

Boat-owner's diary

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

Ben Meakins receives a polite RIB-bing from customs officials, David Pugh has a Great British Gripe about the weather, Tom Stevens feels charitable about the Alde, and Stu Davies sails to Dale

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The RIB returns to HMC Searcher following Polly's inspection

A customs cutter – I do declare...

A law-abiding Ben Meakins is treated in the manner to which he is accustomed

We were sailing slowly and very reluctantly home after two weeks' blissful cruising in north Brittany, and had slipped easily into a relaxed passage-making routine. Polly was 12 miles south of the Isle of Wight when we first saw the menacing outline of a customs cutter on the horizon.

Next thing we knew, HMC Searcher was roaring up to our starboard quarter, looking like a mini destroyer at full speed, her fine bow throwing aside sheets of water. Up to our port quarter planed a large black RIB. 'May we come aboard, sir?' asked a black-clad official. It seemed sensible to agree.

The two inspectors clambered aboard as we went head to wind in a light easterly breeze. The one in

He offered to clean off the black shoeprint from the side deck

charge presented his shiny badge and asked where we'd been, where we were from and how much duty-free we had on board. He looked shocked when we presented him with a 350ml bottle of rum. 'Is that it?' he asked, disbelievingly. We handed over our passports. You could see his eyes light up as he saw an Antiguan visa from a while back. 'Been to the Caribbean, then?' he asked, looking alert. Then, looking around, he came to his senses – we were a small racing boat,

evidently inbound from the Channel Islands.

Meanwhile, his colleague had a rummage through our bilges, and finding only stores, clothing, a powerful Brie and some stale French bread, headed back on deck. 'We've just intercepted four tonnes of cocaine from a sailing yacht off Newhaven,' he explained, 'so everyone's a bit jumpy'.

As they climbed back into their RIB, he offered to clean off the black shoeprint from the side deck. 'So sorry about that,' he said, looking apologetic. With that, they roared back to Searcher which was loitering nearby.

We had nothing to hide, which must have been obvious. In the time-honoured way, we cracked the usual jokes: 'Thank God they didn't find the stash', and so on. We were lucky that

it was light airs and no swell – being boarded in more extreme conditions could be dangerous. The customs men were courteous and respectful, but you got the feeling that they had a fine art of chatting amicably while listening and watching for anything out of the ordinary. Me? I spent most of the time admiring the cutter. It's an impressive bit of kit!

■ 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

Drifting, burning and grumbling

If there's one thing that burns David Pugh up, it's the weather's refusal to provide perfect sailing

What makes the perfect sailing day? Force 3 or 4 somewhere around the beam, just enough cloud to make sun cream optional yet warm enough to satisfy my better half would get my vote. Yet it rarely happens, because as we all know sailing weather is governed by the law of Sod.

Take today for instance. I'm looking out of the window at bright sunshine and a breeze that, judging by the flags outside,

is around 12 knots. Yet the PBO staff are, in company with most of the working nation, topping up their British pallor and occasionally shivering as we walk below the air conditioning vent.

On Saturday, however, although the sun is forecast still to be shining, the breeze is due to drop to less than seven knots. It happened last weekend too – a non-sailing friend of mine departed from a long-anticipated sail on Red Dragon with the impression that it always takes a sailing boat over an hour to tack the mile and a bit from Poole Harbour entrance to Old Harry Rocks. Most of that progress was

due to the tide, and while it ebbed its weary way we baked.

Of course, one should be careful what one wishes for, and I fully expect to be hoist by my own petard with 30 knots and flying spray at the next available sailing opportunity. But that's my point – the aforementioned law gives you all or nothing.

So, Mr Sod, this is an appeal for clement weather at the end of the month when my brother and I deliver Red Dragon down to

All sailing weather is governed by the law of Sod

Falmouth for the beginning of the annual sailing holiday. The plan is to take her all the way west in a couple of days' intensive sailing before pottering slowly back, so a quartering south-easterly would be ideal, after which Britain's supposedly prevailing south-westerlies would be perfectly satisfactory.

Of course, I predict either a south-westerly gale or a flat calm and investment opportunities for BP, but I'd be delighted to have my cynicism proved wrong.

