



A Summer Cruise To Dartmouth

July 2015

Crew: Lynda

Monday (29th June)

By 6pm All preparations had been made, food loaded up in the morning, the fridge on to cool it down, baggage on board, everything ship shape and ready to go. After a short delay waiting for some motorboats to pass through the lock we set off to Ichenor where we picked up the first of several available visitor moorings.



The plan was to stay overnight and set off without any lock delay in order to get to Portland comfortably as a day sail. We soon settled down to an exceptionally pleasant, quiet, sunny evening in what is still a rather special, natural spot off the boatyard, club and harbour office. A splendid meal of smoked salmon, pork and a cheese board made the evening memorable and an excellent start to the holiday.

Tuesday

The forecast was for the wind to be easterly 3-4 becoming 5-6 later but with little wind at 7am we motored off according to plan. The intention was to be in the eastern Solent just as the tide turned which was 10:30 so we'd have a full six hours of west going tide to help us on our way. Without enough wind to make 5 knots we carried on motoring towards the dolphins and had a sustaining, cooked breakfast that had been prepared earlier. Once through the Dolphins we had no difficulty clearing the busy shipping lanes around Portsmouth. However, off Gilcker, the quiet was broken by a high-pitched hum we'd never heard before. In a flash the Team BAR catamaran slid past a couple of boat lengths away, foiling at several times the speed of the wind; with the hull well clear of the water, it's a most impressive sight.



By 10:30 we were off Cowes with full sails up and the tide behind us propelling us west; Newtown River, Yarmouth, Hurst all slid by and soon we were at the Needles Fairway and

half way along our passage. Annoyingly the wind dropped off here so we had to motor for an hour but it soon pick up and we were back sailing in a pleasant 15 knot wind. We went from the Needles directly to Adament shoal, which is south of Lulworth, in order miss the race at St Albans and, more importantly the gunnery ranges which were in use. This leg was 27 miles and took 4 hours; that's and impressive average of 6.7 knots speed over the ground. The wind had built up to about 20-25 knots and the sea became rather lumpy from Anvil point onwards but the Contessa took it all in her stride. With the wind astern some nausea inducing corkscrewing was inevitable but she remained well under control and relatively stable.



The last few miles are often the longest and these were no exception as, once clear of the ranges, we still had to make our way almost to Weymouth in order to enter Portland Harbour by the East Shipping Channel; this is the only one open to leisure craft. By the time we took down the sails the wind had built up to a solid 25+ knots so heading upwind to drop the main became distinctly lively and a reminder of how deceptive the apparent wind speed can be on a downwind leg. The lights at the port entrance we were warned in the almanac so clearly to obey were not visible and the marina staff were rather vague on the VHF but we managed to get moored up eventually and without incident despite this. It was good to be safely tied up after a fairly demanding sail of well over 50 miles which had gone pretty well according to plan, just for a change.

Wednesday

Nominated to be a lay day, a welcome pause between two longish legs, and a chance to see what we could make of Portland Marina. The simple answer is that there's not a lot going for it apart from its position and that it's easy to get in and out of. It's in the middle of a marine industrial area and a long way from any shops or restaurants, which is a shame. There is a sort of brassiere/bar but it's only a substandard pub and not worth using except in emergency. Fortunately there is a good bus service to Weymouth where we spent a very pleasant day, which included a good lunch at the Royal Dorset YC. We ended up in Hope Square where we had a long and interesting chat over a couple of beers with a couple from the Netherlands who were taking their yacht, Luna, to Dartmouth the following day as we'd planned to.



Dinner in the Harbour lights was nothing special apart from the view of the moon rising over the solid mass of the bill, quite a spectacle!

Thursday

It was a very civilized start for a lengthy passage, 9am, timed to get around the Bill on the inside just as the tide was turning between 10:30 and 11am. The forecast was for a southerly wind of 5-10 knots turning cyclonic with rain in the morning but clearing in the afternoon. Visibility was poor when we left with the top of the bill covered in cloud but it seemed ok at ground level, we just hoped it would stay that way for the next couple of hours. Motoring out in such light wind was a bit gloomy but without incident. When we got to the Bill as



planned the sea was comfortable, just a moderate swell. The mass of Portland shrouded in mist sat there brooding and mysterious as we passed by, a reminder that this was not always a good place to be. The low groan of the fog signal did nothing to make us feel more comfortable but it soon disappeared into the murk behind us.

Initially we set course for Brixham as that was the only place we could book a berth but

a couple of hours away from Portland the phone suddenly rang, it was Martin from Darthaven to say that he'd found us a space. A slight alteration of course and we were on our way. For several more hours the wind was fickle so it was a mix of motoring and motor sailing to make sure we kept up 5 knots.

