

Boat-owner's diary

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

Tom Stevens looks a bit of a dummy, David Pugh reefs in the line of duty, Stu Davies gets practical with fuel lines, and Ben Meakins learns that sometimes going slower is quicker!

Missed last month's diaries? Visit www.pbo.co.uk to catch up

Less haste, more speed



The hurrieder he goes, the behinder he gets: Ben Meakins learns to slow down in order to speed up

How is it you can spend a whole day working on a boat with barely a break, yet still end up with a longer to-do list than you started with? I took a day's holiday to work on *Polly* a couple of weeks ago and didn't sit down all day.

I polished the hull, adjusted the stern gland, oiled the woodwork and spliced a new multiplait anchor warp, my Beaulieu BoatJumble bargain, to the chain – and that was all before lunch! Re-soldering the VHF aerial plug, re-sticking a headlining and calibrating the halyards took a few more hours. Before I knew it, it was getting dark and time to row home, and I had a triumphant glow that meant we could go sailing next time with a fully working boat. Then I checked the list. None of the jobs

I'd finished was on it, so I scribbled them on the bottom when I thought no one was looking and was then able to tick them off triumphantly. That's much better.

More recently I thought I could replace the seals on the water pump at home, refit it on the boat and make the start of the Wednesday evening race, all within an hour and a half. In my haste I managed to destroy the pump's new oil seal with a screwdriver, so high-tailed it over to Marine Power where they kindly let me in, Indiana Jones-style, just as they were closing their doors.

With a new set of seals, assembling the pump was easy. Half an hour later, on the boat, I

I dropped a bolt – not into the bilge, but into the engine's crankcase

quarter of an hour was spent in a state of mounting panic until I

dropped a bolt. Not into the wide, open bilge, of course, but somehow through the hole where the pump is supposed to sit and into the engine's crankcase. A

retrieved it with the help of an old wire coathanger and a pair of long-nosed pliers – together, perhaps the most useful tools on board. Less haste, more speed next time around!

Once out on the water and when

things had calmed down, that evening's gentle race was the best sail of the year yet. A short course in flat water meant that we had to be on our toes, but the crew was slick and everything just worked. Best of all, we wore shorts and T-shirts right into the long evening. It was so nice, we sailed back up the river to our mooring as the sun set. Bliss. I don't want to jinx it, but I think summer might be here!

■ PBO's features editor, Ben Meakins, co-owns *Polly*, a 32-year-old Impala 28, with two friends. They keep her in the Hamble on a sailing club river mooring



Eddie Meys

As well as taking part in evening club racing, *Polly* has been out and about taking part in PBO boat handling exercises

The wind is back in her (reefed) sails



David Pugh's *Red Dragon* is back in the water and soon feels a good breeze in her sails

Finally, we're in the water. It's taken a while – my upbeat prognostications as to when *Red Dragon*'s keel would touch the briny again proved to be optimistic by about a fortnight owing to a glut of boats with equally tardy owners – but the deed is done and I have a strange feeling of what the shrinks call 'closure'.

One of my predictions was more accurate – the trip down the River Frome was every bit as beautiful as I expected, although there was no chance of sailing until we reached the river mouth as our prevailing south-westerly had got confused

I felt a feeling of liberation – I was on my own boat, and happy

and was blowing backwards. Nonetheless, we had a lovely sail back to our mooring with that smug, slippery feeling that comes from a newly-antifouled hull.

But the real highlight of the season so far came a few days later. For our article on reefing (see page 37) we planned to take out two boats: Sailtime's Beneteau Oceanis 40 *State Eleven* and *Red Dragon*. Picking up *State Eleven*

from Salterns' Marina, we made our way gingerly across the sandbank to *Red Dragon* and came briefly alongside while production editor Julian Peckham and I stepped down around eight feet to her coachroof.



Ocean Images

Red Dragon takes part in PBO's feature on reefing

Size notwithstanding, I felt a feeling of liberation – here I was, on my own boat, surrounded by my own rubbish, and happy. With around 18 knots on the wind clock she was in her element, and it was only with difficulty we managed to focus on the task in hand and avoid heading for Cherbourg.

