

ATALANTA OWNERS'

ASSOCIATION

1999 - 2000

BULLETIN



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" SNUFFBOX - 1956 "

Raker
of Cowes

ATALANTA OWNERS' ASSOCIATION

1999 – 2000 BULLETIN

41st Edition

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Hon Auditor Mrs Monica Mourant,

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Fred Boothman Esq.,

Although no longer on the Committee, advice on drawings and other technical matters will continue to be available from

Maurice Donovan Esq.,

From the Commodore

I suppose it's all the fault of El Nino.....the extraordinary weather we've been having for most of this year, including hurricanes, tornados and flooding, all of which have reached our shores.

There have been pictures in the local papers of waterspouts off nearby Selsey Bill and the damage they caused at sailing clubs, with boats ending up in the bushes!

But happily there has been no news of damage to any Fairey boats, in particular to Atalantas or indeed the many Fisherman based on this battered south coast.

And so another year draws to a close when Fairey boats of all types have brought pleasure to families and their friends. The year 2000 is almost with us. New Fairey boats of various kinds are still being built and whilst they may be modern structures, in the end, they are the product of Fairey Marine's original designs and experience.

We all enjoy the articles from Fairey owners, recounting their tales of the fun that has been had by so many, from so far a-field. Keep it up!

**Charles Currey
October 1999**



Editorial

When Colin Twyford suggested I might take over as Editor, I didn't really stop to think of the detail. It was only after the AGM when Colin 'phoned to tell me I "was it", that I suffered a mild moment of panic. After all, there was an illustrious line of Editors stretching back years. Give me a force six and a lee shore any day!

I need not have worried. Mike Roberts provided every assistance and dispatched a huge box full of historical material, a lot of which is unpublished as far as I can tell. I hope to use the occasional gem in bulletins to come.

In September, I began to worry (Mike never mentioned this bit!), as all I had was an out of date membership list and my own account of “Gellie’s” west coast wanderings. Not exactly riveting stuff! Then it all started to come together. Many thanks to all the contributors – I hope I have managed to do justice to your hard work.

To those who perhaps have about whether or not to submit material, please do so.

Finally, on behalf of you all, I’d like to thank Mike Roberts for all his sterling work in producing no less than nine bulletins.

**Mike Dixon
December 1999**



Cruise to the East Coast Race

Derek Buckton (A 105 “Taka Maru”)

The voyage down

The trip to West Mersea started out in heavy mist and light drizzle, but the forecast gave an indication that better weather and wind would soon arrive. The first five hours were motor sailed in company with a friend’s boat down to Whitby, where our one boat escort left us in clear weather with a good northeast breeze.

Crossing from Hartlepool to Lowestoft was to be the longest trip, at about 180 miles, that “Taka Maru” had done since her two-year restoration.

The 44 hour trip went by without any problems and with a combination of motor sailing and sailing, we made the tidal gate for the last six hours from the North Norfolk coast past the Cochle buoy and down to Lowestoft in the very early hours of Monday morning.

We had started on Saturday 7th August at 1000 and arrived at Lowestoft at 0600 on Monday 9th at an average speed of just less than four knots. The Coventry Victor ran for two hours on a gallon of fuel and ran for 16 of the 44 hours.

After one day in Lowestoft, we said goodbye to our friend Chris Robson who had volunteered to help us with the long part of the trip, as we have no auto helm. We caught up with sleep and set off at 0430 the following morning to catch the tide down to Shotley.

A miss-placed foot on the gear lever in the morning rain and gloom resulted in a slight bump with the dock wall, but that was the only problem we had during the 7 hour and 15 minute trip.

An extra day was spent in Shotley to watch the eclipse and to meet up with the Vice Commodore John Searle, ex owner of "Taka Maru". Although John had never sailed her, he seemed pleased to see her out on the water again.

We set off from Shotley at 0700 on Thursday 12th to get the best of the tide to West Mersea and actually sailed the whole way, until the wind died at the Bench Head buoy. All sails were lowered to motor through the fleet of boats that were still racing.

Looking for the pile mooring was very difficult as this was an exceptionally high spring tide and they were almost completely under water. Once spotted, Francis and myself did a classic "picking up a pile mooring". Down through the piles, turn back up into the still flooding tide, up to the for'd pile – picked up perfectly, slacken off to drift down to the stern pile, then rope over the side and round the prop. Classic!

"Taka Maru" was made comfortable between the piles, the dinghy was launched and a chest high dip in the sea soon got the rope off from round the propeller. Skipper's fault; skipper did the dipping! The rest of that day and Friday were spent watching other boats and visiting the Mersea museum and rigging our own floating line between the piles for an easy pick up after the race.

The East Coast Race

Saturday 14th race day dawned with a good wind and sunshine. "Blue Belle" (F54), who was moored ahead, was made ready by Rick Wick and Dave Allen (who had fully recovered from an attack of "vindaloo and beer" proportions on a previous night out) and sailed off the piles with great skill.

“Taka Maru’s” engine was started to motor off but we waited for a fin keel cruiser to pass by before setting off. The fin keeler went hard aground level with where “Blue Belle” had been and blocked our way out. The starboard channel was very shallow, but with keels and rudder up, we just managed to scrape over the shallow part.

We finally made it out to the start; now to find out which course to sail.

“Jaunty” (A100), “Blue Belle” and “Kookaburra” (A168) were all cruising and looking good amongst all the other classics and modern boats mulling about for the various starts. “Taka Maru” was sailing well and felt good but we still didn’t know the course. As we rounded the committee boat to see the course board, our flag and course were up, so we made a note of the number and turned away from the line, checked the time and then turned back towards the line. The flag dropped for the start – a complete fluke of timing caused by the grounding of the fin keeler holding us up earlier. “Taka Maru” was away first among a large mixed fleet; behind us, we saw “Blue Belle” and “Kookaburra”. A short way back, “Touch” (A171), with Lorraine and John Searle (not the Vice Commodore) were getting away in this, their very first race, and making a good fist of it.

Up the first beat, we were not sure of the first mark so tacked off to starboard with the rest of the fleet towards what turned out to be number 14 mark. This gave us a good fix on the rest of the course marks. Driving “Taka Maur” hard to windward, we made the mark on one tack and rounded it with ease. The next leg was a very broad reach; with everything set up, we looked back and could see “Kookaburra” with Norman Doddington now clear in second place, with the very rapid Fulmar of Rick and Dave pressing hard in third place. John and Lorraine in “Touch” were a little further back having lost the plot a bit in the confusion of the start, but were now going well and had a good view of “Blue Belle” to aim at.

With the sight of the Fulmar close to Norman. Frances and I pressed “Taka” very hard to try and beat the handicap. Our recently fitted “secret weapon” kicker was put to full use on the broad reaches and runs and really did seem to help with speed and sail shape on these points of sailing, when the boom is set out beyond the main sheet track.

The rest of the race went very well, although slower than many boats on the broad reaches and runs as we have no spinnaker. But with the fresh winds and no reefs in, “Taka Maru” could beat as high and fast as any

other similar sized boat, and held her own well against the smaller Sigma 8 type of sports cruiser. We crossed the line at about 1130 and went back to the moorings. "Kookaburra" crossed next, followed by "Blue Belle" and "Touch". Of the four boats entered, three were from the Vice Commodore John Searle's Hook Farm Fairey stable – "Touch", "Blue Belle" and "Taka Maru". Thanks must go to him for all the help given in the restoration and rebuilding all three boats.

