


Boat-owner's diary

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

Ben Meakins puts the kettle on, Stu Davies gets all lit up with a dodgy plug socket, David Pugh reckons it's time to put the comfort back into cruising, and Tom Stevens beats a hasty retreat from a snow-covered boat

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

A spot of hot water

 Ben Meakins takes a shine to his prop and finds a kettle of boiling water useful for more than just making the tea

Part of the appeal of boat ownership is being able to exercise the little grey cells and apply what management types like to call 'blue sky thinking' to solve the inevitable problems that the winter refit throws up. Or at least, that's what we tell ourselves once the initial bout of swearing has passed.

All last year the crew complained that 'the jib halyard is really stiff'. Of course, every time I tried to see what the problem was, it behaved impeccably and ran smoothly – something it spectacularly failed to do every time we approached a leeward mark at speed.

To get to the sheave, we needed to take the sheave box out. It's secured by two stainless steel machine screws which go through the mast wall and are tapped into



A mirror shine to the folding prop keeps fouling at bay for better speed

the alloy of the sheave box. The first came out easily, but the second was perfectly happy to sit and stew in its own corrosion, thank you very much, and wouldn't budge. We left it for two weeks with penetrating oil seeping in, but to no avail. Then, on a sub-zero morning, I poured a kettle-full of boiling water over it, and – hey presto – it shifted effortlessly to reveal a worn sheave and pin. It's



With Polly's mast down the sheave box could be attended to

the simple solutions that are the most pleasing!


We also found an elegant solution to stopping fouling on the propeller. After a year of attempting to polish it by hand – which looked great, but just seemed to give the creatures a better foothold – we gave it to a machine shop for a day: they polished the propeller and shaft to an incredible like-new mirror shine for under a tenner.

This kept the creatures of the deep off the prop – and gave noticeably better speed under engine.

Tick, tick, tick... The to-do list is slowly getting shorter, despite the freezing weather. Which is just as well: we want to go sailing!

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

A couple of hot topics

 Marina prices are falling and berths are becoming available, reports Stu Davies: now all he has to do is prevent *Sacha* from catching fire

Not long after writing about how pleasant a winter's drive through mid-Wales to and from our boat in Milford Haven could be, we had a lousy trip home to Llangollen. One dark evening, slowed down by Mr Trilby Hat and a tanker with several cars in between, it was horrendous. The journey took us more than four hours that evening – and put disloyal thoughts into my head about moving the boat back up north...

That night, I noticed a post on the PBO forum about marina discounts and contacted a few of the guys. They confirmed that some offers were starting to appear, so the following day I phoned around.

Port Dinorwic: 'Yes, we have plenty of space, it would cost £2,800 a year for your boat'.

Conwy: 'Yes, there's a 15% discount, £3,646 a year'.

Holyhead: 'Yes, an immediate discount of 5%, £3,424 a year' – with hints of a further discount if I pushed it.

This all made for a pleasant change from 12 years ago, when I first started looking for a berth for my boat.

However, after my driving-related frustration had subsided, we

thought about it again. A berth in Milford Haven cost me £2,259 last year, minus a discount for being a member of Pembrokeshire Yacht Club. The haven is beautiful to sail in, and from there we are closer than those other marinas



ABOVE This was taken on a Sunday night coming home from the boat through the Preseli Mountains – I was thankful I have snow tyres on my car

Laura detected a smell of burning: we looked around and saw that the plug of the 4-gang socket was on fire! I hurriedly switched everything off: the live pin had overheated and melted the plug cover. I am investigating further and will report back: the frightening thing is that last winter, when it was really cold, we would leave the heater running all night to keep the chill off...

■ Check out marina prices in your area – see PBO's Marina Price Guide from page 56.

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




Dodgy plug caught fire

to France, southern Ireland and the Scilly Isles.

I enquired about the fees for this year and they have indeed gone up, but are still less than they would be up north – just £2,394. The decision has been made, therefore: we are staying put. But the message is there – the tide is turning as far as the price and availability of berths is concerned.

On a more sobering note, Laura and I were snuggled down in *Sacha*'s saloon on Saturday night, fan heater on, watching the TV.

