

September Solent Cruise 2016 – Trevor Thomas

Ruth and Tim Tayler achieved a minor miracle in arranging a Solent Mini Cruise in mid-September (12th-16th), with virtually perfect weather! From Monday to Thursday we had almost wall to wall sunshine, temperature in the mid 20s and kind winds. OK, on Friday things turned against us so the event was one day shorter than planned, but for those four days... well, amazing!

We met up on the Monday in Cowes at Island Harbour Marina, which is now looking very spruce with apparently a lot of money having been spent on new developments including a complete transformation of the old portakabin type bistro bar that many of you will remember from earlier years. The new restaurant will probably seat over 100 and is very stylish. We did not use it on Monday evening as Tim and Ruth had pre-booked the on-site bbqs and brought along the charcoal. Pity they forgot the firelighters... but that mini disaster was quickly overcome and anyway the drinks were already flowing by this stage. Sailing in September reminds us that the evenings draw in quite quickly, and it was not long before we had table lanterns of various descriptions to illuminate the beautifully cooked (mainly!) bbq fare. With the darkness the temperature began to drop and by around 10.00 we were all back in our Shrimpers ready for an early night.

Tuesday morning arrived bright and blue with some Shrimpers heading off up-river to Newport while others lazed around the marina. Sally and I tried to book a taxi to visit Whippingham Church but the three firms we tried were all too busy! We had heard somewhere that the Isle of Wight is struggling a bit to attract business... not in the taxi world it's not!

With the turn of the tide eastwards we all made our way to Portsmouth Harbour to rendezvous at the Hardway Sailing Club pontoon, situated north of the large marinas of Gosport.

A couple of boats decided to head for the more salubrious setting of Port Clarence Marina a little further south, but their crews walked around to join all the others who were, by this time



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enjoying one of those classic cockpit parties, this time on my new Shrimper 21 *Encore*. We were greatly helped by the very wide club pontoon, so we ended up sprawled out in some comfort over the boat and the pontoon with lots of wine and nibbles. Ray Daniels and friends kindly added music to the mix and played guitar and sang a few songs, which were greatly entertaining. Again the



evening light began to fail and we headed off to a local pub just outside the club gates and a great time was had by all.

Wednesday found some of us heading up the Porchester Channel to visit Porchester Castle at the top of the creek. This castle looks exactly as one would imagine the classic sand castle to look as you approach from the sea. Sadly we were not able to gain entry due to some technical hiccup with admin somewhere, but we tied up to the PSC pontoon and enjoyed a belated breakfast. We finally all left Portsmouth to start the sail back to the Hamble and enjoyed light winds and warm sunshine en route to Mercury Yacht Harbour, a cracking passage!

On arrival at Mercury our team, Julia and Mike, Paul and Sarah and Sally and I spent some time concentrating on finding answers to a challenging little quiz/forage devised by Tim and Ruth to keep us interested and occupied during the week-long event. There were questions, nautical and general, items to find, photos to take, and nautical calculations. I'm not good at quizzes, thank goodness for the clever team, but I think I at least got the air draught question right.

Thursday was to be the day for heading upstream under the Hamble bridges, but the forecast for the following day forced the hand of the Chichester Shrimpers and it was decided that they would head back to home waters in the better weather rather than face possible high winds on the Friday. So the fleet dispersed a day early but all committed to meet up on that evening for our final dinner being hosted by Tim and Ruth's home club, Warsash Sailing Club.

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Sally and I decided to go off for the day as tourists in the car, which was handily available as Mercury is my home port. A beautiful drive through the New Forest and a great lunch at the Master Builders in Beaulieu worked out really well and we had a lovely day despite the thunderstorm forecasts which were thankfully wrong... or at least delayed by several hours until night-time.



Tim and Ruth hosted our final dinner in Warsash in great style. Tim, obviously into these things, introduced yet another quiz into the proceedings for us to complete over supper. The meals were fabulous and all of a French theme. It had been made clear that the evening's fare was to have the French feel and that we should/could dress appropriately if we wished. There were many striped T shirts, a couple of berets, a string of onions, a pretty girl wearing a policeman's helmet (one of our tasks for the week!) and two french chefs. What a bunch!

Obviously everyone had a brilliant evening. Did I mention that the team I was on not only won the week's quiz but also the table quiz as well? The prize for each event was a bottle of red wine, both being ceremoniously distributed glass by glass amongst all those present...a fitting end to a wonderful week.



Sincere thanks to Tim and Ruth for putting the whole thing together. I hope it is not too long before they are persuaded to arrange another .

Trevor Thomas – Shrimper 21 *Encore* (17)