

Boat-owner's diary

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

Ben Meakins experiences withdrawal symptoms, Tom Stevens advocates a different type of heeling, David Pugh alternates the Solent Chop with a sullen shop and Stu Davies finally enters winter maintenance mode

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

The wind in his vanes



An addicted Ben Meakins finds mainlining – when it's the South Coast main line – a very poor substitute for sail

Forgive the confessional tone this month, doctor, but I'm at a loose end and I don't know where to turn. From Sunday evening to Saturday night, ever since early October, I've become a slave to a powerful drug: let's call it Crystal Meteo.

Regular as clockwork, I find myself checking the wind forecast every three hours, as soon as the new GRIB file is available, for the coming Sunday's racing. Then on Sundays we go sailing, and I'm free for a few short hours from the siren call of the weather forecast.

But as soon as we get back on dry land, the urge returns and the ritual starts again. Since the winter series ended, since we lowered the mast and lifted the boat onto



Withdrawal symptoms persist when memories of the winter sailing fade

her trailer, I've been like a fish out of water. The sailing season's officially over, but it's hard to let go.

This addiction is nothing new. I was exactly the same after a few weeks on board in the summer.

headwind. Catching a connecting train at Southampton Central just doesn't give me the same buzz as successfully catching a tidal gate off Portland, La Corbière or Cap de la Hague.

There's only one known cure for this malady, and that's to go sailing – where, unlike on the train to work, you don't get odd looks when furtively checking Windguru on your phone while all around you are on Facebook. It's also socially acceptable to discuss an approaching depression with passers-by. But the boat's out of the water now, so sailing's off the menu.

Mind you, the Sunday following the end of the winter series was grim, with torrential rain and gale-force winds. I'm prepared to admit that staying in bed while the rain lashed the windows felt pretty damn good. Maybe there's hope for me after all!

■ 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 fair passage to a fine pub lunch



Tom Stevens, friends and fellow sailors adhere to a passage plan with a difference – on dry land

I have now completed the winter lay-up process. The engine has been serviced and winterised, all the ropes have been washed and rinsed, the blocks and sheet cars have also been thoroughly de-salted and dried, the sails have been dispatched for valeting, the batteries have been removed and charged, the long list of little things has been ticked off and I'm feeling quite pleased with myself.

So, what does a boat-owner do in the middle of winter, between laying-up and the London

Boat Show, when we start thinking about what we might need for the coming season?

The answer for us is a long walk with friends. This might not appear to have anything to do with boats and sailing, but it is remarkably

similar to a cruise in company. There has to be a passage plan to include a briefing, arranging assembly points, start time, ETA, the onshore version of tidal gates, a bale-out plan in case of bad weather, working out a realistic average speed to ensure that the walk can be carried through and, finally, arranging a safe berth at the end. I should add that it was not me doing the passage plan but our good friend Beverley, married to

one of my regular racing crew.

This year the walk was from Eastbridge to

Southwold, where we were booked into the Crown for lunch. There were 20 of us involved, many from the yacht club. Some wanted to do the whole walk, some would only do half and a few would just drive to Southwold and then be our taxi



A walk with boating friends is remarkably similar to a cruise in company

service back home. Seven of us arrived at the first assembly point in Eastbridge at 0830 and set out at the correct speed to arrive at our first tidal gate, the tearooms in Dunwich, which do not open until 1000. The sun was shining and we had fair winds so we made good progress and arrived slightly early. This was also our second assembly point and, over the next half-hour, the rest of the walking party drifted in and joined us for tea.

Suitably fortified, we set off again toward Southwold, still in bright sunshine and with a fair breeze. Our next tidal gate was the Harbour

Inn, just over the Bailey bridge from Walberswick to Southwold where we had another bracing drink before walking the final stretch to the Crown. This short stop also produced another familiar sailing sensation, that of 'harbour fever', but we forced ourselves onwards after only one pint and completed the voyage, met up with the non-walkers and all in perfect time for a splendid lunch. A fine passage, well planned and well made.