The fish-and-chips supper at Gun House was well attended as always, with both past and present owners. Margaret and Marshall Jenkins collected the suppers and a good evening was had by all. A big thank-you must go to Margaret Odling and the rest of the crew at Gun House for their hospitality and for helping with picking up the crews from West Mersea front and dropping some of them off again for the fireworks. The results of the race were still not known as a convivial evening ended with a nightcap aboard "Blue Belle"

This year's race was held in perfect conditions of sun and wind, and I would encourage any Atalanta, Fulmar or Titania owner to attend at least one year, as the race is fun, even for beginners (just ask the crew of "Touch"!), and the shore side atmosphere is always up-beat and friendly.

The results were tracked down several days later by the Vice Commodore and were, on corrected time – "Taka Maru" 73.28, "Blue Belle" 80.70, "Kookaburra" 82.22 and "Touch" 92.86.

The trip home

Our sail home was to be via Shotley and Lowestoft and then the long crossing back up to Hartlepool. This time we were stopped by a very large thunderstorm approaching Lowestoft, after which the alternator, radio and log stopped working. We were not sure if the problem had been caused by the storm or the alternator failing (we were motor sailing at the time, trying to outrun the storm). "Taka Maru" was towed home by road from Oulton Broad to Hartlepool in 7½ hours.

The total distance covered in the trip was 320 miles. The engine was used for 29 hours motoring and motor sailing, as the winds for the most part were light – unlike the rain that was very heavy – reportedly one of the worst on record for August for that part of the country. Despite the wet weather and a few small problems, I hope to go to the event again next year.

I hope that more people and boats can make the East Coast meeting in 2000, and get the new millennium off to a good start. I hope everyone winters well and has a good new year on the water – wherever they sail!



Stevie's Story, as recounted by Piers Beckett (A128 "ECHO")

Six years ago, Stevie's arrival was announced in an Atalanta bulletin. I talked to him, and this is what he told me.

30th May 1999

At the end of May we went to Puffin Island. On the map it's called Skomer but we call it Puffin Island because there are lots of puffins there and they look funny with their coloured beaks and scuffling over the water. We went for a little motor in the bubble while Mum cooked the chetti and then me and Micky went to sleep in the back cabin. We met a man who said shearwaters would go ping in the rigging and I heard them in the night. They don't seem to hurt themselves.

We both woke up in the night and Mum came to talk to us and we listened to the birds but Daddy didn't wake up at all. I think he was snoring.

The next day we motored through the Little Sound, which is very narrow with cliffs, and we went quite slowly because there's a rock in the middle of it. We had breakfast in South Haven.

The wind was the wrong way when we left so there were lots of "ready abouts" and "leaos" and the boat kept leaning over first one way and then the other. Daddy had fixed it that the tide was going the right way so we didn't have to do it for very long and then we went into the entrance to Milford Haven and tied to a pontoon there in a place called Dale.

I liked Dale because there were lots of other kids to play with and me and Micky chucked rocks off the beach until they told us to stop. Mummy and Daddy went into the pub and came out with glasses of beer and big grins on their faces but that was all right because we got crisps. They kept going in there and getting more beer so we went out on the pontoon with our friends and tried to catch crabs but there weren't any. After a while we motored away and anchored and all went to bed except that I

think they took turns to go back to the pub in the bubble. We slept very nicely thank you.

We all got up early the next day and I helped by pushing the anchor chain into its locker and got dirty hands so I washed them in the sink. We were going out of the Haven when they both started looking worried and I think Daddy said a naughty word. It got all foggy and you couldn't see anything at all. We turned round then and when I tried to make a joke they told me to shut up. They were gawping at something called a GPS and then they found a bay. It was foggy everywhere else in the world but this bay was all sunshine so we anchored and Micky and me said it was Sunshine Bay, which it was though I think on the map it's called Warwick Bay. Anyway, it's very nice, with a soft sandy beach and a little stream and lots of rocks to climb. Before we left we counted we had made more than a thousand footprints in the sand.

Later the fog started to go; you could see the other side of the Haven and they said the tide was all right so we went home to Solva. We went back to school and told our friends about Sunshine Bay and then we didn't go out much on the boat for a bit.

24th June 1999

After we finished school we went straight on the boat and motored out of the harbour. We were going to Ireland. Lots of other boats from Solva had already gone. They put the sails up and it got very quiet and peaceful, slipping past Black Scar with no noise but I think we were going quite fast because the wind was coming from behind us. Micky and I had to keep our lifejackets on because we didn't want to go into the cabin – we wanted to stay up and watch it all. We had our supper in the cockpit and there was the most wonderful sunset, a great golden ball dropping down ahead of us and the sky changing colour all the time.

Because we were on passage they didn't want us to sleep in the back cabin so I slept on Mummy's bed and Micky, who is smaller than me, slept on cushions on the floor. I was listening to the water rushing past the boat and it made me very sleepy. I was looking forward to seeing the doggybones again.

As soon as I got up I went in the cockpit in my pyjamas. It was daylight and there was a big buoy called the Barrels that tells you where there are some very nasty rocks. Before long I could see bits of Ireland. They chased me below to put on proper clothes and my lifejacket and I helped

Micky put his clothes on as well because I was hungry and we hadn't had our breakfast yet. I had Cheerios for my breakfast. Soon we went over the bar which is called St Patrick's Bridge where it gets very shallow and then they took the sails down and started Henry. As soon as they took the sails down we could see the doggybones stretching out from the wall.

In Kilmore Quay all the other Solva boats were moored to pontoons. We went for a little walk and said "hallos" and then Daddy said he wanted to fall over so he went back to the boat and did some more snoring while we walked round the town.

We were looking at the lifeboat when a man came out and said would we like to go on it so we did. It was really good. They have an underwater tractor that pulls it down the road and then launches it. After that we went to the beach and played sandcastles and went for a swim.

When Daddy stopped snoring we went to the pub and Micky and I had fish and chips. We still hadn't seen the doggybones so we all went out to the end of the harbour wall and played on them. Doggybones are big bits of concrete with a ball at each end that they've dropped by the wall to keep the water out and they're great to climb on. I really like doggybones.

Later of they blew up the bubble and I went for a little row. I hadn't rowed a bubble much but it was all right and I went round the boats having chats with people. I took Micky for a row too which was all right as long as he sat still.

Later on we walked round the pontoon and looked at all the boats. One of them had a two hundred and twenty horsepower outboard engine which is very big indeed.

We slept in the back cabin that night. There was a bit of heavy clattering in the middle of the night on the pontoon. I think that one or two people might have been coming home from the pub and I think someone wasn't walking very well but nobody seemed to mind because they were all laughing a lot. It's surprising they didn't fall in the water really.

25th June 1999

We went for a walk and had a shower in a funny sort of place with corridors. Daddy said that because we were going home that night he needed some sleep so we'd better go to the pub. I didn't quite understand

that but it was very nice anyway because everyone from Solva was there and the television was on. I wanted Wales to win but I don't know if they were playing or not. We went on the beach, he went snoring, and then it was supertime.

We were back in the front cabin again. I woke up just as we were clearing the bar and it still wasn't quite light. They stopped the engine and Mummy poled out the jib. She got it the wrong side to start with and Daddy said something not very polite so she put it the other side and then the boat started to move very nicely.

