

Commodore: MARGARET SMITH
e.mail : mihaptic@msn.com
Mob: +44(0) 7771 661 720

Treasurer: RICK HARVEY
e-mail june.rick@sky.com



e-mail: PeterGimson@bccafsworld.co.uk

www.bobcatandcatalac.btinternet.co.uk

Disclaimer

Neither the CCA nor Committee will accept any liability for personal injury arising out of participating in any event, rally or race organized by or through the CCA whether sustained by members, guests, or visitors, or caused by the said members, guests or visitors whether or not such damage or injury could have been attributed to or was occasioned by the neglect, default or negligence of any of the officers, committees or servants of the CCA.

Boat Owners Third Party Insurance

It is the responsibility of all boat owners to have adequate third party insurance in respect of him/herself, vessel, his/her crew for the time being & his/her visitors.

September 2008

Hi Members.

It's that time of year, with the Southampton Boat Show almost upon us as the season draws to an end for all but the hardy. For those members who sail in and around Great Britain who are still hoping for light winds accompanied by at least glimpses of the sun, I wish you well.

My season began with the admiral and I arriving in Cherbourg with a week to spare before the May Bembridge Rally. We fitted the sails, ran the engines, our VHF had not been receiving the weather broadcasts from Jersey coastguard, so we had also purchased a new VHF aerial and cable with the intention of fitting it with the aid of some helpful muscle to winch me up the mast at Bembridge. With good intentions to cross the ditch the following day, the only thing delaying us from crossing was NE winds f4-5 occasionally 6, why are they always on the nose when you have a 60mile trip planned? We had time to spare and put it to good use to power hose ME-AND-ER's topsides. The wind continued NE for another day then with the forecast ENE f4 we decided to have an early night, make an early start and sail to Poole. The night was disturbed by what we thought were fireworks and singing on the far side of the marina by The City de la Mer. However when we woke we learnt that the French fishermen were responsible for the noise, they were also blockading the Marina and had rigged steel hawsers to prevent any boat entering or leaving. We walked to the marina office to discover many other boat owners both French and English trying to find out when they could leave. We were told that the fishermen were in dispute with the government and wanted the price of diesel to be dropped or more money for their fish. They claim that they were working long hours but could not earn enough money to live. The local supermarkets were selling the fish at 12 euros per kilogram and they were being paid 3 euros per kilo. The dispute and views of both the government and fishermen was to be discussed in Paris later that day, the general feeling of the many boat owners was that the dispute would be over within 24 hours.

Later that evening the blockade was lifted for an hour, to allow a tall square-rigger to leave and also allow the many English yachts that had made good use of the NE winds to cross the Channel to France to enter the marina. The next day tension rose as the blockade was still in force, no boat was allowed to leave the marina but yet again boats that wished to enter were allowed in during an hour in the evening.

To be fair, the captain of the marina warned all the boat owner that the fishermen would let them in but he could not say when they would be able to leave. Wednesday, day three still blocked, we had dentist appointments arranged the following Tuesday after the bank holiday, so Sue and I decided to cycle to Brittany Ferries office and get the Condor fastcat back to Poole, attend the Bembridge Rally and keep our dental appointments. We arrived at the docks to see far more vehicles queuing for the ferry than usual, and we soon learned that further down the French coast both the marinas and ferry ports were also blockaded and had been for several days. Most of the owners of the cars and lorries had arrived at Cherbourg after realizing that the ferry port was still open. We heard the rumble of the fastcat's engines as it docked so hurried to the office to pay for our tickets, secure in the knowledge we would be back in Poole in three hours. Within five minutes of our buying the tickets we were told that the sailing was cancelled. We, and many of the passengers left the port, us to cycle back to our boat the others to find suitable overnight accommodation. As we cycled back to the marina we encountered some of the roads blocked by the police as a demonstration by the fishermen marched through the town. With banners waving and loud speakers chanting we estimated at least ten thousand marchers who had been joined by others from the transport union also protesting about the price of fuel. We were further dismayed when we arrived back on our boat to see the fastcat, that had been cancelled, leave Cherbourg for Poole with the few passengers that had decided to stay in the port rather than to find suitable accommodation in the town.

The situation worsened later that day, when hoards of demonstrators who appeared, well organized, raided the local supermarkets and removed all the fish from the counters and cold stores. The fish they then distributed to anyone walking in the town and handed it out to motorists at traffic lights. I didn't see this but was informed by another Englishman who keeps his boat on the same pontoon as ME-AND-ER. He had been given a large salmon, a kilo of cooked prawns and a couple of flatfish. They also lit fires on the roundabouts at the entrance to the various channel ports to prevent any vehicles entering or leaving them, foot passengers could for the present enter or leave the port at will. We learnt from other Brit's who also berth at Cherbourg that Caen (Ouistreham) was also still open for sailings to Portsmouth, Caen (Ouistreham) no good for us on bicycles, as it was an hour by car from Cherbourg. We waited until we knew that the next sailing on the ferry, Barfleur, from Poole to Cherbourg had left Poole and booked a ticket for the early morning return from Cherbourg to Poole. We were warned that there was no guarantee that it would sail. The following morning on arriving at the port it was obvious that the Barfleur was not in port and we learnt that it had been turned back to Poole without arriving at Cherbourg. The port Offices at Brittany Ferries were full of angry and desperate customers all on foot, their cars and lorries abandoned outside the port because the roads leading to the ports were still blocked. I informed many of them ferries were still operating the previous night from Caen (Ouistreham) to Portsmouth. If they must get home there may still be a way. We would have gone there ourselves by bus, or train had a 48hour strike by the transport union not just started.

A group of 20 motorcycles who had ridden back from Spain informed me that they had also had problems in Spain finding it difficult to buy petrol as the Spanish fishermen were blockading the delivery of fuel by tanker drivers. They had found petrol in most places in France apart from La Rochelle where many of the garages were shut and long queues at those with fuel to sell still open. I went to the ticket office and the young lady told me (as I already knew) that there would be no

sailings from Cherbourg until further notice, I enquired about Caen(Ouistreham) and was told that a coach would be leaving within one hour to take those foot passengers who wished to go to Caen but that there was no guarantee of a sailing. "I have two Bicycles" I said. "Non, not possible" was the reply. We booked the ticket and cycled at full speed, as if we were on the tour-de-France back to the marina and left the bikes on the boat.

We then hurried back towards the port and were very fortunate that a Frenchman who saw us running stopped his car and immediately gave us a lift as close as he could to the ferry port. Once there, we boarded a works bus and drove not out of the blocked port but to the other side of the port by the City de la Mer and parked behind two 40ft containers. The City de la Mer is the local aquarium with other interesting exhibits in close proximity. It has a large car park and is regularly visited by many tourists in coaches. It is less than 100yds. from where the fishermen had been camped and still were for the last 4 days setting off flares, eating, drinking and enjoying themselves as only the French know how. We were told to hurry as we walked out a small gate and climbed onto a waiting coach, hidden only by other parked vehicles. The extent of the blockade became more apparent as we headed for Caen we passed many roundabouts 4-5 miles out of town with fires still burning, being guarded by small groups of demonstrators, we passed more on the main roads into Caen (Ouistreham), but the coach driver managed to bypass them by using the side roads and arrived at the port of Caen. The number of coaches, lorries and cars waiting for a ferry to arrive made us wonder how many trips would be required to clear the backlog. There we saw the 20 motorcycles and several other people we had seen earlier in Cherbourg, we had all arrived in the hope that we could get passage back to the UK. Many like us wished to go to Poole instead of Portsmouth but unlike us they had transport while we were on foot. The ferry would arrive in Portsmouth if all went well at 11.30pm. We would not be able to cross from Portsmouth to Bembridge that night but were fortunate to find a car that was not fully loaded with cases of wine who going to Poole took pity on us and gave us a lift back to Bournemouth.

