

Boat-owner's diary

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

Ben Meakins gets into a row with his father, David Pugh sticks to the straight and narrow on his stag weekend, Tom Stevens enjoys a taste of sailing history and Stu Davies anticipates the onset of winter

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Blocked by a lock

 Ben Meakins talks the talk and beats the clock but gets caught by the flock in the Great River Race

After her cross-Channel cruise this summer *Polly* hasn't been idle, but I am ashamed to say that in the warm late-summer water she sprouted a beard that would be the envy of Brian Blessed. The engine wouldn't reach full revs and the once pearly-white bottom was brown and green and a velvet texture. After a long and arduous scrub, she's back to her hydrodynamic best: I hereby promise to keep her cleaner, and hope she'll forgive us.

Mid-September saw a quite different type of boating. I competed in the Great River Race, a 22-mile rowing marathon up the Thames, starting at the Isle of Dogs and ending at Ham, near Richmond, 28 bridges later. I was rowing with my dad in an Acorn 15 skiff. The race takes the form of a pursuit race, and we crossed the start line off Millwall at a good pace, with a following breeze and in good spirits. As we rounded the bend in the river and approached Tower Bridge, the wind-against-tide chop threatened to sink us: only the sterling bailing efforts of our two 10-year-old crew kept us afloat as we tried to make headway through the water. We'd started early, and soon overtook the clunky gigs and pinnaces that had started ahead. But where was the chasing pack?

Soon we were beyond caring, as a 25-knot headwind and hailstorm whistled down on us, washing sun cream into our eyes and cooling our complaining muscles.

Meanwhile, the mighty flood tide carried us Ham-wards at a good 2 knots. We ticked the bridges off, one by one. After Kew Bridge, there was a two-mile stretch to take us to Richmond Lock and up towards the finish. We girded our tired muscles to keep ahead of the as-yet invisible chasing pack.

You can imagine our dismay, then, to find that the lock was closed, and our arrival had taken



Meakins senior and junior, plus two 10-year-old crew, make headway

the lock-keepers by surprise. The wait was interminable as the lock slowly opened and a PLA launch held us back for five minutes.

Worst of all, round the bend in the river came the pursuers, speedy dragon boats with hordes of paddlers and Celtic longboats full of angry Welshmen. As the gates opened, we were let through and had a major sense of humour failure as fast boat after fast boat roared past. We eventually crossed the line in ninth place, five minutes behind the first boat – almost exactly the time we'd had to wait at the lock.

The organisers didn't want to know, which put a definite dampener on the day – but a good jazz band and some hearty roast pig put it behind us.

We wuz robbed: we'll just have to return next year for another go!

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



David Pugh, Dave Stevens and Matt Dury contemplate a cuppa – or a pint

Stay, and keep tea in your cups...

 A stag-partying David Pugh springs to the aid of tea-spilling canal boaters in Warwickshire

After spending two instalments of *Boat-owner's diary* moaning about the weather, I could carry on – but I won't. Well, not much.

In a nutshell, our second attempt to cross Lyme Bay also ended in Weymouth. This time, we rounded Portland Bill with several hours of favourable tide underneath us and a Force 6 on the nose. The waves were mountainous, but under flattened full main and our working jib Red Dragon was making good progress.

She still was, three hours later in a burgeoning Force 7 and with the main reefed down, but with darkness in the offing, more wind in the forecast and another sail change on the cards, things weren't looking comfortable. I'm confident the boat would have been fine, but the sailing would have been exhausting. We opted to turn back, scudding back to Weymouth under headsail and sneaking under the beams of Portland light in the gathering darkness. A week of gales followed, and so ended my brother and his fiancée's sailing holiday. They ended up chartering a motorboat in Norfolk.

I've also been ditch-crawling this month, tearing round Warwickshire canals at 4mph with nine other blokes for my stag celebrations –

by the time this goes to press, I'll be a married man. Canal boating is relaxing, but from a sailing background it takes a bit of getting used to. Fenders are optional to nonexistent, there's usually little to do, and mooring involves driving at the bank and tying on a couple of breast lines. It's this last where I think our canal boating friends could learn from seagoing folk – the importance of springs.

Accepted practice on canals is to creep past moored boats so slowly that there's hardly any steerage; a pleasant courtesy, but one that can result in your making most of your journey at a snail's pace.

The reason is to avoid wash, but even at full chat a flat-bottomed narrowboat makes barely a ripple.

