing in strength.

"Back to the boat for early night, preceded by a wee dram, 'wait and see' in the morning, plan to be up for the last bridge, Mike soothes Terry with horror stories of the Whitby bar in a northerly!

"Flying fish (salmon) lands on pontoon at skipper's feet ... is this an omen?"

Tuesday 20th July 1993 One ear was opened warily for the 0600 forecast; still northerly but expected to back later. We finally surfaced at 0830 and frittered the morning away. A young lad came alongside in a dinghy to chat - he'd been on board the ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLT and remembered seeing us sailing up the Tyne. Half an hour later, he returned bearing a photo of GELLIE under full sail; really nice of him.

After lunch we went for a walk up to the harbour entrance - the sea wasn't exactly breaking over the piers, but it didn't look too inviting either! However, the forecast did promise westerlies which was encouraging.

I'd been meaning to call at the harbour office to see Bill Estill, the harbour master. The last time we had been together was 1966 on VENASSA. He'd been first trip apprentice; I'd been a couple of years his senior. Old memories were revived - much mutual lamp swinging! I reminded him of the time when we, and two other apprentices, had gone out to La Spezia to join VENASSA, but he begged me to draw a veil over the occasion - after all, he did have a reputation to maintain in Whitby harbour!

In the end, Terry and I decided to make a break for it at the first available bridge. By 1610 we cleared the piers, heading north. The bar

was very lumpy, and we struggled to make much headway against the incoming swell. It was easier once outside and the weather fine, although little wind to speak of. A local yacht got into difficulties off the harbour, suffering a fire which immobilised the engine, compounded by jammed furling gear. The last we heard was that the Whitby lifeboat had been dispatched to tow her home.

A massive bank of cloud was beginning to build up to the north-west; clearly we were in for something. As the evening drew in, great sheets and forks of lightning became more obvious. For a time it looked as if the storm would pass to seaward of us, but as a precaution I disconnected the VHF and Decca aerials from their sets. Despite altering course a couple of points, the storm decided to pay us a visit anyway. In an odd sort of way it was most enjoyable - after all, there was little we could do. No wind, torrential heavy rain bouncing off the sea, GELLIE and me, almost continuous thunder and spectacular bolts of lightning reaching the sea apparently within yards of GELLIE. It took us about half an hour to get through the thunderstorm and out the other side. Here we were rewarded by a magnificent sunset to the north-west, contrasting the utter blackness of the storm to the south-east still being illuminated from time to time with vivid flashes of lightning.

The aerials were reconnected at 2200. It was crystal clear - excellent visibility with the lights along the Durham coast brilliantly clear. Neither Terry nor I were keen to re-visit the Tyne as it's not the most picturesque of places unless there is a specific purpose, but it's fine for a stopover. Whilst we wanted to push on up the coast, a few hours rest would be most welcome, and we altered course a few degrees to bring the Tyne piers right ahead.

Wednesday 21st July 1993 GELLIE was safely anchored by 0140 - snug in Tynemouth Prior Haven, a lovely little anchorage, beneath the ruins of Tynemouth Castle and Priory.

The 0600 forecast wasn't bad - northwesterlies - which would mean sailing hard on the wind, but at least we would be sailing. We weighed anchor at 0715 and by half past were round the pier and sailing north close hauled. The ebb was under us, so with the tide and the force four breeze we had a cracking sail up the coast - St Mary's Island, Seaton Sluice, Blyth, Newbiggin, and on to round Coquet Island sailing up to anchor just off Amble. Terry, a keen dinghy sailor and an architect by profession had been sketching modifications to GELLIE's rig which would allow trapezes and wings for additional performance. I wasn't convinced and I'm quite sure Messrs Fox and Vines would have had something to say.

We were waiting for sufficient tide to carry us over the bar. I reckoned there was sufficient water by 1500, and by 1515 we were

moored once more in the marina. After taking care of GELLIE's needs - fuel, water, a trapped rudder downhaul wire etc, we availed ourselves of the marina's excellent facilities such that we were in a fit state to greet my parents. It was perhaps just as well that they didn't want to be late home as Terry and I began to droop, almost falling asleep over the coffee.

Thursday 22nd July 1993 The lunar calendar meant an early start if we were to make the most of the north going ebb tide. The 0600 forecast was promising, but failed to live up to expectations so it was another day's motoring.

FRISKY, the yacht berthed next door left whilst we were having breakfast. She was an interesting boat of indeterminate origins (the owner wasn't sure either) characterised by an alarmingly low freeboard - "Used to be a lot less before I removed a load of weight from the keel," the skipper disarmingly informed us!