Let me sleep on it

 The application of some new foam and upholstery should make for cosier cabins, says David Pugh

In a previous column I cast doubt on the wisdom of working on two boats at once, but this month *Red Dragon* has provided a welcome, creative diversion from the continuous destruction that marks what we call 'progress' with the PBO Project Boat.

Some time ago my brother Ben's fiancée Janice foolishly agreed to make new mattress cushions for *Red Dragon*, and this year we decided to hold her to it.

The fabric was bought some time ago from a marine upholsterer who had an end-of-roll available at a knockdown price, and a few weeks ago Ben and Janice spent a while crawling around the boat making templates for the cushions.

I duly took these home to Poole, where foam specialists PolyFoam used them to cut perfectly-sized mattresses from three-inch foam. Last weekend we offered them up and they fitted perfectly – with a little fettling with a bread knife where we'd got a template wrong.

Replacement is a necessary task. In the saloon we've been sleeping

on a second-hand set of cushions snaffled from a fellow Contessa 26 owner which, while adequate, are grubby and too thick – you can't easily roll over when your feet are in the trotter box. The forecabin cushions, by contrast, are far too thin, so a night up for'ard inevitably results in a bad back and bad temper.

In addition, the forward bunks are only about 18in wide at the shoulders, tapering to nothing. So, with new cushions comes a

new layout. We're keeping it simple, with a small infill panel to slot between the berths and make the whole forecabin a snug double berth. Not only does this mean that you'll no longer have to wave to your beloved across the inconsiderable expanse of a Contessa's saloon, it will also



It's service time for *Red Dragon*'s bronze seacocks

allow us to store junk in the trotter boxes when sailing two-up – a huge advantage on a stowage-challenged yacht.

With this in mind, while Ben serviced our seacocks one recent weekend I set to with saw and chisel remodelling the forecabin for the infill. It's not a big job – just making a couple of timber fiddles a bit shallower and adding a pair of support battens – but even so it's a heart-in-mouth moment when you take a blade to Jeremy Rogers' handiwork.


The job isn't finished, but I'm pleased so far and looking forward to a comfortable 2012 – even lying on the uncovered foam made me want to nod off!

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



It's too chilly to work on *Oystercatcher* in this sort of weather

The roar of the fire

 Abandoning the boat to the elements, Tom Stevens settles down with a good old sailing book

In my last diary I welcomed the fact that the weather was improving and I was looking forward to the fitting out. My word, how things have changed!

Last weekend I went down to Aldeburgh Boatyard to check on *Oystercatcher*, with a vague plan to do a few little jobs, but within minutes I had changed my mind and scurried back home to watch the rugby in front of a blazing fire.

Having scraped the snow off the hatch, de-iced the lock and washboards and made my way below, I was soon put off by her normally welcoming saloon.

Boats at this time of year never look their best with all the upholstery and cushions removed, bookshelves and wine rack empty and everything cold and slightly damp. The small amount of water in the bilge sump came out in one solid lump, which I suppose saved my fingers from freezing as I sponged it out, but my new 'let's get on with the jobs' attitude disappeared in a flash and I was off, abandoning poor *Oystercatcher* to the elements.

Sadly, my workshop is also well below zero so, much to Caroline's disgust, I have commandeered the

dining room so I can carry on with my woodworking and varnishing. The dining table makes an excellent surface to lay everything out on, the lighting is good and it's nearer the kitchen for all those coffee breaks. I'm amazed that I haven't thought of this before!

I've been given three boxes of old sailing books by a friend who is trying to make room on his sagging bookshelves. As a boy I avidly read books by Chichester, the Hiscocks, the Smeetons and my favourite, John Guzewell, so I have really enjoyed leafing through this new batch of books. I still think that long-distance sailing in those days was heroic, with no modern aids to navigation, safety or even any decent clothing that we now all take for granted. I have found several gems in these boxes and am really looking forward to reading them, in front of the fire, when I probably should be down at the boatyard, giving *Oystercatcher* some attention.

■ 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

vetus **Don't buy a toilet from Vetus**
– buy a complete waste water system!
023 8045 4507 • sales@vetus.co.uk • www.vetus.co.uk
NEW 3 Year Warranty on marine equipment