The problem is surge: as the boat passes along, the displacement causes a strong flow in the opposite direction, which reverses once the boat has passed. This causes moored boats to move violently back and forth and spill the occupants' tea.

The solution, to a yachting, is obvious: deploy springs. The result will be a faster canal system, fewer glazed engine cylinder bores – and less spilled tea.

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

The solution, to a yachting, is obvious: deploy springs

Bona-fide masts from the past

 Tom Stevens races back in time in the company of bawleys, smacks and other traditional yachts

While of course favouring my *Oystercatcher* I do enjoy the opportunity to sail other people's boats, especially if they are very different and allow me to enjoy something new. Such an opportunity came my way when I was invited by our Loch Long class captain, David Trower, to join him and a few other club members and take part in the Maldon Town Regatta races.

In a previous life I resided in Brightlingsea, building boats for the long-defunct Cox Marine, and admired all the traditional fishing and oyster boats that were moored there. David had chartered the beautifully restored 36ft (plus a mile of bowsprit!) bawley *Bona*, built in 1903, and we were to race her against other bawleys, smacks and traditional

yachts. The extraordinary sight, as we all assembled for the start off the Nass Beacon, made me feel that we had stepped back a century, surrounded by 30 or so working and cruising boats from the past.

The programme was for two races, the first being about three hours long and finishing by Osea Island where we would all anchor for lunch, then a second race – more of a parade of sail – into Maldon where there would be free beer for all who had taken part: encouragement, if any were needed!

All of us are used to racing fairly close-winded boats and the none-too-impressive tacking angles took a bit of getting used to, but *Bona* was a joy to sail despite carrying quite a lot of weather helm

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Tom Stevens in the beautifully restored 1903 bawley *Bona*

in the fresh breeze. Judging the port and starboard crossings when all around you are racing hard and have long and dangerous-looking bowsprits was quite unnerving, but our skipper (and the boat's owner) Ian was very relaxed about the whole thing.

Sadly, as we finished the first race the wind had increased and

was blowing hard so most competitors, including ourselves, decided not to take part in the parade of sail and we headed back to Brightlingsea, sailing away from all that beer. We consoled ourselves by heading to the bar in Colne Yacht Club for a couple of pints. I have no idea how we did in the race, but it was a wonderful experience and great fun.

This summer seems to have slipped away with alarming speed, and I find myself counting the remaining possible weekends for cruising before *Oystercatcher* has to be laid up in Aldeburgh Boatyard at the end of October. There aren't many, but early signs are for an Indian summer so we'll take advantage of every chance to go cruising. No doubt we will be thwarted at every turn, but I live in hope.

■ 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

The Béné hull show

 As the topic of winter maintenance arises, Stu Davies brings *Sacha's* through-hull fittings into the spotlight

The season is drawing to a close, and thoughts have now turned to winter maintenance and what we are going to do to *Sacha* in preparation for next year. When we bought her she was in a pretty dire state, and work has been ongoing – as can be seen by my Practical Project articles in PBO over the last year or so.

Most of the jobs that needed doing were cosmetic ones, but we also fixed a few problems that could have been dangerous. She is in pretty good shape now, but one of the issues that has bugged me is the state of the raw water system. On the Volvo Penta MD22, the raw water pump

sits at the upper back end of the engine: it is difficult to reach for changing the impeller, and the raw water pipes going to and from it are clear with a helical steel reinforcing. These are now discoloured and have hardened, so we are going to change them and at the same time fit a Speedseal conversion to the pump.

We are also going to lift her this year and keep her on the hard for a couple of weeks.

We normally don't bother: just a lift and a scrub is OK with a Béné, osmosis doesn't seem to raise its ugly head with these later boats.

There is however an issue with one of the anodes and the bodged fixings of the anode bolts: these



The pipes going to and from *Sacha's* raw water pump need replacing

need to come out, the bolt holes need cleaning up and the bolts refixing properly.

The opportunity to check the through-hull fittings will be taken as well – some well-deserved concerns are seemingly being raised about the use of certain types of fittings!

As members of the Bénéteau Owners Association, we got free tickets (donated by Bénéteau) for the Southampton Boat Show, so we visited on the last Saturday. The

sun shone beautifully and we managed to buy some much-needed bits and pieces for this winter's updates.

It was noticeable there were fewer manufacturers on the main boat aisle and that prices were much higher than in previous years – no wonder the price of second-hand boats is also going up!

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