

# Boat-owner's diary

The PBO 'family' share their boat-owning treats, trials and tribulations

An indecisive Ben Meakins paints himself into a corner, Tom Stevens looks forward to another brush with a tiller, David Pugh fashions a 'pail and interesting' gas locker, and Stu Davies vents an opinion on *Sacha's* exhaust

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## In pursuit of Perfection



Ben Meakins manages to secure some hard-to-find two-pack paint for *Polly's* hull: but for once, finds himself unwilling to do what it says on the tin

**P**olly's winter refit is now well under way after a slow start. But so far, it has thrown up more mysteries than ticks on the to-do list.

First was an adjustable spanner that went missing just before the Round the Island Race – found stuck to the bottom of a locker with raspberry jam. Worse was a nest of milk sachets, long past their sell-by date and busy founding a breakaway republic in a corner of a bilge locker: but at least those were easy to sort out with a bucket of hot bleach.

The set of stainless shroud backing plates that anchor the cap shrouds in the mast wall have minute cracks around their

edges. They should have been simple to replace, or so we thought. We drilled out the rivets and punched them out. But try as we might, we just couldn't get their replacements to sit right. Three sets of new rivets and a minor sense of humour failure later, we realised that the new plates have a slightly greater curve than the

20-year-old ones – so it's going to be a trip or two to a local metal fabricator and his fly press before we can get the new plates to fit.

To my eternal shame, I made a mess of coming alongside in a gale last year, resulting in a deep, 2m-long scratch in *Polly's* painted GRP hull. It's not

**A dilemma in the shape of an unopened tin of Perfection two-pack paint**



the first and won't be the last time we'll need to patch the paintwork which, with care, can be blended in so as to be almost unnoticeable. But, since *Polly's* hull was hand-painted a few years back, International Paints have changed their colour scheme and no longer make our shade of Ivory.

My uncle managed to find the holy grail: an unopened tin of Perfection two-pack paint in ivory, on a dusty chandlery shelf in Cornwall. As far as I know it could be the very last tin in the world, so we have a dilemma. The hardener, as anyone who has tried to open one will know, comes in a tin which is impossible to re-seal properly. When opened, it condemns the hardener to a slowly solidifying



The cap shroud backing plates have hairline cracks at the edges of the socket – but their replacements are subtly different

future that renders it unusable. My conscience demands that we repaint the damage to *Polly's* hull as quickly as possible: but is it really worth opening the last tin in the world for the sake of a few millilitres of paint?

■ PBO's features editor, Ben Meakins, and his girlfriend Steph co-own *Polly*, an Impala 28, with friends. They keep her on the Hamble on a river mooring

## Varnishing point



It's that time of the year again: Tom Stevens gleefully disappears into his workshop

**T**he last few days in Suffolk have been gorgeous – blue sky, light airs and dry. The evenings are getting lighter and I'm excited about the coming season: this is the time of year when I disappear into my workshop and busy myself with all those important little jobs.

I love varnishing, and take great pride in getting a good finish on all the brightwork. Unfortunately, unlike our previous boat – a tiny Hillyard

two-and-a-half-tonner, which had masses of varnished and painted surfaces – the Trapper only has one piece of wood on deck that requires any coating. This solitary piece of mahogany, the tiller, gets an inordinate amount of attention lavished on it and is stripped,

sanded and varnished every year.

The only problem is that it gets a tiny bit smaller every season. I tried to compensate by giving it even more coats of varnish, but I must accept that I will have to make another one in a few years' time.

This, however, is not a problem as I love a bit of woodwork as well. Last year I made a new saloon table,

but this time around my only job is a mounting box for the CD player my kids gave me a year ago – which has still not been

installed. They reminded and shamed me by giving me four new speakers this Christmas, along with caustic comments on my 'enthusiasm' for their presents. Once made, the mounting box will also need several coats of varnish. Something to look forward to!

**An inordinate amount of attention is lavished on the tiller**



Tom Stevens in his workshop – and in his element

Every year, I think about whether I should paint *Oystercatcher's* hull. The gel coat has faded and is scuffed along most of its length, but I normally decide against a paint job as I'm sure that, if she had a nice shiny hull, I would be reluctant to lend her to my young – and would be nervous about anyone coming alongside. I also take the attitude that if I am on board, I can't see the hull anyway.

However, my main problem is the deck – which I can see. When I bought *Oystercatcher* she had

been lying ashore in the previous owner's garden with pools of stagnant rainwater in the cockpit and the scuppers. At the time this didn't seem to be a problem, but I now have a slightly upside down boat with a sound hull but decks riddled with osmosis. This will be a big project, and I don't think I can put it off much longer.

