

## Still sailing: delivering Dreamcatcher October 2008

Just because we've sold our own boat doesn't mean we've given up sailing and we jumped at the chance of helping to sail Dreamcatcher from Southampton to Grimsby. Dreamcatcher is a 42 foot Moody yacht belonging to our friends Ian and Janet who live in Lanzarote. Her "home" marina is Grimsby and Ian wanted her brought back there for the winter.

We drove down to Southampton on Friday 10th October together with Clive (Ian's long-time friend and skipper for this trip) and Clive's friend Peter who is former commodore of Humber Mouth Yacht Club. We arrived at Swanwick Marina on the Hamble at 2pm, loaded the boat with all our gear and hit the local Tesco for provisions. We planned to leave at 10am on Saturday morning, just after high water, and estimated we should be in Grimsby by Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning.

Clive ran the engine up to check that it was running correctly, always a necessary precaution but most important in this case as one of the reasons the boat was in Southampton and not in Lanzarote was severe engine problems encountered on the journey south in June. The engine started OK, but would not increase revs. The problem was compounded as a pall of smoke developed in the saloon and aft cabin. The marina engineers were summoned and they bled the fuel lines, but then when the engine was revved hard the cause of the problem manifested itself – the exhaust manifold was worn as full of holes as a lace doily and finally gave up the ghost completely with a bang and gushing of water into the bilges. Oh Bugger! 4pm on Friday afternoon and no engine!

The marina engineer managed to source a replacement part, but it couldn't be delivered until Tuesday, which would delay our departure till Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning. Apart from the fact that this would entail us hanging around in Southampton for 4 days, which none of us wanted to do very much, it would mean more crucially that we would miss our weather window. The forecast was good (light winds, calm seas, no rain) until Tuesday when strong winds were due to arrive in the evening. We wanted to be within sight of the Humber by Tuesday night, not just setting off from Southampton.

Clive phoned Ian in Lanzarote to let him know what had happened and warn him about the delay. Fortunately Ian remembered that there might be a spare exhaust manifold in one of the aft lockers – there was! Phew! But it's after 5pm now – can we get hold of the engineer before he goes home?? David raced off to his office and caught him just as he was leaving. He agreed to come to fix the exhaust at 7.30 in the morning, so we might get away on Saturday after all. Feeling much more positive we had dinner in the marina cafe-bar, and after a couple of drinks headed for our bunks.

On Saturday morning, while the engineer fixed the new exhaust, Polly, David and Peter walked up to Tesco in glorious warm sunshine to get a few last-minute treats with which to beguile the night watches, and after refueling we were on our way at 1.30pm, going down river on the last of the tide. There was very little wind, so we motorsailed and made very good time along the south coast in sunny weather. Clive and Peter took the first watch (8pm to midnight) on Saturday night, so after dinner Polly and David relaxed and managed an hour or two of sleep before going on watch at midnight. The first hour or so of our watch was uneventful with a brilliant moon, bright stars and a slight SE breeze. But as the night progressed, mist and fog began to develop and by the time Clive and Peter came back on watch at 4am the fog was thick, obliterating moon and stars, and we were pretty happy that our watch was over. Sailing with a crew of 4 instead of just the two of us is so easy, it's quite a revelation. It makes such a difference having only 4 hours of (potentially cold and wet) darkness in the cockpit. Then you can hand over to the other pair and go below for a warm, something to eat and a chance to relax and even sleep for the next four hours (engine noise permitting). This is a luxury we never had when we were sailing on our own.

We were back on watch at 8am on Sunday morning and the fog lifted just as we were approaching Dover. We sailed past the Goodwins in glorious sunshine so hot that Polly was seriously regretting not having brought shorts and T shirt. Pretty good for the middle of October. David lay down on the fore deck and fell asleep. The original plan was to spend Sunday night in Ramsgate marina, but we making such good progress, being able to benefit from a double tide, that we decided that it would be better to take full advantage of the extra "push" that the tide could give us and keep going across the Thames estuary to Harwich. Clive studied the tidal flow diagrams closely when he was planning our route to take all possible advantage of the speed and direction of tides throughout. It is of course stating the obvious that if a boat is making 5 knots, a 3 knot tide against you reduces your "speed over the ground" to 2 knots, whereas if you have the 3 knot tide with you, your speed over the ground is 8 knots – quite a significant difference! At 8pm on Sunday night with Peter at the helm we negotiated our way into the mouth of the Orwell, struggling to pick out the red lights of the channel marker buoys against the sodium glare of Felixstowe docks. Fortunately Clive and Peter had sailed into the Orwell many times before and knew where they were going, even at night, although we nearly missed the entrance to Suffolk Yacht Harbour in the dark. The marina was packed and it took a bit of motoring up and down until we spotted an empty berth. Fortunately Dreamcatcher maneuvers well in confined spaces (something that White Horses was not very good at). There was no one on duty at the marina office so we were unable to obtain the code to activate the shore power. But fortunately Peter could remember the code for the shower block from a previous visit (1920# if you're ever down that way) so we were all able to wash off the grime of the past couple of days. Polly just managed to rustle up beef stew and two veggie for 4 before falling asleep. It had been a long 30 hours.