Many thousands of people were affected by the blockade, in France, Spain and Greece, the sad thing is that anyone on holiday during that time would have no idea that their return trip home would be so delayed and in many cases costly.

We had listened to the BBC news on the radio every day, the blockade was only mentioned once three days earlier at Calais. No mention was made on either BBC or ITV television news. It was only after we returned home and the blockade was lifted as yachtsmen returned to UK and informed their local radio stations did the truth begin to be told.

We found Brittany Ferries polite, professional and as helpful as possible, apart from smuggling us out of the Port to Caen they also supplied taxis when coaches were not available.

The Captain of Cherbourg Marina did all that he could to make the stay of the visiting yachtsmen pleasant. He supplied BBQ's and fish for them (I wonder where that came from) at no cost, he also did not charge the yachts for their stay in the Marina.

Being British, I can't imagine my local Poole fishermen raiding ASDA, TESCO, and removing all the fish stocks, it just isn't British. Come to think of it, I can't imagine a marina on the South Coast of England giving out BBQ's and as for not charging visiting yachtsmen to berth their boat that is even more unbelievable.

The French fishermen have achieved a partial success as they are now getting some concessions to help with the price increase of diesel. They pay more at the moment for their diesel than our British fishermen, which seems unfair.

On the other side of the coin our lorry drivers who were also demonstrating in England at the same time, pay more for their diesel than the French and other continental lorry drivers.

The place to fill your Petrol or diesel tanks is The Channel Islands we paid 75p per litre, for petrol.

Petrol for marine use only, has no road fuel tax applied in the Channel Islands and is therefore much cheaper. Why do we have to pay a road fuel tax for our boat fuel in the UK. when we don't sail down the road?

We continue with the crew of 'PIPERS DREAM' on their travels through France.

We tried in vain to escape them but just a couple of locks down, there they were again. This time they were attempting to have a bog inside but as PIPERS DREAMS' windows are slightly tinted nothing could be seen. This time we made good our escape.

Tanlay very pleasant, we were able to let the boys off. Facilities all free again. Toni opened up his sea food bar again, in other words he was attempting to fish but actually only feeds them. I asked him to show me what to do ----- & I caught a fish!

Day 33 Tanlay – Lock 80 pleasant trip, friendly lock keepers.

Day 34 Lock 80 – Montbard fairly uneventful, managed 15 locks & 15 miles. We tried a different method at the locks. Toni drops me off just before the lock, he then continues in, throws the lines up to me; this allows me to have better control which makes it easier for me.

Day 35 Montbard – Venery Les Laumes Toni caught another fish today. Also informed that we will have a keeper with us all the way tomorrow, until we either stop or the locks close.

Day 36 Venery les Laumes – Lock 27

we did 29 locks today with Toni on the helm & me on the bike going from lock to lock opening & closing them with the VNF chappie, who utters not one word! Very happy bunny _____NOT.

Saw a newt today ---- sober!

Day 37 Lock 27 – Pouilly

26 locks done today with laughing boy, I was so emotional when we parted that I couldn't bring myself to speak not even to whisper cheerio to him, or to give him a tip.....miserable sod that he was.

Pouilly very nice. Went up to the office to book our passage through the tunnel, they gave us handheld radio & operational directions & instructions for going through. They also checked our emergency equipment, torch, lifejackets etc.

Day 38 Pouilly – Pont D'Ouche (lock 20)

only 19 locks(all down hill) & 1 tunnel.

Going through the tunnel was a magical experience, it's very picturesque & straight; it also helps that you can clearly see the light at the other end!

Our nights mooring at Pont D'Ouche cost us the grand sum of 1 €; its run by a jolly English lady who has set up a great book swap section up stairs from the office.

It was here that Toni & I caught 4 fish between us, one of which was about 15 inches long. Also saw a deer & a woodpecker.

Met AVASOL here, we also met up with them again in St.Jean de Losne.

Day 39 Pont D'Ouche – Plombierres Les Dijon

30 locks done this day. Stopped for the night at the now unused boat hire centre, no facilities.

When entering one of the locks we were unaware that the engines were still in reverse, result? Damage to the stern LHS.

The town of Plombierres is delightful. Very old & crissed crossed with streams, some of which disappear underground only to reappear further along.

Day 40 Plombierres Les Dijon - Dijon

found out in the morning that the usual lock keeper was on holiday & there was no replacement. This meant that one guy had to cover quite a few locks on his own. We would have to wait to take our turn. In the end we finally left at 1500hrs in the company of RADISH, narrow boat, with whom we met up with again at the steps in St.Jean de Losne.

Day 41 Dijon – Longecourt lock 69

15 locks done today, very slow, very frustrating, so much so that Toni was swearing-----& that's not like him!?

Day 42 Longecourt – H20 St Jean de Losne (SJL)

last 7 locks to our winter berth & once again it was very slow going & very wet.

But we at last managed to find out what it is that the locals are picking up from along the side of the canals --- walnuts. One mystery solved.

We stayed one night on pontoon A, then moved to pontoon B, right next to the bank & quite sheltered. We'd made it & settled down for the winter.

SJL

looking back on our time in St.Jean de Losne, it was a quite a bit different to what we had been led to expect. There were not as many stay- a- boards for the winter; too cold they said & left to fly back to the UK. As it turned out though, we only had about a metre of snow which lasted a few days, & the lowest temperature was -12, which again only lasted one night! Locals said it was the mildest winter they'd had for years.

The town itself is pleasant; two supermarkets, bakers etc on the doorstep. The train station was a bit of a hike to get to if you wanted to go further afield. A car or long bike ride away is a big Brico; we bought a satellite dish from here & so had all the Brit TV (apart from Channels 4 & 5) & radio. Not a bad price for it either.

Marina wise, it's okay, has all the facilities although when cold weather expected, the water to the pontoons is shut off as it tends to freeze. There is also a radio net on channel 77 every morning (if enough people are forthcoming in taking turns as broadcaster), items for sale/wanted; lifts; assistance required; weather reports & social events are announced. It also informs you of who is & isn't about.

We didn't go to the Christmas dinner, but as New Years Eve usually passed with everyone staying in their own space we thought it a good idea to get them all together and organised a New Years Party. Looking for a venue for this was a bit of a headache, till I remembered that someone had told me of the small museum that sometimes allowed social events to be held there. Toni & David (from LEA CREST) approached the lady in charge; found out later that she's actually the Deputy Mayor. She agreed, on condition. Earlier, Toni had attended the local Armistice Day Parade suitably attired in kilt; the Chief of Police spotted the Pipers Badge & asked if he would play for them the following year. Toni had to decline this honour as we wouldn't be around in the canals then. But the fact that Toni was a piper had been remembered & the condition for the use of the museum was attached, ----- Toni had to play at their local St.Nicolas Parade, held at the beginning of December. Toni of course was delighted to accept.

Unknown to me Toni & son Ian had devised a cunning plan, which resulted in said son arriving back with husband, who had gone to UK for a few days, to stay with us for the weekend of the St.Nicolas Parade. The first I knew of this was when I took Jake up the wooden hill for a pee, & heard someone who sounded just like Ian calling him!!!!!!! We had a great time, as Ian borrowed Toni's other kilt so he could also join in the parade. Toni was interviewed by the French TV & also had his picture in the local paper!

It was a relaxing time in H2O, but towards the end we both began to get itchy as we wanted to get on our way.

Day 43 H2O St.Jean de Losne – campsite pontoon Säone River

finally left the marina. We had assistance from Neil (ODIN) to walk PIPERS DREAM round the boat next door as his rudder stuck out quite a distance. Couldn't find anywhere to moor alongside the river, so had to go to the campsite pontoon. But we heard a Cuckoo!

Day 44 campsite pontoon Säone River – Dole

turned off the River Säone into the Canal Rhone & Rhin. 9 locks to Dole, you get a doofer at the first one as all locks are operated by yourself. As we entered the second one I had to hook a bamboo chair out of the way! It's a lovely canal to poodle down.

