

# Boat-owner's diary

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

Ben Meakins gives the elbow to an ailing exhaust, David Pugh waxes lyrical about Wareham's history as a port, Tom Stevens bemoans a lack of sails, and Stu Davies gets vertigo at the helm



Polly's corroded exhaust elbow was not her only engine malady

## I need this like a hole in the head

Ben Meakins' funny bone remains resolutely un-tickled after exhaust elbow and cylinder head decay

Oh, how smug was I, after reading about the engine problems of my PBO colleagues last month while Polly sat afloat and eager to spread her wings.

Well, pride comes before a fall. Soon after the boat went in, I noticed a black stain on the transom. I changed the oil, and it reduced for a day before coming back with a greasy, black vengeance. What's more, the engine – a previously reliable 20-year-old Yanmar 1GM10 – took ages to start and ran with white smoke and oily water in the exhaust. Now, I may not know much about engines, but an engine throwing its own oil out the exhaust is not a good thing. So, after much

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umming and ahing, I consulted Pete Stevens at Marine Power in Bursledon, downloaded a workshop manual and took the head off myself. The problem was immediately obvious. The exhaust elbow had corroded through its inner water tube and was injecting hot, salty water straight into the exhaust port on the cylinder head. Ah well, I thought, 'Only 100-odd quid for a new elbow.' And that's when I noticed a hole between the exhaust port and pushrod space in the cylinder head, cunningly disguised as a speck of carbon.

'Sorry mate,' said Pete. 'It looks like a new head, too.'

So, £600 and a DIY engine rebuild later, it has a new cylinder head and exhaust elbow and runs better than ever, with more power, better compression and – importantly – no black oil in the exhaust. It starts on the first push of the button every time. If you have a Yanmar 1GM10, check the exhaust elbow at least every year for internal corrosion. I had visually inspected ours and it looked fine, but next time I'll remove it and pour water down the gap between the internal and external elbows to check for leakage through tiny pinprick holes. The consolation is that we stepped in when we did, or the bill might have been much higher. But it all seemed

worth it during the long Easter weekend, which we spent at anchor in tropical conditions. We didn't cover any great distance, but it's times like these; gentle sails, sitting and watching the sun set, that make you forget the pain inflicted on your bank balance and the hours spent chasing problems, and remind you why you bought the boat in the first place!

■ 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

## It's like Norfolk, broadly speaking

Winding rivers, marshes and reed-lined banks stir memories for erstwhile Norfolk sailor David Pugh

It's happened! Three days' work from an avid team comprising my sister, my brother's fiancée, our long-suffering, shed-owning friend Peter, my brother and myself saw Red Dragon's new engine in place and tested, the leaking scuppers fixed, the antifouling rubbed down, two fresh coats applied and the boat towed down to Ridge Wharf Yacht Centre near Wareham, Dorset.

We clearly weren't the only ones to take advantage of the two extended weekends in May to finish off our 'winter' maintenance, as Ridge informed us that the waiting list was so long that it would be a week before they were able to put her in the water. But that time is nigh, and I'm hot-footing it down to Wareham to finish rigging her and catch the evening tide down to our swinging mooring in Poole Harbour.

That trip is always a pleasure, for a whole host of reasons in addition to the delight of starting what will hopefully be a season filled with sunshine and sailing breezes. As an erstwhile Norfolk sailor, for me the Wareham marshes evoke memories of the winding rivers, reed-lined banks and wide skies of the Broads – memories probably given a rosier tint because they

date from a time in my life when my responsibilities were few and I was rarely more than 20ft from the water. There's also a feeling of wonder that the river has seen so much history: Wareham was one of the six largest towns in Saxon Wessex, housed two royal mints, was a centre for conflict in both the 12th and 17th century civil wars and, almost unbelievably, was an important port until Poole began to take over in the 13th century. The thought of Norman troops burning shipping on the River Frome puts a different perspective on our petty worries about grounding on the ebb tide.

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Perhaps in homage to our enterprising ancestors I'll see if I can make it down the river and out to the mooring under sail this year. After all, if the wind is anything like the so-called prevailing south-westerlies we are supposed to get most of the time, the passage down the meandering river should be a series of reaches and runs, well within the capability of Red Dragon's genoa.

On the other hand, I might just have eight hours on the mud to write the next one of these. It's all part of the adventure.

