

Shrimper Week in Denmark – Richard Shaw

The idea of sailing in the Baltic has always been appealing; with relatively sheltered waters, new scenery and ports to visit, the innate charm of the Danish people, and sailing on fresh water; all combined to make for an attractive prospect. Yet when one member of the SOA proposed the idea, it was greeted with some scepticism. However, the unique features of the Shrimper - a seaworthy offshore craft, big enough to accommodate two crew yet small enough to tow behind a solid family car - made the idea seem attractive and feasible.

So it was that 33 Cornish Shrimpers gathered in the port of Fåborg on the Island of Fyn, midway between Esbjerg and Copenhagen, on 13th June 2009. They had come from all over Europe, including Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal, as well as from the UK. A week of brisk winds gave us all some exciting sailing and a chance to visit many islands of the Danish archipelago. At the end of the first week, about half the Shrimpers returned home to enable their owners to resume their careers, while the remainder split into two groups: one crossed the Lille Belt and made a circumnavigation of the island of Als, while the rest explored places in the Fyn archipelago, which had not been visited during the previous week. *Gamba* was one of the latter.



The sight that greeted us on arrival at Fåborg was memorable. More than 30 Shrimpers lined up in a car park in serried ranks. Launching, planned for 13th June, was postponed due to strong winds to the next morning, while we repaired to an old warehouse, converted into a restaurant, where we received our briefing from Roy Ratazzi together with a lively supper. Early the

next morning, on Sunday 14th June, the fleet was launched with military precision, mostly by a large mobile crane, and we then sailed in light winds round the south coast of Fyn to the post of Svendborg.

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A large pontoon in the main harbour had been reserved for us and delicious herrings were devoured, with the local beer, by several Shrimpers.

On Monday 15th June the wind was much stronger and we enjoyed a fast broad reach through the channel between the islands of Tåsinge and Thurø to the port of Rudkøbing on Langeland for lunch. The harbour itself was rather spartan, but the town rewarded those who walked around it, with narrow streets and charming shops and cafes. The afternoon leg to Marstal on Ærø Island was a close reach, and in the SSW 5 winds some crews decided to stay in harbour. They missed an exciting but not dangerous sail and the charm of the old port of Marstal, formerly a centre of ship-building and owning. The *Bonaventure*, a Baltic schooner which had earned her keep carrying fish back from the Grand Banks of Labrador, was being restored in a local yard by a team of volunteers. The Maritime Museum and the local church both had magnificent collections of ship models on display. It was at Marstal too that we learned how to moor to the posts which are a feature of most Baltic (tide-less) harbours. Two mooring lines forward, one to a post on each bow, and two astern to the pontoon, sounded simple, but required a fair amount of trial and error before we got it right. By the end of the cruise we were all doing it much more confidently.



On Tuesday 16th June the wind was still in the west but less strong, and the fleet made its way to Ærøskøbing, another port on Ærø. This passage required a longish transit of a narrow dredged channel, but the bolder spirits among us took a short cut over a shallow bank – just the thing for a Shrimper – though several centreboards had to be lifted to get through. This was another attractive town, with cobbled streets and 18th-century houses.



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By Wednesday 17th June the sun had broken through, and we enjoyed its presence for much of the rest of the cruise, with one notable exception. A glorious close reach to the NW took us through the channel between Ærø and Drejø until the wind died after noon, whereupon several Shrimpers beached for lunch on the spit at the south-eastern tip of Avernakø; a delightful spot. Some crews were seen swimming! In the afternoon a southerly breeze came up and we ran together to the port of Fjællebroen, where a barbecue was held. The marina is privately owned by the berth holders, and several of them were on hand to make us particularly welcome.

Thursday 18th June was quite different. The wind was force 5-6 from the WSW; not ideal for the racing which had been planned. At the morning briefing some of the more cautious spirits were for cancelling it, but this was where Roy Ratazzi showed his true colours, sailing out to check the course in the early hours and then urging all present to take part despite the weather. Who dared refuse? The first race consisted of a shortened triangular course, and the second a beat to the island of Lyo, about 8 miles to windward, where the final dinner was to take place. Despite the protestations of some, we all made it and were proud that we had done so. The dinner was in a converted barn, now a restaurant, on Lyo, and all present warmly thanked Roy and his team for leading us on this varied and fascinating voyage.