It's odd how boat ownership tugs at the heartstrings. You can crew, charter or borrow a host of

interesting yachts and still save money over owning the smallest of boats, but it's not until you've taken responsibility for a boat that you really bond with it. It's that bond that makes sailing your own boat extra-special – I suppose that's why we do it.

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

The key to successful sailing



Tom Stevens has three firsts out of three starts, and becomes something of a lock-keeper

Wednesday evening racing, my favourite series, is now well under way. It is the perfect way to divide the week in half and each year there seem to be more and more boats turning out, possibly at the expense of Saturday racing.

Every season, the vexed issue of handicaps comes up and causes heated debate. We run a system based on Portsmouth handicaps, which we then tweak to what we call an AF (Aldeburgh Factor) number. Each year, our handicapper number-crunches all the race results and makes adjustments to our AF value. Those whose numbers are changed for the worse feel hard done by, and similarly those with better numbers still feel that these should be even more advantageous.

George Johnson, our honorary handicapper, gets his ear bent by most of us at the beginning of

every season, but all seems to work out in the end. There will always be a problem with handicap racing as all boats perform differently in each condition. My boat loves a breeze, so tends to do well when the wind is up. Conversely, my arch-rival and good friend Henry Gordon-Jones, in his Bénéteau 31.7, absolutely flies in light airs and is almost impossible to beat. All the evening racing so far has been in a bit of a breeze, so we are on top of the fleet.

We have just had our spring regatta, two days of racing over the Whitsun bank holiday and, luckily for us on *Oystercatcher*, it blew hard all weekend so we got three firsts out of three starts. The fourth race

After the first sail of the season I couldn't find the padlock and key to the boat

was cancelled as it was just too windy and most of the competitors had already decided not to go out again. We had had a very exciting series, including a very hairy spinnaker run ending in a bit of a death roll and a broach to windward, much to the alarm of the fleet of Loch Longs that were



Tom Stevens

High seas skirmish: Tom Stevens races *Oystercatcher* on Wednesday evenings

coming upwind at us.

The regatta party was a great success and, unfortunately for me, I ended up on stage with the entertainer as his ventriloquist dummy, wearing a false pair of moveable lips. Apparently it was very funny, and all

those there enjoyed their commodore's humiliation.

I have recently proved that Murphy's Law is a valid one. After the first sail of the season I couldn't find the padlock and key to the boat, so I had to leave her unlocked. I went out to her the next evening and turned all the lockers

out and generally ransacked the boat, without success. Not being terribly happy about leaving the boat open, I bought a new lock at vast expense. You have probably guessed that the original padlock was virtually under my nose when I next went afloat. A total mystery, but at least I have now got a better lock on my garden shed!

■ Fancy taking your cruiser club racing? See our feature, page 42

■ 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

Filtering out the fiddly bits



Stu Davies finds that one filter sometimes works as well as two

On the trip to Milford Haven from Pwllheli, we motored most of the way. During the small hours on my watch I became aware of a slight change in the tone of the motor every now and again. I put it down to the engine taking the load as the boat moved up and

down the swells, but when I gave her a burst of power at the end of the journey, she failed to reach 3,000rpm.

We booked days off between the Easter and May Day bank holidays to give ourselves a mini-holiday, and had planned to visit Swansea to see our daughter. I needed to check the fuel system before we set off: the primary fuel filter is a CAV-type with a glass water separator hung on the bottom. It is a pain to change because you have to balance a filter on top of a glass bowl on top of an alloy base, with the attendant sealing rings all wanting to leak air in!



Stu Davies

A clogged fuel tank pick-up led to problems further down the supply line at the primary filter

After I changed the filter, I couldn't get the fuel through. I decided to bypass the stupid thing and put the main fuel pipe from the

tank to the secondary fuel filter, and get the engine going. The secondary filter is a big one, and more than capable of protecting the injection system on its own. I left the primary filter system off for the trip to Swansea and back, and the engine didn't miss a beat.

The trip was superb, the northerlies we had over the holidays provided winds on the beam, 8 knots plus all the way, with wall-to-wall sunshine. Sheer sailing magic!

■ To see how Stu changed his oil filter housing, turn to page 61

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