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JANUARY 2002

Welcome to this first newsletter of 2002, my name is Bob and I am the current President of your association.

As we the committee said in our December newsletter we will do our best to keep the association running and producing a newsletter that you will enjoy.

The committee would like to thank you on behalf of Tom and all the Lack family for all your condolences For our founder and secretary Mary.

A card and Flowers were sent on behalf of all members.

The newsletter thrives on information received from its readers so we look forward to hearing from you, whether it's a story of your holiday, some work you have done on your boat or questions or ideas that you would like to ask us, we will try to keep it interesting, so give us plenty of feedback information to help us put it together.

We hope that you all had a good festive season and didn't over indulge too much and brought plenty of goodies for your boat.

Ann and I were to be spending Christmas on our 8m *Think Again* but owing to health problems it was cancelled, never mind perhaps we will be able to do it this year, our eldest son and family have just spent Christmas and the New Year in Brisbane Australia, testing out their summer weather.

We are well into our planning for this year's sailing adventure, which could be the biggest that Ann and I have undertaken so far, we are going down into the French Canal system and will keep you informed as we progress, I have already started preparing *Think Again* with maintenance etc. How is your maintenance coming along?

Bob Freeman. President.

Our Maintenance Tip For the New Year

Gas Cylinders and Regulators

These Checks are very important

Make sure your cylinders are clean, dry and secure.

Renew the washers connecting cylinders and regulators.

Buy new Washers, don't use the one's that are in the cylinder caps.

What's the date on your flexible hose?
You haven't looked have you?

If you haven't got a pressure gauge, it's a good idea to have one so that you can test the integrity of your system.

You can also check for leaks on joints and connections by brushing on a solution of water and washing up liquid

REMINDER

Have you paid your 2002 SUBS

****IF NOT BEWARE****

**NEXT MONTH YOU GET THE DREADED
SPOT (*)**

For Sale

2 Volvo 2000 SERIES 10 HP DIESELS ENGINES
WITH SAILDRIVES BEDS ETC. £500.00 EACH
EX CONDITION: PHONE +44 1202 520 249

SPECIAL NOTICE

The Association is looking for a person or person's that could offer help and assistance to the committee
Especially if you have secretarial skills, and a husband and wife team would be very welcome.

We are updating the register and would like to include your boat's Mooring, Berth, or Port, in the register
so please let us know. Contact: Bob Freeman / Peter Gimson

SUN & SANGRIA, SAILING & SEXTANTS
By Judy & Paul Thompson (SQUIB CL 9.200)

Hola Amigos.

What time is it? Surprisingly this is the question we ask most, apart from of course, “*Do you speak English?*” We also seem to have to constantly check the calendar to see what day it is. Although these are not complaints, just observations!

Our journey continued around Spain after leaving the small town of L’Escala on the Costa Brava at the beginning of April. Our week-long break had been a “mail” stop and we also wanted to wait for the strong winds to subside. During the week, we witnessed huge rollers far out to sea make their way onto the sea defences, crashing with immense power, sending water over roads, car parks and hotels. The sight was incredibly spectacular and we naturally felt relieved at being on terra firma and safe. The following day the winds had quietened but the sea was still suffering from the effects, so we decided to explore the locality and found, on the eastern side of town, the remains of a Roman and a Greek city.

The Greeks apparently landed on Empuries, a nearby island in 230 BC for the purpose of opening up the rich markets of the Iberian Peninsula to the Greek world, before creating a city on the mainland. Later, in 218 BC the Romans arrived to dominate and created a new city nearby. Gradually over the depths of time, the island has formed part of the mainland. The archaeological dig started in the early part of this century and both the two cities and the “island” are remarkably intact. Now it provides people like us with an insight into how the Greeks and Romans lived. It also provided us with an opportunity to enjoy a relaxing lunch in the centre of the “island” surrounded by all that history! *It never ceases to amaze us that almost every port we go to there is a fishing fleet of various sizes, equipped to catch many kinds of fish from bream to tuna, calamari to mussels and with the British fish industry seemingly in decline, several questions have to be asked.*