Friday 19th June This was the day when those going home left to haul out at Fåborg, while the rest of us set out on the second week's cruise. The original scheme was to sail across the Lille Bælt to Jutland, thread our way through the channel between the island of Als and the mainland, and return to Fåborg. A small hardy group of eight boats stuck to this plan, while the rest of us, *Gamba* included, decided to remain in the Fyn Archipelago. *Gamba* made a circumnavigation of the island of Lyo, and while off the east coast was struck by a vicious squall, with heavy rain and hail. The main sail was lowered quickly, and under jib alone she retained control and steerage way. The sky cleared 15 minutes later and we were again under full sail. By 1500 we were moored at Fåborg, and that evening a jolly dinner was enjoyed by a large group of Shrimpers in the White House restaurant.

Saturday 20th June. The strong winds (SW5-6) continued throughout the day, and the Fåborg group decided to take a rest day, one crew exploring the town of Odense, birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen, by car.

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Sunday 21st June – The wind moderated to a good sailing breeze W-SW4, and seven Shrimpers decided to sail to Søby, a small port on Ærø island, which we had missed on our previous circuit. It was a lovely sail, threading our way through the islands off Fåborg and down the strait between Ærø and Avernakø, arriving at Søby at 1645. Another lively dinner was enjoyed, this time on the terrace of the Harbour Restaurant.

Monday 22nd June – The Søby Harbour Master, a jolly fellow, smiled as he collected our dues and told us that there would be no wind today. He also explained to my brother Anthony, who speaks Danish, that there would be a midsummer celebration on the island of Drejø tomorrow. We decided on another rest (?) day and explored the island on bicycles. This gave us a chance to see its varied scenery and the views over the Lille Bælt to the south.

Tuesday 23rd June The day began fair and our friendly Harbour Master advised that the wind would be light from the NW – just the wind to take us to Drejø. A gentle reach from Søby to Drejø saw us arrive at 1330. There were few boats in the small harbour, and we were able to fit in nine Shrimpers, including two who had returned early from Jutland.



Drejø has a population of 72, of which only one is of school age and the rest are farmers or retired. They all gathered at the bonfire which had been built just south of the harbour and welcomed the Shrimper group to their midsummer celebration; an event of significance in Scandinavia. The fire was lit, speeches were made, poems were read, and beer was drunk. The glow of other bonfires on the islands around us lit up the evening sky and signified the common links between the otherwise isolated islanders. We were proud to be allowed to join in.

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Wednesday 24th June We woke to a brisk N'yly wind whistling though the rigging of the boats in the harbour of Drejø, promising a bumpy ride back to Fåborg. However when we sailed at 1000 it had settled to a steady WNW4, which enabled *Gamba* to skip along at 5-6 knots closehauled. The wind conveniently died about 1200 enabling us to anchor off Avernakø for lunch, but it then came up again in the afternoon giving us a wonderful close reach back to Fåborg. We passed through the Grydelob channel into the Fåborg Fjord at 1355, and by 1455 we were moored in the Fåborg Lystbådehavn (yacht harbour), relieved to be safely back at our starting point but exhilarated by the sailing. Even more comforting was the assurance by the Harbour Master that the crane was coming tomorrow morning to lift the Shrimpers out.

Thursday 25th June At 0830 the promised crane arrived, together with a cheerful man from the Harbour Office. A group of three local folkboats were moored close to the lifting berth and could have proved a problem, but they helpfully shifted out of the way. Between 0845 and 0930 five Shrimpers were lifted on to their trailers. “Busy” was an understatement of the activity in the nearby car park as masts were lowered and sails and gear stowed. At 1030 *Gamba* set out under tow for the ferry at Esbjerg, via Odense to drop off Anthony.

All went smoothly until about 1230, when the near side tyre on my trailer burst with a loud report. I was agreeably surprised at how controllable the trailer was, and I managed to pull car and trailer onto the hard shoulder near the turn-off for Nørre Aaby. My efforts to lift boat and trailer with my jack were unsuccessful. However, a phone call to Trevor Thomas reassured me that my problem had been spotted, and that Shrimpers with better jacks were on their way. Peter Smales (*Woodcock* - 872) pulled up soon afterwards and produced a massive jack. In no time the spare wheel was on, and by 1400 we were on our way. A wonderful example of “Shrimper Spirit”. By 1500 the Shrimper trailer fleet was in the car park at Esbjerg Ferry Terminal, and at 1845 the *Dana Sirena* sailed for Harwich.

Friday 26th June The ferry docked at 1300 Danish Time (1200 BST) and unloading proceeded steadily, so that by 1245 *Gamba* was on her way to Reading to start her cruise on the Thames. But that, as they say, is another story...

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