We were just starting to believe that it would be a boring passage the wind started to pick up, we were soon sailing along in 10-12 knots of wind. It suddenly picked up even more and at 15 knots we started to take a couple of rolls in the main. Whilst doing this it suddenly went up to 25 knots, in seconds! Struggling to put the first reef in the main the wind increased to well over 30 knots so we ended up putting the second reef in whilst the over sized genoa flogged wildly. A gentle hiss had turned into screaming cacophony of wind and water which only moderated once we'd tamed the genoa by furling it completely, it was quite the wrong sail for that amount of wind! During this time the boat just sailed itself, virtually without any control needed over the rudder, deeply reassuring. Recovering, we started to realise that the wind had gone through 180 degrees and moved from the southeast to the northwest, the way the boat handled in such conditions was impressive, after all we had been caught with by gale force winds with almost full sails up! We were now in control, motor sailing in roughly the right direction waiting for the wind to settle down. Other yachts around us had similar difficulties, in various states of disarray; the fishermen were not at all happy using channel 16 rather than a working channel to let everyone know they were scooting for home.

It had been strange, there had been no notice of a squall or indication of trouble, the sky had just got a bit darker, fortunately it was short lived and after an hour the wind had settled down to a more comfortable 20 knots. As the sky brightened our spirits rose and we settled down on a close reach whilst we sorted the boat out. Not all was well down below, the deck vent was not completely closed (it never had been) and with a couple of inches of water flowing around on deck quite a lot had got through, just above our sleeping bags and the cushions. Soon the visibility cleared and we had a wonderful view of the coastline, a bit of sun makes most difficulties easier to cope with!



Making a steady speed of 6 knots over the ground we could soon make out Berry Head, Torbay, and the Dartmouth daymark; all looking very attractive and welcoming. Naturally the last few miles took longer than expected but eventually the Mewstone became clear, we passed it's two cardinal marks and entered the estuary and then the river Dart. Arriving at 8pm was just about as planned, a good passage time wise and certainly a test for Lively Levante, which she passed with flying colours.

Once in the marina we met several other yachtsmen who had been out with us. We'd taken the same time as a chap in a Rustler 42, but he did go the long way round the Bill though. The Dutch couple had kept a closer watch of the wind speed than us, they'd seen a sustained period of 35 knots when the squall was at it's peak.

A Week In Dartmouth

We were pleased to have got to the West Country but initially disappointed that rather strong winds were forecast for the next week, force 6 & 7 every day. We then came to the realisation that we were in one of our favourite places and that being forced to have a relaxing week in one place wasn't so bad after all.

Our first day in Dartmouth was dry and sunny, just what we needed to dry the boat out and fix a couple of minor problems that, as always, crop up. We then ventured out taking the train to Greenways, walking to Colton Fishacre and the bus to Brixham for lunch at the Yacht Club. The chance discovery of a lively "Goosbery Pie Fete" at Glampton



livened things up a bit, this was really just an excuse for local folk to have plenty of beer listening to some rather good live music.

It's a friendly place, we'd felt very much at home and met some interesting people at the Darthaven YC and from Chichester at the marina. Something we could slip back into again sometime in the future, one couple had moved their yacht from chichester to Kingswear, an appealing thought for us too.

Thursday (9th July)

After days of wind at force 6 and 7 this was the first time light winds were forecast so it seemed like just about everyone wanted to take advantage of it and move on. At six in the morning there was a steady stream of yachts making their way downstream and out to sea, free at last! Our plan was to arrive at Portland Bill when the tide was relatively slack which was at 15:00 so with 43 miles to run and a bit of tide to help us, a 7 o'clock start was called for, quite civilised.



The hills around us looked rather cold and grey as we left at 06:45 but the forecast was for a sunny day with light south westerly winds backing south east and increasing to force 4, occasionally 5. We hoped we'd be able to make plenty of progress before the wind turned against us. At first the sea was as smooth as glass with hardly a breath of wind to make a ripple on the surface. Motoring out was a pleasure, after all the strong winds a passage using the Iron sail made a pleasing prospect. Passing the castle and going out to sea with the daymark on the hill behind us was tinged with sadness, we'd had a very relaxing and enjoyable stay.

Once past the now familiar Mewstone Rock and clearing the coast the wind started to fill in from the North West which was a bit of a surprise but it was only 5 to 6 knots so we settled down for a quiet motor across the bay on a course of 080 with plenty of other yachts about, some from Torbay, to keep us company. With the engine ticking over at 2000 rpm we were doing a steady 5 knots through the water; nice and quiet, ideal for some reading and a pleasant contrast to the conditions we'd experienced on the way in. During a passage in such easy conditions it's making up the log and meal times that punctuate the day; on the hour the log was updated and every two hours we had something to eat or drink. A cooked breakfast and the pasties we had for lunch went down rather well as the miles slowly drifted by; shame we weren't doing more exercise!