One answer we guess is the amount of fish the Spanish eat and our next port of call was a fishing port called Palamos, which of course had a fishing fleet. That evening we thought we would treat ourselves to a meal in a restaurant and used our usual criteria when choosing a suitable establishment, one which was busy and well frequented. We found one such place in a quiet back street, after quite a long hunt and, on entering, found just a small room almost packed to capacity. There was, however, no menu as it changed daily and, surprise, surprise they only served fish. Feeling very adventurous we listened to the very knowledgeable waiter and chose 4 different fish dishes, which we shared. All heavily laden with garlic and cream, we enjoyed a delicious meal and then realised that, because we hadn’t seen the menu, we had no idea of the cost! ***Too late now – we may have to do the washing up!*** In the event it was £32 which included 2 bottles of wine which we thought was excellent value.

The next part of the coastline showed familiar tourist spots and we had no choice but to stop at a couple. Blanes was the most expensive marina to date and the town awful, but moving into the Costa Dorada, Arenys de Mar was much older and had more character. Here we had some good news when our daughter Zoe rang to say she and Gareth are going to be married next year. The location is still be decided but somewhere exotic is planned. *So congratulations to them both.*

Leaving Arenys we sailed past Tossa de Mar and a place called Malgrat, where we had been on holiday 30 years ago on our last visit to Spain – it seemed far less built-up then. After doing a whole holiday brochure in one week, we sailed into Barcelona on a wet and windy afternoon. Apparently we later discovered this was the first rain they had had since January.

On arrival at the marina which is almost 2 miles inland and in the heart of the city, we could see there were two ends to the marina. One end had the luxury yachts and gin palaces and the other end had the live-aboards like us and resembled a *shanty* town with the washing hanging out and the bikes and paraphernalia on the pontoons. This was where we headed for! After tying up and getting ship-shape, we met our neighbours, a Danish couple Margarete and Leife one side and retired fireman called Rod on the other and yet another retired fireman called David opposite *(these firemen get everywhere!)*

Now to explore... next day up bright and early, well not too bright and definitely not too early, we walked up the main street called La Rambla. This consists of a very wide pedestrian walkway in the centre and a road either side

bordered by shops and restaurants. We now know this is very common in Spain. Dotted along the walkway were numerous human “statues” in many different guises including E.T., red Indians, cowboys, clowns, local celebrities and a girl with a gold lame dress, pink rollers in her hair and a mop! All were in extremely well done and showing tremendous body control especially in the heat. At the end of La Rambla is Placa de Catalunya, this is one of the main parts of the city, “where it all happens”. Busking in one corner, a Peruvian/Spanish band was playing to about 100 locals who obviously couldn’t resist an excuse to party and danced rhythmically around their shopping bags! We also found a Marks and Spencer on another corner and couldn’t resist a look.

In the Barri Gotic area around the cathedral there seemed to be a maze of tiny streets with endless small shops, many of which are grocers, bakers, bars and ferreterias (*ironmongers*) all very busy. Above the shops are hundreds of apartments with iron balconies and washing drying. A residential thriving community in the heart of a big city steeped in history.

That evening we were invited to a quiz night where we met a lot of other people from the marina, who had spent the winter there, forming a community. They told us about “*the net*” which was broadcast at 9 am. every morning on VHF channel 71. They all took it in turns to inform about the weather, medical needs, social events and treasures from the bilge (unwanted junk). We found it very useful and made a particularly good alarm clock!

We were warned by our Danish neighbours about the problem of pickpockets in Barcelona, so we were very careful to take only the necessary money, credit cards etc. and to conceal them about our person. Ironically they were mugged on the metro and had their wallet stolen a few days later. Cameras were a prime target, so unfortunately, we took very few photos – video or still. We made an exception one evening and took the video camera up to the Placa d’Espana to watch some famous fountains. Each show lasted for about 30 minutes and the fountains would flow and change colour in time with music. Words are not enough to describe the spectacle and mood it creates. The piece de resistance comes finally when Freddie Mercury and Montserrat sing Barcelona – it brought tears to your eyes!