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



On a recent gear test, PBO test team member Tony Green measured 2.4m/s (4.6 knots) wind speed. The following weekend blew about 30



An enjoyable, convivial outing to 'Little Japan' on the River Alde

A fund of good memories

Despite a distinct lack of summer, Tom Stevens enjoys a day's worth of charity events on the water

Up here on the East Coast, we are still waiting for summer to kick in. The last few weeks have been wet and windy and not really conducive to our usual activities. At this time of year we usually go for a quick evening sail at least once a week, preferably with friends, drop the hook, have supper on board and then return to our mooring.

We did manage one such evening recently and a group of us headed upriver in three boats.

Rafting up off 'Little Japan', just a couple of miles from Aldeburgh, we flashed up the barbecue and had a great al fresco meal. The weather was chilly with the odd drop of rain, but the company, food and wine made for a wonderful evening. There is something magical about the evening sky on the Alde, and we were treated to a magnificent sunset as we motored home.

For the last couple of years all the yacht clubs on the Alde, Ore, Deben, Stour and Orwell have been raising money for disabled sailing under the collective banner of East Coast 50. The two charities involved, The Woolverstone Project and EAST, the East Anglian

Sailing Trust, do a fantastic amount for disabled sailors. Each group of clubs have their own fundraising events, and we have just had ours.

Our day involved sponsored sailing activities including a race round Havergate Island open to all comers, a shorter race for the juniors and a treasure hunt for those who just wanted to be on the water without racing. We raced round the island in Oystercatcher and were pleased to finish second on handicap, just 20 seconds behind a new Wayfarer. In the

It looks as though we have raised well over £2,000 for the charities

evening both clubs joined for a party with good food and, in my case, bad dancing. As it was a fundraiser we had a raffle and an auction of promises, during which one of our members paid £100 to come racing with me on a Wednesday evening. There was a suggestion that my usual crew were prepared to pay to NOT come racing!

We don't have a final figure yet but it looks as though we have raised well over £2,000 for the two charities, while having a great day.

■ 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

Availing ourselves of a sail to Dale

Stu Davies happily fetches up among numerous nationalities and PBO web forum contributors

After my moan in PBO's August issue about the weather on our annual cruise, I was hoping to get a bit of warm sailing in. Well, one recent weekend came up trumps.

The tide times were just right to leave Milford Marina at a decent time, as we have to lock in and out except for two hours coming up to high water. We drove down on the Friday with fine weather forecast for the weekend. Saturday dawned with blue sky peeping through our forecabin window: breakfast, then a walk to get the newspaper before we set off for Dale.

Dale, as I have mentioned in the past, has a large pontoon that can be tied up to. We exited the lock on free flow with about 12 knots of south-westerly wind, very nice for beating and tacking down the river. We got the sails up and called port control to see what movements were going on with regard to big ships. Isle of Inishmore, the Irish ferry, was on her way up so we stooged around until she passed us, then got all sail up and off we went. There was a Westerly 36 about half a mile ahead of us, and being the way I am I was soon twitching and adjusting the sail trim. Laura cocked a jaundiced eye

We arrived at Dale in adequate winds and with warm blue skies

at me and asked what was going on? Hmm... Anyway, we were soon pointing higher and about a knot faster: sorry, Rajah!

We arrived at Dale in light but adequate winds and with warm blue skies – bootiful! A couple of boats were already on the pontoon as we tied up. One, an Island Packet, was leaning against popped fenders: its Irish owners had apparently left it for a week. The locals had informed port control but the mooring lines had started to fray, and the popped fenders weren't doing much protecting. A boat with some Canadians on board was also



Sacha moored up in Dale

moored up, and we met some PBO web forum contributors. Quite a meeting place is Dale! Interestingly, we have met more foreigners and PBO forumites in the Haven than we ever did in Pwllheli. There was a Norwegian boat in the marina the last time we were there, and more recently another in the same spot.

Previously when we were tied up to the pontoon in Dale, it was noticed that one of the stainless

steel cleats was missing. This time, we saw that three were now missing – strange, that. One

of the local boat owners said that strong winds may have caused the moored boats to pull them off, but closer inspection revealed that the thread inserts in the pontoon were fine, with no pulled threads or broken bits of concrete. It looks more as if someone has been helping himself, armed with an Allen key. The cleats would be worth a few bob if they were weighed in at a scrappy!

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