It was all rather uneventful really, the most we had to do was to avoid a fishing boat in the middle of Lyme Bay that insisted on wanting to be in the same place as us even though there was hardly any shipping around, most inconsiderate! The other pastime was listening to Lulworth Range Control on channel 16 constantly trying to shepherd craft out of the way of the extended range that was in use that day. Time after time we heard “Fast craft south of Kimmeridge heading east, this is Range Control”, most of the time their calls were unanswered, a sad reflection on those motorboat owners.

Reluctantly Berry Head and the expanse of Torbay receded to the west, Lyme Bay opened up and eventually Portland appeared on the horizon and gradually grew in size to the east. The visibility was excellent so at one time we could see the whole of Lyme bay as a panorama, a rare moment to be savoured. We took a cautious approach rounding the Bill about two miles off to avoid the race limited in its power by neap tides; in the event it turned out to be quiet enough for two yachts to take the inshore route but still very agitated in



between. Seeing acres of white water rising up into sharp, triangular peaks was a reminder of the reputation this race has and to give it the respect required.

Our speed over the ground had been raised by the tide to 7 knots for several hours so we'd made good progress and arrived, on time, at 3pm. Having cleared the Bill it was not difficult to then head north passing the Shambles bank to the east and

head up to Grove point assisted (as we'd hoped) by a tidal counter current. Shambles Bank there is clearly a popular place for anglers, what had appeared to be a line of boats heading for Weymouth turned out to be day boats moored with their rods out; hopefully they caught something for it looked a bit unpleasant there rolling in the swell.

Pasting Grove point, we watched the huge concrete arms and forts of the harbour, still mighty but with little purpose now as they crept by. The East Shipping Channel appeared to port and we were soon safely moored up in a spacious alongside berth, well away from the bustle of the visitor's area. It was 5pm, a little earlier than expected but then it had been an easy passage; those 55 miles could have been so different! A quiet evening followed with the traditional sailing dinner of fish pie accompanied by some rather nice sauvignon blanc. The stillness and quiet of the berth was an appropriate background to the singing of traditional sea shanties; an impromptu gathering of musical folk on the large wooden schooner adjacent to us made for a particularly pleasant evening.

Friday

Another day, more uncooperative winds, so typical of this summer. The forecast was for it to be sunny but with a south easterly force 3 to 4, right on the nose if you were heading east.

The good news was that the range had suspended operations so our fears of having to head ten miles offshore, well out of our way, to avoid the outer range were unfounded. The tide was west going until about 1pm so there was no point in leaving much earlier than 11 o'clock so we had a relaxing start to the day with breakfast and a chat with some neighbours in an Arpege who were hoping to head back to the Solent.



Once clear of the harbour, full sails went up but it soon became clear that the forecast was a little optimistic, a strong force 5 than 3-4. With a reef in the main and a couple of furls in the genoa we started to tack across Weymouth Bay along with half a dozen other yachts. It was a lively sail but comfortable, the Contessa is in her element on a beat in fresh winds and seas. Off Osmington Mills each time we tacked we assessed how we were doing against the competition; we were holding our own against these

larger boats! Unfortunately none of us were doing very well in terms of speed over the ground; it may have been fun but with only 2 miles made good in an hour it was going to take a long time to reach St Albans head. Nothing else for it but to wind up the headsail and motor along inshore to avoid the waves; this was by common consent and magically within 10 minutes the whole "fleet" were under power. We were delayed slightly as the alternator drive belt, which had been fine all the way across Lyme Bay, started to scream; all rather unpleasant until taken off.

Close inshore the sea was surprisingly flat and we were soon making much better progress with the added advantage of an excellent, close up view of the Jurassic Coast. Durdle Door, Lulworth Cove, Worbarrow Bay Kimmeridge all slid by, the colours and layers of strata all highlighted by the glorious sunlight. Approaching St Albans Head the coast looked deserted, no walkers, nobody anchored (not surprisingly) at Chapmans Pool, only the lonely NCI lookout post that we knew would be keeping watch over us.



Close inshore to the headland to avoid the race was quite pleasant at first but that soon changed becoming moderately rough as we headed westwards to the Light house at Anvil point, another race to be treated respectfully! Once clear of the point it was only a few miles past Swanage bay and the Old Harry rocks towards Poole Fairway and our destination for the next two days. Off the wind it was

tempting to put up the sails but for such a short distance it didn't seem worthwhile as it was still rather bumpy and we were keen to moor up without delay. Numerous motorboats roared pass as our welcome to Poole, by reputation, the home of the Birmingham navy.



