

# Boat-owner's diary

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

## Splendid isolation



Ben Meakins savours the silence of quiet cruises in Newtown Creek and Beaulieu River

**T**here are few things better than beating up to a snug anchorage in a freshening breeze as ominous black clouds gather. You're safe in the knowledge that you can soon drop the hook, pull the hatch to and settle down as the wind begins to howl and the rain beats a tattoo on the deck. That feeling of snug, self-sufficient isolation is one to savour.

It's just as well, really – the Easter weekend provided ample opportunity to sample said isolation in a nicely empty Newtown Creek and a deserted Beaulieu River. In both, we swung to the huge spring tides without the continual anchoring chaos that usually accompanies a long bank holiday weekend later in the season or in better weather.

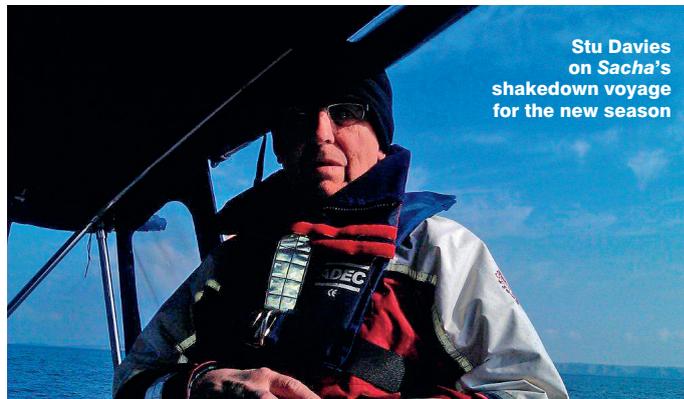
It wasn't all rain and wind, though: we had some excellent quiet sails in the conditions in which *Polly* excels, pointing high and slipping along in silence, slicing past heavier yachts which

just bobbed there with sails hanging limp. And when the heavens did open, we could catch up on some sleep, lose ourselves in a book and rustle up some fine meals on our two-burner stove.

We felt so beautifully cut off from the world that we jumped about a foot in the air when the harbour master came alongside and knocked on the hull for her dues, bringing us back to earth with a bump.

And that is exactly what cruising should be like. It doesn't matter what size your boat is or how far you sail – just being afloat, self-sufficient and master of your own destiny is enough to make you forget the stress of shore-bound life and slip into a routine governed by wind and tide. The only problem is that you have to go back to work eventually. Bank holidays just aren't long enough!

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



Stu Davies on Sacha's shakedown voyage for the new season

## In the pursuit of perfection



A pleasing pattern emerges for Stu Davies: now a perfect summer is all that's needed

**W**ell, here we are, our shakedown voyage complete! Beforehand, we had lifted *Sacha* for the annual dowsing in antifouling and carried out a few jobs – one of which was cutting access openings through the inner hull so that the anode bolts were bolted directly to the main hull.

We had four days on the hard then put her back in for the shakedown sail to Lundy: the forecast was Force 3-4 north-westerly, the sky blue and sun shining. Off we went at 4-5 knots under our 'new' (to us) No3 genoa and full main. We arrived at slack water so the races off the northern end were not a problem, dropped the hook and prepared dinner. We were nicely sheltered from the north-west, tightly tucked in.

I noticed we were starting to move around a bit, then saw that the wind had shifted to north-easterly and was rising. We were aware that it would soon get dark, so I suggested that we move around the corner to shelter. This was

worse – a katabatic wind howled through the gap between Rat Island and the main island. A quick decision was needed: we could beat back to Milford Haven or beat to Swansea, and opted for the latter.

It was full dark now, the wind was blowing at more than 20 knots and we were achieving 7.5 knots with just the No3 genoa up. It was fantastic! The tide was with us, but with the wind from the east it was lumpy with wind over tide. We took turns watching Vera the steerer (the autopilot) and I switched on the Eberspächer so it was cosy down below. After six hours we were off Swansea: we stoozed around until daylight then entered the marina for a full English and a lovely sleep.