It was now Easter and we decided on the spur of the moment, to fly back to the U.K. The Easyjet flights were cheap and the airport on a 10 minute taxi ride away. A good opportunity we thought to see our daughters Zoe, Emma and Sam and family and friends, although unfortunately it proved impossible to see everyone. Nevertheless we enjoyed our trip.

Back to the boat and we thought we would stay a little while longer, as it was my birthday in a few days and I thought it would be nice to celebrate in Barcelona. Paul did a routine check-up and started both engines. However only the port engine would start. After systematically checking everything, it appeared to be a faulty solenoid in the starter motor, so we took it to a local garage to be fixed. We then went through the “manana” process and what was initially supposed to take 3-4 days, eventually took 2 weeks to fix.

My birthday arrived (21, the same as Paul now) and after a leisurely breakfast and the card and present opening ceremony, we wandered around the city taking in a few sights. We were handed a leaflet advertising the Museu de l’Erotica, this looked very interesting, but by this time it was getting near lunch-time and there are some museums you just can’t see on an empty stomach! In the evening we frequented Barcelona’s best Cava bar (Cava being the champagne of Catalonia and £1.20 a bottle) and then treated ourselves to a paella in a restaurant renowned for being the best for paella. A lovely day and a big thanks for the cards, presents, phone calls and text messages, they meant so much.

We made the most of the rest of our time in Barcelona and explored the city further, taking in the museum of the history of Catalonia, the aquarium, 3D imax cinema and the maritime museum. The latter was to us, the most interesting. Housed in the former Royal shipyards, in a 13th century Gothic building, it presented to us a wealth of vessels and nautical treasures collected over the centuries, as well as a life-size replica of a Spanish galleon which, whilst wearing headphones piping sound effects and a narration, took us on “The Great Adventure of the Sea” (where have we heard that before?)

Rumour has it that on Sunday at midday an orchestra plays in the shadow of the cathedral and the locals turn out for a traditional dancing session. Being curious, we went along to see if it was true and were not disappointed.

Rarely have we seen so many people dancing hand in hand forming massive circles. All ages and all Spanish.

A glorious sight and sound. Towards the end of our stay, Barcelona was host to the Grand Prix and with the cheapest ticket at £125 to stand at the back, we decided against going. All day the sky was buzzing with helicopters ferrying

personnel to and from the airport to the track. Rumour has it that one of the drivers was on a boat in the marina – *the posh end we think!*

One evening, toward the end of our stay, we went to a pontoon barbecue, where you take your own food and drink and a plate of something for the table. Here we met a few more colourful characters from New Zealand, Australia, America and Canada, many of whom had circumnavigated the world and all with their own stories to tell. Quite an inspirational and intriguing evening.

On our last day in Barcelona, we watched a music festival being set up on the adjacent quay and went to investigate in the evening. Not starting until 9 pm. the 3-day event was called Diversitat and involved many different nations from around the world massing together to stamp out racism. Represented by approximately 60 or more countries ranging from Ethiopia, Cuba, Sudan, Jamaica, Inca, Brazil and many more, each had their own stall selling their wares and/or food. These were interspersed with drama groups and exhibits showing, for example, the holocaust, the concentration camps and the atrocities of the second world war. There were two stages, one at either end, allowing bands to promote their music that inevitably, got our feet tapping to the rhythm. We had a wonderful evening and came back with a really good feeling of unity and a headache from all the unclassified substances that were floating in the air!

After saying our farewells the following day, a month after we had arrived, we departed and headed for Tarragona (only pronounced if you can roll your r's and spit – a bit like Welsh really!) about 80 kms south. Too far to do in a day averaging 5 knots, so we anchored in a small cala (bay) after about 60 kms. It was so peaceful after the cacophony of Barcelona and on the lee side so, very calm water too.

We arrived in Tarragona the next day, a Sunday, just before lunch and, after getting ship-shape went for a short walk into the town to hunt out some bread. On our way back to Squib, we passed the town square and were treated to a fiesta. On the stage came a succession of different dancers, ranging from flamenco to folk and passedoble, some backed by an excellent Spanish guitarist and others by a female vocalist with a melodic, but glass-shattering voice. Paul and I stood there hungry but completely enthralled at this unexpected display of Spanish culture.

