

Our First Sail

We had finished laying out the garden at our new house and were at a bit of a loose end so a new project to keep us (me) busy was required. I could remember reading articles on building boats at home during my schooldays, I had seen Barry Bucknell on the television with his mirror dinghy, so I decided that I should like to build a boat. Having explained to Barb that this was safer than an aeroplane I sent for some catalogues of boat kits. Looking through a list from Bromley Boats we were surprised to read that you could actually sleep on a boat and have cookers and things. This opened up new thoughts, some boats were capable of extended voyages and had made Atlantic and even Pacific crossings. We measured up our boatbuilding area (patio) and in the lounge and when the frames were made we moved the dining table and furniture to try them out.

The boat was slowly built first upside down on the patio and then rolled over to complete the inside. Our first crew member Ken arrived sometime during this stage. Eventually the boat required sails (boats are never actually finished!), yards of sailcloth were ordered and once again the lounge was cleared this time to become a sail loft. After much cutting and sewing a set of sails was produced and the boat was ready to be tested. We decided to call the boat Annabell after my first car and because I thought it was the name of Dan Dare's private spaceship (actually called Anastasia as I now know). We mixed equal parts of Blue and Green paint to make Myfanwy green and painted her. A trailer was built, next doors fence removed and the boat rolled out into the front garden.

We had been to Shell Island near Harlech camping a number of times after reading about it in "Practical Boat Owner" and decided that here would be an ideal place for our first sail. Leaving Ken in safe hands and armed with a chart of Cardigan Bay, we trailed Annabell there and set up our tent. The weather was warm and sunny with a gentle breeze, a perfect weekend for boats. We (I) had read all about sailing in the books but never actually sailed before, it didn't seem too difficult but if we just launched the boat and found that it floated OK I would have been happy. We investigated the slipway and thought we could manage the car and boat down it if there were not too many people about. Back at the tent we met a man who was very interested in looking at Annabell, He said he could sail and asked if he could help us. This sounded a good idea so the next morning he helped us put Annabell in the water for the first time. We could not get the engine, an Ocean outboard, to run (the only thing we had not made ourselves!) so we paddled into the basin and dropped the anchor. We played about putting the sails up and down, found how to start the engine and answered questions from interested onlookers about the boat.

The next day on the tide we and our friend motored out through the channel into the sea. He showed us how to set the sails and in a good breeze we sailed out and around a marker buoy in the bay. We learnt how to tack and come about and to shout "Lee oh" each time the boom came across the boat.

Annabell seemed to move through the water quite well, sea water splashed onto us and we were made up to be actually sailing on the sea!. Motoring back through the channel, standing up and handing the tiller, I felt like the captain of a ship! We had one more day sailing on the sea before we

had to recover Annabell and return home. Barb stayed on Annabell to guide her onto the trailer and when she came close I waded in to carry her ashore. I had seen people do this in films but they must have more muscle than me because Barb suddenly felt a lot heavier than I imagined and we nearly both fell in. Some lorry drivers waiting to launch their boat sensed that we could have difficulty reversing our trailer down the slip so they offered to help and in a flash Annabell was back on her trailer.

The weather was changing for the worse and we saw some people rowing their boat from a long way out. When they reached the shelter of the channel we could see that they had a dead Ocean outboard in the bottom of the boat!

Back home we felt elated at our experience, we were now sea going sailors and a few weeks later we learnt that a second crew member Sue was on the way. There must be something in this sailing lark!