Naturally we had to wait for the chain ferry to pass into the harbour, up the North Channel to Parkstone Yacht Club where we'd booked a berth. It's full of yachts, always buzzing with racing activity, a great family club, such a sharp contrast to neighbouring Salterns Marina where we could only count three masts amongst the motorised gin palaces. Not a great sail but a 40 mile passage made in less than seven hours, an average speed of 6 knots thanks to the tide rather than the wind.

Saturday

A lay day and a welcome break from all that motoring. The club is an excellent place to stay with a well organised haven and extensive club house facilities; our first stay and certainly one to be repeated. Our stay coincided with a "cruiser" rally organised by the Contessa Association so we were in good company with a dozen other 32's in the haven overnight. Our plan was to take the bus



into Poole but it wasn't needed, it's only a half hour walk and a very pleasant one at that around the bay. Parkstone used to be the centre for Flying Boat activity both military and civil with Imperial Airways; the bay was the centre of one of the main take off and landing areas. All the yacht club buildings, Parkstone, Salterns and RMYC all played their part during the war. It brought back memories of seeing unused flying boats moored in the distance when crabbing on holiday in Sandbanks in the early 1960's.

Sunday

Rested and re-provisioned we were ready for next leg of our return journey as far as Gosport. The Contessa Association had organised a race back starting at 11am, which was just about right to get to Hurst and the entrance of the Solent as the tide turned east. We knew the weather was going to be a bit rough with a westerly force 6 forecast but it was behind us and we would be in good company. We had no intention of racing so motored out through the East Looe Channel whilst everyone else was struggling to put up their sails, fortunately it was high water so the channel was more forgiving than usual. This was just as well as the wind was soon gusting 7 and once clear of the land the wave state became quite rough. We were soon making a steady five knots with the headsail out but with several furls in it; this allowed us to sail under control without any tendency to broach.

As the first away, unconcerned about the start line (which many missed anyway) we led the fleet, at least until Hengisbury Head. Several 32's had followed us inshore with full sails up whilst the more racing oriented members sailed offshore with spinnakers up; so much for it being a "cruiser race". Naturally they all went faster but much less than expected, main sails often got in the way of headsails and one very over canvassed competitor spent much of the time careering wildly from one side to the other with some impressive broaches but little in the way of boat speed. It was quite a sleigh ride with lots of white water created by between 25 and 30 knots of wind, exciting but unforgiving! The wave state, always more important than wind strength, was quite rough, especially off Hengisbury Head. The long keel of the Contessa and the compact stern really paid off; a clear demonstration of why the design had performed so well in the 1979 Fastnet, she almost sailed herself.

Approaching Hurst we were amongst a string of yachts cutting the corner of North Channel taking a direct line into the narrows. It was a tense period as we passed through the turbulent water, but soon over as we passed rapidly into relative calm. By the time we were off Yarmouth the wave state had dropped right off and by staying close to the south side of the Solent we were shielded from the worst of the wind.



The autohelm was able to take over so we had a much-needed lunch with hot soup, it might have been summer but still cold! Once over the tide had set in and we were shooting through the Solent at 7-8 knots over the ground. An hour later we had a couple of tense moments as we jibed off Cowes, then we were storming past Osborne Bay and in another

hour off Gilkicker. in the company of another Contessa who abandoned their mainsail too and followed us all the way into Gosport marina.

It didn't take long for us to be safely moored up drying out some rather wet oilies, thankful that we had such a good heating system. The passage of over 40 miles had only taken 6.5 hours, another record-breaking trip and a reassuring experience for us as the boat had handled so well.

Monday

The last, short leg back home to Chichester but not without difficulty as the weather was going to be much the same as the day before, and we had to get over the Bar. Leaving at 8am meant that we'd be entering the harbour at high water and just might avoid the worst of the weather. It was a fortunate that we were listening to the Queens Harbourmaster on channel 11 as there were four ships all trying to get in or out whilst we left; knowing what their intentions were, it was easy to keep clear.

Naturally the wind had gone from virtually nothing in the marina to a good 20 knots, gusting 25. Time to be conservative (again). With just the headsail up we made good progress through the dolphins and on to West pole where the wind had risen to a sustained 25, gusting 28 knots. As it was slack water the bar was no worse than the sea offshore and once in the



security of the harbour it became quite calm. We were home; not wishing to be purists we tidied up the sails and motored past Ichenor and back to our berth.

Overall a great two week holiday, some exciting sailing contrasting with a relaxing week in Dartmouth. We'd found how to live comfortably on the boat, worked out how to do things and now have everything we need carefully stowed and in a sensible place. The 250 miles we'd covered had built confidence in both the boat and ourselves. We'll be able to face those challenging conditions that inevitably arise when cruising the Channel with less apprehension in future which can only make it easier to enjoy the more moderate sailing we plan to do.