The sun came up and Ireland went away. In the distance you could see the other Solva boats spread out. We passed the boat in front of us before Carnsore Point and raced across the Irish Sea with a lovely wind from behind. I stayed in the cabin. I have a really good jigsaw with dinosaurs on and I was doing it on the bunk. Micky went upstairs and came back.

"Big Waves", he said and they were because my jigsaw nearly got upset once or twice. I think they were having a good time because I could hear Daddy singing in the cockpit.

Later on we put our lifejackets on and went up. "Echo" had a mainsail out on one side and big jib with a pole on and she was making a fizzing kind of noise as she went hurtling down the front of the waves. We watched Ramsay Island and all those rocks rushing towards us and had squash and special cake. We sailed past a sailing boat that was motoring and they were rocking about a lot in the sea but I think they come from Cardiff so that explains it. We were going much faster than they were. It was very bright sunshine, the sun was shining across the sea and throwing white light across the wave tops. He says 55 miles in eleven hours all under sail and seems pretty pleased with himself and I'm pleased too.

Katie was on the quay so I played with her and told her all about it.

24th July 1999

I got up very early so we could park the boat out. There was dew on the ropes and the seats were wet, but it was very shallow as we left the mooring. Most of the boats in the harbour were already aground. We anchored in the pool and went home where I had a big bowl of breakfast.

We met the new owners in the car park and Mummy and Micky ferried us out. They stayed with the car so they could drive round and pick us up

later, while Daddy and I and the new owners sailed round to Milford Haven river. He pulled up the anchor and I pushed the chain in the locker so I had to wash my hands because they were all dirty.

There wasn't any wind so we motored across the bay and through Jack Sound. There weren't any puffins by Skomer Island but lots of cormorants and birds that looked like ducks. It was quite good going through the Jack Sound because the tide was with us and the rocks went by very fast. All the same, I'd rather have been sailing.

We went past the big pepperpot lighthouse called St Anne's and here were lots of boats pretending they were sailing but I could see smoke from their transoms and I know they were motoring really. Then a breath of wind came so Daddy put the sails up and poled the jib then poled it the other side because he got it wrong. Good thing Mummy didn't see that. They let me stop the engine which is very easy because all you have to do is put the little lever upright and it stops and then wait a bit and turn off the key.

We passed the jetties with the big tankers unloading then Gellyswick where we go dinghy racing, then Milford and then Hobbs Point where the Kelpie boat sellers are and we went under the big bridge with the cars going over it. It was very peaceful in the cockpit – there wasn't much wind but the tide was with us so we went pretty fast really. The new owners were steering and Daddy was in the cabin trying to talk with Mummy on the radio only she wasn't listening. He kept getting a lady who was trying to organise a sailing race. It was a lovely sail.

Round the corner we came to Rudders boatyard at Burton. Sails down, engine on. First we went by a pontoon where Mummy and Micky were waiting and then we went out to a buoy in the river towing the yard boat behind us. We put a loop from the buoy on board, I stopped Henry, we had a quick tidy up and climbed into the yard dinghy.

Good-bye "Echo".



A glimpse of Paradise, summer 1998

Keith Viewing (A126 "Solone")

There was no chance for a holiday for a full three years and at 68 next birthday, it was time to go before it was all too late. Frouwke was stuck with responsibilities, but not so the erstwhile breadwinner whose contracts of the time were complete and knew that another adventure was needed, out of Africa.

There were several glimpses of Paradise, and one was so close that it might have to suffice. An ancient wooden boat, a Fairey Atalanta 26 built in 1962, was sailed from Christchurch to Brittany via Cherbourg, Alderney and Guernsey, and then back to Dartmouth. There were plenty of adventures, from being familiar with the great ships by night and by day, to navigation in thick water smoke near the Casquets lighthouse, west of Alderney, and water smoke again where the dreaded surge of tide sets across the entrance to the Trieux River in north Brittany.

Fortunate indeed to hear a warning of strong winds when sailing in the Channel one morning en route to Cherbourg. "Solone" was simply turned around and sailed as quickly as possible to Poole harbour to find shelter in a narrow channel, safe between the mud flats. The wind was strong that night with the surf creaming over the shallows. On the following day there were eight lifeboats out in the Solent, and the wind came in gusts to 90 mph.

The penultimate glimpse of Paradise was well within the Channel shipping lanes after that gale had subsided. The recognition of the Condor high-speed ferry sharpened the focus amazingly. What a sight! At first the Condor was a blur on the horizon, to become in a few moments, a visible shape. It was enormous; say 100m in length, 30 m in beam and for a catamaran, well off the water. The sides of the hulls and the bottom between, swept up and merged together in a pointed bow. Very long and very sharp. No rubber ball on that as it soared gently to the sky, about 30 m above the water. Seen through the binoculars, we were exactly head-on for collision.

The bridge of the Condor-and it looked like it- was a great sweeping curve of windows ('the better to see you with my dear!'), but the real concern was to be dismayed as it shot over us at some 45 knots, say 75 km/h. That might be survived, but the huge double rooster tail of the water-jet that streamed astern would swamp and split the boat.

All over now! And as these thoughts and others flashed past, and the Condor closed to two or three miles; say about 2 minutes of grace before the inevitable, it started to swerve to port. Relief! We were seen, and we would pass according to the rules; splendid. A few seconds later, and from a glance aft, it was clear that the Condor had altered course to pass around the stern of a container-ship, high off the water and of sufficient bulk to be mistaken for some headland on a foreign coast.

“Solone” attracted some interest in Cherbourg. People on huge yachts came along to show how to adjust fenders, others had not seen an Atalanta for years and remembered the talk of the time. A young fellow from a whizz-boat close by said to his crew, as they walked past; “You could go anywhere in that”. Then a blonde and mature beauty appeared in a black two piece (never talk to strange women) and gazed with interest. “How long was the crossing?” “About thirteen hours for the sixty five miles”. It seemed churlish not to invite her on board but she decided against a transfer of allegiance on the basis, it seemed, that there was no shower on “Solone”. She was much attracted to the technical innovations in the design, but, “no shower!” It was self-evident; a bucket of sea water in the cockpit and a fresh cold-water rinse to follow. Character forming, they had said, and really rather nice when you were used to it.

There are always small boys in dinghies, and so it was in the tiny harbour of Ormanville, even in the dusk. Their parents had built a traditional one roomed fisherman’s cottage behind the pebble beach, and this and its contents were all collector’s items. The furnishings, the bunks along the walls, the galley arrangements all related to small boat practice; no waste of space and a place for everything. The timbered ceiling provided for the boys above, and a marvellous contrast of shades for the careful collection of wooden blocks, deadeyes, models of fishing craft, and a string of onions. The simple crockery of life was a superb selection of studio ceramics and it was a privilege to look around. The choice in this wonderland was impossible, but for some reason the occupants were unused to such attention. ‘No, it wasn’t a shop, look at the ham on the stove; just our home’, or words to that effect. The Norman beauty was at ease in a classic chair in one corner of that tiny room. She looked down at her sewing, it was some simple repair for the boys. Was it only a trick of the light that gave the impression of a spinning wheel? The intruder from foreign parts left in disarray, but richer for yet another glimpse of Paradise. Some would have called it magic.