We had had perfect weather for the 'on the hard' work, almost perfect weather for the shakedown cruise and our No3 genoa performed perfectly. Now we await the perfect summer...

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



Gentle cruising and close racing – the season is off to a good start

Barney Smith



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There's a kind of hush all over Ben Meakins' world, Tom Stevens loves nothing more than a peeling, David Pugh makes a director's cut to the jobs list, and Stu Davies looks forward to a summer of contentment

Missed last month's diaries? Visit [www.pbo.co.uk](http://www.pbo.co.uk) to catch up

## To do, or not to do



Some jobs on the 'to do' list can wait, says David Pugh – at least until the boat's back in the water

**W**e're afloat! After several years of letting the job list hold up launching *Red Dragon*, this year we took the sensible, rational alternative: shortened the job list.

This allowed us to get the boat from her winter storage down to Ridge Wharf Yacht Centre at Wareham, have her lifted in and spend the Easter weekend rigging, tweaking and finally moving her to her summer mooring while fellow boat owners desperately sanded, polished and slobbered antifouling. Permission to feel smug, sir?

Permission denied. Prior engagements had left us with Easter Sunday and Monday to get the boat sorted, which with the tides meant that Monday morning had to be delivery day. The day dawned blustery and wet, and was a salutary reminder of last year's lesson that sailing must take priority over other aspects of your personal life if you don't want to find yourself battling a squally Force 6.

Nevertheless, despite winds up to 30 knots and driving rain, it was great to be back on the water. The wind was behind us, which

always helps, but what instantly appealed was the feeling of stable instability beneath my feet – somehow you get bored with walking on dry land after a while.

Unfortunately, having pulled out all the stops to get the boat in the water by Easter, the things that I put off will now fill up the next couple of weekends. However, one of the privileges of working on PBO is that you can invent reasons to go sailing in the week, so Ben Meakins and I are thinking up gear tests, seamanship features and any other ideas that can take us away from sailing our desks and get us afloat.

There's still a bit of desk-sailing to go – we've been working hard on our *Essential Maintenance Guide*, a distillation of PBO practical wisdom due on sale in May – and of course we still have lots of work to do on our project boat, *Hantu Biru*. She's looking much better now we've stripped all the paint off – she'll be at Beaulieu Boatjumble on 29 April if you'd like to see her.

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



Late Easter weather isn't great, but *Red Dragon* is back in the water



Tom Stevens undertakes his favourite end-of-fitting-out task

## It's time to show off her bottom



Peeling away the tape between *Oystercatcher's* boot top and antifouling is bliss for Tom Stevens

**L**ast month I was bemoaning my total lack of progress and the terrible green tinge of jealousy was starting to show as more and more of my friends announced that they were all done and ready to launch. I am now very pleased with myself as, after a superhuman effort, I too am all done and ready to launch.

This superhuman effort was mainly to control my desire to chat to everybody and actually get on with the job. I was just about to roll the last coat of antifouling on when Mike, the elder of my racing crew, suggested that we might repair to his fully fitted-out boat for a refreshing drop of something. Normally I would have trotted off after him, but with my newfound steely determination I carried on and completed *Oystercatcher's* bottom. Every year I love that moment when I have done the last of the jobs and she is now ready. This is usually the lead-up to my favourite end-of-fitting-out moment,

when the masking tape comes off. There is something wonderful about peeling off 28ft of tape to reveal a knife-edge (nearly) straight line between the boot top and the antifouling. Suddenly she is looking smart again and looking forward to the coming season.

The boatyard takes over from here – stepping the mast, lifting her with the jumbo then trundling her the few hundred yards to the yacht club for launching. I shall not be around when she hits the water as the family are off on our annual surfing holiday in Cornwall, but I will still be worrying from afar what I might have forgotten. This year I have even remembered to collect my freshly-valeted sails from Dolphin so I am really looking forward to our first weekend afloat, actually being able to sail.

■ 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





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