

## Chapter 9 Sailing

My first sailing experience was at Weston Turville reservoir in little Firefly dinghies. These small craft were very “tippy” and in the fluky wind conditions pertaining on the water I was swimming frequently. An open meeting at Pitsford reservoir Northampton showed me that both better water and better craft were available so I converted to this club sailing an International 505. It is a fast and stable 5.05 metres long craft with a large spinnaker for downwind sailing and trapeze assistance for the crew. Derek Bowers and I became so immersed that our holidays were set by the ruling committee, as to both location and timing, having to coincide with dates set for the National and World Championships. We found we could be very competitive in a blow but I never had the touch in light airs. At Burnham on Crouch, when trying to round a buoy against the tide in zephyrs, I got a bit ragged when Derek warned me about my proximity to the said buoy which I had been “racing” at close quarters for more than five minutes: I was so well aware where the darn thing was. We put up some creditable performances, winning a handful of races but no big trophies. Fifth place overall often seemed to be our lot.

**Plymouth** Open meetings were spread round the country. You had to be keen to get up at some unearthly hour, tow your craft to Liverpool, get rigged, compete in the afternoon race, get stuck in at the bar, go out on the briny with a hangover in the morning, race again in the afternoon, then pack up in the cold and rain before driving home. On the plus side was the camaraderie. One of the moments that comes to mind was when Larry Marks from Southampton won the World Championship at Plymouth. After the celebratory dinner Larry was leaving the Guildhall when he was besieged by a group of Swedish competitors. He accepted that they would throw him into the ornamental fountain: having swung him once, then twice, they put him

down saying that they would give him the chance to take off his clothes. This he did and then, once, twice “no you are a nice man we will not do this to you”. Larry re-dressed and then it was, once, twice, in you go.

Larry became skipper of Prime Minister Ted Heath’s yacht, Morning Cloud, and was on board for the ill-fated 1979 Fastnet race when a force 10 storm blew up. On the 14th August half the fleet of 303 yachts was listed as missing and a massive search operation took place. Fifteen sailors were lost. At the helm of Morning Cloud, Larry was struck by a wall of water and wrenched away from the helm as his safety harness broke: his good fortune was to fetch up against some webbing at the stern. Larry has not raced offshore again! Now he wins long distance gliding races.

**Southampton Water** Before the advent of wetsuits Derek and I competed in an early Easter meeting close to the piers where the liners dock. It blew hard and was freezing cold. We capsized, righted the boat twice and then could do no more as we became exhausted. On shore the safety boys saw our plight and went to start the rescue boat without success. Paul had to cycle down to the garage for a new sparking plug. The drill is to stay with the boat at all costs and, when safety arrives, get away from your dinghy so you will not be crushed. On its arrival they picked up Derek and I then cleared the dinghy as they came back for me. It was at this moment that a line fouled the propeller: I had a long swim before it was freed. Getting us to the clubhouse it was decided to take us to the ladies side because that was warmer. As we were undressed we might as well have been ladies! Trying to get a hot drink down was not possible because of the convulsive shaking.

**Lyme Bay** This race started in a good blow; the wind grew stronger and stronger and a huge sea developed from the West. Masts and booms were breaking but somehow we

completed the shortened course. Then followed the two miles reach back to the harbour. I have never sailed faster: the tiller was light as a feather and I knew that a slight tweak either way would spell disaster. A gust came through as we were on top of a massive wave and then a gust on top of that. We raced down the wall of water at breakneck speed and then at the bottom we were shielded from the wind for a second or two before being thrown up into it again. Never was a sailing club bar better received. It was over a sail loft on The Cobb and I shall never forget the expression on the face of a dog traversing the carpet when a gust of wind came through and the dog was walking on a magic carpet twelve inches off the floor.

**Torquay** The 505 Championship coincided with the Torquay Centenary Regatta and there was to be a sail past of the Sailing Club dignitaries. Bowler hatted and saluting we did the top brass proud. Later in the week I remember two of the lads from Felixstowe were dancing on the roof of a car in the town centre. This drew the attention of the police who thought they were in for an easy arrest since the roof of the vehicle was much dented with the aggressive dancing. The cast iron defence line was “is there any law against dancing on the roof of my own car?”

**La Baule** A memorable World Championship was held at La Baule. The concluding prize giving dinner was held in the casino where the round tables seated ten. “Boisterous” does not adequately attempt to describe the mood and the spirit of International competition was alive and well. The UK were the ultimate winners with three fully laid up tables mounted one upon the other crowned by our Commodore, Commander Percy Chandler, posing as “The Thinker” with his head in the chandelier. A gorgeous Danish blonde was then paraded in a chaise longue at head height. I thought that some silly sod would jump up there but as none did the duty fell on me. When the sedan was eventually laid to rest in an

aisle she seemed content for me to stand my ground over her.

