

THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH

Stuart Letton

(When Stuart wrote about Time Bandit's passage from southern Spain to Norway a few years ago – see Winter Sun to Midnight Sun, in Flying Fishes 2015/2 and 2016/1, he didn't admit that he was already starting to stray. Only Anne – and possibly Time Bandit – suspected....)

We've been together a long time, through thick and thin, both good times and bad. It was a long-term relationship, but sadly we're now going our separate ways. I have to confess the fault lies with me – my impetuosity, impatience, and I guess a seven year itch that took quite a long time to scratch. We got on really well for all those years. We went everywhere together and even with all our ups and downs, we kept going when many others just didn't or couldn't.

Then 'she' came into my life – tall, slim and drop dead gorgeous. We were simply meant for each other. And so, after seven years together, nearly 50,000 miles, and many months of agonising, anguish and tears, not to mention polishing and varnishing, we've finally parted. *Time Bandit*, our beloved Island Packet 45, has gone to new owners to continue her travels.

Us? Tall, slim and drop dead gorgeous will be *Time Bandit II* ... but from the 'dark side' ... a square boat ... a proper boat but with a trainer hull ... a catamaran. Our monohull friends are horrified. Our multihull friends thankful we've finally come to our senses. The Ocean Cruising Club probably re-considering our membership. I have to exorcise my need for speed demons, however, so I'm returning to my catamaran roots dragging Anne, screaming, behind me.

Time Bandit approaching Hole in the Wall, Tasmania, before 'she' came into my life



The affair started a few years ago. Early one morning we woke to the sound of the cruisers' jazz band. Hall Yach was drumming out the beat on the mast, Ann Chor was straining at the bow, and Sue Easterly was screaming in the rigging so, accompanied by these unwelcome harmonies we joined a dawn mass exit from a wild anchorage in the Canaries. Along with a dozen others we had woken to find our pleasant little cove of the night before turned into a raging, white-capped lee shore.

One by one we picked up our anchors and headed around to the neighbouring sheltered anchorage, all pretending we'd actually bothered to get a forecast the night before and wrongly decided it wouldn't come to much. As the anchor came home I was conscious of the two-hulled job behind us, an anxious skipper on the trampoline probably regretting his smugness off the night before ... 'Look! I'm in a catamaran. I can anchor right off the beach', his transoms now kissing said beach. I was too busy to think about it until ten minutes later when, under furled genoa alone, this guy went flying past at 12 knots. 'Outremer – Fast Cats' read the strapline on his hull. That line was filed away somewhere in the depths of my brain, where it muddled around aimlessly waiting for one of those passages when 2, 3 or 4 knots was so painfully slow.

I started digging the hole off the coast of Norway back in 2013. It was a bright sunny day and we were making our way slowly south in a gentle westerly. Very slowly. At some point, memories of *Outremer – Fast Cats* exploded from the depths of my brain and at the next wifi spot I looked to see if Google knew anything about these boats. Before you could say, 'brokers' exhorbitant fees', WHOOSH ... up came an action-packed video of *Obedient*, an Outremer 45, doing 16 knots up the Sound of Jura, our home waters, spray flying from the lee bow like a fire hose.

*Time Bandit
II – Tall, slim
and drop dead
gorgeous*



*You could cut cheddar
with that bow*

A little detective work led me to the owner and, ignoring the rule that ‘when you’re in a hole, stop digging’, we ended up in Stranraer in southwest Scotland on a blustery winter’s day in November 2013. On the drive down the coast, waves were crashing over the promenades. Old folks out for their morning walks with their ubiquitous little white dogs were dodging the breaking seas and at severe risk of appearing on the evening news ... posthumously.

We finally blew into Stranraer about eleven. Spotting *Obedient*’s owner amongst the morning walkers was easy, thanks to the subtle but noticeable Musto branding policy.

No sooner were the introductions made than Gordon says, ‘Let’s go for a sail’.

‘It’s blowing 35 knots out there’, says I.

Dig, dig, dig. Anne steers us out of the marina while Gordon and I hoist the main – seemingly endless amounts of halyard and expensive canvas compared to what we were used to. Five minutes later we are flying up Loch Ryan doing an effortless 10–12 knots. Not flat out but, strangely for us, just plain flat. No heeling over, no coffee cups secured in little cup-shaped holders, no standing braced and needing one leg longer than the other.

These were clearly signs! Probably signs to stop digging, right enough, but a man’s gotta do...

So, at the end of May 2018, we found ourselves in the south of France at the Outremer Cup, trying to discuss the pros and cons of catamarans versus keelboats, while also trying hard, but failing, to eat our body weight in Outremer-sponsored oysters and champagne cocktails. Twenty-four of these beauties turned up for the event – Outremer’s, not



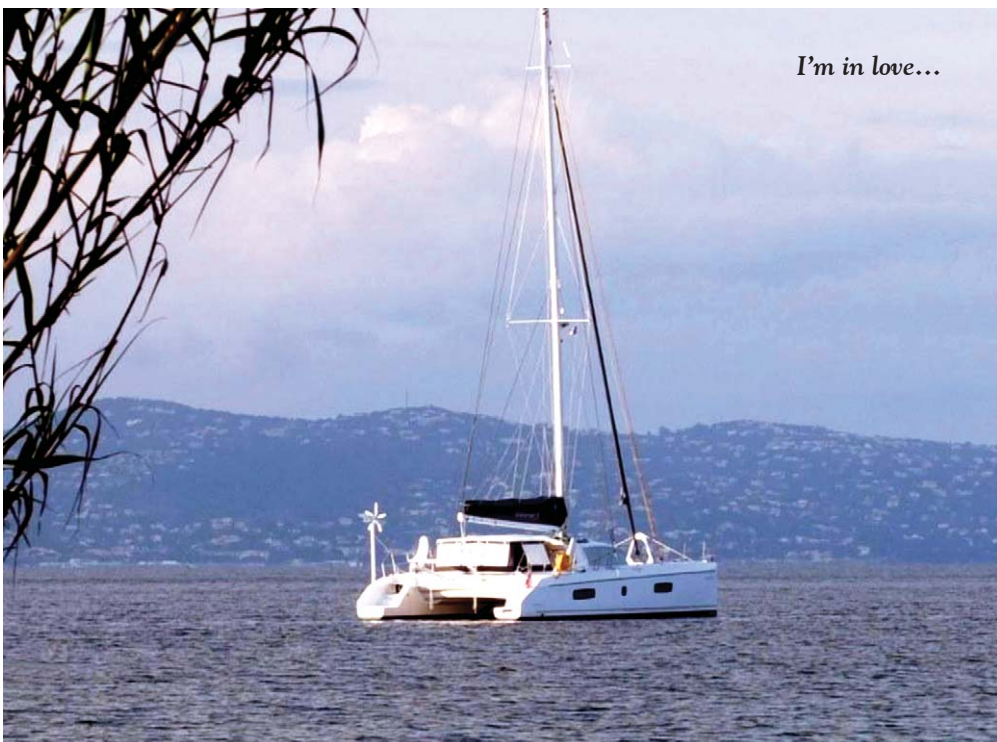


What have I done?

oysters. For three sun-drenched days we raced around the Mediterranean on azure blue seas, on boats the size of tennis courts, sailing faster than the wind and flying hundreds of square metres of very expensive sailcloth. I was in heaven.

And in a bit of a dither... Just how far was I going to go on this quest for speed? This unexplainable need for change? This venture to the dark side?

Come back next issue and find out!



I'm in love...