Came the dawn, and away to the west, to Cap de la Hague the corner post of Europe. We worked the eddies in the flood tide along the coast and wondered at GPS that had worked so well, except in sight of the Cape. A difference of two and a half miles in our estimated position was of small concern on the way to Cherbourg. Now it was much more important as we set course at slack water for the head of Alderney Race. A compass fix put us four miles off shore, but the GPS was only two miles. Which do you believe? No great problem, for the visibility was good and we were well clear of the 'heavy overfalls and occasional breakers', marked on the chart.

We were so well clear that when the ebb set in, we were carried to the west, towards Alderney. A large gaff-cutter much closer to the La Hague lighthouse, was swept through the race at a frightening speed, and was hull down in only a few minutes. You could say that we had missed the boat!

But there was time to consider the glories of the coast and the rural setting of the hills above. Time also to ponder upon the huge concrete monolith on the sky-line; its staggered chimneys and the brooding silence of an engineering works of substance which stretched for a full five miles, at least. Gradually the penny dropped; something that the blonde mature beauty had said in Cherbourg; something about an Atomic Power Station that upset the transmissions.

You looked again and again as "Solone" rose on the swell. No sheep, no cows, no crops, no movement, no life. Just sterile. Was that why Ormonville was such a secluded time-stood-still, sort of a place? The man from the creeks shivered: the Northern lights were much stronger now. It was as if they were trying to shoot electricity into his walls.

By five one afternoon, and now en route from Guernsey, via Alderney, to the Brittany coast, we were 12 miles off the D'Ouvres light, sixty metres high, and those awful and mainly half-tide rocks were less than ten miles to the lee. All were invisible; not so much due to fog, but more to haze. Nor could the great light of Les Heaux de Brehat be seen, a generous 48 m high, and much closer. Whilst these thoughts occupied the mind, some poor old fellow was lost in the water smoke and they put out an emergency radio call for him. For some reason that episode was terribly upsetting, and then they found him; thank Heaven.

We sailed on as the circle of visibility tightened and the haze gave way to fog. The flood started and set us three miles to the east in an hour. No

problem for the course made good was a gentle sweep to the south of the rocks, which form the Plateau Barnouic, and a good position for the entry to the Trieux River. Closer to the shore, as yet unseen, the spring tide was enthusiastic in its stride and fairly gurgled over the hidden rocks below. All was tiderip and disturbed water; the boats head swung this way and that in the eddies. A great lighthouse appeared in the mist on the starboard beam and was gone. Was that the same that had appeared on the port bow a moment ago, or another? By day, the shape of lighthouses becomes important, but unlike buoys, they are not named. Find Grandmother's magnifier, and where are those tiny star shaped symbols on the chart that represent the terrors of ages?

To find the river entrance it was necessary to steer WSW or SW to make good the course south, depending upon the current at the time. Then we crossed tracks with a big yacht, going like fun. There was no look out that could be seen; no wave in the mist, and she was gone at fifty metres.

It was a tense business, but by plotting every ten minutes we homed in on the mist shrouded channel marker late that evening. Into the entrance now, with the current on the bow instead of the beam, and sufficient visibility to steer by sight. Through gaps in those razor-backed rocks of the Granite Rose, you could see boats anchored, and others on moorings. The temptation was very strong to cut through a gap in the rocks, but you wondered at those fangs of granite above the water and thought of more below.

A few yachts floated down on the tide, and one of them pointed out the red leading lights of the river as the light faded. A little before midnight a full moon rose over the cliffs; up through the pines and further, until the river was a sheen of silver. The ebb poured out and over the stern, the river seemed to flow down hill to the sea. Perhaps it did, for at about 7 knots over the water "Solone" made very little progress. And what was that weird shape on the bow? The binoculars revealed a huge whirlpool, with the current swirling against a huge jagged rock that rose well above the water. The surface of the water was contoured as it sloped and spun clockwise to the centre where the eye of Nzuzu, (the Zimbabwe river god), was open and watchful.

The course lay between the whirlpool and a solid masonry tower. Narrow. The current swung us in; you could see the water lap against the rocks, and in a moment of panic the tiller was put hard over to regain control. A few minutes after midnight and we were past; the pontoons

opened up ahead, and there was one vacant slot that could be entered against the tide.

The day of rest that followed gave plenty of opportunity to reflect upon the fishermen of Brittany and the engine-less visitors of the past. What a remarkable race they were. They would give the water-smoke a miss, but how would they know? Those incredibly heavy boats were built for keeping the sea and not so easy to row against the tide, and the rocks would be the best place for lobsters.

Keith enjoyed a brief interlude sailing with friends in Turkey before returning to Brittany. His account continues.

We left with the tide in the evening, almost alone on the deep. In the night, and about thirty miles west of Guernsey, the fishing boats working over the banks moved towards our track. When seen first, there would be a light that winked on the horizon and disappeared in the swell. Gradually more and more lights were seen, and eventually the navigation lights depending upon the course at the time. Schools of sardines were shoaling and swirling around "Solone" leaving faint traces of phosphorescence as they moved off into the darkness.

The night was starlit, with a clear and the loom of a light that swept the sky in the east. Was that Les Roches D' Oeuvres at a little more than twenty-eight miles? But it was cold; polo shirt, pull over, track suit, cotton trousers over, then fisherman's smock, oilskins, harness and life-jacket; the Michelin man at last.

Thoughts of a rest were dispelled the lights of a large tanker moving fast on the bow. She made towards Guernsey, and was soon invisible except for the stern light. Incongruous that a ship of that size was represented by only one tiny white light in the darkness; 'Ships that pass in the night, and greet one another in passing, only a flash and then silence and darkness again'. The description was perfect.

Not long after midnight there was action. Six or seven dolphin were on the bow, and then swam abeam for several minutes, sometimes alongside and darting out for twenty metres, and back again. A superb luminous trail gave character to the sea and we were not alone. That was wonderful as the torch illuminated the graceful, gentle, and exceedingly powerful movement of the closest dolphin who could generate five or six knots needed to keep station. The best fun seemed to be within the propeller wash, with little space for such large animals between the blades and the

sharp leading edge of the rudder. True, that could swing on its pivot; but that was a poor answer to a damaged back. The drop keels did not attract, so perhaps it was all about the source of unusual noise in the sea, or just fun. The light frightened my nearest friend, and together they all disappeared towards Guernsey, perhaps following the sardines.

Not long afterwards with the fishing boats well off to starboard, the temptation for a quick snooze was too much. The engine was run to charge the batteries, the hatch was warm and the night was cold. A line from Keats, well remembered; 'St Agnes eve! Bitter chill it were'. Well, it were! The cockpit floor was as soft as down on that night, and the feeling of infinite peace is remembered still. But dreamtime was interrupted by an extraordinary gentle swishing noise. The cockpit shone in a soft white light. The swishing noise was louder still as we peered under the jib, and could see the wall of a great ship slide past. Only that huge black side, the swirl of the waves lapping the water-line, the whale-back stern with its broad white stripe, and the glare of lights on the after-deck. No trawl, no hawser, nothing to identify her business. She had passed a few metres off the bow and that was superb judgement by her helmsman. There was nobody about, no one to offer a well deserved imprecation to an old goat asleep at the helm.

The realisation that many ships we crossed that night were on separate, but reciprocal courses was a little confusing at first. You had to keep your wits about you. It was safer to walk across a busy four-lane motorway, with two lanes of nose-to-tail traffic, one fast and one slow in each direction.

