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# Bobcat & Catalac

**Founder: MARY LACK**



# Cruising Association

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*Hello*



*Fellow Bobcat and Catalac Friends every where*

We are now back home, every thing went ok when we got back to Calais, the mast was put back up and *Think Again* was made ready for the sea. We met up with a boat that had gone into the Canal system with us and also enjoyed a final meal ashore before setting off for Boulogne and a visit to the Nausicaa Aquarium, which we found well worth a visit. We were also able to see Ellen Macarther onboard *Kingfisher*. It was now time to head back across the channel to Eastbourne, a nice marina if you are in the area. We were able to visit an Aunty while we were there and as it was her birthday it was a cause for a celebration! We then moved on to Littlehampton and enjoyed a mooring and a meal at the Arun sailing club, then back into the Solent and a visit to Newport on the Isle of Wight where we met Derek & Linda on *Singing Wind* 8/01, it was then down to the Folly inn before setting off on the final leg back to Christchurch. *Think Again* has been unloaded the washing has been done so its back to a normal way of life, if there is such a thing. We have just had an enjoyable week end at Studland (Poole) with Nigel and Ann on *Ard-na-Greine* 9/220. Now its off to the Southampton Boatshow to have a look around a see what's new. We are hoping to purchase a couple of new hatches to replace the one's in the front cabin and the heads, that will be our winter project this year. We will also be looking at charts and possibly a new Almanac ? I don't think Ann is ready to start thinking about next years trip yet, (but I am) ! We have also had a B.C.C.A committee meeting and every thing is going ok. Thank you all for your stories and pictures and please keep them coming, we need a good reserve of items to keep things going. *Good Sailing*

*Bob & Ann "Think Again"*

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

**Jeremiah & Kathleen FARIES** of Pleasant Retreat, 148 Middle Road,

Southampton SNO2. BERMUDA e:mail [jmf@ibl.bm](mailto:jmf@ibl.bm)

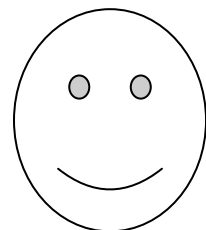
CL.8.157 "SUNBEAM"

**Graham W. SOUTER** of 21 Buchan Pl. Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire. AB43 9TX

CL.8.201 "CAT-NA-MARA" Moored at Plockton Ross-shire.

**Bill TAYLOR** of No.5 Wallis Avenue, Exeter, Devon. EX4 8DB

CL.8.107 "POLYAPPLE"





# AKU-AKU ... Reflections on the French Canals!

By Dave Thomas CL 9.07

**BANG!-----CRACK!** a sound like a rifle shot drew our startled attention to the parting of a 22mm polypropylene stern mooring warp. AKU -AKU our catamaran house and home was being sucked towards the massive black gunwales of "Valiant", the biggest commercial barge I have ever encountered outside the Rhone, We had seen her long sharp bow and high wheelhouse in the distance, knowing of her reputation for giving no quarter, we went astern to find a spot where we could moor safely and allow her to pass. But now, her massive displacement sucked us out and spun us around putting paid to our prudence and caution as our stern hit her side, a davit was wiped off, we were then rammed against the sharp concrete canal side, first one bow and then the other as the spin continued. Away went the other davit, we were battered and bumped all the way down the side of the vessel. Next our bow line parted with another loud report our other bow was again rammed up the concrete as we were sucked and drawn right around through 180 degrees.

Thankfully the barge was so heavily laden and low in the water that our mast, carried on crutches, miraculously cleared her decks. Time stood still. We were powerless to do anything until the horror passed. Then we were left bobbing helpless in the middle of the canal. We stared after the inappropriately named Valiant as she proceeded on her awful way as though nothing had happened! I scurried below and tore up deckboards. Incredibly we were not making water! I dived in to recover various items which had been knocked over the side We looked in disbelief at our parted mooring lines, recently purchased and easily adequate for the job so we had believed!

We tenuously motored on to Frontignan, gradually recovering some of our wits on the way. Here we met a large Dutch steel barge that had been rammed onto rocks by the same vessel. She was looking for someone to assess the underwater damage. As it happens, I am a diver, but with regret I did not volunteer my services on this occasion, feeling far too shaken to undertake the task.

To repair the damage, we shored up using timbers alongside some steps in the quay thus lifting our bows well clear of water. We effected repairs by working from the bottom step and our dinghy, half inflated.