Saw HERITAGE again, seems that they may have a buyer. Also saw Dillykim they moored further up from us.

Took lots of photos as Dole has some photogenic areas.

Day 45 Dole – steps St.Jean de Losne

very hot today 36deg in the shade! So the inverter was put on along with the fan. Arrived back at the steps at 5pm, just as the VNF office was closing, so Toni hurtled up there to pay for the water etc only to find payment is made at the café!

Day 46 steps St.Jean de Losne – Gergy/Chalon

few more clouds around but was still hot & clammy. Quite tired, so decided to stop at the floating pontoon at Gergy. Soon changed our minds though & continued on to Chalon. It appears that the pontoon is the meeting place for all the local teenagers in Gergy, they were very noisy. Arrived Chalon 1830, but got a good result cos as we arrived late & were leaving early, we weren't charged for the mooring!

Also had a bit of a laugh on the way. Coming round a bend I saw a chappie & his wife fishing from the bank but I had to look twice then have a bog through the binoculars just to confirm what I was seeing. Both of them were completely starkers.

Day 47 Chalon – Macon

we had intended to stop way before Macon, but the old lock we'd seen in the chart book was full of permanent boats, the quay at Tournus was too high for us so we had no alternative but to continue on to Macon. We were a bit dubious at first as the mooring at Macon is of the Mediterranean variety – fore & aft. But we managed it without any probs.

Day 48 Macon – Creches sur Säone

bit disconcerting at the Creches pontoon, for although the campsite wasn't open therefore we couldn't pay, the tariff was still in Francs!

Very popular place with locals.

Creches sur Säone

We got ourselves ready to cycle up to the phone box to call Nina as she was due to go into hospital for her hip op, when the heavens opened with a terrific thunderstorm. It lasted about 5 hours with some torrential rain.

Another boat joined us on the pontoon, think it was Swiss, but it was the name which tickled us ----- SKUM.

Richard text us Nina's' op went okay, she is fine but very tired.

Also found internet café at small office supplies outlet near the Carrefour.

Day 49 Creches sur Saône – Jassons Roitier

only 1 lock on this sector. No captainiere here, just a phone number to ring. So we did & the local bobby pitched up. They charge only for electric & water at 4 € per day, we paid for 4 days.

Looking again at the charts we decide it would be great if we could stay there whilst I returned to the UK (another hospital appointment) as there was a train station at Villefranche just across the river. But we couldn't get hold of anyone on the phone to find out. As the office opened on Saturday morning, we cycled up there & spoke to the same bobby who said no problem. We actually stayed there till the beginning of June & it cost us 36 €.

Day 50 Jassons Roitier – Quay on Rhone at 0 kp just passed Lyon

we hadn't wanted to actually stop in Lyon itself, so carried on through then turned to go upstream on the Rhone a wee way where we thought there was a staging. We eventually found somewhere to stop just passed the Pasteur Bridge.

Day 51 Quay on Rhone – Les Roches de Condrieu

left 0940 & headed for the fist of the big locks. We had just gone past the point where the Saône meets the Rhone, when Toni saw we were in convoy with another catamaran. We realised upon hearing them contact the lock that it was BLUE MOON, which had been moored on the same pontoon as us in St.Jean de Losne over the winter.

We stayed with them for two locks & moored for the night in Les Roches de Condrieu marina ----- expensive place, cost us 15€ for one night. We were not only stung by the price, I received a very painful insect 'kiss' on my thumb as we came alongside!

We'd had a bit of a fright approaching the second of the two locks, the stbd engine overheated. But as we exited the same lock, the port engine did the same! On inspection we found that the two tea strainers were doing their job ----- they had collected quite a lot of muck.

The river was running very fast, at one point we were being pushed along at over 9kn.

Saw a large bird of prey hovering & circling round above us.

We also heard two bits of news from the UK, the Cutty Sark caught fire & Tony Blair announced he was leaving the office of leader of the Labour Party & also Prime Minister. Which means that Gordon Brown will take over both vacancies, poor old Britain; won't be much Great about it now!

To be continued next month.

Day 52 Les Roches de Condrieu – La Roche de Glun

BLUE MOON left before us, so we had the river to ourselves. Very nice journey with only two locks, one 16m drop & the other only 12m. We had the video running as we rolled into the first lock, so it's all on record.

Very few places to stop on this stretch. We had a look at Tournon but decided against it as it was next to a really busy road. We thought therefore we'd try the pontoon indicated in the chart book located in the old disused part of the river. Disused 'cos they've built a detour round it.

We are so pleased we did, it was delightful – one large pontoon which could take three boats & three finger pontoons, & all free. But there are no facilities. The peniche as they go passed the entrance have little effect on any boats moored there.

The best bit about this place is the wildlife which swims passed the pontoons every night at 9pm. At first we thought they were a couple of Coypu, but they're actually Beavers! You can see their paddle tails quite clearly as they swim close to your boat.

We stayed for a while in Glun, it was quiet & peaceful until that is the thunderstorms struck. Luckily though most of them rumbled over Lyon behind the hills, away from us.

Internet access can be found at the Mayors office again free of charge.

On a wander one night we stood & watched the antics of the some of the local kids practising 'La Joute'. This was in preparation for their jousting tournament to be held soon. But this isn't jousting as we know it; this is jousting on a boat on a lake!

The person with the stick (pole) is on a platform at the back of the boat; others in the boat are there to assist in the stability of the boat, but mostly to help the poor unfortunate who ends up in the water.

The idea we think is to get as low as you can with the stick held in a holder worn under the trousers & the cup of your hand. The boats are then driven by outboard, very slowly towards each other. The engines are then cut & the momentum carries them forward, gliding towards battle. The jousters lower their poles & aim them at the wooden blocks worn over the left shoulder. These blocks have indentations in them to accept the tip of the pole. The jousters, when contact is made, then push as hard as they can until either they or their opponent is in the water. The part which amazed us in the whole spectacle was that in order to get as low as possible these men are actually doing the splits!

Another strange phenomenon we encountered here was the time we were out for a cycle ride. There we were legs & wheels going round when I realised that we should actually have been free wheeling as I could see the road went downhill. So why did it feel that we were going up hill? We turned round and started going back the other way. This time we could see the road going uphill & we were now free wheeling! Very weird.

Day 53 La Roche de Glun - Valence

rained off & on , mostly on. The lock at Bourg Les Valence took two hours & twenty minutes to get through. Although the scenery here outside the marina is lovely, (there is a ruined castle up on the hill), it does not justify the cost of one nights mooring --- 20.30€!!!! I must admit though the nearby bridge looks stunning when lit, almost as though it's made of glass.

Met Dutch boat by name of KOBOL crewed by Rob & Fini.

Day 54 Valence – Viviers

in convoy with KOBOLD & no problems.

Viviers mooring a bit strange as the pontoons & quay are very high up.

We met another couple who are doing something similar to us but on the road in a campervan.

Day 55 Viviers - Avignon

we went through the large lock which has a drop of 23 metres! The other two were only 10 metres each. The pontoons indicated in the chart book are missing, as they were washed away nearly three years ago & have not been replaced. This meant we had to moor alongside the quay, right next to the busy road.

Our first impression of Avignon was not good; the city itself is behind a huge wall & access is through a few 'gates', which are just gaps every so often in this wall. I think we must have picked the cheaper end of the city - ---- it seemed very dirty with lots of posters & graffiti everywhere. The following day we saw a different side, the side the tourists see. The difference was very marked, clean & quite pretty.

We had a ride round the town in the street train, only cost 7€ each.

Day 56 Avignon – Bank on the Canal de Rhone au Sete

we'd intended to leave early but due to heavy rain, thunder & lightening we stayed where we were.

Toni sent a text to his sister to wish her a happy birthday, also to Ray & Mags, (boat name SALLY BETH) the couple Toni had met in Jassons Roitier, to advise them we would be delayed in arriving in Beaucaire where they were waiting for us.

