

West Solent Mini-Cruise 2016 – Maggie Haxell

I was one of five single-handed sailors from Poole who joined this rally organised by West Solent Hon.Secs Carolyn and David Howden, held 13th-18th June 2016. For the last 10 years I have regularly sailed in *Piglet* (430) with owner Sally Davis, but sleeping on a Shrimper is not her idea of fun (back problems!). However, she kindly said that I could borrow the boat: having been a teacher until retirement last summer I have never before been able to do such things in term time. A retirement challenge appealed, so here follows “A First Timer’s Experience!”

Sunday 12th June

Ian Roberts, Pete Stubbs, Nikki Francis, Mike Shearman and I were due to set off from Poole to Yarmouth at 9.30 Sunday morning...well, that was the plan, but the first technical hitch was that my engine refused to start, having been fine two days before! That filled me with foreboding for a week in the Solent with visions of tankers, cruise ships and car carriers bearing down on me and roaring tides whizzing me past my destination whilst I frantically pressed the starter button to no avail! Pete got it going and said “no problem, if it happens again we’ll just tow you!” Reassured (well, sort of) we set off!

A SW F3/4 meant a broad reach towards the IOW... well actually, into this white murk with no view of that normally very visible chunk of land! But visibility gradually improved, we had a smooth passage past Hurst Castle and at 1pm motored into Yarmouth where we had booked berths at Hayles Yard. So, my first experience of berthing in foreign parts was to “slip into a gap” on the pontoon, with just three feet to spare at either end because four yachts were tied up, two abreast, fore and aft of the gap, and there was an audience!! Oh joy! Actually the audience proved very helpful and grabbed my mooring lines just in time to prevent my bowsprit adding a new decoration to the bow of one yacht! Mike joined me alongside. When someone suggested we move later to tie up alongside the other Shrimpers, I declined!

We had a good meal at The Wheatsheaf and retired well fed and watered. As it was my first night sleeping on a Shrimper it took me a while to get organised but by the end of the week I got better. How those with two on board manage I cannot imagine, but I did notice good use being made of cockpit tents.

Monday 13th June

We were due to meet up with the Lymington contingent at 12pm off the Lymington Starting Platform, so we allowed for all five of us getting out of

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Yarmouth Harbour, fenders and lines stowed, sails up to leave at 10.30am. We arrived at said meeting point at 11.15am! It was fairly frisky so Ian suggested we sail up the river to meet them. He led the way but after a short time and negotiating one ferry with another approaching, Pete announced he was going to turn around as he thought we would have to beat back out of the river, which all seemed a bit unnecessary and stressful! The rest of us agreed and hung about outside the entrance for the Lymington boats to appear.

We set off for Portsmouth at 11.55am with the wind from the SW F4/5, between broad reach and run, and the waves enabling a bit of surfing from time to time. A lovely sail! Big black clouds loomed all day and it looked like it rained over the mainland and IOW but we escaped. Approaching the harbour, we took sails down, motored up through the entrance and into Hornet Service Sailing Club Marina by 3pm.

Berthing was going to be four Shrimpers nose to tail along the pontoon, with three abreast to get us all in. One boat from Chichester had already berthed. The sensible option was to turn round and reverse down between the pontoons (with quite a strong wind blowing!). Oh joy again! Ian led the way and tied up ahead of the first Shrimper. I was next. I turned round, lined up, planning to go right to the end alongside the first Shrimper to make it easier for the next boats in but found myself blown beautifully onto the pontoon - where I decided to stay! Others managed with differing degrees of expertise, then we heard a conversation on the radio to David Howden, about reversing into the berths, whereupon he was heard to say “Carolyn can do that”!...and indeed she did! A lovely meal was enjoyed in Hornet SSC followed by a “jamming session” on the ukuleles and accompanying singsong. A good evening!



Tuesday 14th June

The plan was to sail to Bembridge mid-afternoon when the tide was more favourable and have two nights in Bembridge. Some had planned a walk of several miles for the following day. Nine of us took advantage of the very good cooked breakfast offered at Hornet and then many went to the Submarine Museum just a few minutes' walk around the marina. It was really interesting, particularly the guided tour of the submarine from an ex-submariner.

Unfortunately, the weather was not co-operating and at midday we all gathered and the decision was made that conditions were “a tad too breezy” and to postpone our trip until the following afternoon. This made good sense and several of us took the ferry across to Portsmouth and went up the Spinnaker Tower. Gunwharf Quays is a pleasant shopping centre with a good variety of shops and coffee stops, so once revived we went up the tower. We were rewarded with stunning views, right up the Solent and inland.

We had a good meal at Hardy's restaurant that evening, just over the bridge from the marina, and retired to bed hoping for better weather the next day.

Wednesday 15th June

A few boats elected to make a very early dash (I think about 5am!) to Bembridge so that they could still get their walk in. Some of us took another ferry trip and walked around Old Portsmouth and took in a view of Ben Ainslie's impressive new HQ (see photo taken from the Spinnaker Tower - not sure it's quite in keeping with the surrounding area though!).



The rest of us set off for Bembridge about 3pm. Was it less windy than yesterday? ...I'm not convinced! Force 5+ so two reefs were the order of the day and off we set on a reach (Nikki and I with some trepidation, I have to say!). I could liken the trip to a roller coaster ride, mostly exhilarating, with the odd OMG moment,

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especially when Nikki took a rogue wave on board and ended up with a mini swimming pool in the cockpit! But she dealt with it quickly and it takes more than that to put her off!