■ PBO ad executive Tom Stevens and his wife Caroline keep their Trapper 500, *Oystercatcher*, on a swinging mooring on the River Alde by summer and lay up over winter at nearby Aldeburgh

## Winter maintenance can be exhaustive



A thorough and resolute Stu Davies treats *Sacha* to a new exhaust – and no longer fumes

**W**inter maintenance work carries on. One of the jobs on the list was to re-route some of the ducting on the Eberspächer diesel heater.

When *Sacha* was first delivered to Holyhead, I spent the first night

on board: it was cold and blowy, and I ran the original Eber all night. There was a whiff of diesel exhaust in the cabin and I thought it was due to the blowy conditions – a backdraught, perhaps. I resolved to check it out when I got to Pwllheli, and when I did I found that the Eber exhaust had

**Diesel-contaminated air was being pumped into the cabin**

cracked almost in half. Fumes were being pumped into the sugar scoop, and because the original installation had the air inlet in the sugar scoop the machine was sucking in diesel-contaminated air, warming it up and pumping it into the cabin. I was lucky not to be asphyxiated.

I fitted a new exhaust, lagged it and made a mental note to fit an inlet trunking from the cabin. That way, if the exhaust ever leaked again the fumes wouldn't be pumped into the cabin. It would also increase the efficiency



INSET The new heater inlet in the aft cabin bulkhead MAIN The sugar scoop looks tidier with new ducting and re-routed wiring

of the Eber as it would be reheating already warmed air. On my Bénétéau the aft cabin has hatches that we always leave open. This allows good ventilation which prevents any problems with condensation, plus we stay on the boat most weekends. My argument with regard to using recycled air for the heating system is that the existing ventilation is good enough to keep condensation at bay. It is a well-discussed topic on the PBO forum, with people expressing strong views both for and against.

I also decided to tidy up the rest of the wiring in the sugar scoop. I had to cut a 4in (100mm) hole in the starboard aft cabin bulkhead: Mrs Davies wasn't happy, but judicious use of a jig saw soon enabled me to fit a new air inlet and put a piece of trunking from that to the inlet of the Eber. I reckon that I can save up to 20% on my diesel heating bill this winter: I'll keep you posted.

■ Stu Davies has written many practical articles for PBO. He and his wife Laura keep their Bénétéau *Océanis 381*, *Sacha*, moored in Milford Haven

## Pails into significance



A more effective gas locker was near the top of David Pugh's bucket list – and then, somehow, an economical solution suggested itself

**W**hen we bought *Red Dragon*, she had a gas locker – of sorts. Made from a cut-about plastic header tank, it had all the LPG integrity of a sieve, plus a long length of tatty copper pipe loosely glassed to the hull. It survived until our first winter, when we ripped it all out and plonked the bottle in the locker under the stove, attached by a short length of flexi pipe – exactly as the boat had been designed. We had ignored all the regulations, but it felt a lot safer.

We have lived with this temporary fix for eight seasons now. With the bottle so close to the cooker, turning the gas off at the bottle is no hassle – but we have been pinning our safety on a single valve. Time to do something about it.

But what? Any owner of a small

boat knows how difficult it is to fit a locker which allows gas to drain overboard. Our preferred cylinder size, the Camping Gaz 907, is 25cm high – that's almost *Red Dragon's* freeboard! We can just get away with a locker suspended below the aft deck and accessed by a deck hatch, sized to leave the regulator skimming the underside of the hatch. That gives us adequate fall to an existing skin fitting 4in above the waterline.

Buying a gas locker off the shelf is expensive – £175 for the one we would need. For that you get an open-topped box in fire-retardant GRP, and generally much too big. Moulding one would give an exact fit, but is time-consuming and again costly – the Boat Safety Scheme for hire vessels suggests a minimum 5mm thickness.



The bottle looks right at home in its bucket-based gas locker



A ring of 25mm marine ply is attached to the rim of the bucket

bucket with a wire handle. The bottle fits perfectly at the base, with the regulator poking out of the top by about an inch. A few hours fettling a ring of 25mm marine ply brought it up to height, enabling me to allow for the many below-deck obstructions – after which I drew a sharp breath and cut a large hole in the deck.

Next time I visit *Red Dragon* I'll be armed with plumbing bits and sealant; but so far we've saved about £165 and made a safer boat.

■ PBO's deputy editor David Pugh and his two siblings jointly own *Red Dragon*, a Contessa 26 that they keep moored in Poole Harbour