The residents at Frontignan advised us to report the accident to the Gendarmerie, (I felt disinclined to embroil ourselves with French beaurocracy having suffered "difficulties" in the past with the export of an aeroplane).

The incident with the inappropriately named *Valiant* occued along a particularly narrow, cluttered and shallow stretch of the canal between Magalone and Frontignan in the South of France. Some months later we had occasion to pass the same spot again and comprehensive dredging works were in progress. Huge spoil banks bore witness to the magnitude of the works and it seemed that perhaps there may have been a few more victims thus forcing V.N.F. to react.

**Lessons learned:** We shall never know what may have happened had we continued and attempted to pass *Valiant* port to port as is just.

It was undoubtedly shallow to starboard with a great many visible sharp obstructions poking up. Our forward viewing sonar showed it up well, its transponder being installed in the starboard hull! We have adopted a policy of securing at least four warps ashore when these monsters are about.

**To my amazement, they sometimes sail at night!**

We have found other similar huge barges grounded whilst negotiating locks, shifting their loads with an on board crane in an attempt to solve the problem.

***Incredibly the skipper and crew of one vessel appeared to be students on vocational work experience!***

Yet we must pass a **CEVNI** test before we are allowed into the canal network. Moving on to this subject, a somewhat bizarre situation now exists here in the Euro inland waterways particularly in the French Canal du Midi which runs from Bordeaux to the South Coast where there are a number of exits to the Med. If you are British, and you wish to access the Med. via the canal system then you will be obliged to comply with certain Euro regulations governing your passage. If you have an R.Y.A. Helmsman's certificate of competence with a currently valid inland waterways endorsement then you will be able to navigate the waterways quite legally until such time as it comes up for renewal. At this point the R. Y.A. will see fit to disqualify you by removing your inland waterway endorsement. To regain this qualification you must pay to sit and pass a written CEVNI test/exam. and prove to the satisfaction of one of 'their accredited schools that you are capable of handling a boat If you happen to be already in the canal system at the time, you may well find yourself forced to return to U.K. in order to achieve this. It was not the R. Y.A. who moved the qualification goal posts of course.

***The infamous Eurocrats were the culprits, well, what a surprise!***

Now let us look at another side of the coin which makes this situation seem ludicrous in the extreme.

If it should be that you wish to sample these canals and the French lifestyle you may decide to **hire a boat** here thus saving the time and trouble of a channel crossing. This being so, you may contact anyone of the many hire boat companies which operate in the waterways. Almost without exception they are British run. There are around 3,400 hire boats operating at anyone time within the confines of these waterways mostly in Canal du Midi.

Now here is the interesting bit.

A boat **HIRER** needs no qualifications whatsoever and can rent a motor cruiser such as the one in the photo which may be up to 45 ft in length. Such vessels are possessed of- little water bite but carry a great deal of top hamper and obviously suffer unpredictable windage problems. It will not matter in the least however if in fact an aspirant to the conn has never set foot aboard a boat let alone steered one since the hire company will provide a "**sailing card**" which amongst other things, certifies that they have taught the hirer to handle the craft! (see page 10 of *Sailor's Guide Canal des Mers 2001 issued by Voies Navigable de France*). How said companies manage to carry out such instruction in the very little time available during turn rounds is something of a miracle" since maintenance and cleaning is also done at the same time. Staff must be hard pressed to get it all done. Maintenance and repair appear to be conducted during winter and or when something breaks. We heard of an engine that performed several somersaults in its bay. The bearers having been allowed to deteriorate so badly they simply disintegrated when throttle was applied.

Chaotic scenes, collisions" hornblasts, lock gate races, international gesticulations coupled with thunderous vocal suggestions are the order of the day.

The boats in question are aptly nicknamed ""**Bumper boats**" for this is how they spend most of their time. They are armed with numerous dangling fenders and comprehensive rubber fendering capped with stainless steel strip. Needless to say this can be very unkind indeed to ones fibreglass when you suffer the inevitable contact For some reason hirers are mostly German. They arrive at hire centres in Mercs. and BMW s expecting a hire boat to behave in much the same way as their autobahn chariots. Often the crews are all male" and it appears almost obligatory for the boat to wear the **largest Skull and Crossbones** flag that can be found. Whilst many people find this deeply **offensive**, others feel it to be quite appropriate and should in fact be **mandatory** for it is normally used to mark a poisonous substance or a minefield!