At another French championship, we climbed into our wetsuits each morning and then languished for three hours or so under a hot sun with barely a breath of wind. There were 144 competing boats and we must have been lying close to last. On the final day we concluded that our time would be better spent on the beach. 288 men converted to not far from 288 ladies, mostly seeking to acquire a tan. We took on the task of applying sun cream.

**Copenhagen** When the Championships were held in Denmark it was at a time when Danish pig farmers had embarked on a massive advertising programme in the UK proclaiming that we should “Buy Danish Bacon”. In bold letters along each side of our vessel we had emblazoned the words “Kob Engelsk Bacon”. Initially the shipping line was going to block our carriage but all turned out well and we spent the whole week in Danish waters spreading the message. Driving from Esberg the trailer developed a puncture and we reversed into a farm gateway to change the wheel. A most amiable farmer came out to assist and actually helped to hold up the dinghy whilst we changed the wheel. As we drove off he read our slogan and we left him shaking his fist and shouting “Dansk, Dansk!!”

It was a windy week and we had two quite memorable races. In the first, having won a close up encounter with a Moroccan boat, which capsized at the initial buoy, we went on to fizz past the Olympic helmsmen from France, Germany and Greece. Closing to second on the reigning Champion we had him looking over his shoulder at us as we made ground on the downwind leg, with our new green spinnaker. Sadly, the wind eased and he pulled away. Nevertheless our second place was clear by a quarter of a mile. The second race of moment was when the storm came

through. Turning the windward mark for the downwind leg, like all those before us, we succumbed. The rescue boats were sorely tested and competitors were towed into a string of minor harbours along the Danish coast. Since we had a new 505 on order, we sold “Cockatoo” to a local man and, returning through UK customs, got the comment “did it sink?” He seemed upset that we had sold it and asked where the proceeds were. I told him the cash was in my pocket. This was most upsetting and he would have to speak with a superior. The country’s balance of payments was dreadful and we thought we were doing our bit: he returned to reluctantly let us pass.

**Kiel** The International 505 World Championships were being held at Kiel: Derek Bowers and I, together with many other competitors, were camping in a wired compound on the beach. It was rather daunting to be awoken with the announcement “Achtung, Achtung - all the competitors will now get up for the day’s racing!” As usual the helmsmen pushed the starting line: three starts were recalled and eventually the organisers let the fleet go although a number of boats were in breach of the line. The next morning we were promised a bottle of beer each if we behaved at the start. Over the days this bribe was increased to a crate each but still with no effect. I have a lasting memory of the Mausoleum to the Naval dead at Kiel. Built as a sunken lighthouse you descended the spiral wall hugging staircase to a most eerie and echoey chamber with effigies of the dead: it was all quite spooky. Above the Mausoleum was a naval museum. In history I had learned that the British had won the battle of Jutland. This did not seem to be borne out by the models and statistics shown in the German version: my first intimation that maybe the British Government could put a slant on events for propaganda purposes.

**Hastings** This was a “blowy” event and good winds meant high jinx at the dinner. Arranged as a “U” the proceedings were presided over by the Mayor who sat adorned with his regalia in a canopied chair surmounted by the Town’s Crest: talk about a target! Derek, always up to the challenge, decided he would collect up all the spent streamers and deposited a whole bundle beneath the Mayor, who sat impassively if bemused by his actions. The next step was probably one too far but Derek never held back to get a laugh. Producing a cigarette lighter he applied the flame. The Mayor survived. Needless to say our class was banned from ever again competing at Hastings. Previously it had been pointed out to me that a man of modest stature at the bar was Ian Frazer VC who with his midget submarine put a bomb under the Japanese cruise *Takao* at Singapore with the tide ebbing and the noise of the hull scraping the topsides of his craft and threatening to trap him. (Despite huge difficulties in scraping off barnacles in order to get the limpet mines to adhere and a faulty panel bomb, which his crewman had to release externally, the attack was successful and *Takao* was taken out of the war). I just had to walk over and shake him by the hand. He wanted to know whatever for and I replied that I had just learned who he was and what he had done. His most casual response was “That was nothing compared to that wind out there today”! Prior to X-craft Ian served in destroyers: the *Monrose* at Dunkirk and he was serving in *Malcolm* when she sank U-651. Transferring to submarines he was awarded a DSC when *Sahib* sank U301 off Corsica (Ian had a diving business and I am delighted to say that he was well placed when the offshore oil and gas rig ventures started).

**Medway** We upset the Flag Officer here. Apparently it was my idea to bedeck the nearby apple tree with his beloved signals. We made sure that “W” for five-o-five was the highest one.

