



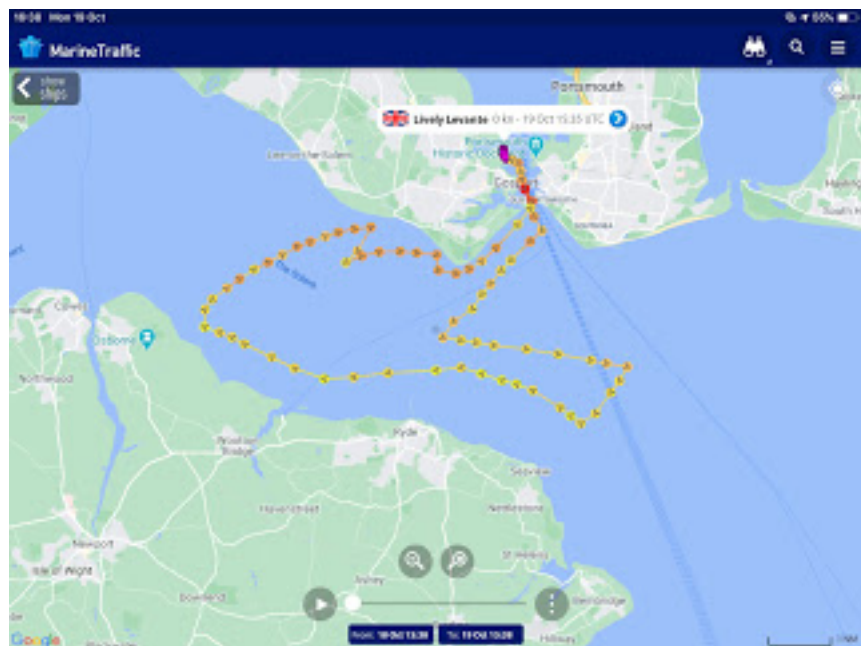
Eastern Solent Daysail

October 2020

Crew: Pete

October was characterised by adverse weather due to a series of complex depressions assaulting Britain from the Atlantic. Fitting in a few days away proved to be impossible even though we had a couple of prepaid nights at Beaulieu. However between Storm Alex and Storm Barbara there was one day when the forecasts looked favourable enough for a day sail so together with an accomplished fisherman we set out to see what we could make of it in the Eastern Solent.

The BBC app forecast a 15 knot southerly but this is notorious for underestimating wind strength, a cursory check of others indicated gusts of stronger stuff, but nothing we couldn't handle. I'd checked that high water was at about 2pm but failed to notice that it was a 5.1m spring tide until we had set out. With this in mind there was a hazy plan to set off along the coast to West Pole at the entrance of Chichester Harbour and let the tide take us back.



First impressions of the weather were that it was fine with a moderate breeze so full of enthusiasm we set off soon after 10:30. Motoring out towards Blockhouse at the entrance of the harbour, the wind was right on the nose so we didn't hesitate to haul up the mainsail with the first reef in. Under the watchful eyes of NCI Gosport the main was flogging more than I'd expected and the wind indicated was already 20 knots. By the time we'd cleared No 4 bar buoy it was obvious that we would be in for an uncomfortable slog to windward in quite rough waters for much of the time if we persevered to Chichester. After a quick reassessment we unfurled the Genoa keeping several rolls in and snugged down the main and cracked off on a comfortable reach towards Ryde. At about 60 degrees off the wind Lively Levante picked up speed and powered over the considerable wave state that had been raised by the southerly fetch.

In no time (it seemed) we were off Ryde sands tacking towards the forts. The gaunt, dark granite walls of Horse Sands fort towered above us as we sped past, a forbidding view against a similarly forbidding



background of darkening grey skies and green sea covered with white horses. Not quite the weather we'd expected but at least it wasn't raining. We had an exhilarating sail towards Bembridge; these are the conditions that bring out the best of a Contessa, she remained well-mannered needing hardly a touch on the tiller to keep on track.

Approaching lunchtime, we thought it prudent to head back into the Solent rather than out into an increasingly lively sea. Bearing away we flashed past Seaview on a broad reach enjoying the drop in apparent wind and opportunity to warm up a bit. Tracking round Ryde Sands we achieved some remarkable speeds according to the instruments. The log indicated over 7 knots several times, the tremor of the hull beneath us confirmed that we were planning even though the sea state was far from smooth. Our speed over the ground went over 8 knots which was consistent with the tide which had been slack and was now starting to turn. We had quite a sleigh ride surging forward with plenty of spray thrown up as we blasted over the waves.

Clear of the sands we headed inshore towards Wooton Creek then on to Osborne Bay. Here the sea smoothed over and the wind dropped to a very pleasant 15-20 knots in the lee of the Island; ideal

conditions for lunch! I had intended to keep well away from the Cowes end of the Solent not wishing to have to plug the tide. However, this was so pleasant we continued on to get a splendid view of Osbourne House, for a few seconds at least. The cream towers and house rose up majestically over the reds and yellows of the trees in their autumn colours.

It would have been tempting to stay longer but the thought of fighting an increasing wind against a strong spring tide won and we hardened up onto what I'd hoped would have been a reach. We'd left it too late, Gilkicker was directly upwind in the distance so it was hard on the wind. Lively Levante points well, especially if you ease off and keep the speed up which we did passing the cardinal marks of Ryde Middle in the distance.

We might have been going through the water fast but the tide was getting into it's stride so by the time we'd reached the northern shore and forced to tack we were doing less than 3knots over the ground. Time ground on, it was clear that this was going to be a long, difficult haul before we could clear Gilkicker. We took an age to pass down wind of a starboard lateral mark on one tack then some time later dispiriting to find that we'd made such little progress on the next tack. Looking round we saw that we were the only yacht out there at that time, earlier there had been so many; not surprising really!

This was quite deep water with a strong current that still had time to build; we cut our losses and used the engine to point higher and increase speed. Motorsailing we headed inshore to Stokes Bay where we could cheat the tide; passing a yellow racing mark we could see that we were now making steady, if slow, progress. Eventually we were able to crack off and ease the sheets as we passed south of the fort with the harbour entrance in view. Conditions are often a bit tricky here and this time there was no exception, the waves had built up in the shallow water kicking up an angry sea that demanded respect; we were on a lee shore after all!





Somewhat relieved that I'd made an error of judgement but got away with it we sped over to the diving tower under sail power, the engine just ticking over. The Genoa was soon furled ready to enter the harbour but we chose to leave the main up. This was not a good place for a drop and we might have needed it to get through the entrance against the tide. As it happened, once over the Hamilton Bank the sea eased and with little traffic to get in the way, we entered the harbour without incident.

With the main dropped and stowed just off the lightship at Haslar, we then motored sedately into Royal Clarence Marina. Fortunately the oil jetty provided shelter from the southerly which was right on our stern so we slid into our berth doing what we could to keep the speed down.

We moored up at about 4pm so that was a five and a half hour sail, enough to feel we'd had a good day out. The log showed we'd covered just over 25 miles, further that to the Nab and back; it was all that tacking. A challenging but satisfying day, perhaps not according to plan but what we ended up doing was better anyway!