That evening we went for a walk and had a drink in a line-dancing bar (yee-ha) before finding a bar with the locals practising their salsa. People of all ages seemed to be joining in, but they were too good for us, so we just watched! This town had a good atmosphere and not too touristy, so we made it a mail-stop and stayed for a week.

We cycled around the interesting old part of town, followed the original walls and looked across the sea on the “Balcony of the Mediterranean”. It was good exercise getting there! An American couple, whom we had met in Barcelona, arrived just after us shortly followed by another English couple Caroline and Peter, who eventually travelled with us for about 2 weeks. All of us witnessed the following day, the lifeboat dashing out to sea and returning with the body of a man, which was dumped unceremoniously, on the quay a few yards from us. The fire brigade (called bombers in Catalanian) arrived, as did the police, an ambulance, a doctor and several marina personnel. They all stood for a couple of hours discussing the situation, before the body was put in a transit van and driven away. It transpired, he was 72 and had gone to rescue a young woman who had been swimming in a locally known black-spot. She survived. Sadly, he died, a hero.

When our mail arrived we set sail again and, after a few miles our starboard engine decided to play up again and developed an oil leak. At a place called Ampolia, we arrived in time to see the prize-giving for a 3-day fishing competition and 20 kg. Tuna was amongst the champions and the merriment in the club afterwards was coupled with a Spanish wedding.

Early start the next day to round Cabo Tortosa, a tricky cape and head for Vinaros. After a few fluky winds, squalls and a lumpy sea, both boats got round and eventually had a good sail into an unexpectedly expensive marina. The next couple of days were spent again in tandem with Caroline and Peter, stopping at Castellon de la Plana on the Costa del Azahar, noting in our ship's log that we had crossed the 0 degree meridian line, before arriving in the city of Valencia. We stayed a few days as there was so much to explore with Caroline whilst Paul solved the oil leak. We decided to be really *touristy* and took a ride around town on an open top bus and had a lovely “*girly*” day,

while the men played with their toys! A small pinprick in a high-pressure pipe was the cause of the oil leak. Paul managed to have a new one made for just 1900 pesetas (about £9)

Departed again, this time heading for Denia, where we were to say goodbye to our friends who would be travelling to the Balearics for the summer. Denia is just into the Costa Blanca and absolutely beautiful. The marina has a craggy mountain as a backdrop and is spotlessly clean. On the east of the town, perched on a hillside, are the ruins of a castle, overlooking a vibrant and friendly town, where we discovered an international bookshop.

The starboard engine decided to do its spoilt child impersonation again and had a tantrum, so Paul said he'd had enough and called the local Yanmar mechanic. They checked everything and found the head gasket had worn and water leaked into the engine. The damage was so bad that a new cylinder head had to be fitted. Apparently the only one in Spain was in Madrid and would arrive in 2 days – we've heard that before! Settling ourselves in for a long spell, we were very surprised when, two days later, he turned up with the part and fitted it there and then. Miracles do happen. By this time the temperatures had risen to 30 C average during the day and several times we recorded 40 C inside the boat, so we had been dipping ourselves in the sea at the nearby beach. After yet another farewell, this time to Caroline and Peter, we sailed to Alicante, intentionally missing Benidorm on the way, but stopping for the night in a small cala 20 kms. before Alicante, to have a cooling swim. *We did not realise it was a naturist beach! Well! When in Rome....All part of the adventure.*

Yesterday we stopped in San Juan, an anchorage just before Alicante, for another refreshing lunch-time dip – this time in the conventional style.

That is us up to date now. We are in Alicante for a week and the bimini and wind scoops we made earlier in the year are a godsend. We've met another couple called Peter and Anne, they are from Swansea and he's a retired fireman!!!

Adios!