Eventually left at nearly 1130 in beautiful weather; bit scary on the river as there were big peniche causing us all sorts of problems due to their wash. At one point the mast was moving & we were in dread of losing it!

So we were relieved when we turned off the Rhone onto the Petit Rhone as there were no peniche, or so we thought.

The Petit Rhone has to be treated with care as there are massive branches poking into the channel, which isn't that wide anyway. It was along one particular narrow



part that we met the peniche. It didn't really cause too much problem as he was having to go quite slowly any way, but it did give us a bit of a heart flutter when we first saw him.

St Gilles lock is very easy to negotiate, it only has a variable of about a metre.

The Canal de Rhone au Sete is one of my favourites. Beautiful wooded sides with bamboo growing quite thickly along the banks, which cut down the amount of noise & wind. We couldn't make Beaucaire as the lock just before it closes at 7pm. So we pulled alongside the bank.

KOBOL carried on towards Beaucaire.

The spot we chose was lovely & allowed the boys to get off to explore, play in the grass & chase bugs of which there were plenty.

Day 57 Canal de Rhone au Sete - Beaucaire

we saw a purple heron on the way, up till now all we'd seen were the more common grey ones.

The lock is all automatic, but you have to start the process by pushing a button. This meant that Toni dropped me off, I then walked up to the lock & applied my digit to the said button.

We poodled along at about 2 knots. We'd already contacted the marina to organise a time for the bridge lift to allow us into the inner marina.

After tying up I met Ray & Mags & liked them immediately.

Toni & I went for a wander later & met John, moored on the other side, he has an 8m Catalac. He invited us on for a beer & a natter.

We'd gone into Beaucaire to allow me to go back to the UK for yet another hospital appointment.

Day 58 Beaucaire – Our spot on canal

we paid just 120€ for 21 days at Beaucaire. Saw another purple heron & a spotted woodpecker.

Day 59 our spot on canal – Aigues Mortes

nice journey, saw lots of wildlife; kingfishers, egrets, purple heron, huge mallard duck and miniature red hot pokers

Day 60 Aigues Mortes – Port Camargue

this was our first attempt to leave to go to Port Camargue, but we couldn't make it as there was a huge swell at the entrance, so had to turn back & return to Aigues Mortes. Very frustrating as the journey over to Port Camargue only takes about 15 minutes. But we couldn't risk it, as at the harbour entrance we saw some very large white horses.



On the way back there was a loud bang from the port engine, all the alarms screamed at us. We'd either hit something or something was caught around the prop.

We phoned Port Camargue to re-arrange our lift out, made arrangements to have the mast re-stepped at Aigues Mortes & proceeded to find out what was wrong with the engine.

Toni leant over with the boat hook to try to determine what had happened & came up with a lump of plastic attached to the hook. By strapping a knife to the other end of the hook, Toni managed to slice through the plastic & with me gently tugging on it we soon had it removed. It had been a large plastic sheet, now in ribbons.

As the weather seemed to be bad for the next few days & we were loath to part with any cash, we moved PIPERS DREAM alongside the canal again.

The spot we picked this time was almost perfect; nearby were the Camargue bulls & horses, both of which posed politely for my camera; but, & there's almost always a but, the peniche going by were a real pain in the butt!

That's why we moved back up to our spot where there were no peniche.

Just before we left, Toni decided to wash the decks down a bit as they were a bit grubby. One minute he was leaning over & the next he'd slid down a hole with one foot in the canal; he managed to prevent himself from going under completely by grabbing hold of the guardrail, which now has a gentle curve as he bent it. I don't know.....a gay guardrail, what next?

Day 61 canal bank – Aigues Mortes

moved back down to the marina as mast being done following day. It means we then have to stay in the marina as France will more or less close for the weekend due to Bastille Day.

Aigues Mortes

mast up with no probs, 'cept I was stung yet again when we moved the solar panel.

We sat up on deck to watch the firework displays that were going on all around us. We put the foresail up as well on the Friday & the main on the Saturday.

With the dinghy pumped up & once more in commission, Toni used it to go to the supermarket & get some shopping!

Day 62 Aigues Mortes – Grau Roi

moved down today as it would be easier then for the trip to Port Camargue.

Saw lots of flamingos & yes they really are pink. We went through the first bridge & stopped for the night alongside a pontoon. We had a wander through the town & came to the conclusion that it's just a Mediterranean version of Southend on Sea.....minus the Kiss Me Quick Hats!

Day 63 Grau Roi – Port Camargue

at 1157hrs we left the canals & once more put to sea. We had a little sail around simply because we couldn't resist it.

we had booked our lift out for 1500, we were actually lifted out at 1600.

END OF CANAL JOURNEY, GPS TRIP 1075nm.

A CATALAC COMES HOME

By

MARTIN MINTER-KEMP

ECHO sat in the RAF marina in Akrotiri, basking in the hot sunshine looking very much the weekend sailer. She also looked very small. Nine tons lighter than our last boat, was she up to the passage to UK? Five countries, 27 islands, three canals and lots of lock later we know that she was. What we had thought might be a fun boat for the grandchildren turns out to be a very comfortable and seaworthy second home afloat.

Our first optimistic plan was to sail west from Cyprus, around the toe of Italy and enter the Canal du Midi via Gar du Roi. The winds thought otherwise and we ended up on the Turkish coast in Finike Marina. So kind were the staff and so reasonable the rates that we left “Catnick” there for the winter, returning in the spring to continue homewards.

The Turkish coastline is truly enchanting with tiny villages, (all selling carpets at rock-bottom prices) and really friendly people. Turkish food is delicious and the water of the pure spring variety. Skirting Greek islands, which appear improbably close to the Turkish mainland, we finally took our leave of Turkey south of Bodrum and entered Greece (and the EEC) at Kos. Here we met officialdom in all its bureaucratic splendour! Customs, Immigration and Police, the latter demanding £36 to enter Greece from a country outside the Common Market, even though the boat had originated inside it! From then on, however, no official came near us during our meandering course across the Aegean, Patmos, Livitha, Amorgos, Thira, Skhinousa, Paros, Kithnos, Cape Saunion, Poros, Vathi, Epidavros and Corinth. Our most lasting impressions were the sunken volcano of Thira, still steaming and emitting noxious fumes, and the amphitheatre near Epidavros, so acoustically perfect that a speaker standing on a marked spot on the stage can be heard by all of the 9000 audience.

We arrived at the eastern end of the Corinth canal to be reassured that “*little boats pay little money*” and that 8.9m was “*very little*”. Our top speed of four knots however meant sailing at the back of the west-going convoy which suited us fine. The canal really is a wonder of the ancient world even though a motorway now crosses it. A slight delay was due to the floating bridge at the western end getting stuck, due we were told to lack of maintenance, due to lack of traffic, a downward spiral we suspected.

After a supermarket victual ling stop at Corinth we sailed at dawn with an easterly wind, which blew us up the Gulf of Corinth, gusting to f.6. Suddenly we felt that we had left the eastern Mediterranean and were back, almost, in European waters. We moored in Novato’s and climbed the hill to view the tiny harbour from the ramparts of the castle whose walls encompassed both town and harbour. The following day we sailed through the straits where what looked like a new bridge foundation was being laid across the mouth of the Gulf. Turning north we followed the coast, with the mountains giving way to low hills and marshes. Our destination was Corfu but the islands en route made it hard to hurry. Small wonder that Onassis bought one of them for his own personal use, (*with the one next door for his dairy herd*).

Reluctantly leaving the calm of the Inland Sea we entered the Lefkas Canal after waiting for the swing bridge to open. Now we were in the Adriatic proper and the wind obliged, allowing us a close reach towards Corfu. We worked up the east coast, keeping a wary eye open for the almost continuous stream of ferries that criss-cross from Italy, Greece and the islands. Our goal was a tiny bay on the north east tip of Corfu, with Albania less than a mile across the strait. Dropping anchor in the bay was like entering a land of milk and honey; a cable off the beach lined with tavernas, pure water to flop into and far too much ouzo on tap.