An hour and a half later we were packing sails up and motoring up the channel into Bembridge harbour, where we were all directed to moor up individually alongside a very long pontoon, with no difficult berthing or rafting up! Excellent!

A restorative walk to the Brading Haven Yacht Club resulted in another very good meal that evening with very hospitable staff who were not expecting to feed so many ...nothing was too much trouble.

Thursday 16th June

We motored out of Bembridge about 8.30am. A F2/3 westerly suggested a slow sail to Cowes and I realised I had forgotten to get my comfy boat seat out. It was down on the berth in the cabin, so I reached over the bottom washboard...couldn't quite get it...so I stretched even more...pressing very hard down on my chest on the washboard, when suddenly there was a terrible whining noise and a huge bang! My self-inflating lifejacket had inflated and I looked like the proverbial Michelin man! Ian witnessed the result but fortunately for me couldn't get to his camera in time! I managed to extricate myself and was glad that I had brought a spare lifejacket!

We arrived at the Medina entrance at 12.30pm then motored up past the chain ferry to Island Harbour Marina. I could have sworn that earlier I had heard a conversation about having to lock in, three Shrimpers at time, but the lock keeper seemed intent on a challenge. "How many Shrimpers can you get in a lock?" and he settled for 7!



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More reversing into berths but they were individual and masses of space between. Discussion surrounded a walk to The Folly to eat or trying The Breeze restaurant on site. As the weather forecast suggested rain, many decided to try The Breeze and were not disappointed.

Friday 17th June

We left at 10am, tidal conditions allowing “free flow” with lock gates open, and we motored down the Medina in convoy. The Solent was very calm and there was a very light NW breeze, so a beat to Yarmouth. The forecast was for rain... and boy, did it rain...several times... the raindrops were so big it looked as though hail stones were hitting the water. To be fair, although it had looked like it was going to be a very wet week, this was the only day that we really did get very wet.

The possible lunch stop in Newtown Creek was ditched by most due to the weather. A fast ebb tide helped us on our way, and taking that into account we prepared to drop sails in good time east of Yarmouth Harbour, before we were swept past. I turned the key and pressed the button...nothing...tried several more times without success so radioed Ian, my “guardian angel”, who fortunately was close by and calmly said “No problem, I’ll tow you in.” Whilst I no doubt could have sailed in, I would prefer not to!

Actually, Carolyn radioed me suggesting I contact Yarmouth Harbour Master who would sort me out, as they had suffered a similar experience once before. Indeed, the Harbourmaster took over my tow once inside the harbour and gently guided *Piglet* in to join the rest, who were all squeezed into a space just in front of the shower block, which made socialising very easy! Once tied up around 2pm, Shrimpers were soon festooned with wet weather gear as everyone tried to dry out!



I went round to Hayles Yard to see if they had an engineer available who might look at my engine. Unfortunately, there was no-one in that day but they gave me the number of another yard that might be able to help (but

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they didn't work Friday pm) and the number of a mobile engineer. I left a message on his phone without much hope of hearing, but he soon rang back and promised that he would look at it "sometime this evening" but couldn't say when as he had three more jobs to do in Yarmouth before mine and he would call me later. I was very grateful and expected that I would get a call part-way through supper but told him I would only be about 5/6 mins away.

Living in hope of him solving the problem, I shot into Yarmouth to get some more cash and as I arrived back at 5pm saw him sitting in the cockpit with Ian and Pete in attendance! He had just finished a job close by! I was told he had pressed the button six times and it had started every time (and I expect he was about to think "stupid woman") when Ian told him he had tried it and hadn't made it fire...so the engineer tried again ...and again ...and again, without success! He then spent the next hour testing all sorts and eventually replaced a corroded connection (and we ascertained that the starter button had been stuck in) and it worked perfectly.

I was eternally grateful that someone (Rob Kitcher, Island Marine) was willing to come out at short notice, on a Friday afternoon, even if I was a little poorer!

'Last Night Drinks' at 6pm were on *Tarrocks*, and in order not to sink her, other boats and the pontoon were soon well utilised with much chat about the week's adventures. Even "sea dog" Molly joined the festivities! Another good meal followed at Jireh House, who had agreed to take our sizeable group at short notice, and staff who had finished work during the afternoon happily came back to accommodate us...that's what I call great service!



Saturday 18th June

Some were dashing back to Lymington to watch the rugby (having scoured the town and been disappointed to find nowhere was showing the

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match), others were dispersing at a slightly more leisurely pace in different directions... Having fortified themselves with breakfast in the Pier Café, the Poole contingent set off with sails up but motored through Hurst Narrows as there was little wind F2/3 NW/W and quite warm. Have you ever seen Hurst Narrows look so benign?

We managed to beat until we neared Hengistbury Head, but the wind became even lighter and bang on the nose so we put the engines on to help us on our way. Ian was more resilient and gradually became a speck in the distance behind as he insisted he had found a bit of breeze and wanted to sail if he could. He did come in later past the RMYC as we were packing up our boats.



So what are my memories of my first Shrimper Cruise? Varied sailing, interesting destinations, plenty of time to sit on boats with a cup of tea (or something stronger!) at the end of the day, socialising with fellow Shrimper enthusiasts, to be continued over a good meal that evening. Did I enjoy it? Yes, unreservedly. Would I do it again? Yes, certainly! Sailing singlehanded was a great learning curve.

Thanks must go to Carolyn and David Howden for all their organisation, both before the trip and during it (getting us all sorted for berths and meals was no mean feat) and to all the sailors (and Molly!) who made the week such a pleasant experience.

Maggie Haxell - *Piglet* (430)