

# Boat-owner's diary

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



## Blast! Is that the Queen on the phone?



It's 'little big horn' all over again as a smartly-deployed smartphone sees Ben Meakins and his wife safely home through the foggy Solent

**W**e spent a chilly weekend in mid-January tied to a buoy in the Beaulieu River, spending the short hours of daylight gently sailing there – and the long hours of darkness sitting comfortably below with the heater on.

On the Sunday morning, we awoke to a thick fog and not a breath of wind, so we prepared the boat for a foggy trip home to Hamble – lifejackets on, passage planned, waypoints in and AIS switched on, and of course, dug

out the foghorn. Or, I should say, we *tried* to dig out the foghorn before I remembered that it was still on my desk in the PBO office, where it had been sitting since our

**A foghorn worthy of the QE2 blasted out of our small boat**

foghorn test a few months back. We decided to risk it and motored gently down the river, with the chart to hand. One by one, the piles that mark the channel loomed eerily out of the mist. After a few minutes, Steph disappeared down below to check the chart plotter. Five minutes later, as we neared the bend in the channel, one long blast on an



**A foggy winter's day – just don't leave home without your foghorn!**

extremely loud foghorn blared out, dangerously close behind me. In panic, I steered hard to the edge of the channel to avoid the large vessel bearing down on us – to find nothing there. I looked forward in confusion to see Steph grinning, smartphone in hand. She had downloaded an MP3 clip of a foghorn before playing it at full volume through *Polly's* cockpit speakers.

It wasn't strictly speaking correct, but played on a two-

minute loop it saw us home safely nonetheless.

Best of all was the moment we met some friends on another boat that emerged out of the mist as we approached the Hamble. The look on their faces as a foghorn worthy of the QE2 blasted out of our small sailing boat is one that will stay with us for a while!

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

## Charging less for more charging



Stu Davies craves a purpose-built USB socket, but devises a cheaper alternative

**I**n last month's PBO, I noticed a USB gear mentioned in the 'New Gear at the London Boat Show' section. This is basically a voltage converter that looks like a 12V cigarette lighter but has two USB sockets, allowing 5V to be accessed to charge smartphones, etc.

**I now have two 12V sockets near the nav station**

On *Sacha* I have a 12V socket extension with two connectors on it and a cheap white plastic USB converter that works for charging things, but which doesn't look very tidy. After seeing the USB socket in PBO I resolved to get one, so I looked up the manufacturers' website. It turns out they are based in the USA: they only supply to wholesalers in the UK, and the only source of retail I could find wanted £27 for

one (they cost \$19.99 in the States). I emailed the salesman in the US, and found out that their distributors haven't listed them yet.

I had another think. Some time previously I'd bought two waterproof 12V car lighter sockets and had fitted one to the

binnacle on *Sacha*, intending to fit the other one to my motorbike. I knew that Maplin sold

flush-fitting USB plug/converters to fit into 12V cigarette lighter sockets, so I thought why not fit an extra 12V socket near the original nav station one and use the Maplin converter to make a nice neat job?

We visited *Sacha* last weekend, so I took the opportunity to drill holes in her nicely varnished nav station: Mrs Davies wasn't happy.



**Drilling and enlarging an old hole in the instrument panel bulkhead**

**A neat installation for the new USB socket INSET This is the dual USB that plugs into the 12V lighter socket**

To be fair, I utilised some existing holes, and the finished job looks great. I now have two 12V sockets near the nav station and one by the wheel. I can utilise the Maplin plug at both stations and can now use my smartphone AIS system to send out my location and see other boats, whether at the wheel or down below. No

more worries about flat batteries, and it's possible to charge an iPad as well using the car charger or a 2.1A converter.

A winter job well done!

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