Moored on the beach, we made friends with another 9m Catalac and her artist owner, who walked ashore down his gangway straight into his local taverna. This we decided is what catamarans are all about and followed suit, filling our water tanks at the same time. While parts of Corfu have turned into concrete costas, the North and interior of the island remain unspoilt and we hired a car to explore. Looking across to Albania, remote and mysterious, it was not difficult to believe the stories of desperate crossings of the strait on inner tubes, only to be repatriated if caught, by the Greek Border Guard boats.

The only excitement on the boating front was the loss of our CQR due to a failed swivel. I had seen a Bruce 7.5 kg anchor in town and found it cost under £25. So far it has not dragged, once in all sorts of weather and conditions, and is easier to handle and stow than the CQR, highly recommended!

After an *alcoholic* farewell evening ashore we sailed for the Straits of Messina with *fuzzy heads*, but remembered the advice to keep well to the Greek rather than Albanian side of the channel north. Murphy’s Law gave head winds after motoring across the shoals of Othoni and Mathraki islands, (thank

heavens for our shoal draft), and we finished up on the heel, rather than the toe, of Italy. Marina di Leuca is a fishing port boasting an enormous marble staircase ordered by Mussolini, as a welcome symbol to Italy. It also has a useful lighthouse, since we arrived in the small hours. After a few hours' rest, we proceeded under power, again towards Messina Strait, only to be blown out of it by the local and violent wind. Anchoring off the beach we had the bonus of a clear view of Mount Etna above the mists and the bells of a church in the village nearby. The harbour on the chart had silted up but next morning a flat calm allowed us to follow the coast to Reggio di Calabria for fuel and water. The marina was crowded and expensive, the Italian navy appears to control it, and we elected to leave on the northerly tidal stream and a fair wind.

The Isole Lipari lie 20 miles north of Sicily and advertise their volcanic origins by the fumes which wreath the islands. They are high peaks dropping straight into the sea with villages clinging to the edges. The natives however were as friendly as most islanders tend to be and sold us wonderful fresh fruit, eggs and milk. We motored away in a flat calm looking for win which, when it arrived, was once again on the nose. Electing for a port tack, we ran into a 7 km. fish net at two in the morning. Such nets are meant to be lit by lights at either end – not much help if you arrive in the middle. Once more blessing our shallow draught we used our bread knife to cut away the net from the screws and fled NE, raising Isola di Ponza the following day. This is a delightful island with colour co-ordinated homes around a sheltered harbour with good anchorages and no marina. It is a favourite weekend destination for Neapolitans and the ferries to and from Naples were frequent.

Taking advantage of a NE breeze, we next headed NW only to suffer a flooded crankcase due to a water-pump failure. Anzio was to starboard and we limped in to find a berth and mechanic. This was our first real experience of an Italian town and its inhabitants and we liked both. Italians seem to fizz, the women are immaculately dressed and all the cars appeared to be new. Scooters use road and pavements with equal abandon while the police admire their profiles in their driving mirrors! Re-provisioned and with both engines pulling, (*or should it be pushing?*) we slipped for Elba.

Needless to say, the wind backed to the NW and pushed "Echo" relentlessly towards the shore. The river Tiber offered an overnight possibility and we thankfully sailed two miles upstream to a berth alongside a yacht club on the riverbank. Here we saw cantilevered fishing nets similar to those on the Garonne, lining the banks for miles. It was strange to think that we were just downstream from Rome on a river with so much history. An early morning start took advantage of a strong ebb and swept us back to sea where the wind allowed a course to be set for Elba. This was not to be however and we motor-sailed to the remarkable peninsula of Monte Argentario, arriving in the old port at dusk. Here was another delightful circular harbour fringed with pastel-coloured houses and restaurants. Once again we appeared to be invisible to the locals due, possibly, to our small size and discreet livery!

Sailing at dawn next day, with a calm sea and hot sun, the islands along the coast shimmered in the heat haze. Sadly mirror-like seas show up the plastic flotsam all too clearly – roll on biodegradable plastic bags. By late afternoon we were off Porto on the west coast of Elba and made for the anchorage at the head of the forest-fringed bay. While deep-keeled yachts jostled for space, we smugly sailed on until we could see the bottom and anchored in splendid isolation.

Elba is a beautiful island, it has been said that Napoleon was truly happy here, albeit under enforced circumstances, and would have been content to take up permanent residence. We promised ourselves a return visit. Our next leg was to be aimed in the general direction of the French Riviera and the tiny island of Capraia stood in the way and, with evening approaching, we anchored off the small harbour and rowed ashore. The island was, and in parts still a penal settlement with convict cell-blocks dotted around the northern mountainous slopes. We reckoned that life for the inmates could not have been too bad. The cafes around the port were full of the "beautiful people" from French resorts aboard their beautiful yachts. One such yacht, thinking that we were anchored in deep water, made the mistake of anchoring alongside us and went firmly aground. With very little tide the ensuing pantomime made amusing viewing!

An 18-hour passage with a light following wind raised Cap d'Antibes in the early morning. The brown haze over the water turned out to be smog from the numerous gin palaces and high-speed motor launches tearing from A to B and back again, (or simply in circles). Having our tanks filled by a blonde in a micro-bikini was also a new experience, but being invited to pay double fees as a multihull in the marina made us opt for island anchorages, as we moved west past the well-known resorts, St. Raphael, St. Tropez, Iles d'Hyeres, Toulon and Marseilles. Surprisingly the coast offers numerous anchorages in between the ports and marinas, often with one or two yachts anchored in a sheltered bay.

Our last stop before crossing the mouth of the Rhone was at Cap Couronne and after a memorable fish dinner, we sailed at dusk to arrive at Grau du Roi in the early morning. The presence of the Rhone made itself felt five miles to seaward with the current pushing "*Echo*" south in no uncertain way. Visibility then closed in and we had genuine fog for the first time since Cyprus. Thanks for the GPS the entrance to Grau du Roi appeared out of the mist exactly where it should and entered the canal-like harbour, (which is what it is), and tied up below the swing bridge among the fishing boats. The latter sell their catch direct to the restaurants that line the quays on both sides with tourists already much in evidence.

The bridge opens every four hours and we passed through it and up to a second lifting bridge carrying the new bypass. Thereafter the canal continues north for six miles to the impressive fortified walls of Aigues Mortes where masts have to be lowered. This we did without any dramas, thanks to explicit instructions and applause from the inevitable boat watchers. Due to a family wedding, "*Echo*" was moored on a quiet canal reach, the keys given to a friendly French live aboard and a flight home from Nimes via Ryanair was simplicity itself.

Two months later we returned to find all well and the grape harvest in full swing. After suitable liquid farewells, we set off along the Canal du Rhone a Sete which has been widened and deepened in attempt to lure back commercial traffic – with little apparent success to date. We passed Sete, pausing to watch maritime jousting on boats fitted with cantilevered platforms from which young braves attempt to dislodge their opponents with lance and shield, encouraged by partisan crowds on the quays. Lots of noise and everyone seems to end up in the water. Sete is the beginning of the Etang de Thau, an inland sea complete with flamingos in large numbers. The start of the canal du Midi lies at the western end 17 kms. from Sete and marked by a lighthouse. Entering the Midi the countryside enfolded us and the Mediterranean suddenly seemed totally remote.

Up until now the waterways had been lock-free and our first one on the Midi reminded us of what was to come. It was still early in the season but we shared the locks with two or more yachts or holiday mini-peniches. As we travelled in company towards Agde, a camaraderie evolved between boats with mooring lines being taken for each other and fenders strategically positioned. Agde was reached at dusk and the locks and their keepers were most definitely not working – it being Saturday night. Sunday morning however produced a keeper for the famous circular lock and we passed through, waving to the numerous British boats, which form a little colony along the canal bank. "Why bother to move when it is so pleasant here" seems to be a very sensible philosophy much in vogue along the canal.