The fishing boats were close to the shipping lanes. So close that the officer of the watch on the occasional ship would call on the VHF; "fishing boat on my bow! Keep clear". You looked around; were you a fishing boat?

Certainly the fishing boats were not above playing games. One trawler approached steadily on the starboard bow, but we would pass easily ahead. Then her pace quickened and as we rose on a swell, and she appeared below, she altered course and came fast ahead, all red, green and masthead lights on a collision course. In the nick of time, she altered again to cross close under the stern. Now round and on our port side about fifty metres off and continuing the turn. All frothing bow wave she shot past with the crew lining the well deck and yelling in unison under the floodlights, "starboard". Nothing like a power-assisted sailing race under the stars!

The first light of the dawn was at seven that morning, cold and grey in late September. The landfall of Start Point was mid-morning; bright and sunny and beautiful. There was the lighthouse and there the low ground beyond the cliffs that marked Salcome.

The entrance to the River Dart after twenty years away (and another twenty before that) was one of the grand sights. Gentle, peaceful and prosperous. Look at the sheep on that sunny pasture of the hill beyond the College! Dartmouth and the ancient castles at the mouth; the town; the ferries; all in place as they were before. So many more yachts were in the river and the diminutive flags of France and Brittany fluttered drew a kindly wave or two. The people at the Marina were incredibly kind and helpful. One might have returned from a circumnavigation! The peace on the mooring at Dittisham was wonderful too, and so were the forty winks that followed.



South Coast reminiscences –1998

David Pullinger (A60 “ACHATES”)

It's the little vignettes that stick in the mind at the end of the season: watching the sun go down with brilliance and flames on the longest day while anchored in Newtown River on the Isle of White. The glow reflected in the unusual stillness of the river, while on the shingle bank to the west, the blackness against the light was punctuated by BBQ fires and the happy drift of laughter. Anchoring in the confined space among all the yachts and gin palaces while single-handed was not easy. I took three goes to get myself where I wanted to be and was rewarded by being the only boat around not to drag in the winds and three knot currents. Holding a 38 footer off my bows as it extricated its anchor from under my chain was what we euphemistically call fun. Not for nothing does the Solent pilot describe weekend parties at Newtown as “pyjama parties”.

There are other surprises at night. Mine was going to the heads and seeing phosphorescence swirling around the bowl and then going along the waste tube. The tube is opaque (the opposite would be terrible!) so the idea of light shining through it took time to occur to me at 3.00 a.m. as we sailed across Lyme Bay. We were hard on the wind in the dark with top of F4 all the way from Weymouth to Brixham – beautiful. One feels especially blessed when an instant decision – “let's go tonight” –

works out well. Late at night others, taking the following tide, limped in seasick from the “terrible rough sea”.

Andy, my crew and nephew, had never sailed before until this summer holiday from Solent to Cornwall and back. I had asked him two questions: “Do you get seasick?” to which the answer came that he knew not, and “Do you get frightened?”; the best answer came – “Not easily”. So on his first day’s sail ever we left “Achates” mooring at Hardway just inside Portsmouth harbour and set off west down the Solent – past Newtown – and on out past the Needles. It was magical – the red light of the evening sun resting on the white spikes just as in the photographs. There we met the large waves that seemed as steep as the cliffs – “Moving walls of water” Andy exclaimed. “Hey – these boats have been to the Galapagos Islands” I said, and enjoyed the Atalanta’s seaworthiness as we lifted over the ten-foot waves. All the same, looking at it from his point of view, I had just emphasised the thinness of the hull a few hours ago when he had arrived the previous night!

The thickness of the hull depends on the amount of accretion on it – and it doesn’t half increase on a warm, muddy, half-tide mooring! Before this trip, I had secured the services of another nephew (it’s useful having 21 nephews and nieces) and put “Achates” onto a drying grid. Hardway Sailing Club has many grids, but only one for flush bottoms – which the Atalanta is with its keels up. I was nervous and it turned out with good cause, but got it right more by accident than planning, despite lots of the latter. The high-pressure hose soon blasted the amazingly large barnacles off – next year I might try for mussels, as I adore those. I would have liked to do the keels as well without the cost of a lift out – any ideas anyone?

VHF on the south coast of England is both frustrating and though provoking. It is always noisy, mostly with requests for radio checks (why “Baby Bear” need a check having talked for the previous five hours, I just don’t know). On average I have heard a real mayday once every two days of sailing. The return from Cornwall was in the first week in September. All the firing ranges cease their activity during August, but come September all the warships are out playing, the firing ranges popping away and the sailors grumbling about the extra miles to go round them and praying that the torpedo ranges are not in operation.

The firing range outside Weymouth was clearly frustrated. The steam paddle ship “Waverly” had ploughed right through he middle. A small yacht had crept along under the cliff edge, clearly hoping that the

trajectory of any rounds would go over it. There it has spied a climber waving for help on the cliff face and a helicopter was duly dispatched for rescue. CG; "Firing range, firing range, this is Portland Coastguard, have you completed your firing for the day? Over." FR; "No." CG; "Firing range, I have a helicopter coming in ...can you kindly cease firing while we effect the rescue? Over." FR; "No." Silence except for the popping and the sound of the helicopter we could see hovering near the cliffs. Gripping stuff – would he get the person off and away before being hit and plunging into the sea, or not?

Unusually for me, I did use the VHF, in order to tell the Coastguard where I was going when we set out in thick fog from Plymouth, weaving our way past and between two invisible but close warships also departing. I wondered again whether our little foghorn was really audible to them and of course we had our lifejackets on and were unattached to the boat so that if we were hit we would be left floating on the surface. The opposite applies for night sailing and then we always wear slim lifejackets and harnesses clipped on. There is a wonderful attachment point in the centre of the cockpit floor, which the previous owner Fred Boothman fitted. From there you can readily go down to the operations centre of the boat (galley and chart) without unclipping.

One joy of night sailing is catching breakfast. After we left Dartmouth at 3.00 a.m. and it had got light, we caught one mackerel and Edmund (the new crew) was reeling the second when he felt an almighty tug on the line – "A shark got that one" he glumly remarked. It seemed true – all the tackle had gone and we were left with a very small breakfast. When the boat behind caught us up, they excitedly asked "Did you see that shark between us?"

Sometime on the same stretch back across Lyme Bay, the downhaul on the rudder became detached and the wire had pulled right through out of the rudderstock. I spent about an hour in the dinghy with my head occasionally under water trying to fix it because the rudder is so heavy when not fully down. Although I got pieces of wire and string through the groove and out the bottom, I just could not get the wire through. I gave up battered, cold and promising myself a Bernard Upton drop rudder. In fact back in harbour it took a couple of hours to fix it in still water, since I didn't quite have the courage to take the rudder itself off with the fear of dropping some part.

Nevertheless the hard work made surfing down the waves under reefed spinnaker even more fun. A reefed spinnaker? Yes. From a club

member I had got one of those socks that looks like a large spring and designed to be used when half undone. I had bought it with the hope that when single handed I might be able to set it – but in fact I just goose wing and cook a meal instead. On this occasion with crew it was great – we could match the size of the spinnaker with an acceptable level of fright.

