

Boat-owner's diary

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

Tom Stevens makes a big hole in his cockpit, David Pugh wants to do more sailing, Stu Davies tackles a tricky passage, and Ben Meakins breaks his own promise for a leisurely lay-up

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No relaxation in spring sunshine



Next time, Ben Meakins will give himself longer for the winter refit. But he said that last year, too...

I'm not too bothered when we get the boat back in' I said as *Polly* came out of the water in February. 'Let's be relaxed this year and put her in when we're ready'. My girlfriend, Steph, just smiled and raised her eyebrows.

She was right to be sceptical. Five weeks of sunshine, sawdust and a lot of paint and polish later, *Polly's* back afloat and we're recovering from a month of little sleep. *Polly's* looking smart, with freshly painted decks, polished hull and super-smooth racing antifouling. We're not looking quite so alert, with bags under our eyes, antifouling in our hair and engine grease under our fingernails.

The thing is, as soon as she was safely on her trailer, the weather

improved. So as we rewired her electrics, stripped, dried out and repainted a soggy bunk side and smartened up her woodwork in the spring sunshine, we began to dream of this year's sailing adventures. The new season beckoned, as did the mooring we'd just paid for. Co-owners Adrian and Jo travelled from Bath to do their share of the work and made smart new forepeak cushions to replace the 30-year-old originals. We serviced the engine, replaced the stern gland packing, riveted in new shroud terminals and replaced the crazed nav lights.

We picked a launch day and the pressure ramped up, with the jobs

An 80-tonne travel hoist picked the boat up like a child's toy



With a weighty keel *Polly* is more stable than she looks on a trailer

list never seeming to shrink from a whole side of A4. Finally, however, we painted under the last of the trailer pads the night before launch.

Now there was only the small matter of the road trip from the driveway to the boatyard. *Polly* has a deep fin, with the result that she looks

high up and somewhat unwieldy on the road. The 1.5 tonnes of weight in the keel means this instability is only an illusion, but I still breathed a sigh of relief once the boat and trailer had negotiated the streets of Hamble and found

their way to the boatyard. We parked up, dwarfed by an 80-tonne travel hoist, which picked the boat up like a child's toy and placed her gently in the river.

So, she's now back afloat, with her mast stepped and kit aboard, and we were just in time to do the first double-handed race of the year. Next year, we're determined we'll give ourselves more time to tackle the yearly refit stress-free and slowly. Now where have I heard that before?

■ 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

Honest toil and appropriate oil



Red Dragon is on track to get back in the water by May, to David Pugh's cautious delight

Summer's on its way, and with it my spirits are lifting. They also lifted with *Red Dragon's* engine as it rose on the Weston hoist to rest in her cockpit. That's as far as it's got at the moment, but anyone who read about the parlous state of said engine last month will appreciate that this is a big step forward. Not a cheap

one admittedly, as we eventually opted to bolt the old gearbox, water pump and alternator to a new engine block, but hopefully one that will see us back on the water without further trouble.

It's still not certain what caused

the problem. The engine was loaded correctly, just reaching maximum revs when flat out, and was rarely left to idle. We definitely made one mistake by running the engine on semi-synthetic oil, which diesel expert Pat Manley counsels is not advisable for marine engines owing to their

often being run at static revs for long periods. Old-fashioned mineral oils are better, and you should also spend the first 50 hours with running-in oil in the engine, another sin of omission on our part. We'll do it right this time. Meanwhile, we still have the old engine block and are considering trying to fix it

We are considering trying to fix the old engine block ourselves



We used semi-synthetic oil: don't make the same mistake

ourselves, with some expert input from PBO contributors. Watch this space: there might be an article in it!

So, after all, it looks like we're on track to get in the water by early May. There are still a few jobs to be done as well as refitting the engine – antifouling for instance, and a couple of deck leaks to block up – but thanks to the Easter weekend and a bonus holiday the weekend after we should be able to trail her down to Wareham and launch her in time for a good season's sailing.

And, this year, I'm going to do what intelligent man is supposed to do and learn from my mistakes.

Last year, I planned to take some holiday at the last minute when the forecast looked good, and go sailing for a week or two. I never did: work always seemed too busy, or we had friends to visit, or the car needed servicing. Whatever the reason, weekend sailing ruled the roost. This year will be different. I'm going to book time off and go, whatever happens. You'll know when – I'll hang a notice in this space, saying 'Gone Sailing'.

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

A hole in my sole



Tom Stevens' big project this spring has been tackling the legacy of the winter project!

This year, I decided to break from tradition and not have *Oystercatcher* in the water by April Fools' Day. The Suffolk weather has not been springlike, and every time I visit her to work through the list of jobs I convince myself that conditions are too cold, windy, wet or generally unsuitable for fitting out. I missed the one good weekend that we had recently as we were away for a wedding.