This account has so far made little mention of "*Echo*" and her virtues (and vices). Our previous transit of the French canals with a 13 ton motor-sailer was sheer hard work, especially in the locks. A Catalac at four tons displacement however is a joy both to handle and cope with the locks – especially going uphill. "*Echo*" remained docile and unflustered by the torrents of water thrown at her, while other deeper draught yachts in the lock were straining their warps, and crews, sometimes severely. She could nestle up to canal banks, allowing crew to step ashore with dignity and without a gangplank. On the debit side, entering the hulls tended to cause headaches until one remembered to duck – but did provide a little gentle exercise.

Progress west continued with Carcassonne as our destination where my wife Bunny would fly out to rejoin "*Echo*". We went up the eight lock ladder at Beziers and through the oldest(?) canal tunnel ever at Malpas. The canal twisted and turned around the hill contours, climbing ever higher with glimpses of

the Pyrenees away to the South. Much canal-side planting is being carried out since the Canal du Midi is now a World Heritage Monument with funding to match. We stopped counting after the 1000th!

The ancient city of Carcassonne finally appeared. South of the canal looking as awesome as it did in films like *"The Gun"*. We moored where we could see the floodlit ramparts at night before moving into the Port de Plaisance in front of the convenient but noisy Gare. (French trains, even the goods variety, seem to go at break-neck speed, day and night – but then they are always on time) The next five days were spent spring-cleaning and polishing before Bunny's arrival. The intricacies of the lavateria were mastered and everything washable was –put through it. All this activity was observed with amusement by bachelor/grass widower skippers along the canal bank with no such deadlines to meet. Finally all was ready and Ryanair deposited Bunny at the airport with no formalities at all. A celebration dinner in the Old City and the crew was once more complete. The temptation to linger in Carcassonne and savour life on the Midi in slow motion was almost overwhelming. However, we knew that the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel with its inevitable equinoctial gales were waiting for us at the Atlantic end of the Gironde and we needed to get a move on. It actually took us seventeen days and although we didn't hang around we still managed to do a decent run each day and also find time to explore our surroundings in the evenings, even occasionally stopping for a leisurely lunch at some irresistible spot.

Knowing that we might not stop again in a large town with shops and a market handy, we victualled the boat with what we thought were enough stores and fresh fruit and vegetables to last at least a week. To wander around a French open air market sampling fruit, cheeses, cuts of saussicon and smoked meats on a warm sunny autumn morning, is to sample a small slice of Heaven. Even with our rusty French and limited knowledge of the produce on sale we were made to feel that each of our small purchases was of the utmost importance to the stallholder. It is wonderful how goodwill and a handshake cuts through language barriers and makes one feel valued and at home.

Working the uphill locks is totally different from dealing with locks on the downhill stretch. On entering the lock one is faced with a towering metal gate with water pouring and spouting out of every crack, flowing powerfully through the lower sluices. The walls of the lock chamber appear to be impressively high damp cliffs, sometimes almost shutting out the daylight. The Midi locks are oval shaped – built that way for strength – and sometimes makes it tricky to come alongside neatly. With these uphill locks it is necessary to put a crewmember ashore before entering the lock so that there is someone up on the lock to take warps. The poor skipper, if he is left alone onboard, has to be nifty about positioning his vessel and then throwing lines up fore and aft and to his crew, before the incoming waters force the boat backwards. The Midi locks aren't big and three boats of average size – say 30/40 ft.- are all it can accommodate. The trick is not to go too far forward because when the lock keeper opens the main sluices the water pours in at an alarming rate. A little distance between your boat and the lock gate ahead is vital if you are not to be swamped or battered by the incoming torrent. We managed between 15 and 20 locks most days without any problems and enjoyed the challenge enormously.

The joy of travelling across France in late autumn is that we travelled alone most of the time. We went for days sometimes without seeing another boat and where the locks were automatic, without seeing a person. We would stop when we had had enough and just tie up to a tree or its roots to hold us into the bank. Having such a shallow draft and two hulls meant that we could nudge into the bank easily and still keep one hull in deeper water which helped when we came to push off again. It never felt lonely and we just revelled in the peace of the green tranquillity that had become our world. Some mornings we would get underway before it was fully light. The mists rising from the canal and the moisture dripping from the trees lining the banks, which almost met overhead, created a mysterious, timeless atmosphere. We would chug slowly along in the half-light occasionally disturbing herons that were feeding on the edges of the canal and small fish that skipped and flapped through the water at our approach. Once we annoyed a coypu, which swam across in front of the boat. It looked like a large otter. It turned its head as we passed and glared hard at us for disturbing his patch of water.

Most days by lunchtime the sun overhead was really hot and we would look for a shady tree to shelter under for a lunch break. The lock-keepers, rather like the rest of France, lunched any time from midday

till 2.00 pm and we had to fit in with their schedule. We found everyone helpful and friendly. At one lock we asked if by any chance there was a mechanic who was familiar with Renault engines in the little town ahead. No-one around knew but later we found out that a phone call to the lock-keeper down the line asked the question and when we arrived the answer and the engineer were waiting. We had no idea all this was going on. Everyone is just concerned to be of help. Throughout the whole journey through France everyone we met was friendly and if needs be, most helpful. We did wonder if we would have had the same treatment in the UK, if the boot were on the other foot.

Within three days of leaving Carcassone we arrived at the “top” near le Segala. This is the highest point of the watershed between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, 90 metres above sea level. It was here, in the mid 17th century that Paul Ricquet, chief architect of the Midi, set about channelling the waters which flow from the mountains to the north to create what we know today as the Canal du Midi and the Canal Lateral a la Garonne – one flowing east into the Mediterranean and the other west into the Atlantic. At this point we tied “Echo” onto a tree stump by the towpath and walked up to the Ricquet obelisk to pay our respects to the man and his vision. Afterwards we entered our first downhill lock aptly named Ecluse de l’Ocean with a gentle drop of 2.60 m. What a difference – gone were the rushing waters pouring in on us from above. That first lock was a gem of peace and quiet with the shade from trees over 200 years old almost covering it. Before entering the lock we had to slow down and wait on a deep green pool of clear water that cannot have changed much since its creation except that the trees have matured and now cast an even deeper shade over the still waters of the canal. A short while later we turned out of the canal and into the Port de Plaisance at Lauragais. After being on our own for the last few days we found ourselves suddenly surrounded by buildings and boats and lots of people. The port consists of two huge man-made lakes and some impressive buildings cantilevered out over the water which housed restaurants, shops and an interesting museum dedicated to Ricquet and his works. The rest is immaculate parkland mown to perfection with little grassy hummocks, rose beds and banks of flowering shrubs. Apart from not seeing any rabbits, we had the distinct feeling we had arrived in *Teletubby land*. We had managed to foul one of our props on a tree root earlier in the day and needed to fix the problem as we looked around for a suitable place to moor up and be able to get at the stern of the boat easily, we found ourselves taken in hand by a couple of splendid characters – a bargee and a man walking his dog and obviously bored. With lots of instructions in a marvellous mixture of French and English, the offending tree root was removed. The barge owner then insisted that we tied up alongside him so that we shouldn’t get into any further trouble. Little did he know what we were capable of!