After a good night's sleep in a silent, motionless boat we were ready to set off on a misty Monday morning at 9am. Unfortunately the engine wasn't so ready: it ran for a few minutes and then died. We had had a bit of a scare on Sunday afternoon when the batteries suddenly went flat even though running the engine should have kept them charged. Fortunately Clive is a trained electrician and he was able to locate and fix the problem. This turned out to be a faulty alternator, which Clive was able to bypass and rig up the necessary bits of electric string to the other alternator. Now it looked as if the fuel problem had returned. Clive bled the fuel lines, thus getting rid of the air in the pipes, which seemed to fix the problem. So we set off on the second leg of the journey still on schedule, with an ETA of 2pm on Tuesday afternoon.

The mist soon burned off in the warm sunshine and, making excellent speeds with the tide in our favour we were sailing past Lowestoft 5 hours after setting out from the Orwell. So far we had been so lucky with the weather, it was more like summer sailing than autumn. If conditions were always so benign even sailing in the North Sea would be a doddle. But as the afternoon progressed the cloud began to gather and the wind to pick up. At least we now had enough wind to make good speed under sail alone and could switch off the engine. This was fortunate as the engine problem was getting progressively worse and it needed bleeding more frequently. But this is the east coast we're dealing with here, so it wasn't long before we started to get a bit too much wind. By 6.30pm it became necessary to put a reef in to reduce the heel so that Polly had a reasonable chance of cooking dinner without everything ending up on the floor.

The boat was jumping about so much that it was impossible for Polly and David to get any sleep before going on watch at midnight, and before we changed watches Clive and Peter put a further reef in both sails because we were now sailing so close to the strengthening wind that having too much sail up was neither comfortable nor wise. The wind was now coming from the NW, the course we wanted to sail. Wouldn't you know it, wind on the nose! Why are we even surprised? There seems to be a sailing sod's law that states that there will either be too little wind, or a strong head wind bang on the nose. As our watch progressed it became increasingly difficult to maintain our course and eventually we had to alter course 10° northwards. The wind speed continued to increase (gusting up to 25 knots, but fortunately not the 33 knots we had when we were sailing White Horses to Lowestoft 3 years ago) and it became apparent that we would have to turn a further 10° northwards if we were to continue under sail and avoid arduous and time consuming tacking. At this rate we'd be heading for Norway. The engine needed bleeding before it could be started again and so it was with regret that we had to wake Clive after the poor chap had only had 2 hours sleep. So it was back to motorsailing and plunging nose-first into the waves so that, if it hadn't been for the spray hood, we would have been very wet indeed. But we were back on course. Polly was reminded of our own delivery trip bringing White Horses up to Grimsby from the south coast in virtually

identical conditions when going to sleep wasn't an option. Consequently we were very happy to hand over to Clive and Peter at 4am. David was so tired he fell asleep sitting up in the saloon.

When we came back on watch at 8am the wind had dropped and we were approaching the mouth of the Humber. High water at Grimsby would not be until 6pm so we were in no hurry to get up the river. We ambled very gently up under sail with Peter in his element at the helm. Even though it was raining David couldn't resist a spot of helming as well while Polly rustled up bacon sandwiches. We locked in to the marina and tied up with a real sense of achievement shortly after 2pm, 72 hours after leaving Southampton. For the statistics-heads amongst you that's 400 miles in 3 days and nights. With 12 hours spent in a marina that gives a sailing time of 60 hours (in two 30 hour passages) at an average speed of 6.6 knots. Not bad, and a credit to all of us, who had never sailed all together as a crew before, and especially to Clive who was an excellent skipper throughout. As Peter said, a good ship and even better company.