

# Tallula Goes Offshore

## Edward Dobson's Marcon Trophy Winning Log describes his first trip across the Channel with his friend Steve in August 2020

I bought *Tallula*, a fin keel Trident in June of 2019 and spent that summer exploring the Solent, getting to know the boat a bit better and providing several entertaining spectacles to observers of some of my berthing and unberthing manoeuvres.

She was hauled out in November and I spent more time and money than I could have possibly imagined making inroads into some essential maintenance and improvements. I took the mast down and discovered that it had cracked and become dented under the spreader brackets and also that the triangular spreader for the jumper stays had broken and was only attached one side. I had the triangle re-welded, along with having some stainless steel backing plates made up for the spreader brackets to strengthen the area. It was also a good opportunity to replace the standing and running rigging and rewire the mast to get the radio working properly, along with the various mast lights and fit a decent radar reflector.

The idiosyncrasies of 2020 had rather curtailed my ambitions for the season, but I was delighted to splash back in the water in May and I continued the frantic recommissioning process, including a complete rewire of the interior.

We finally left the dock for the shakedown cruise on 4<sup>th</sup> August, going from Fareham to the Folly Inn and back via Port Hamble, which was a good reminder

of all that had been forgotten by both captain and crew in the intervening months. The voyage was a success by the conventional measure, other than the tragically unsuccessful MOB exercise to pick up my handheld VHF.

10 days later we set off from Fareham bound for Normandy. I intended to get down the river before it got dark, as the piles are only lit up as far as Bedenham Pier. I wanted to avoid plugging the tide going round the Isle of Wight and ideally to arrive in daylight at Cherbourg, in time for dinner.

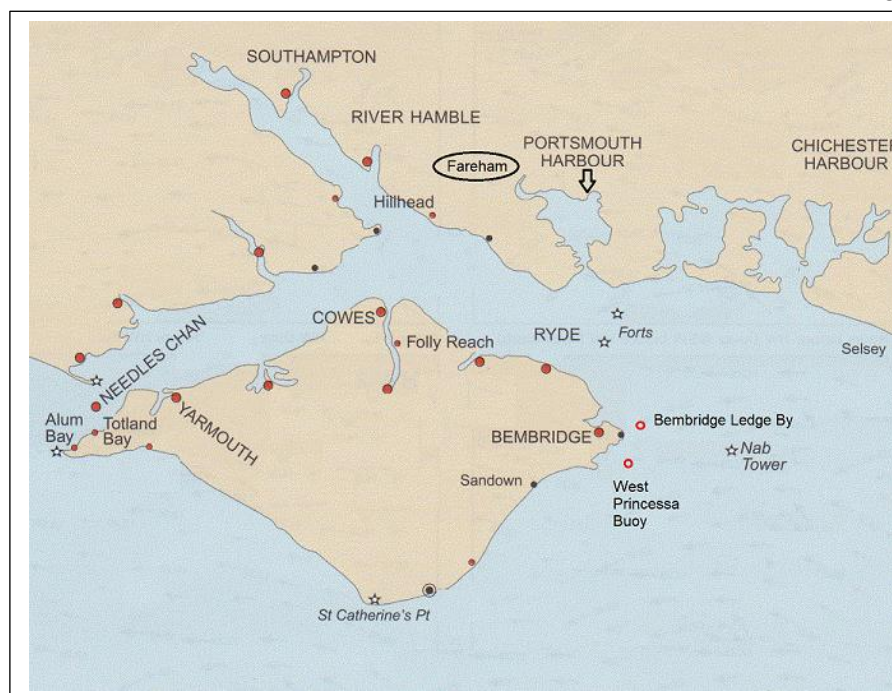
I estimated a speed of 4kts for the journey and carefully added up the tidal offsets to get from Bembridge Ledge to Cherbourg eastern entrance. This process was largely a pointless exercise as the tide and leeway all cancelled to give a final course to steer of 200 degrees, which is the direct bearing. The weather forecast promised force 2-4 winds, variable between SW and NW, a smooth or slight sea and possible fog, which gave me pause for thought.

We followed my pilotage plan as far as the West Princessa buoy, hopping along the reds out of Portsmouth and across to No Man's Land fort and round. I'd learned the lesson from the pilotage adventure of my Day Skipper course, and this time I was a bit better prepared. In the event the visibility was good and we managed to find all our marks in good time and where we expected them to be.