AKU-AKU ... Crocodiles of the Rhone

By Dave Thomas CL 9.07

Suddenly the Saone river/canal met the Rhone at Lyon after we first passed through a massive lock. The river broadens out and one is immediately aware of a substantial increase in boat speed, owing to the downgoing water flow. It carried us along to such a degree that our speed is increased to 8 knots and more at times. But with it there comes a new danger, which we have only encountered occasionally up until now. There are real Crocodiles in the river and they are lurking just on the surface, waiting for an opportunity to bite our hulls or damage our propeller., I refer, of course, to driftwood which often looks very like a crocodile and is at least as menacing and dangerous. Often there is so much that picking a clear path through is simply not possible. We are obliged to reduce speed to a crawl, which only seems to serve to prolong the stress of the encounter. Once clear it is only too easy to believe we will see no more of it, only to be confronted with yet another barely visible tree trunk. What is particularly irritating is that a great deal of it is quite obviously the product of forestry, for it is clearly cut and sawn. It therefore did not just happen to fall in! There are also wine casks and bottles, but since these days they are usually plastic, they do not pose so much of a threat. The wooden crocs are, however, quite unnerving if they pass between our two hulls, perhaps striking the central engine nacelle or propeller on the way. The noise is guaranteed to startle even the boldest helmsman with resulting fears for the mechanical consequences. So far there has been no apparent damage even though some of our encounters have actually stalled the engine. Once again, we are glad of our liftable propeller, which enables us to inspect for damage!

The Rhone, which starts in Switzerland, has other peculiarities. Unpredictable strong winds spring up out of nowhere. This in itself may seem inconsequential but the wind puts a very uncomfortable wave motion into the water. The water surface does not seem particularly disturbed, but there have been times when Aku-Aku has been pitching fore and aft at least as severely as anything experienced at sea. When from the north west it is called the Mistral and it has gained a great deal of notoriety in the Mediterranean. There are large windsock at the entrance to the locks, so we can gauge the strength and direction of the wind and make due allowance for it. We are also now sharing the waterway with seagoing ships. The wake from these has sometimes given us a very nasty rolling whilst moored alongside a wall overnight. We must also be wary of a form of underwater structure known as a "Bem". It is like an underwater staircase of concrete leading to a wall where we might be tempted to secure for the night.

The consequence of receiving a beating against one of these, caused the wake of a passing ship or the Mistral is the stuff of nightmares! We cannot always detect these potential hazards with our sonar, so a good old-fashioned tubular pole is used to sound out the shape of the bottom of any wall we go alongside. We first encountered one of these at a halt which turned out to be closed for improvements and maintenance. Being unable to use the normal moorings we

thought that alongside the usual wall would as good a place as any. That was when we discovered what a Berm was. The obvious solution was to anchor outside the roadstead, as near the bank as reasonable. However the hook did not seem to want to bite, so an alternative type was employed in addition to our usual "Bruce".

This worked well enough and we spent a peaceful night with our anchor light set up. It has now become necessary to record another light deployment in the ships log-book. *Insurance can otherwise be invalidated!*

We stopped only a few hours at Lyon, since its thieves are universally infamous. A Dutch man close by had suffered the theft of a motorcycle from on deck the previous day and we were indeed dismayed to learn of it. Our navigational guide book makes specific mention of such problems, so we took no chances here.

Moving on to a pleasant rural vineyard area, we discovered the meaning of the word "Cave". It has no connection with troglodytes. It means cellar and it is of course, full of wine. The difference being that you are first allowed to sample the goods without spitting it out. You may then have your own containers/bottles filled with your choice. The cost is ridiculous. We have just suffered our first encounter with a bit of French sharp practice. Having gone alongside the usual free pontoon and plugged into the electricity supply, we went off on our bikes to explore the nearby village. On our return, a uniformed Frenchman appeared out of thin air and informed us that a charge was payable. It follows that, since it was by then late evening there was little option but to cough up and remain. It was however a particularly pleasant spot, the village being very quaint indeed and full of helpful friendly people. Our bikes proved particularly invaluable for shopping and sightseeing in these sort of places. The only snag being that it is often difficult to find our way around in the very narrow, often cobbled streets.

