

# Boat-owner's diary

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

Ben Meakins spectacularly fails to get away from it all, the weather taunts David Pugh with cruel precision, Tom Stevens gets served with an ace feast, and Stu Davies errs on the side of caution to bring up the rear

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

## How dare you pick my spot...

Newtown Creek evidently merits a seal of approval, but Ben Meakins prefers it out of season

It's a well-known fact that there are no undiscovered havens in the Solent. Therefore, the few unspoiled places are very well known, and to experience them at their best you need to visit them out of season or on a day when no sane person would venture forth.

This was amply demonstrated over the August bank holiday, a good chance – we thought – to head to Newtown Creek, recharge our batteries and catch up on some rest. On Saturday, we beat there with a strong ebb tide heaping up a vertiginous and rather wet chop

**Everyone seemed determined to anchor in 'our' patch of water**

that knocked a good few knots off our speed and soon made us think longingly of our oilskins, still down below in their bag. We had been expecting the proverbial sardine-tin conditions as we motored into Newtown, but the brisk wind and heavy rain showers had evidently persuaded the masses to stay at home. There was ample room to sling a hook and relax in our snug cabin as the rain pattered on the coachroof and the wind whistled through the rigging.

Sunday was a different story. The wind abated, the sun came out and the hordes descended. It was a great place for people watching: there were single-handers in their

small keelboats, grizzled seadogs in their heavy, battle-scarred cruising boats and sailing schools in their large Bavarias. There were motorboats of all shapes and sizes and there were families in their Westerly Centaurs, with Mirror dinghies and Optimists in tow. Every one of them seemed determined to anchor in 'our' patch of water, and one or two apparently hell-bent on locating – with pinpoint accuracy – the exact spot where our anchor was dug in.

I must have looked like a hyperactive meerkat as the rattle of chain or the churning of propellers and bow thrusters saw me sprinting for the companionway to glower at the latest approaching boat. Worst of all was when the ebb began and we all sailed around our anchors – but miraculously no damage was done and sanity returned with the turning of the tide. A lone grey seal swam around the anchored boats as dusk fell.

Even with close to 50 boats jostling for space, Newtown was a magical place. We can't wait to visit in the winter with only the birds and the seal for company.

■ 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



Newtown Creek: a magical place at any time of the year



Ben and Janice enjoy a dawn cuppa as the iron sail pushes us doggedly in the opposite direction to the one in which we were supposed to be going

## Sailing weather: a law unto itself

Be careful what you don't wish for: Sod conspires with Machiavelli to thwart David Pugh's plans anew

Last month, I put forward the theory that sailing weather is governed by the law of Sod. Furthermore, I predicted that my efforts to sail *Red Dragon* from Poole to Falmouth over the course of two or three days would be thwarted either by a westerly gale or a flat calm.

I was wrong. With a Machiavellian twist, Sod adjusted my plans by bringing about both predictions: gales AND flat calm. On Saturday morning, my brother Ben, his fiancée Janice and I set out from Poole, carefully timed to catch the tide

as far as Portland, traverse the race at slack water and take advantage of the weaker tide in the offshore reaches of Lyme Bay to make our passage to Start Bay.

We started off well, close-hauled to a freshening westerly and making good a course fairly close to where we wanted to go.

Unfortunately, as we passed Swanage and met the full force of the east-going swell, exacerbated by the west-going tide and westerly wind, the sea reached a state of enthusiasm only surpassed by the growing lack thereof in the green faces of the crew. The prospect of several hours' night sailing, hard

on the wind in a roiling sea, did not appeal so we turned right and went to Weymouth.

The weather was much the same on Sunday, so we stayed in port and fitted our new sprayhood. The previous day it had languished below decks while the spray galloped unimpeded over the coachroof and down our necks, so the incentive was clear. Tomorrow, we thought, we would use this pesterly westerly and spinnaker home to Poole through a Purbeck dawn. Instead, we motored over a glassy sea back to Studland Bay where we stopped for breakfast, our new

sprayhood unscathed by a single grain of salt. Dropping the hook, however, brought the first breaths of a freshening north-westerly, and we finally beat back through the harbour entrance in flat water to have the best sail of the trip.

So, Sod 1, Pugh 0. But I can't accept that you get the best sailing by staying at home, so we'll try again next weekend. One forecast predicts easterlies and the other westerlies – I hope for one and confidently anticipate the other.