Launch date is complicated further by the fact that we are taking the family on a 'surfin' safari' to the West Country, where no doubt the weather will be vile but perfect up in Suffolk. So, the planned launch is now the week leading up to Easter: subject, of

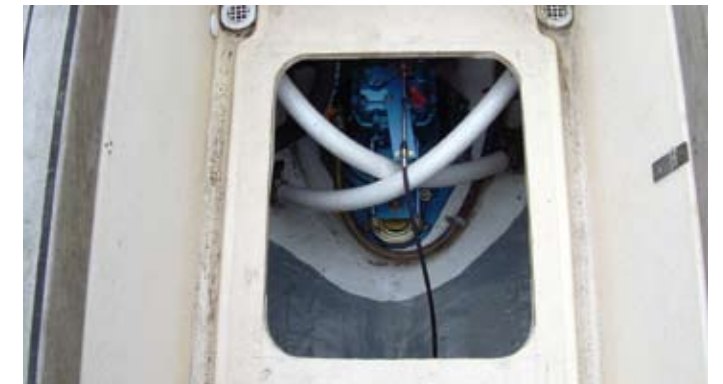
course, to the weather gods.

I have just had a very unnerving experience: my engineer and I had decided that the only way that we could guarantee that my saildrive leg would not leak again was to refit it in one piece and somehow get round the lack of access problem. After much measuring, the only solution unfortunately involves cutting a large hole in the cockpit sole.

I could almost feel my boat's pain and outrage as I cut into the cockpit

There is something very frightening and unnatural about cutting chunks

out of your own boat, and I could almost feel her pain and outrage as it was done. My wife, Caroline, is cross that I have vandalised the cockpit and even more convinced that I do this sort of thing because I can't be bothered to think of a



The controversial new access hatch in *Oystercatcher's* cockpit

more sensible solution. I'm confident that she will grow to love the new hatch!

Aldeburgh Yacht Club, of which I am commodore, is gearing up for the coming season as well. During the winter there has been the usual maintenance, sailing courses organised, calendars planned and printed, new computer system looked at and so on. Sailing started at the beginning of April but most members, including me, will not be ready until Easter. On Good Friday we have a volunteer work party to tidy up the dinghy and car parks, and this is always a very sociable event. We follow this on

Easter Saturday with our AGM, and then a quiz night in the evening. We all then feel that the season is properly under way.

One last thing. I mentioned last month that my kids had bought me a CD player for *Oystercatcher*. They are convinced I should be fitting an amplifier and 'boom box' so that they can enjoy deafening noise on the occasions when they borrow the boat. Fear not, fellow East Coast yachtsmen: I am resisting.

■ 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

Seeking a safe haven in Milford



Finding a new mooring site can be a moving and memorable experience, as Stu Davies relates

After finding that our berth in Pwllheli was untenable (see last month's PBO), a swift decision had to be made as to where we were going to moor our boat. Our choices boiled down to Holyhead or Milford Haven. Milford was the best bet price-wise, so we made plans.

We'd booked a lift for the weekend to antifoul, and planned to make a run for Milford on the Monday. But the forecast was for 50mph winds: not nice for making passage around St David's Head! A swift call to Partington Marine, and we were instead lifted out on the Thursday and back in on the Friday. High tide was at midnight and would let us get a push down to St David's Head ready for the

passage though Ramsey Sound and Jack Sound at or about slack water. Doing both sounds on the same trip means going through Ramsey Sound two hours early to reach Jack Sound, the more dangerous of the two, at slack water. We've done this before, our 50hp diesel pushing 6 knots of tide. This is all well and good if the wind isn't against the tide.

The tide was nearly at Neaps, yet two hours before HW it was coming into the harbour at 6 knots. I was glad we were going at high tide: the thought of pushing against 6 knots in the dark in Pwllheli Harbour filled me with horror! We set off at

The thought of pushing against 6 knots in the dark filled me with horror



Sacha is now safely at her new home in Milford Haven

midnight, a cold clear night, with hardly any wind. Laura was on the bow with the 'steamer scarer', two million candlepower of short-lived torch, to guide us out of the harbour. We motored on until past Abersoch and its outlying islands.

Laura had elected to do the first four hours, so I went below to sleep.

I dozed, then went to relieve Laura at 0400. Daylight slowly came, and with it some warmth. We arrived at St David's Head an hour early! We stogged around a bit then lined up for Ramsey Sound. The wind was gusting at

20 knots, not nice against the tide. We poked our nose into the sound, then bash! Big waves caused by wind over tide, so we peeled off into Whitesands Bay and waited for the tide to abate.

Finally, one hour before slack, we tried again and went through. The result was that we would now miss slack at Jack Sound, so we went around Skokholm and Skomer Islands instead.

We finally arrived at the mouth of the Haven at 1600, tired but happy to have made it.

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