And that is how we came back into the Needles. I have missed out describing all the lovely River Yealm, Fowey and the other bits of Devon and Cornwall. Being away, we also missed the razzmatazz at Portsmouth for the Festival of the Sea, but had compensation in two small ways. First the Red Arrows display team followed us down the coast to all the royal regattas with the firework displays (not at the same time) – I was grateful for the peace of an anchorage where we holed up for a day as a F 7/8 went through! The second was when we got back into Portsmouth with the crowds gone. A very proud seaman showed us the topsail of “Victory” as it hung there for the first time in 200 years, complete with all its cannon holes – some of them as big as the Atalanta’s mainsail.



CRUISE TO THE WEST COAST

Mike Dixon (T4 “GELLIE”)

PORTSOY AND THE CALEDONIAN CANAL

David and I were to take “GELLIE” along to Inverness and the Caledonian Canal where my Goddaughter Sarah, would join us. At the last minute we agreed to take a couple of Danish students along for the trip. They had been part of the festival activities down in the harbour area, in their case distilling tar from pine wood.

The alarm clock woke us at 0300 on the Monday morning, and I made a quick trip out to the end of the harbour to check conditions. The wind was light from the north and we decided to go. It was a poor day and the wind never did come to anything. If at all possible, I wanted to enter the canal before it closed for the night, so didn’t want to hang around. It worked out that we motored the whole way. Jonas and Casper emerged from the aft cabin mid morning having managed to sleep uninterrupted during six hours of motoring.

Despite getting the tides correct, we were advised that we would not arrive in time for the last locking into the canal. This resulted in a very uncomfortable night moored in the entrance to the sea lock, ranging back and forth in the outflow from the sea lock chamber. Eventually it dawned on me that no boat was going to go either in or out of the canal for the night! A line across to the opposite side of the entrance from the bow pulled us nicely away from the wall and stopped "GELLIE's" sheering to and fro. The skipper was a good deal happier.

By 0930 the next morning, we had transited the sea lock and picked up Sarah at Muirtown basin. The canal fee of £142 seemed a lot, but that did allow unlimited access to all locks, use of all the public mooring pontoons, and, for a £2 deposit, a key to all the canal-side toilet/shower facilities for two weeks. At £10 a night, it didn't seem so bad. Jonas and Casper left us to rejoin their friends, and the three of us continued through to Loch Ness and onwards to Fort Augustus, where we arrived at 1730. Sheena met us there and we all repaired ashore to eat. Sarah was by now becoming expert at searching out "land loos". Fort Augustus' offering was the public loos on the main street. Whilst "abluting", a coach load of Japanese tourists came in. Quite what they thought we're not too sure.

Over the next two days, we gradually made our way south, motoring all the way due to lack of wind. The weather was mixed and never brilliant. Sheena spent some time on board, though only in the canal sections where she could see both banks close by! By Thursday night we had reached Gairloch and ate ashore in fine style at the An Cran restaurant. Returning to "GELLIE", we were able to sit outside enjoying the evening peace and quiet – the first decent evening so far. The skipper managed to receive his only midge bite of the entire trip.

The next morning we were up early so as to get down to the top of Neptune's staircase at Benavie. It was a delightful morning. Absolutely flat calm, there was a low-lying mist over the canal which was quickly being dissipated by the strengthening sun. Over to port was the massive presence of Aonach Mor and Ben Nevis completely clear of any cloud cover. Two herons stood statue like on the side of the canal.

Boats were being locked up towards us when we arrived, so we had ample time to fill up with fresh water ("GELLIE's" new stainless steel water tanks were proving a great success) and make use of the showers. By now Sarah was into grading "land loos" but sadly the ones at Benavie didn't rate highly. Exchanging greetings with Alison and Robin and with Bobby (two boats homeward bound back to Stonehaven) we entered the

top lock. An hour later we were in the final section of canal before the sea basin at Corpach. There were a couple of hours to kill, so we had a belated pub lunch and did a bit of shopping.

THE WEST COAST

“GELLIE” finally tasted salt water again at 1512, and despite the rather late hour, we decided to make a go of getting well south before stopping for the night. David sails his own Wayfarer and Sarah is a keen “gravel pit” sailor, so the skipper was quite content to let the experts tack to windward down Loch Linnhe. It was a glorious late afternoon and evening and the two of them had great fun going for fishing buoys. By 1830, the wind had eased and we continued to motor-sail on down through the Corrran narrows. Once out into the wider lower Loch Linnhe, we were able to free off a touch and sail close hauled away to the southwest. It was decision time; either sail and/or motor until the wee small hours to Dunstaffnage or Craignure, or anchor up somewhere handy. The latter option proved popular! Whilst I had the appropriate charts, I had stupidly forgotten the West Coast sailing directions. Fortunately there’s a chart insert of sufficiently large scale of the wee bays off Port Ramsay, at the north end of Lismore Island that allowed us to make a cautious entry in the deepening late evening gloom. The anchorage was utterly peaceful – only the occasional cry of a bird disturbing the quiet. One of those magic occasions when manoeuvring and anchoring are done by signals and whispers.

Next morning, (Saturday 10th), we set off after breakfast with the intention of reaching Tobermory. There was very little breeze, so we pressed on south down the Lynn of Morvern under engine, rounding Rubha an Ridre into the Sound of Mull at 1030. As is its wont, the wind was blowing straight down the sound, so we continued under engine, the cloudy conditions giving way to some weak patchy sunshine. Tobermory bay was crowded and we gilled around for a while looking for a vacant buoy. I’d just let go the anchor with some reluctance (the bottom is notoriously foul with old moorings and the like) when David spotted a boat preparing to leave one of the buoys. A quick sprint alongside the departing boat, and we had our home for the night.

Ashore for stores (and land loos) we introduced Sarah to the Mishnish hotel. The bar has been completely refurbished in the last couple of years but thankfully has lost none of its character. Spirits continue to be served in decent sized quarter gills – none of your fancy metric measures here

thank you very much! Sarah discovered the delights of rum and coke, thus providing her with an alternative to Bailies.

Back on board for supper, we enjoyed the evening – cool with the northwesterly breeze, but dry and sunny. There's always some activity going on in Tobermory bay, so boat and people watching is a very pleasant way in which to while away a couple of hours over a night-cap or two.

Minds very much in neutral, it was some time before we noticed a boat in difficulty across the far side of the bay way downwind. It was a 20 ft wooden motor cruiser whose engine had obviously failed, and the skipper was attempting to row his tender with the boat in tow. We watched for while before reaching the conclusion he wasn't getting anywhere fast. Leaving our dinghy on the buoy, David motored "GELLIE" down to the "BETSY" – as it turned out to be – where we came alongside and lashed the two boats together. On arriving back amongst the moored boats, David threaded us through to an empty spot where "BETSY's" owner anchored. Squatters hadn't occupied our "reserved" buoy so after sorting out the moorings we settled down to a final nightcap.

THE TRIP HOME

We had gone as far as our plans allowed, and it was time to turn around and head off home. The next day's tides only became favourable in the afternoon, so we had a leisurely start to the day and a trip ashore for showers and lunch. Motoring from the buoy at 1442, we had the sails up within minutes and were enjoying the faint breeze from the northwest. The sun came out, shorts appeared and the crew lounged around reading the Sunday papers. All very civilised. One of the northbound yachts nearby had steering gear problems and reported it to the Coastguard as a PAN PAN. Tobermory lifeboat came to the "rescue". It's at times like this that the decision to close down Oban Coastguard seems particularly crass. All parties were using local references and landmarks not found on local charts, but because they were local, everyone involved had no doubts as to where the yacht in "distress" was.