**45ft. BUMPER BOAT**



**PARKING.....PARKED**

The standard method of going alongside is both ingenious and reliable. A crew member is despatched to the forward deck armed with the bitter end of the bow line. The helmsman will then aim the bows at the canal bank at as near 90 degrees as can be managed. Full throttle is then applied so that the vessel hits the bank hard enough to ride up it and come to a halt. The crew member is thus catapulted through the air onto the bank hopefully taking the bow line with him. Some other person aboard may then throw hammer and stake ashore possibly thus braining the advance bowlinesman. The latter, should he survive, will hammer in a stake and attach the *line*. Meanwhile the stern, having been left to its own devices will have proceeded downwind or downstream and *it* seems to come as a surprise to those aboard the boat that this happens. At this point a stem line is sometimes taken ashore and the situation brought under some form of control! Bumper boat hire companies ensure that bow and stern lines are no longer than the boat itself, there being less chance of a prop fouling that way. It means however that the flying bowlineman has no chance of simultaneously taking both lines ashore even if the idea entered his head!

In locks it is common for them to halt simply by fetching up on the stem of the preceding vessel or the lock gates, though this can earn severe rebuke from their keepers, who vary from the downright surly to the very patient and pleasantly helpful. Theirs is indeed an unusual way of life.

Wintering in the canals can be, to say the least, unpredictable. There are many stopovers and quays where limited facilities and electricity are provided f.o.c. Regrettably a certain flag is notorious for its abuse of such



amenities, the bypassing of supply meters and safety limit trips is commonplace as is the plugging in of two or more connections to feed one vessel. We have seen an industrial air compressor directly connected to the supply grid wiring, thus bypassing all electrical safety devices. The inevitable result is the total cut-off of such facilities and who can blame the authorities for so doing when there is such blatant abuse. It is not uncommon to find lamp posts tapped into. *Unfortunately for those resorting to this practice they have generally failed to find a way of fooling said lamp posts into providing electricity during daylight hours!* Should one be fortunate enough to find a legitimate working electrical supply, it is likely a sudden disconnection may occur. Investigation will likely find your plug drowned in the canal and another substituted. Stand up fisticuffs and worse have sometimes occurred. Often both electricity and water are fed from a common obelisk the resultant supply is unpredictable and may be *literally shocking*. It is well established that water and electricity do not make good bed fellows and it seems amazing that such ill conceived arrangements exist.

**Bodies** are fished out of the canals with alarming frequency particularly during the winter. Should you happen to collide with any, or perhaps discover one nudging against your hull, best ignore it. The reporting of such, may well find you accused of having been responsible for the deceased's demise. Since you found it dead, you may well have been the last to see it when still alive is the premise! Regretably theft takes its toll as Unfortunate victims have been relieved of trousers containing wallets, bikes, motor cycles, generators large and small even when chained and or bolted on deck Such thefts have some times taken place in broad daylight! Reporting such occurrences may cause you far more trouble than it is worth. Some times the canal makes a convenient dump after the odd shooting has occurred. One body was discovered immersed amidst an oil slick, still astride a motor cycle! The town of Agde alone chalked up three clients for the undertaker over the last Xmas holiday period. The local undertaker displays a large sign which reads. "PARKING reserve for clients". But don't let any of this put you off life for survivors in these waterways is in fact mostly convivial, sociable and thoroughly enjoyable. It is a fact that many a once proud sailing vessel has become completely canalised. Their owners have become addicted to the way of life and see no good reason for putting to sea again. Masts are sometimes cut up and literally scrapped. Bilge and fin keels are also often dispensed with not always with premeditation. Curious structures appear on some boats where once there was a cockpit. Some of them are U.P.V.C. with double glazed windows. It is not to difficult to understand why, for there is never a dull moment" always something different lurks around the next bend and tying up alongside the bank for a few days costs nothing. It is also unlikely that seasickness will occur! Many boaters have cars and somewhat amusingly hike or bike back along tow paths to recover them and catch up with their boats. Larger vessels crane their cars aboard usually onto the poop deck Shoreside general interest abounds.

Carnivals start at the beginning of February.



Les Joutiers are a wonderful spectacle in their brightly painted cutters as they joust with lance and shield from platforms high on the stem. In the bows are musicians with fife and drum and stalwart oarsmen wear traditional white flannels and straw boaters. Inter town competitions lasting several hours involving a great many participants are fiercely contested in the South. Many beaches are easily reached from the canals, some are for naturists and there are good lifeguard patrols. Back in the canals bankside flashers and bridge top mooners provide their own unique brand of entertainment foc.

