

Cruising on a racing boat

As a sailor who has raced most of his life, from dinghies including a 505 to yachts including half to two-tonners in their heyday in the 1980s, and latterly our own half tonner in a revived half ton class, the concept of cruising was always considered a luxury somehow you never had time for.

The closest I got to cruising was typically a return home from a finish line, St Malo perhaps or Plymouth. Often I remember turning a buoy off Cherbourg or Le Havre with the crew almost sniffing the moules-frites but racing away back across the channel away from them!

Kate, my wife, had not sailed before we met and while we had the odd weekend sailing, family and work commitments precluded cruising over the years. During those weekends both of us found we could be seasick, as indeed were the children, which did not help.

But with the children grown up, my health now up to a reasonable, if reduced, level and a spirit for a bit of adventure – particularly on Kate's part – 2018 was the season to try cruising together, which was going to be a largely new experience for us both.



Our 30' boat – High Hopes - is a one-off IOR half tonner built for the 1978 Half Ton Cup, and is broadly in original condition (GBR 3633T in the above picture, taken in a Half Ton regatta we competed in a few years ago). She is not most people's idea of a cruising boat, but she was built before the concept of stripped-out interiors was fully developed and so has the (small) engine under the cockpit (as opposed to in the middle of the cabin with a propshaft raised above the floor!), six bunks, a small but fully functional galley, toilet, chart table and hanging locker.

The rig is a triple spreader masthead giving the boat plenty of power, terrific upwind speed and pointing ability and making her an outstanding light air performer. Downwind she is very steady in a breeze and we have race-tested her to a boat speed of 15 knots under spinnaker!

You will not be surprised that we have found there are several comfort compromises to be made, including having tins of G&T and Pimms rather than a fully stocked bar! But the main ones are not

quite having standing headroom below, the need to eat on your lap as there is no table (other than the chart table, converted in harbour to part of the galley), a small water tank and the curtain in the loo providing only the slightest hint of privacy! Anchoring is for most a routine process, but when your kedge is located in the bilge in the middle of the boat (weight must be kept out of the ends!) anchoring takes on a whole new meaning. So while we do moor up and anchor, we probably take to the marina with its facilities more often than many.

Overall, particularly with the wonderful summer and frequent light breezes, we found on many occasions we were the only boat sailing - with others motoring around us - often with our large spinnaker (as below) which in light conditions could readily be launched, gybed and dropped with just the two of us.

A brief word about the sails we are using which are all dacron, the Mylar/Pentex racing set having been left in the loft, and are limited to the main, a large (#2) and small (#4) genoa covering a wind range of 4-30 knots, large and small spinnakers with a similar wind range, and a storm jib. All sails are hoisted up and down, the genoas on a twin groove headstay, and main and genoas need flaking when dropped. So leaving and entering port keeps you busy, and with just two of us a basic autopilot comes into its own when sail handling.

Our first outing was the RNSA Portland cruise to Mupe Bay, following the cocktail party and dinner, and we set out with a friend to sail there. I suspect we were the only boat that sailed, having crept along in a zephyr until the sea breeze came in when we hoisted our large spinnaker which took us nicely down to Mupe (pictured below). Just in time to circle Gwendoline Grace nearing the end of the drinks party and head back home on a lovely beat! A very nice shakedown in lovely weather which got us off to a good start.



A couple of days later Kate & I decided to go east for a couple of nights, but the weather was so good that this turned into a 10 day outing to the Solent. We quickly got into a routine of one day sailing and two days in port, the latter exploring the locality typically by foot but also hiring bikes where available. We also built in "recovery" days to cater for my health condition and reduced strength and stamina.

First and last stop was Yarmouth, where we spent a day walking along the shore past the Hurst narrows, another walking south to Freshwater and back along the Yar, and a third cycling to Freshwater and up to the Needles (pictured below – note the change in water colour between the channel and the Shingles bank).



It was here that having put the bikes against a fence we walked to the viewing point above Scratchells Bay (below) and were asked by a couple whether our bikes were electric!



Our next stop was Beaulieu, looking beautiful in the good weather and with the estate seemingly immaculately kept. Boatbuilding capability at the Agamemnon boatyard we were told has been

moved to Hythe, but there were still boats on the hard including a very successful 1979 Irish Admirals Cup two tonner, whose sistership I raced on a few times in the early eighties.

This boat (pictured below) is built of carbon fibre reinforced wood, with a solid carbon fibre rudder, which was very progressive for the time. As you can see there is something of a restoration job to do on her now, but the rudder is still looking good!



The new showers at Beaulieu are breathtakingly luxurious, and after morning ablutions we walked to Beaulieu village, somewhere neither of us had been before. The walk up the river was delightful (pictured below), and if you have not done this it is highly recommended, and while the village was twee it was very busy.



Lots of old motors around too, as it turned out to be the Beaulieu auto-jumble that day, and the only garage in town sells just classic cars starting at £50,000. There was an E-type Jag in the window at over a quarter of a million, and so we concluded that boating seemed cheap!

A lovely estate with the castle surrounded by the river which looks more like a lake up at the top, with cows wandering down the road giving the place a casual, if busy, feel to it. Good to get back to the boat though and from it enjoy wonderful views of Buckler's Hard (pictured below).