Between Bembridge Ledge and West Princessa I was flummoxed for some moments trying to identify what I was looking at, which was two vertical green lights.

I knew that whatever it was I didn't want to collide with it, so took some judicious avoiding action. I chuckled when it became evident that what I was seeing was in fact the starboard aspect of two yachts sailing in formation.

I had planned we would mark our position on the chart using the 'compass rose' method, that is finding the GPS range and bearing to the point at the centre of the pink compass rose on the chart, which means the line of the bearing can be speedily determined straight from the printed compass on the chart, then the distance can be marked using the calipers. What I hadn't anticipated is that my newly installed red LED strip which



functions as the night time chart light makes the pink compass rose absolutely impossible to see on the chart, so we fell back to using the Breton plotter to mark our position in relation to St Catherine's Point or Cherbourg harbour entrance.

Until we reached the west-east shipping lane, not much happened. The sea-state was pleasant although there wasn't enough wind to get going properly so we motor sailed. At dawn the fog arrived. Conveniently this coincided with our meeting the traffic coming eastwards from Ouessant.

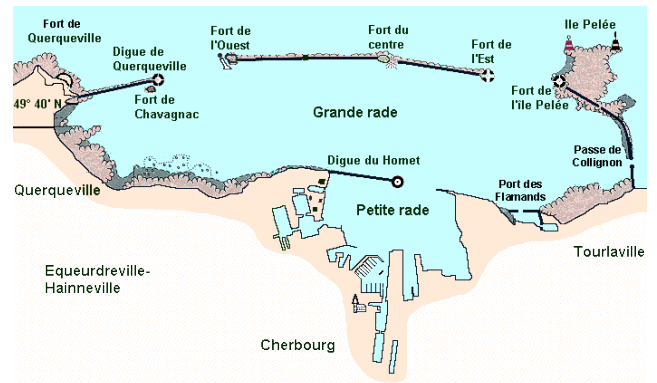
I was very glad to have installed an AIS system, although I will definitely revisit this as ships were only showing up about 2 or 3 miles out and that really wasn't far enough for us to take timely action. We found ourselves ambushed by a front of 5 container ships travelling abreast of one another in a chain a few miles wide and did our best to thread ourselves between them. We never actually saw any of these ships because of the fog and I was relieved to see on the AIS a straggler of the group changed course to give us some more space to get round them.

The fog soon lifted and having cleared the shipping lanes I was pleased to lie down for a while and let the first mate keep watch again. I was woken with the news the wind was 'perfect' and we could stop the engine and get sailing in earnest, which really was a great pleasure. It doesn't seem to happen often that the wind is abeam and of the correct strength to fly the full canvas so of course that's what we did. Turning off the engine and unreefing the sails and hoisting a courtesy flag for the first time was a joy which was soon tempered when I went back down into the cabin.

The boat was now heeling further than before which revealed a layer of oil sloshing up the side of the floorboards atop the water in the bilge. I wasn't unduly concerned about the volume of the bilge water; I'm fighting an ongoing battle with water ingress which I think may be coming through the toe rail amongst other sources.

The oil however was a new development. Last year I replaced the water pump seals on the Yanmar 1GM10 which I noted was dripping onto the oil pipe below. I had noticed a small amount of rust on the pipe at the time, but as it wasn't leaking I never got round to replacing it. The dipstick on the engine didn't register the presence of any remaining oil whatsoever, however the low pressure alarm never sounded.

We continued to Cherbourg under sail. It seemed to take forever to actually get there after it came into view and I used this time to work out what to do when we arrived. I decided I didn't want to restart the engine with no oil in it unless it was absolutely necessary and so decided to drop the main out in the



Grande Rade and proceed to the long and accessible waiting pontoon under the headsail. The main on *Tallula* has a bolt rope attachment to the mast and boom, with roller reefing and no lazy-jacks or stack-pack, so getting it up and down can be a palaver which I felt best avoided in a busy marina.