■ 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



Testing lifejackets can be fun – but we're about to get grittily wet

One bit at a time



David Pugh convinces himself that buying bits for future projects equates to 'making progress'

In last month's diary, I noted that our PBO Project Boat, *Hantu Biru*, had supplanted *Red Dragon* in terms of time spent on boat maintenance.

Now, I have to hang my head still further and admit that my practical boat ownership this month has been limited to buying bits for future projects – that cop-out many of us use to feel like we're making progress when, in reality, we're not.

My excuse is that, owing to a certain midwinter holiday, this issue of PBO has to be completed in less than two-thirds the usual time. This allows the printers to have a holiday but leaves little time for the more pleasurable things in life, such as angle-grinding *Hantu Biru*'s bolts.

On the upside, once we've gone to press the downhill run to Christmas will hopefully give Ben Meakins and I a chance to forge ahead. We plan to start by making a tent, possibly followed by installing a heater and a kettle.

One of the benefits of working for PBO, however, is that even when work pressures get in the way of boat ownership, work can still involve boating. In the last two weeks I have been afloat twice, once to don a range of lifejackets for Ben's test this issue (see page

46), and again for a future gear test.

Both days were characterised by weird weather – the first instance a flat, sunny calm rapidly replaced by a 20-odd knot squall with hard bits in it, and the second by some serious breeze. We set out in 25 knots, recording gusts in the 30s, and by the time we came in again the average wind was well into a Force 8, complete with a 50-knot gust at one point.

In sheltered water with only a double-reefed main up the boat shrugged off the conditions with aplomb, but it's a salutary reminder of ocean racers with nowhere to run. As I write, the Transat B to B (St Barthélemy to Brittany) has been diverted owing to adverse weather, the Global Ocean

Race fleet are struggling to avoid a vicious anticyclone in the Indian Ocean and the Volvo Ocean Race is bracing itself for six-metre waves as a 30-knot south-westerly opposes the Agulhas Current off the southern tip of Africa.

Good luck boys – but I'm for Christmas pud, onshore boat-bashing and a bit of coastal pottering within reach of the pub.

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

Don't play it cool in winter



Unseasonal mildness almost leads Stu Davies to put off winterising his boat...



Higher-than-average temperatures can lull you into a false sense of security

Finally, we are in proper winter maintenance mode. We have been going to Milford, fully expecting the weather to be horrible but finding that it has actually been very nice. The thought of winterising the engine has therefore been moved to the back of our minds – but remembering the very low temperatures experienced in Wales from mid-December last year, we felt it best not to put it off any longer.

On our Volvo MD22 there is a Vetus raw water strainer bolted to the rear. To winterise the engine, all I do is remove the strainer lid by undoing a wing nut, leave the raw water intake seacock shut and pour in some antifreeze mixed 50/50 with fresh water, then start the engine. As the level drops in the strainer, I just top it up. I use a 4lit bottle of antifreeze, sufficient to fill the raw water pump housing and the intercooler, with some also poured into the exhaust muffler.

Another job that needed doing this winter was changing the plastic raw water hoses, fitting a Speedseal to the raw water pump and overhauling the siphon break in the raw water system. All the parts had already been sourced –



The engine looks good with its shiny new bits

some from Southampton Boat Show – so I did the maintenance bits and pieces first before putting the antifreeze into the system.

The engine looks good with its shiny new bits, and it is winterised and ready for next season. All that is left to do is some modifications to the Eberspächer air circulation ducting, fitting a new twist-and-lock Jabsco heads handle and tidying up the MOB gear.

I enjoy my winter maintenance jobs just as much as the sailing. Visiting our 'weekend cottage' is very pleasant even in the depths of winter: the run through Mid Wales is a lot easier with not so many holidaymakers on the road.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed your Christmas celebrations, and I wish you a happy New Year.

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