

Trailer Sailing in Cornwall & Devon By Brian Roberts

A New Experience.

The last Friday in July found me crewing for Dennis Marsden aboard Weasel, his Etap 22. We were at Calstock on the river Tamer. The first to arrive on the expedition organised by the Trailer Sailer Association we were to be joined by Norman in his Dehler 25 and boats from Newcastle on Tyne, Middlesbrough and Southport. Ambitiously we were to finish the cruise at Poole Harbour. This is not a blow by blow account of the voyage, rather a few impressions.

Launching and recovery can be the easy way - up and down a gently sloping slip or the hard way. Launching was easy. Recovery was the hard way at Topsliem Sailing Club for the Glasson contingent. The advantage was it was cheap. The disadvantage the steep ramp with a dog leg near the top. The ramp was normally used for dayboats. Several of the Club members gathered to watch the proceedings. These required the combined skills of heavy haulage contractor, rigger, slipwright and supreme optimist. The locals were pressed into service as human counterweights to prevent Norman's boat and trailer tipping up backwards down the steep slope. The dog leg was negotiated in steps pulling the trailer with ropes offset round a metal post to one side. The entertainment lasted for more than three hours. The Club members enjoyed the spectacle so much they provided us with free tea and cake afterwards.

Weasel's instruments were interesting. the Decca suffered from senile decay. I had to tell it were we were more times than it could tell me. Dennis maintained the problem arose because we were often 'anchored up the creek'. I'm sure it was the Decca that was up the creek. The Etap 22 sailed very well being close winded and fast for it's length, but 7+ knots in a moderate to fresh breeze? I commented that perhaps it was a little fast. Dennis assured me it had been calibrated. How? I queried. 'Against Captain Ps Alden' I was told!

In the River Yealm there is a mooring pontoon anchored but not connected to the shore. The tide was running swiftly at nearly right angles under it. A fresh breeze was blowing onto the pontoon in nearly the same direction as the tide. We were moored on the down tide down wind side so if we left before the tide changed (which we did) we'd have no problems. Not so those on the other side. The 35' French boat lay innocently to the pontoon. The departing English boat about the same size, just in front. The skipper, red tee shirt, red boat, was the voluble type. His chosen technique for departure was to get the bows pointing away from the pontoon somewhat, give the engine full ahead and steer in the 'right' direction. Of course, wind and tide got him and he crashed into the French boat. He got free, circled, tossed a note of his name and address ashore and departed. He wasn't going to risk an attempt at berthing. This left a much sought after gap on the pontoon. It was only a few minutes before it was spotted by an English 30 footer. The French were still inspecting and listing the damage. The new arrival made straight for the vacant place on a course past the French. Yes, you're right. The wind and tide got him and he hit the French boat. He was extricated and tide alongside and the process of damage assessment again gone through. The next boat on the scene was another 30 footer French boat. By now all the ghouls were gathering. The French passed by their compatriots and appeared to be asking permission to raft alongside. 'At least they'll be able to argue out damage claims in a common language' observed one ghoul. The newcomer completed it's circle and started to come alongside it's

compatriot. Crew member at the bows with line ready, crew member at the stern with line ready. Crew ready to take lines on all the moored boat. To the disappointment of the onlookers, indeed their embarrassment, the helmsman on the arriving boat compensated expertly for the wind and tide and brought it alongside his compatriot barely touching fenders. In a thrice lines were passed and secured. The French had shown the British how to do it and they knew it.

Dennis's diaphragm! Yet another heads story but true. The sea toilet in Weasel is a masterpiece. To operate turn on the sea cocks. You are then confronted by two pumps - one in and one out. The technique was to pump both together but one had twice the capacity of the other requiring the dexterity of a drummer giving two strokes with one hand to one with the other. I'll not dwell on the consequences of getting all this out of synch. The pumps are exposed on the bulkhead. Dennis threw some hard paper into the toilet. He pumped. The pumps resisted. He applied some force. No effect. More force still. Bang - the diaphragm split and a jet of ? caught Dennis. Thus began the quest for a new one. He did find one, fitted it and now pumps with caution!

By Topsheim Norman's daughters, Elizabeth and Fiona had joined his boat. When a lorry load of marines arrived and embarked on a river boat they thought it was the Isle of Man

Ask Dennis to tell the story of his Yorkshire Bank card in the Barclays Bank hole in the wall!

We were in the pub on 29th July, We were in the pub every night except one. Main meal preparation is not so easy on a smaller trailer sailer. Pub grub is the order of the day. If you do eat on board you go to the pub anyway. At the end of the meal I was presented with a birthday pudding complete with candle and a card signed by all the party. I was so touched I couldn't bring myself to tell them they were exactly one week late.

Going aground in a drop keel yacht, providing it is in a muddy or sandy estuary is not too serious for the boat. In what is a well marked channel it's embarrassing for the crew. The screw for raising the keel is at the foot of the mast, requires the strength of an ox to operate the ratchet handle and is 179 turns from down to up. Winding like hell, red in the face, perspiring and uttering nautical oaths you can't pretend you're carrying out some routine deck work. When it came to removing the rudder(not our boat) it is all very entertaining for the others.

Would I go trailer sailing again? Yes. The passages are shorter. There's more pilotage. It's more interesting to sail in an area you don't know. The localities were very varied from the flesh pots of Torquay Marina with its multistory floating gin palaces to the deserted upper reaches of the River Yealm. And the company was great.