**Grimaldi Prize** The Grimaldi prize was up for any takers. Competitors at a championship would nominate the target lady and the first sailor to get to grips would earn a barrel of beer. At Hayling Island the extremely large Italian breakfast frying lady was nominated. She could not believe her luck when handsome Australian Hank pursued her on the dance floor and duly won the prize on the beach.

**Emsworth Encounter** Between Southampton and Portsmouth this was an open event of three races on a sunny and breezy week-end. On the Saturday Derek and I had both spied a Margaret who displayed the most stunning figure in her bikini. On Saturday night the bar was in full swing when I went outside to the lavatory. Returning to the bar I heard girlie laughter coming from the outside pool – an inspection told me that there were two nude ladies having a swim. I immediately required Derek's presence and we joined the girls "au naturel": they proved to be Margaret and friend. The girls got cold and I persuaded Margaret to come to the gents changing room for a shower. I was just getting Margaret warm when Hank, the Grimaldi winner, popped his head round the curtain – very good for Brownie points.

**Shiwara** I had a phone call from Piers and Cheryl Morgan who had acquired a 60' schooner called Shiwara. She was lying in Antibes and they had arranged for the French skipper to take the vessel to Corfu: to be sure that she arrived at the destination they wanted a representative on board so I could have a free trip if I paid for my flights. Changing planes at Paris, a quite wholesome young lady sat next to me. She was going to Cannes and I learned that she was involved with the Film Festival. On further questioning I established that she was in fact the leading actress in a film being shown there and her name was Francine Carpon. As I was being met at Nice I was able to offer her a lift to Antibes and then found a taxi to take her on to Cannes. Would she be interested in Dinner that night? Arriving at the

vessel I enquired about going to Nice that evening since we were not due to sail until the following day. Take the car - at each port where they stayed for any duration they bought an old car and sold it on leaving. On the ship's radiophone I rang Francine and arranged to meet her at her five star hotel. Where would she like to go? The Blue Bar of course – it is the only place during the festival.

I found myself at a table of ten actors, actresses and directors in the heart of all the festivities. On the following day departure was delayed because of a storm so, back to Cannes for another, quieter, meal; on this occasion I travelled by train since the car had been sold.

Whilst I had done much dinghy sailing this was my first passage voyage. On watch in the early hours I spotted a spasmodic flashing red light on the port bow. After watching it for some minutes I woke the skipper thinking it may be some form of distress. He immediately announced that we must start the engines and make all haste towards it. As we progressed several red lights became apparent: we gradually established that what we were seeing was a French aircraft carrier with helicopters doing landing exercises! Later on the same night we nearly became entangled with the drift nets of a local fisherman.

Approaching Corfu around midnight some lights should come into view on my watch. Firstly three short and two long on the port bow and, twenty minutes later a different sequence on the starboard bow. About on time lights appeared on the port bow but not to the sequence I expected. Nothing appeared to starboard. Concerned, I woke the skipper and we duly established that we were in the right place but the Greeks had changed the port sequence without telling anyone and the starboard lights were not functioning.

Piers and Cheryl invited me on a cruise along the Turkish coast on Shiwara. We were in Marmaris and, late one night a session was in full swing in the saloon. It was after curfew and much rakki had been consumed by Piers and Cheryl, by the Australian skipper David and by the guests comprising the local chief of police, the harbourmaster and Mehmet who was a lecturer at Istanbul University (he was also Cheryl's lover). I thought I would enliven proceedings by announcing that I would never forgive the Turks for what they did to my father at Gallipoli. I explained that he was a Regimental sergeant major in charge of supplies. The troops were in rows of pristine white tents and one of his charges was a dump of apricot jam as big as a house. "You bastards fired a shell into that jam which was thrown everywhere – from that day on my father would never again eat apricot jam, and I blame you!"

We were taking lunch with Mehmet in the main square of Marmeris when a lorry with a winch came along; men clambered out and started chiselling away at the feet of the leaping charger upon which Attaturk was mounted. Eventually the statue was loaded into the truck although part of one foot did not accompany the model. I asked Mehmet what was to be the replacement and it was to be a fisherman's wife looking out to sea, anticipating the return of her husband. Asking who ordered this change he replied that he did.

Boars had been raiding the maize and Mehmet arranged that we accompany the locals on a pig shoot. Abandoning the car at the highest point we could reach in the hills we then climbed to a peasant's abode where we consumed peppers and weak tea. This was the performance at half a dozen dwellings as the team was assembled and trekked to the ambush gully. With their cow-pat hats and antique weapons they resembled a band of Mujahideen. My companion was to be the harbour-master as we lay prone for ages.

Eventually a rumbling sound told me of the approaching boars. Not so, it was the action of the peppers in my companions' stomach. We never saw a pig but I did see a fantastic sky.