At 1900 we motored into Loch Aline and anchored in Miodar Bay in the southeast corner. "MINNA" – a Portsoy festival boat - was anchored close by. After dinner, Bryce and Tina rowed across to share the evening with us.

The two boats sailed in company the next morning in light airs. Continuing down the Sound of Mull, "GELLIE" was being carried along more by the tide than the wind. Eventually, the wind died altogether and we became aware of an extensive bank of fog rolling up to meet us from the south. When the Calmac ferry "ISLE OF MULL" hurtled out of the fog not half a mile away, we decided that discretion etc., hit the starter button and headed towards the bay nestling beneath Duart Castle. Not sure of the bottom, an anchor tripping line was rigged. "MINNA" came alongside and bacon sandwiches were shared between the crews of the two boats.

By noon the fog had cleared and we weighed anchor. After a couple of false starts, the wind filled in nicely and we had a very pleasant sail for an hour and a half across the Firth of Lorne between Bach Island and Dubh Sgeir. Just before 1500, we entered Puilladobhrain and anchored at the head of the bay. Going ashore, we walked over the brow of the hill to the so-called bridge over the Atlantic. Dinner that night was eaten on board.

Tuesday dawned pretty horrible. It was to remain wet and blustery all day. The plan was to go to Dunstaffnage via Oban for shopping. It was one of those days when you have to wear oilskins and consequently the whole boat becomes damp and stuffy. It began to brighten a little once we arrived at Dunstaffnage, but we decided to rig the full awning anyway. The Wide Mouthed Frog restaurant had our custom that evening to be followed by a bottle of port back on board.

Wednesday was much brighter and the strong winds of the day before had abated a little. Motoring from the pontoon, we experienced interesting eddies just below the castle in the entrance channel. Once outside, sails were set and we had a super sail for the next six hours – the first really "proper" sail since Portsoy. Once round Ru Fion-aird the sheets were eased and the reef shaken out. "GELLIE" was tramping along (for her), up through the Lynn of Lorne, past Port Appin, to the west of Shuna and up to the Corran narrows. Here we had some very interesting eddies and whirlpools. David was on the helm and found it quite difficult to maintain course, not helped by being overtaken right in the narrowest part by the "WADENZEE" – a Dutch ex-naval harbour launch manned by what appeared to be retired navy personnel.

Sails were handed off Lochaber Yacht Club and we motored the remaining couple of miles to the transit pontoon at the sea lock entrance. After supper, Terry and his wife Mary joined us for a couple of drams.

The next day started with a rather tedious ascent up through the locks to Benavie. The locks were shared by the "WADENZEE", which had a powerful engine and wash to match, a small sailing cruiser and a hovercraft. The latter was being "driven" by a couple of students from Bristol University and was doing a charity run round Britain. In the end, they lashed up alongside "GELLIE" – altogether much easier and a good deal quieter for everyone!

It was 1245 before we locked out at the top of Neptune's Staircase. Lunch was courtesy of Sarah, complete with restorative. Spirits much revived and with rather better weather, we made good progress along the canal and Loch Lochy, coming eventually through the Laggan swing bridge to moor up for the night at the Great Glen Water Park pontoon. Whilst David and I tidied up "GELLIE" and rigged the awning, Sarah went off to recce for LL's and restaurants. The site's restaurant was OK – food good, but woefully understaffed.

The alarm went early on the Friday morning and David did hear it for once! We left the pontoon just after 0700 and were hovering at Oich Bridge ready for it opening at 0800. By 0930 we had arrived at the top lock at Fort Augustus, but too late for that particular locking down. Never mind, it gave us time to do some shopping, visit the LL's, and keep an eye out for Strath – due on the bus down from Inverness. He'd promised the morning papers and butteries. We had a sort of brunch whilst waiting our turn to lock down, and then a sort of lunch as we locked down. The lock was full – five yachts, two large motor cruisers and a fishing vessel.

Out of the locks, down the short channel into Loch Ness itself and up with the sails. The wind was still in the southwest, and we had a stonking goose-winged sail down the Loch. Strath was on the helm most of the time. With a glass in hand and a smile that would shame the Cheshire Cat, he was in his element!

I managed to find an empty pontoon berth at Dochgarroch, where Sarah awarded top rating for the LL. A somewhat liquid assisted, three course dinner was cooked at eaten on board, to be followed by rather too much socialising with the couple from the "RED DRAGON" alongside. At some time during the evening a heaving line throwing demonstration was organised which seemed to degenerate into high farce. The disturbed and disgruntled ducks were mollified with crusts of bread.

Saturday arrived very dully, but the weather was quite fine. Strath insisted buying breakfast at a roadside café just a short walk away from the canal. Then it was off down the final stretch through Dochgarroch, Tomnahurich and on to the top of the Muirtown flight. Strath went off shopping, arriving back just in time to jump aboard. Sarah took us down through the locks to Muirtown basin and so on to the sea lock. There was a slight delay whilst a Norwegian boat loaded 25 cases of lager and a couple of cases of whisky, but then it was off out into the Beaully Firth and salt water once again. We had but a short distance to go to moor up at Longman Boat Basin. We all ate ashore that night in Inverness.

Next morning, Sarah and Strath headed off back for Aberdeen by car. David and I motored out at 0636. Although we attempted to sail from time to time, the wind was light and fitful. The tide carried us out into the Moray Firth through past Chanonry Point and Fort George, and as it continued to ebb, great swathes of White Ness sands appeared over to starboard. We counted over 150 seals relaxing on the sands. The day past by, familiar landmarks marching by, cups of tea and snacks at regular intervals, sometimes sailing but more often motoring. At 1900 we were off Portsoy, but strong willed, we carried on! At 2230 the wind settled into the southeast, not ideal, but at least there was some peace. For an hour, the skipper avoided the fishing fleet coming out from Fraserburgh.

By now it was Monday morning and by 0230 the visibility had come in to about a cable. The wind was by now a good force four from the southeast and the seas had started to build. Rattray Head is never particularly pleasant as it is quite shallow for some distance off the light and the wind over tide causes confused sea. The conditions were not good. Though we had both had some sleep, we were both weary. Cutting our losses, we decided we had had enough, so stowing sails, we motored on towards Peterhead keeping well inshore to avoid any traffic. By 0400 the visibility improved to allow us to see our way into Peterhead Bay and across to the marina. We moored at 0442.

Later in the morning, David's wife Helen came to collect us. "GELLIE" was well snuggled down on her pontoon where she could be safely left to her own devices.

A week later, David, Jimmy and George went up to Peterhead. After sending the night on board, they set off south under engine. After an uneventful trip they arrived in Stonehaven at 1345, eight hours out from Peterhead.



This year, next year, sometimes, always

It is late November. Over to starboard the cliff top lighthouse flashes, as if in defiance of the weak and watery winter sunshine. Further along the cliffs perch the whitewashed cottages that overlook the shingle beach. The beach is partially protected by a rough stone pier and we're reminded that not so long ago it was here that an Atalanta broke adrift from her mooring in an easterly gale, fetched up on the beach and was wrecked.

In a field just back from the cliff we see seagulls squabbling in the wake of a tractor as the farmer takes advantage of this fine weather for the winter ploughing.