We left the berth at 0700 and once outside the river set the main, more to steady than to propel. It wasn't a bad morning on the whole, a bit cloudy but with excellent visibility. Once round Boulmer Stile Buoy we could clearly see the Farne Islands up ahead as we ticked off the landmarks - Craster, Dunstanburgh, Newton, Beadnell, Seahouses. I'd decided to take us between some of the Farnes rather than inside them - more interesting navigationally and providing a closer look at the wildlife. We transited Staple Sound at 1000, for ten minutes or so being subjected to very lumpy confused seas as the tide sluiced through the gap.

The transit had made us somewhat peckish, so we enjoyed brunch whilst watching, with interest, a Northumbrian Rivers patrol boat power past us to board a fishing boat a mile or so ahead of us. Why they chose that particular boat we'll never know, but they keep a very close watch on illegal salmon fishing on this bit of coast.

We crossed back over the border into Scottish waters at 1245. We came across several floating logs and other vegetation, the biggest of which was well over twenty feet long and two feet in diameter. I shuddered to think of coming into collision with it, possibly at night, and the effect it would have on half an inch of mahogany.

Terry served "proper" lunch - excellent wide jawed sandwiches accompanied by an excellent cheeky red wine. By the time we cleared away, we were fast approaching St Abbs. I'd been in with Ron the week before, but Terry, up for'd, looked a bit nervous, but later claimed that I'd sent him up there to look for rocks.

Securely moored by 1415, I went up to pay my respects (and dues) to the harbour master - returning to the boat with ice-creams - but it had been some time since lunch!

Later on we took a walk along the cliffs to the north of the village, but stopped short of going all the way to the lighthouse. There were fine

views back towards the harbour and we could see other boats making their way in. By the time we got back, FRISKY had arrived, and also LICERE and ARIEL, the latter being the pride and joy of her ninety-two year old skipper.

Supper (it was turning into one of those continuous gastronomic days) was one of GELLIE's by now famous vegetable dishes, the idea being to lightly fry as many varieties of fresh vegetables as there are on board, throw in some protein if desired (in this instance some German smoked sausage) and then pour in a sachet of Sharwood's finest, and simmer for fifteen minutes. Not forgetting the aperitifs of course.

After supper, we arranged boats so we were outboard ready for an early departure. Then up to the Haven Hotel - we had more precise directions this time - more to stretch legs and aid digestion than anything else. St Abbs doesn't possess either a hotel or a pub, hence the fifteen minute walk along the cliff top path, well trod I might say, by the inhabitants of St Abbs, into the Haven's back garden. Nigel and Lynne from LICERE joined us shortly afterwards and we spent a very pleasant hour mainly discussing the rising crime wave on Tyneside.

Friday 23rd July 1993 It was another early start, slipping out at 0600. Once we had cleared breakfast away, we set sail although it wasn't until 0930 that the wind finally settled down in the west south-west. By 1000 it had freshened to force five and GELLIE, despite broad reaching was overpressed. With a reef in she was much more comfortable - even the weather helm was manageable.

We were making steady progress across the Firth of Forth - there's little to be gained by trying to work the tides as sooner or later it will become foul. By 1430 the wind had eased sufficiently to shake out the reef, and as it was such superb sailing we decided to push on home to Stonehaven. At 1600 we threw caution to the winds and set the spinnaker. It was marginal in the wind we had, both in terms of strength and direction, but I reckoned it was worth the try. Apart from attempting (and sometimes succeeding !) to round up into the wind from time to time in the stronger gusts, GELLIE went like a train. Terry was steering for much of the time, standing to leeward with his hip braced against the whipstaff. As he remarked, he now knew the origin of the phrase "bum steer"!

By 1800 we were up to Montrose, enjoying the early evening sunshine now that the cloud had all but disappeared. To quote Terry:

"Creaming up the coast, 7.0 knots plus, wonderful evening, fields and hills lit by low level sun, vivid greens, yellows, sea green/blue white, sky blue, white clouds - this is why we do it!"

It was too good to miss - no attempt at meals - mineral water and biscuits in the cockpit sufficed. Terry swears I started to hallucinate about

Macallans in Stonehaven, but at least I didn't claim to have seen a penguin flying off Tod Head; talk about hallucinating!

At 2040 we handed the spinnaker and prepared to enter Stonehaven. We were alongside at 2112, just a little over fifteen hours from St Abbs. Without a doubt the best day's sailing of the trip.

We needed to eat, but rejected cooking in favour of Sandy's fish and chips. Whilst Terry was off seeing to our inner needs, I topped up the water tanks before mooring alongside a deserted visiting motor cruiser. After our belated supper, we renewed our acquaintance with the Orkney Dark Island at the Ship, returning to GELLIE an hour or so later. On turning in at midnight, Terry, looking out of the partially open hatch, exclaimed, "Look - a shooting star! Oh no - it's a seagull!" I realised I would have to buy Terry a book about birds, and, with that thought in mind drifted off to sleep, the cruise at an end.

Voyage distance 393 miles, under way for 97.4 hours.

Sailing distance 145 miles, 40.5 hours.

Motoring distance 248 miles, 56.9 hours.