Avignon! We arrived in glorious sunshine and thus enjoyed splendid views as we passed up the river and beyond the end of the world famous bridge which comes to an abrupt and somewhat ignominious end, right in the middle of the river. The place has organised itself such that there is no option other than to use the moorings provided. However the facilities and security are good and since they cost, we made full use of them. It so happened we arrived on a Sunday. The street entertainers were out in force. Particularly unique and enchanting was a marionette show set up on a corner. The puppeteer, in clown's dress kept up a continuous tour de force with various string puppets operating many of them together with the benefit of any form of assistance, other than recorded music. It was somewhat reminiscent of the Black Theatre of Prague in its presentation but a large variety of characters were used and the clown who pulled the strings was very obviously enjoying his art. There was the usual juggler and mime artist in the square, a few inoffensive amusements, surprisingly, hot chestnuts, which seemed odd in view of the temperature.

We continued on down to Arles where the once free pontoon was found to have changed its status. However, we were able to retrace our course a short way back up the Rhone against the current, thus taking an alternative route along the Petit Rhone. Once again with the benefit of sunshine, we followed it into the area of France known as the Camargue. Here there were far fewer crocodiles and no fast flowing current to contend with. Wildlife abounded. The famous wild white horses accompanied by cattle egrets were first to be spotted. Then the huge black bulls with egrets often stood close beneath their bellies, picking their share of the spoils kicked up by the animals' hooves. We have seen many brilliant kingfishers, butterflies, dragonflies, different ducks, a beaver, lizard and numerous small songbirds. No pink flamingos yet but we hope to be lucky. Sometimes the kingfishers actually fly around us as we move.

There is a travelling fair in town at this time and we have gathered that we are in St. Gilles during a festival. Some streets are occupied entirely by the amusements and there are barriers here and there. While visiting the Sunday market there was a very loud explosion in the town. The streets were empty of vehicles and clearly something was about to happen. Suddenly, a posse of horsemen came galloping through the streets, driving black bulls between them. The riders reached the end of the street, turned around and drove the bulls back at breakneck speed. Again some onlookers risked life and limb to get near. Thus we witnessed the local means of advertising the bullfight what was to take place later. Having visited the local tourist office, we find there is to be a series of bullfights culminating in the grande finale on Remembrance Day. We had no idea that bullfights take place in France, believing it to be peculiar to Spain. We would probably enjoy the pageantry but not the barbaric cruelty which the animals suffer. In our naivety we even thought that perhaps the thing was watered down to acceptability in France. Not so, by all accounts, so after little consideration and we did not attend.

Friday the **T**hirteenth

No we are not superstitious but I, for one, would not change the name of a boat whilst she was afloat! So it was on this day and at this particular pontoon, we were given the news we had been awaiting. After five days of enforced

waiting around, the VNF, which is the authority responsible for the smooth running of the canal system, decided we could proceed. A number of boats slipped their moorings immediately and a small convoy formed all heading for the first lock, with Aku-Aku at the head. This was all to change however, since a Dutch power boat was already waiting at the lock and another power boat driver claimed next spot since he had been first to be halted at the Marina.

We reformed in the original order, which made everyone happy. So on we went having decided that this particular date had in fact brought us luck. We noted however, that Peter the German stayed put. He had perhaps found the success he sought ashore! As we progressed, a couple of lock keepers mentioned peniche ahead. We realised it would be in the opposing direction but so what, we had encountered them before with no problem. But in fact this part of the canal is both narrow in places and shallow. It was built, I was amazed to discover in the 1700s, which accounts for its modest depth and meandering aspect. So when we found a peniche about to emerge from the next lock we did the obviously prudent thing, going astern to the widest bit we could find where we manoeuvred as close to the bank as possible. A bilge keel sailing boat ahead of us with far greater draught, decided on a similar tactic. The bank on this side was overgrown with foliage and it was not possible to get ashore with our mooring line to secure the boat to a tree or whatever. This was a safety tactic we had instinctively used in this particular canal and it had at the time, seemed a little overcautious.