Here in the Camarge there are wild white horses, pink flamingos, kingfishers" brightly coloured bee eaters, watersnakes and terrapins. Often there is free entertainment, dancing and gastronomic delights including barbecues on bankside or cockpit. Historic architecture and pageantry is to be found everywhere. Open air markets offer amazing produce at good prices. There is also Petanque, (**Boules to you**).

Further entertainment may be derived from **Autumn fly swat** competitions. Standard size and type of swat must be agreed. Scoring is based on how many victims large or small, participant competitors can kill in one day. Several, in one swat counts double score, whilst an unlikely total miss may put you back ten. Successive squadrons of mosquitoes and "no see urns" will devour some unfortunates whilst ignoring others. In common with vampires they are said to find garlic repugnant. Consumption of considerable quantities of it may help this problem whilst also serving to disguise your nationality which can be advantageous when dealing with shoreside traders.

Astronomers will love the clear undistorted skies and there is fishing everywhere. No wretched bailiff will appear from nowhere intent on spoiling a fisher's enjoyment. Considerate boats slacken speed and avoid their tackle. It is obviously in everyone's best interest to do so. Most fishers acknowledge with a friendly wave.

If you perhaps would like a pet cat or dog, don't bother to go looking, for sooner or later at least one will be given you or will simply come aboard and make its self comfortable. Cats, whilst popular and supposedly little trouble, can be awkward. They both board and jump ship as and when it suits them or will scale a tree ashore, just before negotiation of a lock is imminent. **Don't believe they keep mice and rats down. In fact they are notorious for bringing them aboard as prizes to share with their owners.** Some clever victims sometimes escape leaving the hapless Skipper with the difficult task of extermination. Their nocturnal activities can be noisy and disturbing as they demolish insulation and wiring causing havoc with the electrics. The galley is obviously unlikely to escape their aspirations. We even know of a rat that followed the cats route aboard through the cat flap! The cat was totally disinterested in assisting with it's capture. A great deal of time and effort was put into the catching of it. It was cornered and captured only to escape whilst the skipper was deciding on a method of dispatch. Either two had boarded this unfortunate vessel, or the creature chose to return, for the nocturnal disturbances continued. Once again and with even greater difficulty it was captured, but this time a swift and unceremonious knock on the head was administered. Obviously, if in fact a pair boarded there may be offspring left aboard! Only time will tell.

The cat has lost a great many Brownie points. Our small dog "Salty", by contrast, having been brought up aboard, fiercely guards our floating home against all invaders big or small!

All this coupled with dodging bumper boats. scraping under incredibly low archway bridges, avoiding submerged cars and barges all devoid of marker buoys adds further to the fun.

*French wine and beer whilst palatable are rubbish, for they share a remarkable ability to evaporate! However said beverages are ridiculously cheap and one does learn to tolerate this odd feature.* This, and the general low cost of living tends to make one resentful of British taxes and perhaps the idea of a return to U.K. may become unthinkable. However it may not be the place to come to avoid heart attacks. Seriously folks it's great, and the French are lovely. Generally, you don't get ripped off here.

**Vive la Belle France.**

PS. Do however keep a sharp lookout for le "**Crotte du Chien**" whilst on a run ashore!

**We are going to join Derek xyz on their 9Mtr. "WANDERLUST" as they continue with their shakedown cruise to the Bahamas.**

*(Well we are finally in the dominican rep. after three months of wind on the nose. First off let me apologize for all the spelling mistakes but I'm not going to bother checking as it hot as haddies in the office.)*



*Well where did I leave off?*

*Think about the time we reached cacois down in the Turks&Cacois Islands. Nothing happens quickly here in th D.R. so thats why it's been a while to finish.*

*After reaching west cacois island the wind started to blow again and we had to hol;e up there for 3 days before we where able to make a harbor to clear customs. The west side of west cacois is a diving area witha shear wall that comes up from 1000' to 60' within a few hundred yards of the island. We did alot of snorkling here and I'm back to free diving 60' witch surprized me. It had been years since I tried these depths and didn't to a whole lot in the bahamas on the way down due to weather.*

*Lori just follows along and the water is so clear she just watches from the top. Though this time she is getting better at free diviong and can now make 10-15'.*

*Finally when the weather let up some we sailed up to Porvo and cleared customs. Not much in provo really to do so after a couple days we cleared out and headed back over to west cacois as the wind was out of the SE. and we could not get across the big shallow sand bank due to the wind.*

*We tried to sail for Mazanillo witch is the last town on the north coast of the DR, but the wind beat us again and we had to turn back for west cacois. Ended up hanging there for about another week. then sailed back up to the main island of provo and checked into a marina for a couple days. More supplys and more fuel and another game plan.*