Upon arrival a nice Lady in a RIB suggested we go to pontoon H, normally reserved for the giant visiting boats, instead of the non-walk-ashore pontoon I was heading for. Getting there was no easy task as tacking in light wind under headsail in a confined space presented a novel challenge. We were lined up perfectly to take up the suggested position between two boats when the wind changed direction, seemingly out of spite.

We gave up, and perched on the end of pontoon H. The marina team seemed happy for us to stay there until I could repair the engine, and I was happy to occupy this unique position in the marina with its fantastic view out into the harbour. I took a photograph of *Tallula* on her berth from the monument to Fishermen lost at sea, located on the eastern side of the marina. She looks like a tender to the giant catamaran parked in front.

After dealing with the usual pleasantries at the marina office, we headed into town for drinks and nibbles. I think I must have been uncommonly tired if not emotional after the crossing and the celebratory refreshments as on my return journey to the boat I managed to walk directly off the pontoon and disappeared into the marina up to my eyebrows. This invigorating and unexpected diversion focused my mind quite quickly and as I was planning how to extract myself I was very kindly rescued by a fellow matelot called Peter, who was taking a break from his westward passage towards Spain.

I determined that the engine was leaking from two places, the O-ring seal between the water pump assembly and engine block and from the aforementioned rusty pipe I should have replaced earlier. I took the opportunity to practice my French "*Je cherche un joint torique comme ça mais plus épais*" and to buy some more oil. I didn't fancy trying to special-order Yanmar parts so I effected a 'temporary' repair of the leaking oil pipe using a





*Tallula dwarfed by the giant catamaran she is tucked behind like a tender (right)*

considerable quantity of JB-weld and some duct tape to hold it in place while it dried. This was a complete success and along with the serviced water pump, the engine was now back in order.

Having fixed the engine we moved the boat to a more appropriate if less prestigious berth and awaited a good forecast for the next leg of the journey. I had hoped to go as far as Honfleur but the weather didn't look very supportive of the endeavour and the engine issues had cost us several days, so after a pleasant, if curious, week in Cherbourg we took advantage of the only decent weather window to head back to Portsmouth.

Retrospectively I wonder if I would still fancy taking the same weather window for the return leg. We had about 24 hours between the end of storm Ellen and the start of storm Francis to make the crossing. I can't remember the precise forecast but it was approximately south westerly 4-6, good visibility and what turned out to be a pretty moderate sea. I ensured we reefed the main before we left the dock, so we could just pull it up with the minimum of fuss when we got out in the harbour. This was a good plan although the reef wasn't really deep enough and I would have had a much easier time addressing this before we had left.

We set off about 21:45, motoring out into the Grande Rade again to get the sails up and set off out of the harbour. It was pretty windy and lumpy out there and I reminded myself that it's not good form to

betray any nervousness to the crew, so we set our course in good spirits back the way we came, trying not to get pushed by wind and tide into the prohibited area of the explosives dumping ground north-east of Cherbourg.

The first half of the journey was at a speed I had never seen before from the Trident. Last season we saw a 6.0 on the Log and got very excited. After a bit of a scrub and antifoul this year the 6.0 was seen on a few occasions but on this night the log never read below 7, and occasionally went up to 9knots when coasting down the waves.

The visibility was very good and we could pick out the lights of the ships many miles before they showed

on the AIS. One ship was going to pass I felt a bit close so we spoke on the radio and they graciously changed course for us. Unfortunately I fell back in the cabin, destroying my boat guitar in the process. I had meant to store all such detritus in the forepeak before the crossing but I had failed to do so, which was to my cost. This also highlighted the need for some hand-holds in the cabin. We would have additionally been glad of lee cloths during the passage, as it was not terribly easy to lie down without falling out of the bunk due to the waves.

As we drew parallel with Sandown Bay, we were shielded from the wind and waves by the Island and it was astounding what a difference it made. The sea flattened and the wind died down; by the time we were at Bembridge Ledge it felt like any other lovely summer afternoon pootling around The Solent. We borrowed a mooring in Portsmouth Harbour while we waited for the tide to rise enough to get back to Fareham. I took the opportunity to get some sleep.

The unsung hero of the expedition was unquestionably Terry the tiller pilot, without whom the trip would have been a lot more difficult.

**Edward Dobson**

Planning a cruise this year?

Don't forget to keep a few notes for your Marcon Trophy entry for next year.