A solitary fishing boat is out to sea, its sole occupant tending lines and pots.

The tide is turning; time too for us to turn and head back home.

A couple of hours earlier we had slipped the mooring and motored out from the harbour, vaguely apologetic for disturbing the tranquillity. There was a light offshore breeze, just sufficient for sailing. Settling onto a fine reach we brewed tea and drank in our surroundings. Over to starboard were the rocky cliffs capped with a toupee of greeny brown autumn vegetation. On a rocky headland, the ruined castle provided a reminder of a grim episode in our past. The dark tan of the sails contrasted with the pale blues, greys and yellows in the sky.

Both of us were determined to savour the final sail of the season and, for a few brief hours, to turn our backs on our respective responsibilities of everyday life. It was important that the day went well. After all, recollections of the day would have to carry us through to the next millennium!

The boat is back on her mooring. She's shipshape once more and the two crew are warm again after winding up one keel each. On the stove is the saucepan, the contents gently bubbling with a concoction from an odd assortment of end-of-season tins. Smell's good though!

The last inch of whisky has been emptied from the bottle. Eyeing each other over the rim of our glasses, we agree it has been a magic sail.

Tomorrow, the boat will be hauled ashore and into the shed for the winter. When she returns to her natural element in the spring it will be

the new millennium – the year 2000. Not that she'll notice the difference; this year, next year – it's all the same. Her sympathies lie with the seasons, the weather and the tides. And the only bug she's worried about is the gribble!

No, as far as she's concerned, she doesn't need any of the millennium hype, because she knows that come next year, that same lonely fisherman will still be working the sea and the farmer his land. And that between us, we'll be working the tides and the wind to re-create November's magic.

Now that is something that we can both look forward to!



The Loop Reefing Line

Marshall Jenkins (A17 "Gambol")

When I applied slab reefing to "Gambol's" mainsail I minimised the length of the reefing lines normally used and avoided fixing dangerous eye straps to the low boom.

Tack reefing cringles are hauled down by hand. Two snap shackles, one per reef, are held up by a bolt which runs through the redundant lower end of the luff track in my aluminium mast. Each shackle holds a tack reefing cringle firmly in place to give a right angle between the luff track and the boom top – the first step to a good reef setting. No reefing lines her!

A reefing line has to be used for the clew cringles, both to haul them down and to apply the tension to the reef foot necessary for good modern slab reefing. Normally each reefing line is tied to an eye strap on the port side of the boom, led through the reef clew cringle, down through a cheek block on the starboard side of the boom, and through eyes to a cleat on the for'd end of the boom or on the mast.

In my loop system, eye straps are replaced by cheek blocks. The reefing line is looped through the cringle and led down each side of the sail through the cheek blocks. When the sail is fully hoisted, the ends of the line hanging below the blocks are tied together close up to the boom to complete the loop.

When the loop is pulled in, the line is doubled and, therefore, half the length of the normal single line. When the first reef is taken in, the surplus second reef line is also half as long and easily hitched up, out of the way, to the end of the boom. Neither of these loops reaches the mast when in operation and can easily be hauled in by hand. Because they avoid the need to be drawn in over the cringle – as with single line reefing – friction is reduced to a minimum.

I haul each reef tight with its own attachable line fitted with a snap shackle. This clips into its loop beside the knot and is led through a sheave in a double block down to the starboard foresail winch and its attendant cleat. The double block is shackled to an eye on the end of the bolt that holds the snap shackles for reefing the luff. These attachable/detachable lines replace the permanent lines that normally stretch along the boom in eye straps when the main is hoisted fully. They can be kept reeved to the double block if necessary when heavy weather is anticipated, their ends tidy around the cleat.

This arrangement is convenient for “Gambol”. Our high bridge deck gives great ease of access to the mast foot and the old winches are available for reefing, self-tailing winches for the foresail being fitted elsewhere. Other arrangements will no doubt be required on other Atalantas, but the common enabling factor of a centre cockpit makes the system appropriate to us all.

I confess that when I hit upon the loop idea, I had already fixed eye straps to my boom and have been using loop reefing without changing them to cheek blocks. Despite the extra friction this creates, reefing is still easy. So those who already have slab reefing might like to try a loop system sometime. I would be interested in reactions!

Those who have slab reefing will, I hope, find the description above easy to follow without illustrations. Those who are intending to fit slab reefing, I refer to the article “The Virtue of “Jiffy” Reefing” which I have deposited with Colin Twyford, the Hon Sec. This article gives full illustrated details for normal slab reefing – including the all-important way to achieve correct tension in the reef foot.



OUT WITH THE OLD – IN WITH THE NEW

A replacement engine for “Hiran” A95

By Colin Twyford

Last autumn Janet said to me “Are we going to have another year of wondering whether the engine will work when we need it?” a question that I realised I could not answer with any conviction. We thought of the cost, closed our eyes and took the plunge. The market was investigated and we decided that the “Beta 13½ HP” seemed about right. Favourable information was received from members and local contacts and help was promised from Adrian Rivett, past owner of A161 and A164 and whose knowledge of engines and practically all other subjects leaves me amazed.

Beta was contacted and a deal was made, (discounts can be organised up to 20%). In the meantime and old friend and adversary Coventry Victor “N” Type looked at me suspiciously each time I opened the hatch. Although it had been stripped down more times than I care to recall, it still had an appeal, and it must be found a happy home. Derek Buckton, owner of A105 was contacted and duly arrived at Erith YC. Extraction was completed, including copper exhaust and brass silencer. CV “N” Type departed, I hope happy with new owner and joining brother and sister in Harrogate.

An empty compartment meant that stripping and painting could be done and eventually the Beta arrived, looking very smart and completely red; they paint everything.

We had decided to place the engine as far forward as possible and the existing engine bearers needed replacement brackets. I was anxious to keep the engine below the level of the hatch covers, so this meant the prop shaft would need a thrust bearing and adjustment of the angle to line up with the engine. A suitable “sierra” drive shaft was purchased from the local scrap yard plus a lorry type fuel filter; the cost was very reasonable. Adrian took the drive shaft away to cut-and-shut it down to the correct length and make a connector to fit the assembly together. Over the years the original prop shaft had become worn where the “P” bracket and tube assembly had made contact. By carefully adjusting the position of the shaft, I was able to cut off at both ends and have a taper made for the new prop. The shaft fits perfectly and does not drip at all.

Strips of ply were fitted each side of the hog, to rise above the drive shaft, encasing it, and providing a secure fixing for the thrust bearing. I lid was fitted to prevent any accidents.

The fitting of the water trap and “U” bend on the exhaust system, along with the drive cables, new fuel lines, filter, water trap and electrical circuits, meant the job took a great deal more time than anticipated, so when launching day arrived, 12th September, I was quite excited. As the tide rose to take “Hiran” off her trailer, two large ships went past upstream causing a considerable wash, and bounced her on the trailer. The engine took us out to the mooring after a few circuits of the river with no problem. Before leaving the boat I did the normal checks and found a small leak at one of the stringers below the starboard bunk next to the rear bulkhead. One of the securing screws had been pushed outwards by the impact when launching and split the outer laminate. It meant the boat had to come out again the following week and after a repair was relaunched on the 24th September. Though the engine has not had a great deal of use so far, I am very pleased with the performance. Some soundproofing will complete the job though the noise level is not disturbing.