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



Red Dragon is in the boatyard queue to go back in the water



Oystercatcher is still waiting for her first sail of the season

## Oh, blow: as yet, we fail to sail...

It's best to have sails if you're planning on sailing, as Tom Stevens ruefully acknowledges

My sailing season has almost got under way despite a couple of last-minute hitches.

Oystercatcher was launched just before Easter and we were looking forward to our shakedown sail sometime over the bank holiday. This was not to be. Going into the shed, where I keep all the boat gear over the winter, I was rather puzzled that the sails weren't there.

It slowly dawned on me that, having sent them back to Dolphin Sails for cleaning and checking, I had completely forgotten to pick them up again. They were closed for the weekend due to the bank holiday, so Oystercatcher sat, bare poled, while Caroline and I fumed about missing the perfect sailing weather. I picked up the sails the following week, got them bent on and then watched in dismay as the wind picked up and up. We should have been taking part in the season's first cup race, down the river, round Havergate Island and then home, but the thought of an eight-mile beat, short-tacking against a spring ebb and 25 knots of breeze, did not really appeal.

Surprisingly, my crew did not argue when I stood them down. At the club later I was pleased to see that everyone else had had the same idea. We postponed the race

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so that it could be rescheduled for a later date. It continued to blow hard for the entire royal wedding long weekend, topping 35 knots at times, so we are still waiting for the first sail. I don't think that we have ever been so late in all the years that I have owned boats.

Despite not yet having sailed my own boat, I skipped an entry in the Marine Industry Regatta, run by Sunsail out of Port Solent, with a crew comprised of PBO advertising and editorial staff. The day was bright and sunny, but unfortunately windless. The race officer managed to get us away for one race before the wind died completely. We drifted over the

finish line in third place and also picked up another trophy for

having the highest number of novices on board. Exactly one year since Aldeburgh Boatyard burnt down, we went to the reopening party. It has been a great achievement for it to remain in business for the past year, but also to build a wonderful new shed on the site. My congratulations to Peter Wilson and his team for making this happen.

■ 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

## Phew, that was a narrow escapade

Stu Davies experiences heightened perception when piloting a narrow boat over the Chirk Viaduct

I own a computer repair shop, and one of the joys is meeting new people. I keep pics of Sacha on the wall, and they can be a good conversation piece. The other day, a long-term customer came in to have his laptop fixed and in passing said that he had a 12.2m (40ft) narrow boat that was moored a few miles away. It had been moored there for a month and he had to move it: did I know anyone who could help him?

Having never 'driven' one, I thought: why not? I brought a couple of batteries back to the shop. They required a gallon of water each,

### The steel boat gaunched itself all the way across the viaduct

but took enough charge to get the two-cylinder Lister engine going. It was a sunny day as we set out from Chirk to Llangollen, a distance of around seven miles, which involved crossing the famous Chirk Viaduct. The first discovery was that we were pushing a current of about 1 knot, which is quite strong when the canal narrows as it goes underneath the bridges. Steering was another learning curve: 12.2m in front of the rudder, with a flat bottom, is not a recipe for precise handling! I had got the knack of it by time we reached the aqueduct, 36.6m (120ft) in the air crossing the River Dee, which is a cast iron trough with a footpath on one side

and thin air on the other – quite daunting for someone like me who doesn't like heights! The iron part over the Dee is actually only a few inches wider than the boat, and with the water being squeezed in, the current increased. We were pushed to port, and the steel boat gaunched itself all the way across the viaduct against the iron side. What amazed me was the apparent flimsiness of it all, 200-year-old iron sections held together with crude-looking bolts, and four or five tons of steel boat bouncing against it!

We turned left into the Llangollen cut at Froncsyllte and it grew quieter except for the evocative 'dug, dug, dug' of the Lister. We ran aground a few times: the canal had silted up east of the Bryn Howel Hotel, but British Waterways had a dredging outfit in the area. Llangollen was full of boats when we arrived, all of which must have bounced across the shallow bit the same as we did. All in all, totally different from steering a 11.6m (38ft) sloop, but it gave us an insight into how a big, flat-bottomed powered vessel reacts. It took us about four hours, so we averaged about 2 knots!

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



A flat bottom and 12.2m in front of the rudder precludes precise handling