The next day we decided to bite the bullet and position ourselves at Port Sud in order to tackle Toulouse the following morning. We reckoned that, as it would be Sunday the water traffic through the city might not be too bad. We had managed 45 locks since Carcassone without a mishap but knew that we were coming up to automatic locks and until we reached them, didn’t know how they worked. The build up was slow. Most of the city seemed asleep till around 8.00 am but then it seemed that every able-bodied man, woman and child was either jogging, roller-blading, running, walking or cycling along the tow paths. To our relief they weren’t on the water. We had a busy morning and once we had worked out the automatic system, made good progress. Before we knew it we were through the city and into the Canal Lateral a la Garonne. Yet again, we had the canal to ourselves and began to feel guilty about the huge amounts of water we were moving in and out, each time we went through a lock. We had left the oval locks of the Midi behind and were now working with the oblong shaped variety, much easier to negotiate. The country around us was some of the loveliest that we had yet seen. In some parts nothing appeared to have been cut back along the banks in a decade or so. It was wild and beautiful. One of our overnight stops was in the Port de Plaisance at Castelsarrasin where we met a splendid Dane who had built himself a garage on the stern of his boat and, with the help of a small hydraulic lift, could drive his car on and off with ease. One learns not to be surprised by anything on French canals.

Progress is such that the French canals are now official tourist areas which attract European funding. The lock keepers are paid officials; boats need papers and have to pay dues. The picturesque houses with their enchanting cottage gardens are being sold out of the system and becoming holiday homes. For us, the dramatic entrance across the Tarn Aquaduct at Moissace is now far less spectacular since at the far end, the loveliest of all the lock houses has changed. We have fond memories of how, when we passed through ten years ago, the lock house and the garden were smothered in masses of bright flowers and climbers and everything was painted and cared for

with great love and pride The old couple who lived there allowed us to tie up in the lock overnight, so that we could enjoy the amazing view of the river and wander in their garden. Next morning they smothered us with fresh fruit and vegetables and wouldn't take a franc. So what, we wonder, is progress? Moissac is a favourite place of ours and so we allowed ourselves some time there. We revisited the magnificent basilica of St. Peter with its vast intricately carved stone entrance and enormous interior walls, hand painted in ochre, blue and pink. We stopped in the square for a table d'hote lunch which consisted of three courses of excellent food and a large jug of superb local wine, all for under £5 each. That lunch combined with the warm sunshine, forced us to make a late afternoon start. Still sleepy we set off again. Our first obstacle was a swing bridge. Luckily the Madame in charge saw us weaving our way towards her and opened the bridge for us. Our klaxon, which we were feverishly trying to use, wouldn't work. We found out later that it was completely clogged with a spider's web. That spider must have been there since Turkey, the last time we had to use it.

October 1st found us nearing the end of the Canal Lateral. After a breakfast of fresh croissant and coffee we set off from Buzet aiming for the village of Mas d'Agenais where we planned to visit the local church and see for ourselves the Rembrandt picture we had been told about. The church was large, empty and quiet. In the subdued light, hanging on a plain rough stone wall, we found this beautiful, agonisingly sad painting of the Crucifixion. It is not protected or secured in any way that we could see but to look up into the face of the Christ figure is to know that it is indeed the masterpiece it claims to be. We came out into the bright sunlight in the little town square both awed and humbled by such beauty in so simple a setting.

The Garonne and the canal are, at this point, now beginning to run parallel. Every so often, through gaps in the trees bordering the canal, there were glimpses of a very wide, rather muddy expanse of water flowing ever seawards. We began to think we could smell the Atlantic.

It is important to coincide ones arrival at Castets en Dorthe and the last lock down into the Garonne with the top of the tide. This allows a favourable current all the way to Bordeaux. This was important because there was no way "Echo" could have moved against a foul tide. We also needed daylight for this part of the journey, so had to get it right. In the event, we arrived at the top lock around mid-day and were told to wait for an hour and then enter at 1.00 pm exactly. We did as we were told. This last lock is in two stages and both are very deep. We were one of three boats marshalled by a very efficient lock-keeper who told us exactly what to do and when, even more important, what to expect. Down we went and we were suddenly out in the Garonne – sort of spat out. One minute you are in a quiet canal and the next you are in a fast flowing river heading rather alarmingly for the middle span of a large bridge across the river.

It took us exactly four hours to get to Bordeaux. It is very exciting to arrive in a big city by water. We had had a huge tide under us all the way and at times were doing 7 knots, which up till then was unheard of and undreamed of by us in "Echo". It was an exhilarating run but with good charts and a non-panicking crew picking out the landmarks and shouting warnings about submerged tree-trunks, branches and plastic flotsam, we arrived tired but unscathed. Once in Bordeaux we had to find somewhere to tie up and quickly, before the tide changed and swept us upstream again. Our small engines were no match for the river's awesome strength. We should have realised then that that was to be the pattern from now on – with 350 miles still to go. We found an ancient laid-up iron barge and tied on but had our doubts as to whether it would lift with the tide. By then it was too late change our minds, the tide had turned.

Once again we had good reason to be grateful we were on a Catalac. All the tree trunks, branches and rubbish that had gone down with us earlier, was on its way upstream again and doing its best to ram us. We would rush on deck whenever we felt a big bump only to see whatever it was hitting us disappearing between the hulls and out again.

In the late afternoon light the water looked a very evil murky brown and the sight of it swirling and racing past made one giddy and determined not to get any closer to it. We were glad to leave next morning and be out once again in the current heading for Pauillac, where we hoped to put up the mast. That trip took another four hours. It was a fascinating journey down the wide and often shallow Gironde – the city of Bordeaux and its outskirts on one side and mile after mile of docks and large industrial works on the other. There was also a lot of shipping on the move and we had to keep a good look out behind, sideways and in front. Yet again we arrived at our destination with no tide to spare.

A friend had joined us at Buzet and now in the quiet water of the marina at Pauillac, he and Martin raised "Echo's" mast without any problems. Sadly Simon's time with us was up and he caught a bus back to Bordeaux the next morning and we were on our own again. Taking advantage of the tide, we set out to motor-sail across and

up to Royan, about 45 miles away on the north side of the entrance to the Gironde. The tide beat us this time and we only just made it into Port Bloc on the south-west side of the estuary. It had taken about 7 hours to do only 30 miles. The tide turned against us making the last mile a real slog with the light also fading. We finally crept in to find the port full. There was no room to raft up because it is a busy ferry port with little turning space. Here again being a Catalac and therefore not very wide and not needing much water to float, we found a small slot of space and pushed and squeezed until we fitted in rather snugly. We tied up, closed down our faithful engines, had a tot and relaxed. We were the only people, apart from the Pilot crew, aboard in the whole port. After the day we were very grateful for the peace.

With a forecast of strong north-westerlies there was no way we could get out of the estuary and work our way around Oleron and across to La Rochelle. So we relaxed and enjoyed ourselves in Port Bloc, which turned out to be a delightful place. Gone now was the peace and tranquillity of the canals. We were now back once more in the environment our little boat was designed for. We were keen to know how she would behave in Atlantic waters. From now on we would have to move whenever the tides and winds allowed, to try to work our way north west exactly where the winds always seemed to be blowing from. We had always known it would be a gamble to be wandering around Biscay and the west coast of France in late autumn but there we were and we had no choice. Several times along the way, when it seemed we were going to be weather-bound for a long while, we researched the possibility of leaving "Echo" and returning later when the weather improved. When it came to it, we could never bear to leave her again and it became a matter of honour to get her and us home together, to our mooring on the river Fowey. So we sailed on when we were able and ran for shelter when the conditions became too foul to be at sea. The big tides in that part of the world were also a huge factor, without them in our favour we could get nowhere. We moved mostly in daylight hours rather than at night, unless we really had to, due to the very real danger of becoming entangled in one of the hundreds of unlit fishing buoys that seem to litter the French coastal waters. We had a couple of nasty experiences with these floats when Martin had to go over the side with the breadknife at night in rough water to free a snared propeller. We were grateful that "Echo's" propellers are so close to the surface. Having two of them also meant that we could limp into port using only one engine, if we had to – rope cutters are now high on our priority list!

Our average day's run was only around 30 miles. This meant that we found shelter in all sorts of out of the way wonderful places. Places we should never have dreamt of visiting if we had been able to get a move on. We went from mainland to Atlantic island and then back to the mainland, zigzagging our way up and around the coast of western France. Usually we were the only visitors in port and we were either totally ignored and allowed to please ourselves as to whether we stayed or left, or else we were almost smothered in goodwill and made some wonderful friends, which was very heart-warming. Without doubt every single place we visited we promised to return to one day – but preferably in gentle, warm summer weather.