The lock gates opened and the bows of the peniche hove into view. A bow wave developed as she increased speed. She was low in the water and was obviously fully laden. Hundreds of tons of huge vessel gathered way, plumb in the middle of the canal. It headed inexorably towards the first yacht, which hugged the bank some 100 yards ahead of us. Because of her bilge keels she could not get as close to the bank as we could. The peniche was about three quarters way past the yacht when, for some unknown reason, the smaller boat seemed to turn sideways on, bows to the bank. Why? The preceding bow wave approached and it was on us and passed some three feet away. The dark and menacing black side slid past rather more quickly than expected. The wheelhouse seemingly towered above us, then suddenly in an instant, we were picked up and spun hard against its side, our bows were pushed hard into the canal bank and our stern quarter banged and thumped along the side of the peniche. Full power from our engine and full opposite rudder did nothing to improve matters. Extra protection, which I had made during the refit were working overtime and undoubtedly saved us from damage at this point. Our mast, carried horizontally on our trestles had swung across the peniche's deck. It just missed the wheelhouse but our dish type omnidirectional TV antenna was destroyed and the current whereabouts of its innards are unknown. Then as suddenly as it had developed, the peniche was gone and it was all over. So Aku-Aku licked her wounds and together with somewhat shaken crew, continued on to the next lock which thankfully contained no peniche. Little did we know what lay in wait for us!

Once inside we learnt that another peniche was waiting to enter. This time there would be no problem as it should stand off until we were clear. On exiting the lock we were amazed to see that it was making way towards us. The yacht ahead of us cleared the open gates and dived hard for the bank with the result, unbeknown to us that she fetched up hard on her bilge keels. Astern of her we had no alternative escape, so we tucked in as close as possible. The peniche came on, her stern slewed sideways toward us as she lined up with the lock. Closer and closer it came. Somehow we must escape or surely be crushed! The yacht ahead now had clear water and could apparently go ahead, thus leaving us an escape route. Go! Go on! Move! Go Ahead! We shouted and gesticulated whilst jumping around the decks armed with boat hooks in a forlorn attempt to deal with the threat. But nothing moved other than the peniche. Slowly she cleared past us with a few inches to spare. Our hair was surely stood on end (would not notice much in my case I suppose) the danger passed. The yacht ahead explained why she had been unable to move away and offered apologies. Decidedly shaken one again, we realised that Aku Aku was quite unscathed, only our nerves had taken a beating. The incident had been very close indeed!

Once again, on we went, but by mutual agreement Aku-Aku took over leading the small convoy, a position which felt somewhat more comfortable as far as we were concerned. We could work out our own salvation should it be necessary. Thereafter things went very smoothly, we were only three in number, it was not possible to put more than this into a lock at any one time. Each boat worked out its own routine and method of keeping station whilst in the lock. We quickly developed into a team and so smoothly did we operate together that we frequently caught up with the power boat convoy ahead of us. We must have become quite fit as there is much scaling of ladders to do and the layout of securing bollards is quite varied. VNF were very good and worked locks for us beyond normal hours in an apparent effort to help recover some of the enforced time loss. In view of the aforementioned narrow squeaks we have reflected on what VNF actually stand for. *Very Nearly Flattened* springs to mind, some readers may think perhaps of an alternative appropriate "F" word! So on Friday 13th were we lucky to have survived these frightful incidents or were we unlucky to have suffered them?