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

## Anyone for tennis elbow?

Tom Stevens has a stout rebuff to injury, and settles into a Moroccan role at an end-of-regatta party

We have just taken part in Aldeburgh Yacht Club's regatta, sailed over six days. There are starts for a variety of One Designs, both dinghy and keelboat, and handicap racing for cruisers and all comers.

As usual I sailed in the morning races with Rory Bowman in his *Dragon* then raced *Oystercatcher* in the afternoon cruiser B handicap fleet. I somehow got a bad case of tennis elbow during the first day – despite not having played the game for several months – and the regatta got increasingly painful for me. I attempted to control the discomfort with bandages, painkillers etc, but

**A number of 'Tommy Coopers' wore dinner suits and a fez**

the best solution was to keep topping up my bloodstream with carefully controlled pints of stout.

The racing week pauses while Aldeburgh Carnival takes place, and a lot of our members take part. The grand finale of carnival day is a Chinese lantern parade down the high street followed by a firework display on the beach. On carnival day morning, some of our dinghy classes will have hauled themselves over the wall to take part in a couple of races.

During the week we also have dinners for all the classes, a junior disco and an end of regatta party in the clubhouse and our adjoining marquee. It was dry and sunny on

the Friday afternoon so we held the prizegiving on the terrace while the party rooms were transformed for the 'Moroccan' theme. The club and marquee were decked out with rugs, scatter cushions and wall hangings, and 170 of us sat down to a Moroccan feast, joined later for dancing by a further 40 people.

The invite said that the dress should be Moroccan or black tie and most members made an effort, although there were a large number of 'Tommy Coopers' wearing dinner suits and a fez. I fell into the latter category, but had a

huge turban which looked like a pumpkin stuck on my head. As to the results, we won all races bar one in the *Dragon*, and came second in the cruiser handicap to a beautifully restored *Stella*, visiting from her home port of Levington. If any of you are interested in taking part in our regatta week, the dates for next year are August 12-17. See you there!

■ 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



Aldeburgh Yacht Club's One Design fleet of Dragons heads upwind

## A lasting memory

Stu Davies takes part in a yacht club regatta's weekend race, and finishes a cheerful last

By the time you read this, the season will be coming to an end. It has been one of weather coming in from the south-west, and trying to pick a day or two in between the fronts to enjoy some pleasant sailing. Those days have been few and far between, so when I heard that **Pembrokeshire Yacht Club** would be running a regatta weekend halfway through August, it was something to look forward to.

We duly arranged to take part in the Sunday race: nice-ish weather was forecast, if a bit windy. We then found out that Milford Haven Marina was celebrating its 20th birthday on the same weekend, so we promised to bring my mother-in-law, sister-in-law and young niece.

The Saturday was spent enjoying the face-painting etc, nicely rounded off by a free meal in the

marquee and drinks from the marina. Several important announcements were made at the meal, including the news that the lock at Milford is going to be made smaller, thus allowing locking on demand. The work is scheduled for completion in 2013. Also, perks were announced for existing berth holders if they can encourage other boat owners to berth in the marina. Here goes then: Milford really is a bargain, less than half the price of some Welsh marinas, and I haven't regretted moving there – or should I say, my wallet hasn't.

The day of the race came along and it was a strange situation, racing amongst enormous tankers. As I understand it, Milford Haven Port Control schedules movements

**I went astern of the tanker: I didn't fancy ending up on YouTube**

so that the once-yearly race can safely take place. Indeed, as we got to the mouth of the haven we could hear several tankers telling MHPC that they were holding back so that the fleet could pass the outer mark without interruption.

The wind was quite stiff from the south-west and we were overpressed at times, with an enormous broach sobering us up a bit. We arrived at the outer mark with one of the tankers turning

BELOW Stu with Pembrokeshire Marine Group general manager Nathan Hewitt and the revised locking times



ABOVE Stu enjoys the hospitality with his in-laws at Milford Haven Marina's 20th birthday event

towards us, so I called him and he said he could see us, and to stand on. However, I opted to go astern of him – I didn't fancy ending up on YouTube like a certain boat off Cowes the other week – and let him know. He was very pleasant, and kept thanking us. We eventually finished... in last place! Ah well, it was good sailing, the sun finally shone, and my mother-in-law enjoyed herself immensely.

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