A couple of days later we moored up in a beautiful bay where there was just one other yacht. It was a concrete Turkish boat and sunbathing naked in the bow was a bull of a man with a red bandana round his head. When he saw that we had all our warps sorted he addressed us with his loud hailer and asked if he could send a drink over. "Of course" So along came his man with a bottle of Rakki. Piers then invited him to join us, which he did with the bandana now adorning his loins. The drinking continued and our guest told some fine stories, one of which I recollect was about being a Spitfire pilot in the war, would you believe? Now Cheryl has a very fine figure and it soon became apparent that our guest admired her. There was the usual story about exchanging her for some cows and the bull's ardour became most apparent as his manhood thrust at the bandana. In fact so great was the thrust that the cloth fell away completely: it was at this moment that he made his lunge for the lady. She immediately threw herself overboard, followed by him. To this day I am unsure whether this act was to escape or to obtain some seclusion for the two of them. Thereafter Cheryl fondly referred to the man as "Turban-Tool"

Unfortunately drink got the better of Piers and Cheryl went on to marry Dudley from Australia, who had become the skipper of Shiwara. Dudley was no slouch having sailed a 12 metre open yacht from Australia to England. He could also turn a phrase: introducing him to Rupert Lawrence, a formidable deep voiced all square Englishman, he indicated that he struck him as "solid as a brick built shithouse".

**Assassin** A client owned a Class 2 ocean racer "Assassin". As a dinghy racer, he wanted me to be his tactical adviser

and invited me to join the vessel for Cowes Week. This coincided with the hottest summer for years and there was no sign of Assassin in the harbour (their engine had failed and they had to anchor outside). Finding somewhere to sleep was nigh impossible and I had to accept a bed in pretty dire accommodation, so determined to get a meal and take some alcohol. The temperature was 100 degrees. I found a fish and chip shop: at the adjoining table arrived a face that seemed familiar. It was Peter Gilmore, better known as Captain James Onedin of the "Onedin Line". We fell into conversation and he helped while away the time before I had to retreat to my smelly accommodation. Re-united with Assassin the following morning we found ourselves the last of three yachts on a spinnaker reach in the middle of the fleet. "Blast" said Neil, the Townsend Ferry is coming and will take our wind. "Good" said I. I then explained that whilst we would be first to loose the wind we would be first to get it back and that would be our opportunity to luff and overtake. "You do that in dinghies?" "All the time". Rather reluctantly Neil performed the exercise and we duly gained two places. His pals sent him to Coventry in the bar that night for such a despicable deed.

In spite of this Neil invited me to perform the same function on an ocean race from Rothesay, with around fifty yachts starting at dusk. I am a big believer in pushing the starting line: if you start from the back you are lost. We were fractionally early and Neil refused to heed my advice to press on and incur the ten minutes penalty. We eventually started towards the rear. There was not much wind and as it grew darker it was noticeable that the masthead lights of yachts around us were gently jogging ahead. Looking up, a flock of birds was circling over our masthead - I had sailed us into an eddy! Things did improve and there was half an hour of glorious sailing, off the isle of Ailsa, with flocks of Gannet diving into the water all round us. The return to Crinnan along the Sound of Jura was exhilarating. Broad

reaching under full spinnaker, Neil gave me the helm and we raced along at breakneck speed, all the time on the edge of a broach if I got it wrong.

**Roy Cutler** Another client, Roy, offered me the use of his yacht in the Caribbean. It was based in Anguilla and came complete with skipper, Alain, and his girlfriend Jeanne, as cook. Our party comprised me and Jan, my sons Chris and StJohn and Chris's wife Shirley. Alain had opted out as a lawyer in Paris and said he worked for the US anti-narcotics bureau. He kept a loaded magnum revolver under his pillow and we had some target practice with this weapon. The sailing was idyllic although we did get rather a soaking at St Baarts. This was compounded by the dinghy to shore capsizing and both Chris and StJohn acquiring sea anemone barbs in their backsides. StJohn was first to be subject to Alain's remedy which was to drip hot candle wax on them for easy removal. Chris decided to keep the barbs. It was a topless boat and Jeanne hoisting the halliards got full attention. From time to time Alain would point out a "bad" boat. A year or so later we learned that Alain had been arrested on trafficking charges and been sent to jail in Guadeloupe. Not long after his incarceration we heard that he had died there.

A word about Roy Cutler, Nephew of Sir Horace Cutler, Chairman of the Greater London Council. Roy's family had been much involved in the westward spread of London, building railway stations to support their development schemes. Roy had a massive presence and made things happen: he also drank far too much. To my knowledge he made millions several times and then proceeded to lose them. He loved animals. He ended his days living in Anguilla; there was no veterinary surgeon and a local brought a savaged goat to Roy. He sewed up its wounds with fishing line and gradually the islanders brought all their sick animals to him. In the fullness of time he would send

off to Saint Martin for required drugs and became much loved by the locals.