*we new if we could get the 40 miles or so accross the bank to the east side we would be better off. So with our shallow draft we decided to try a small boat channel that was suppose to exist along the top part of the bank. (by staying in shallow water 3-5' the waves couldn't built and we could motor into the wind) Well it was a very good idea till 4hrs from the dock the channel came to a dead end witch left us with 12inches a water around us for as far as we could see.*

*Oh well back to the dock we went. Lori and I have never did so much back tracking in all are years put together as we have had to due on this trip!!*

*Well the next day we tried another route just a little farther sail and though it was rough manged to get accross the bank to south cacois witch is on the east side of the bank.*

*Course you can figure out what it did when we got there!! IT began to blow and blow and well think your getting the drift of this trip! So we squeezed up in to some very skinny water and decided to wait. We where now only 100 miles from are desdination or so we thought.*

*The conch diving was good where we where anchored and we feasted on them while we where there. The water around the boat was 3' at low tide and around 5' at high. Lori and I collected a bunch of conch one day and I would just stand next to the boat and clean them as the water was shallow and I could use the back of the boat as a table.*

*I was in water only as deep as my stomach cleaning conch and lori went inside to make some drinks. She comes out an says Derek look at the size of this ray, OH NO LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THIS SHARK! He was on one corner of the boat and I was on the other Apox14' apart. Needless to say I proved it was quite easy to clear the side of the boat with out a ladder! Normaly don't have any problems with sharks when you are cleaning conch, but we latter found out there where a lot of big sharks up in this shallow water. The next day we seen a 9' hammer head along the boat in 4' of water! Doesn't he know he's suppose to be a*



*deep water shark. Though I due know they will come up in the shallows I've only ever seen a few real shallow.*

*Well the weather was suppose to blow for another week so we figured we would just hang out here and wait, then the weather guys down in the carribbean started talking about a possible tropical depression forming latter in the week. Oh no we didn't need that. There was no place to hide where we where at and it would mean retreating back across the bank to the boat yard!!*

*Not another retreat. Well the wind had been blowing close to 20kt's for a few days and sea's where forcast at 5-7 and 6-8 farther south. We figured we would sail in this kind of weather farther down in the islands but wanted to try the boat in this kind of wether on a short day sail and not a 100 mile run.*

*Well we where not turning around so the fallowing morning off we went. We could not point the boat high enough into the wind to make Luperon witch was where we where headed so decided once we got south of the sand bank and reefs we would fall off the wind for Manzanillo back to the west.*

*We had 20miles to work due south fairly hard on the wind before we could fall off 30 degrees and we where making good speed until the working jib blew out.(thats the forward sail). Here we go again! So changing out a roller furling system in that kind of wind was interesting to say the least. Exspeacially since we had to put up our big genny in that kind of wind. I was wrestling with it by my self on the front deck as I did not want lori up there with her back. Well I got it up but lori still hurt her back grabbing a line, and down she went for the count!! So we got her laying down and there she remained for the whole trip unable to move around. I got the boat back under way and with a reef in the genny we still where making good time and got the boat back up to over 6.5 kts(Thats flying fo us!!) Once we where able to turn and lay a course for Manzanillo the the boat was much more comfortable. We where running with wind and seas on the side of the boat. The boat actually rides quite nice though at times very wet as a big sea would brake next to us and slop water thru the cockpit.*

*We avergaed windaround 18-20kts and seas from 5'- 8' depending on time of day. We rounded Monto christi shoals around midnight and that commed the seas down and had a nice easy 15 miles to finish getting the hook down at about 4:40 am. (Tell my old student steve hogg at kemper it was time to brake out that bottle of scotch we had made the DR. Thanks mate!)*

*Well we spent about a week at manzanillo a really nice little spot that very few cruiser hit and one I would highly recomend. The people there where all very nice and vary friendly and we had a really good time.*

*Finally the wether broke for a few days and we did an over night trip down the coast to Luperon. It was Uneventful exsept for the log or what ever we hit at 4:30 in the morning. That did get the adraline flowwing. I was inside charting our position when it came down between the two hulls but luckly missed the props.*

*Well we are now here for hurricane season if any one would like to come down would love to have you. Theres some really neat stuff to see and do here not to mention it quite inexpensive.*

*Will fill you in on whats going on soon but the heat is building and its Presedente' time.*

*Until Later*

*ASTA LA VISTA BABY!!!*