



A Proving Trip To Cherbourg

June 2015

Crew: Chris Allen

Although the main restoration of Lively Levante had taken place in 2013 there had been many changes in the light of experience we'd had sailing short distances around the Solent. A new propeller, new deck hardware, additional sails and innumerable other bits of kit had been added, much of it quite recently. At long last she could be considered ready and properly equipped for long distance cruising; however, all this was untested, we needed to make sure it was all working satisfactorily and dependable. In short a significant cruise was needed to build up confidence in her abilities and to work her up into a solid seagoing state.

A short trip to Cherbourg would fit the bill and Chris, an experienced yachtsman, had agreed to come along and put Lively Levante through her paces. We started in Chichester on the Sunday just after the round the Island race with the shortest of legs, just as far as Ichenor where we spent the night so we could leave at 4am in the morning at low tide. We wouldn't be able to get out of the marina at that time but it was neaps getting over the bar would be fine, especially with a good weather forecast.



Monday 15th June

With minimal delay we were up and away at 4am, soon leaving the mooring far behind in the early morning light. Within an hour we were at West Pole where we set a course of 210 degrees for our destination, allowing for east then west going tides over the twelve hours of the passage. I wanted to be up tide when we reached the other side to avoid being carried past Cherbourg, as the tide can be very strong there. As forecast there was a 13-knot North Easterly breeze, just what we'd been waiting for to try out the new cruising chute! The

practise launch the previous evening really paid off, the chute went up in it's sock quickly and with out incident; when opened out it led to a surge of speed as the big sail caught the wind. Without the engine we were making a steady 5 knots; the main stayed on the boom, thinking it would do more harm than good, which was almost certainly the case. The sail was pulling well with the wind just off the stern on the starboard quarter; with good speed the boat stayed stable and really easy to sail. Clearly it had been a good choice and a valuable addition to the sail inventory.

In calm water the boat was predictable so the autohelm was switched on allowing us to concentrate on the priority at that time – breakfast! Once past Bembridge Ledge our speed over the ground slowed down to 4 knots as we came into the adverse tide flowing north east around the south of the island but this would change later on as we followed the usual “S” curve either side of the direct route to Cherbourg. There were good views to be had of Sandown Bay, Ventnor and St Catherine's Point as we made out way south west.

As had been the pattern throughout 2015 the conditions didn't stay so calm; after a couple of hours the wind had risen to 18 knots; time to get the chute down not knowing how difficult that might be. When we'd eventually got organised for the drop it was 22 knots but



that didn't stop the snuffer from working perfectly and soon we were going just as fast under headsail alone. Just as well too, as it became quite windy and rough for a while.

These conditions continued for a while then moderated around lunchtime when we crossed the first of the shipping lanes, which were (fortunately) not very busy. We only had to alter course once to avoid a tanker. Later on, once clear of shipping, we hoisted the chute again and had a good sail for a couple of hours. As

ever, good conditions don't last long, the wind dropped and we had to resort to the iron sail to keep moving at a sensible cruising speed; such a shame.

It felt good once the French coast was in sight but we were too far west having over corrected for the effects of tide, so changed course to 180 degrees. It was easy to make out the nuclear power station and Cap de La Hague but Cherbourg was more difficult to identify. An hour later the buildings and water towers of the town became clear, a further hour and we could see the forts and outer Rad; nearly there.

There was plenty of room in the Chantereyne Marina so we moored up at about 7pm whilst everyone else was enjoying a pleasant evening sitting in the sun. Even though we'd over shot and gone too far west necessitating a detour through the west rather than the east entrance, we'd crossed in 15 hours; not bad for 72 miles on the log and rather more over the ground.

Tuesday

Perfect weather for a lay day and a good forecast for the following day meant that we could have an enjoyable time without worrying how we were going to get home. The morning drifted by doing a few minor repairs, replenishing the stocks of calvados and other essentials and chatting to some of the other folk at the marina. This happened to include Clem, one of the mainstays of the “Meltem” (our Storm 33) racing crew, who had sailed over in his J53. Everything was bigger on this yacht, push button winches all over the place and three fridges to our one; the down side was that a much larger crew was needed than on a Contessa.



In the afternoon a walk up to the top of the hills to the museum was a good opportunity to stretch our legs. On such a clear day the view from the top was splendid, the Gare Maritime and the rest of the port stretched out before us, just as it appeared on a map. Little had changed over the years except that the port de plaisance had filled up, seemingly to capacity. This followed by a splendid meal at Le Vauban, a reminder of why we'd come over here!

Wednesday

It became an early start as my iPhone had sounded the alarm an hour earlier than intended as it had changed from BST to French time of it's own accord; it took me a while to realise what had happened. The forecast was for a westerly wind, force 3 increasing to force 4 in the afternoon. However, first thing in the harbour all was peaceful as we motored out through



the inner then the outer Rad. Once out to sea we found about 8 knots of wind, from the west, which we expected to build so up went the main and out came the genoa. That magic moment when you turn the engine off and can only hear the sound of the wind and the sea swishing by came just as the sun rose on the horizon, a really wonderful time to be out on the water. Despite the lack of wind we were only able to make 4

knots but sailed on as the passage plan was to arrive a couple of hours after low water so a delay would be easily tolerated, we only had to get back through Ichenor Reach in daylight.

Offshore, as coastline gradually receded into the background, we only had fishing boats for company. Although they were relatively few and far between some insisted on making a course that converged with us; one pair were trawling together without any indication just to keep us on our toes. As the wind filled in we passed through the east bound, then the west bound lane which were both quite busy this time but nothing that could not be easily avoided.



After lunch the wind rose, first to about 18 knots giving us a good 6 knots through the water even though we'd put a reef in the main and a turn on the genoa. By now it had clouded over and the visibility had dropped off considerably, but it still seemed to be reasonable. The wave state rose and, unfortunately, steering the boat became more difficult as some play had started to appear in the steering; clearly the earlier problem with the tiller head becoming loose had returned. The wind continued to increase, so did the sea providing some lively sailing as we were on a beam reach making a good 6-7 knots over the ground. It would have been more enjoyable if the tiller was solid but with the movement it was difficult not to be apprehensive. It was a cause for concern even though it shouldn't have got much worse as the securing bolt had been wired up.

By late afternoon we should have been very close to Nab tower but nothing was to be seen due to the poor visibility; a time to have confidence in GPS and remember the perils of sailing before electronic navigation. After tense period it was a relief to see the tower close by through the murk, we were on track. Unfortunately this was way ahead of plan and at the speed we were making would be at Chichester bar at low water; not something to be relished in such rough conditions. Not wanting to stay offshore we shaped a course to enter



Langstone Harbour which had a deep water entrance where we could pick up a mooring and have dinner, a much more attractive alternative!

Still making good speed we were soon approaching Langstone and after a bit of difficulty identifying the clear-water mark motored in and picked up one of the visitors buoys just past the entrance. A good meal of chilli con carne in the security of the harbour was just what was called for after being bounced around for the

afternoon. Feeling fortified and with spirits raised by moderating weather conditions we

soon set off for the short trip out into the bay to West Pole and back into Chichester which all went without incident; we even managed to get back in time to have a welcome pint in the club!

It had been a good sail and a pleasant trip overall; we'd experienced some reasonably challenging conditions and the boat had performed well with no significant problems. Certainly there were a few things that need improvement such as a gimbal lock for the cooker and a definitive fix for the tiller but they were relatively minor. Lively Levante had passed the test and was ready to go to the West Country in two weeks time!