Peniche Extraordinaire

One evening, whilst alongside a grassy bank secured for the night, we were invited aboard a peniche. The owner skipper had magnanimously decided to allow our entire convoy, including the power boats, to start ahead of him the following day. We jumped at the chance and bolted down our meal hurrying aboard as quickly as we could. Nothing could have adequately prepared us for the sight which confronted us as we opened the door to what we expected to be the owner's cabin. My jaw dropped open wide enough for a dental extraction! We were actually in the cargo hold. It held a secret from the outside world however, since it was converted into a palace, so opulent that it compared more than favourably with the foyer at the London Dorchester. The entire interior was panelled in light oak or pine. Wooden framed windows cut into the sides gave a good view out. Artistic décor, many pictures and maritime artefacts abounded providing unique interest. There were model ships in glass cases, a huge bar constructed from what must have been a vast wine vat. The deck was varnished planking with a finish like glass. Many and varied exotic carpets from all over the world lay here and there. There was soft hidden lighting, which had the effect of giving great height to the deckhead (ceiling). Soft music played discreetly somewhere in the background. It was comfortably warm and dry. An African grey parrot eyed us with considered curiosity from his perch by the ornamental fountain. Satisfied he greeted us in English. A large wooden sea chest containing doubloons and a tattered parchment chart purported to suggest as to the owner's source of wealth. A large copper standard diver's helmet lay on a shelf above. Brightly coloured lovebirds were in large cages. Leather bound books stood on the many and varied shelves. Ornamental African, Chinese and Indian wood carvings added to the ambience. After what seemed like an age in which we tried to absorb these wonders, the owner joined us introducing himself as Phil. We retired to a vast wooden refectory style table. Unlike the table, Phil had no wooden leg. He spoke excellent fluent English whilst we did our best to reply in halting French. With parrot settled comfortably on his shoulder he reiterated his life story and future intentions. He was born on a peniche he explained, as had been generations of his forebears. He, however had gone off to London where he ran a delicatessen.

Returning to France he bought the peniche and converted it into the floating hotel in which we now sat, taking, to my amazement only a year to complete the task which included shortening the hull by a few metres. We did not learn why this was done. He was now heading for the Canal du Midi, thus returning to the life of a bargeman but carrying paying guests instead of cargo. He showed us more. There were comfortable cabins with en suite facilities.

We were in the lounge/diner/bar. The vessel had the benefit of a constantly running 240 volt generator so standard electrical appliances, power showers and full size baths were provided. The central heating system was also standard domestic. It is difficult to adequately describe the vast space within the boat but several houses would have easily been swallowed up in it. Permanent residence and life aboard the peniches exempts one from all taxation, Phil explained. There were, therefore, considerable advantages to such a way of life and any commercial enterprise or activity aboard was similarly exempt. Even the car carried discreetly on the aft deck, was we believed exempt from certain regulations and taxes. Most of the main deck above was set up rather like a Mediterranean taverna with canopy overhead. Other seating was provided fore and aft so as to give an excellent view of the passing countryside. There were shrubs and bright flowers in baskets. The entire vessel gleamed with fresh paint. All in all, very comfortable and salubrious. Since there is such a revival of interest in cruising, the enterprise is bound to be successful. One of the many advantages to inland cruising is the greatly reduced likelihood of sea-sickness although there have been times on the broader river stretches when we have been surprised to find it quite rough. *An interesting bit of French history came to light during our conversation.* It seems the English once owned large areas of France and it was they who taught the French to make wine! *Well, so Phil told us!*

But now there is a problem. We set off this morning only to run into fog. We can no longer use our radar since the mast is down. We quickly decided conditions were too hazardous to continue. We returned to the safety of the pontoon at Tournus on the Saone where the previous night had been spent. Here, to our surprise, we found one of the convoy, which had disbanded once we left the last lock on the canal du centre. The boat was of course "Erevan" the bilge-keeler which had barred our escape from the last peniche incident. She had developed an engine overheating problem which the crew, Tony and Bernie could not rectify. We cannot just leave them stranded on a public use pontoon, for one thing it is not allowed and for another it would be unsafe in a fast flowing river containing substantial potentially damaging flotsam. Tomorrow we shall try to tow the stricken boat to a yard or marina where it may be possible to carry out repairs. We have been obliged to stock up with provisions once again. As before the bill was far less than anticipated. The pontoon at Tournus is a magnificent 100 m. long, all free of charge, again with free mains electricity. We have now covered 946 kms. and 198 locks. Soon we hope to sail sous la Pont d'Avignon!

Next month we will tell you about Tugboat AKU-AKU ED.

DON'T FORGET TO LET US KNOW WHERE YOUR BOAT IS MOORED