An early start from Yarmouth leaving at 0630 saw us passing the Needles at the start of the fair tide, then Anvil at 0910 where a gusty north wind funnelling off the cliffs and the full ebb drove us fast past St Albans on the inner passage and allowed us to approach the Portland wall by midday, just as the northerly died to make way for the sea breeze.



Our next trip in late June/early July was heading west, but before that we had some Japanese friends to stay and took them down to Portland Bill by land on a day when there was an easterly F7 recorded on the breakwater wall and the top spring flood tide. The results were dramatic, with boiling water and standing waves from the Bill to the eastern end of the Shambles bank (see below, although it's always hard to photograph a rough sea).



We also took them for a tour up to the top of the lighthouse, from where you could clearly see the scope of the race, and we would recommend this for anyone who hasn't done it as the narrative was interesting. Amazing to see also that the light source is purely a single 1000 watt bulb.

So it was with a little bit of nervousness that we set off after breakfast to go round the Bill and across Lyme Bay, but the conditions were good – see below - and with an easterly breeze varying between 8 and 14 knots we had our big spinnaker up all the way across the bay giving us 5 – 7 knots of boatspeed and arriving off Berry Head by late afternoon.



We spent a couple of nights in Brixham, eating fish, witnessing lovely sunsets by night and sleeping in our owners' ensuite (the foc's'le!) with the hatch open looking up at the stars.



By day we walked around the town and up to Berry Head with its stunning views along the coast, including that towards Scabbacombe below with its beautiful wild flowers.



Then onto Dartmouth for several days where we met up with Richard & Jenny Stevens, who kindly showed us round the Royal Dart and treated us to a drink there. We stayed in the Dart Haven

marina, on the Kingswear side, where the regular steam train can interrupt your ablutions as you need to cross the railway line to access the toilet block.

By day we walked up the river on the Kingswear side to Agatha Christie's house, now owned by the National Trust, from where you can enjoy spectacular views towards the town as below.



A walk from the marina around the coast felt Mediterranean in the conditions, giving views as that below, and we stopped for a chat with volunteers at the Coastguard Station who showed us seals basking on the Mewstone. From there we cut inland and passed a landmark no doubt familiar to all



members, but would you recognise the Dartmouth daymark from the photo below?



A walk on the Dartmouth side to the castle at the entrance rounded off our stay and we then went to Salcombe, still with an easterly breeze and our spinnaker up, gybing at Start Point and dropping as we approached the Salcombe bar. A trip up the river past the town saw us joining a couple on the RNSA buoy who had sailed down from Edinburgh, where we were later joined by a third couple as below (sorry about the brush!). A thoroughly enjoyable stay for four days, and while the buoy must be in one of the most scenic parts of the harbour, we found that the tides meeting from the two rivers made things pretty lively at times.



This didn't stop us trying the local gin, duly chilled in the absence of a fridge using the traditional method!



As well as exploring the town, which neither of us had visited for 30 odd years, we walked around the coast towards Prawle one day, which was stunning, and then towards Bolt Head another – very different but equally magnificent. The latter gave wonderful views up the harbour, as that below.



From Salcombe we headed back to Torquay, not least as the toilet had started playing up, past Start and Berry Head below, and would you believe that the wind had now shifted to the west so we were still flying our big spinnaker!



It was near here that we were followed by dolphins, which always seems to be special.

Torquay seemed to be the powerboat capital of the south coast, so to get away from this we headed inland on foot to an historic village called Cockington where we found a piano being played outside at a picturesque tea-room (below).



From Torquay we headed to Lyme Regis, with the afternoon sea breeze allowing another great spinnaker run, mooring up on a visitor's buoy prior to an early departure the next morning for home.

The sunrise was very special, as was some short-tacking in 4-5 knots of wind close in to Chesil beach, catching a back eddy and listening to the shingle rolling – photos below.



With the wind shadowed by the island as we approached the Cove Inn we had to motor to the Bill to make the tide, again taking the inshore passage, dodging all the pots and almost being able to chat to those onshore as in the picture below.



While I suspect tame for most members, for a couple of people new to cruising we felt a sense of achievement at having done this trip together, something that perhaps shows in Kate's face in the picture below.



As well as the two trips above, we “nipped out” for a couple of overnights in Lulworth and Mupe – places that in the past we had just hurried by on our way to Cowes. The sheer beauty of these perhaps gets overlooked as they are on our doorstep, but we couldn’t help feeling how lucky we are to have these within such easy reach. A guidebook we keep in our guest room describes Worbarrow as “claimed by many to be the most picturesque bay in England”, and waking up there on a nice morning we certainly wouldn’t argue with that.

One facet of being on a racing boat is that there is little room for liferaft/dinghy storage, so the latter does not currently feature in our cruising. Below are a couple of pictures in Mupe, including Kate showing her determination to get ashore!



As always it is good to get home safe and sound, and we greatly appreciated the marina berth we had as we found we were always very tired when we got in. We packed up slowly and often spent the night aboard before leaving for home, during which we witnessed some wonderful sunsets, one of which is shown below. It’s not half enjoyable, this cruising lark!



Ian & Kate Bowker