When we were in Carcassonne planning the last 600 miles of "Echo's" odyssey from Cyprus, we felt as if we were on the home straight. Martin did mutter something about the possibility of there being a "sting in the tail". How right his prophecy was. As far as his crew was concerned the last 100 miles was a sting and a half. We were sheltering in L'Aber Wrac'h river when the shipping forecast gave us what we hoped was our weather window for a run across to Fowey. We set out in a blustery west wind and a big swell. That was all fine till about half way across. Then the wind increased alarmingly. The expected f 6/7 became 8/9. The big seas were too much for the self-steering and I didn't have the strength to hold "Echo" against some of the huge waves that were pushing us along. Martin had to hand steer having first taken in the jib and then the main. We surfed up and down the seas for hours on end and finally, seventeen hours after leaving France, almost flew into Fowey harbour entrance at three o'clock in the morning, under bare poles and doing just over 6 knots. It had been a terrifying yet exhilarating passage. Later that morning, with great pride, we introduced "Echo" to our welcoming and relieved family. Throughout "Echo" had behaved like a true ocean sailor and did everything we had asked of her with style and courage. We were all three home again, having shared a great adventure.

The Cyprus to UK statistics may be of interest. Five seas, one channel, one ocean, 25 islands and a lot of locks! Total mileage 285.5 nm by GPS. "Echo" behaved impeccably throughout and my wife fine-tuned on the distaff side as to what makes a boat a home, is definitely converted from mono to multihull. "Echo" is now almost literally parked at the bottom of our garden, taking her ease in a mud berth across the river Fowey, while we pipe-dream all the improvements we hope to make, but that is another story.

"Echo" has had several mods since coming back from Cyprus and is moored at Golant, up river from the pretty Cornish town of Fowey in company of another 9m. Catalac.

Golant is an ideal stop for the night with easy landing on both sides of the river it has the added advantage of being just past the limit that the dreaded highwayman tends to call for mooring fees. ED.

Dagnall And Cathy Clutterbuck were busy last winter.

This has been a very strange winter for Cathy and I, as we managed to get to two boat shows within two weeks of each other. No, not Earls Court and Excel, but Excel and “The Florida Boat Show” in Orlando!. The reason for this happy circumstance was that my work took me to Orlando for a week, and I was able to take Cathy for a winter break after the work finished. It was Cathy, who surfing the web for things to do whilst I was working found the “largest boat show in Florida”.... Well, we just had to see what Excel might be up against!, and I thought it might make an interesting “filler” for the magazine, so made sure I took some photos.

The event was easy enough to find, the location was vast, which looked like good news, but actually, the boat show only filled the “north” hall of the center. The car park was the first thing that showed the difference from the London Events: Quite apart from the sunshine, there was hardly anyone in the car park, and it was VAST.

We paid our \$8 admission, and entered the hall. Second difference from London, - Virtually no chandlery stands, no big name electronics, and no SAILS!. It was all powerboats, and all petrol engines. Anyway, having got in we decided to at least see what was there, and found that all the stand helpers were exceptionally friendly. We were able to look in detail at even the most expensive boats on show, and had some great chats. It turned out that this was the third day (Monday) of a normally two day event, and most Floridians had attended on the earlier days. There were probably only about 200 visitors whilst we were there and the staff were glad of any attention!. – But were still happy to let us wander over their boats without “hovering”. I’m afraid that at this point I must admit that I did nearly get seduced away from the true CATALAC path, by some amazing interiors:

This was a 30 ft power boat, brand new and about £100,000. It had three air conditioning units, (with their own silent generator), as well as the obligatory massive petrol engines to actually power the beast. I think that there were two TV’s, a Microwave, cooker fridge etc... all electric and run from the generator. One difference that was very noticeable was that the “Cookers” on all the boats were single ring Electric units, often set in beautiful solid “corian” work surfaces like the one in the photo. We talked to the guys on the stand about this and it seems that in the USA, if a boat has “cooking” facilities, then it is classed as a second home, and you can claim the interest back against tax!!! - But eating out is so inexpensive that most boat owners never cook on their boats and eat out in restaurants... Hence the single electric hob!





We did actually find a lot of catamarans at the show, they were these "pontoon" boats.

These are effectively Aluminium tubes with a solid deck, sun shade, motor and lots of seats.

They looked great for the sun and fishing, but I could not imagine what a slight sea chop would do to them!

Nevertheless, some were able to do up to 50mph, by having massive motors and planning surfaces on the bottom of the tubes: Which brings me to my final picture....

I wonder what I would need to do to put these on the back of SCUBACAT?

All the best,
Dagnall and Cathy.

I think if you had those on the back of SCUACAT with all that power the standard props would work ok. However you may need to beg your boss not to let you have so much time off work and ask him to let you do longer hours, as having recently spoken to an owner of a 30ft. cabin cruiser with a single diesel engine who is very pleased with the fuel consumption of his present boat, he continued to tell me that he gets 2.5 miles to the gallon. (he is pleased with 2.5 mpg little wonder most gin palaces don't venture to far from their home port)

I think you would be lucky if those two engines on the rear of SCUBACAT did one mile per gallon and with petrol still a lot dearer to buy than marine diesel, you will need very deep pockets. ED.

AIS (Automatic Identification System) on the Cheap.

This article has been written for those of you who want to save a bit of cash and also see how useful this might be to your navigation, especially across busy shipping lanes.

AIS is a VHF radio transmission.

To see this transmission you need a VHF Radio With a Discriminator output.

An Audio Cable between the Radio and Computer.

A computer, preferably a laptop With a Pentium type hard drive with a reasonable Amount of memory and a compatible sound card.

Don't despair please read on !

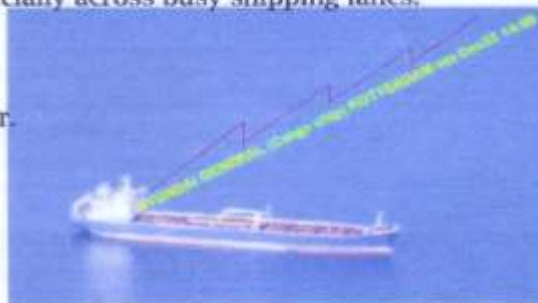
All can be found from the following web site.

www.coaa.co.uk/shipplotter.htm

From here you can download your software on temporary basis or you can spend a few pounds to buy a more permanent version.

You can also look at the site www.discriminator.nl/index-en.html this site has all the information about finding and / or converting a radio or scanner to one you can use.

I purchased a very nice scanner on EBAY for about £10 which will also scan aircraft, police, amateur radio bands and loads of other things that you can listen in to. It is best in FM mode as the AIS signal is quite broad band and you may not receive all the message if not



The questions members have asked about this month are too numerous to be dealt with in this month's newsletter, they include rubbing strake replacement, Davits, Cockpit covers and

Should any member have advice or pictures of cockpit covers, or davits please e.mail them to me so we can share your experiences and please give us an idea of the costs that you incurred.

It was agreed that a rally should be held at Bembridge commencing on 22 May (HW 13.55 hrs) to 25 May. Those who wished could stay on over the Bank Holiday.

It was agreed that there should be a rally at Poole from Friday, 5 September to Sunday, 7 September with a lunch party at the RNLI College.

Peter Gimson advised the meeting of a MOCRA rally at Brest to which we had been invited. A local French Club had also invited us to join their cruise from Brest exploring some of the Islands further down Biscay. The details of which he would provide in due course via The Newsletter.

Rush update from Marilyn who is fortunate to be enjoying better weather than us Europeans as she continues her adventure of a lifetime that most of us can only dream about.

whether it be after work on Friday evening for a week-end cruise or the annual sailing holiday on and off with all the usual must have provisions