



Ready to go: pre-voyage trial, with the two-piece canoe on the coachroof.
Opposite page: *Teal* arrives by lorry at Downs Road yard,



Later... *Teal* in the Baltic





Just do it

How Andy Rankin and friends found a decrepit 90-year-old Falmouth Quay Punt built for Percy Westerman, fixed her up in just two months and set sail for a summer in the Baltic

Mick glanced at the sky and shook his head. “I wouldn’t go now if I were you” he said. “I reckon there’s some bad weather coming”. But the three-day forecast we heard on the radio before we slipped from the buoy mentioned nothing, and I wanted to get the crossing over with. Should I go with the salty sea-dog leaning on his stick, trusting on the intuition of a life spent sailing and shipbuilding, or with the mighty supercomputers of the Met Office?

Now Tollesbury lay three days’ gentle cruising behind us, and our destination, Thyboron on the western coast of Denmark, was still several hundred miles ahead. So far, the Met Office had done

OK, but now even they were admitting there might be problems ahead, for the shipping forecast wasn’t good. Gales in most sea areas – in German Bight it was forecast to reach force 9 over the next 24 hours. I can picture vividly Julian and me crouching to hear our only link with Britain – the crackling of Julian’s old car stereo clumsily wired to the battery; the measured tones of the BBC announcer; the knot that was forming in the pit of my stomach.

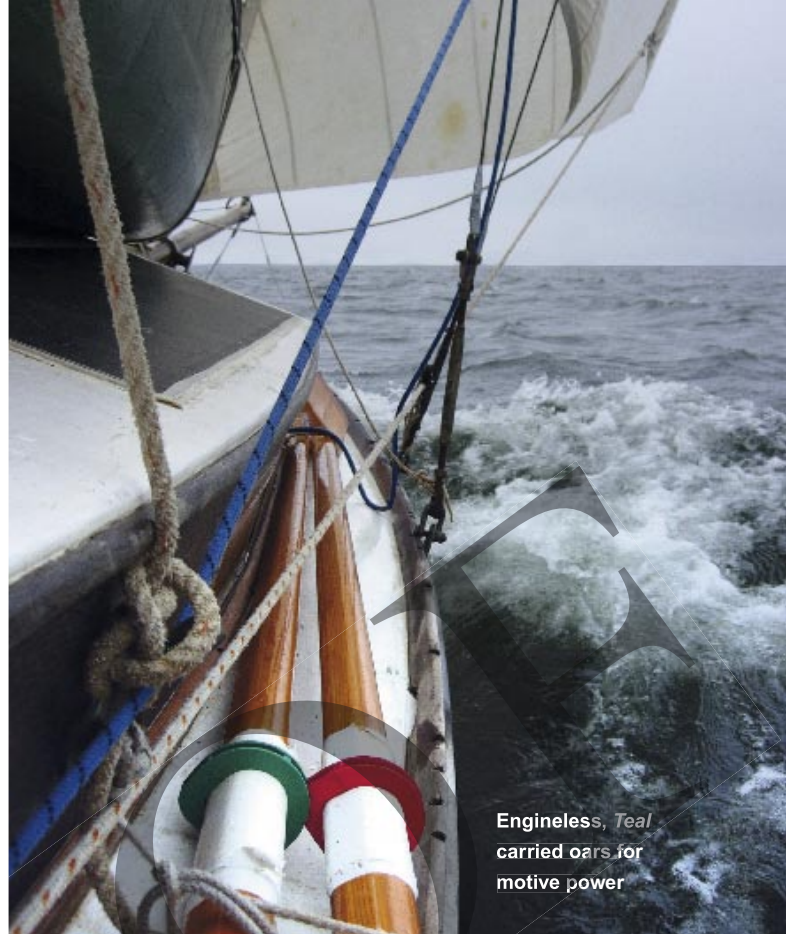
At 21ft (6.4m), *Teal*, the 1914 Falmouth Quay Punt which I’d bought as an abandoned hulk and, with the help of friends, hastily restored to sailing condition in under two months (see p22) is not a big boat to be facing that sort of weather.

But real sailors aren’t meant to worry about mere gales so I tried to be nonchalant as we checked the lashings on the canoe that was stowed on *Teal*’s cabin top, and reduced sail. The wind had backed round to the south-east, so we were sailing on a beam reach.

I let Julian take the deck for a while, and I tried to get some rest while conditions were still bearable. I don’t think I managed any sleep, and as the wind built up and the odd wave came crashing down on the deck we discovered that although our recently repaired decks were sound in most places, we had not sealed the mast step well. The intermittent gushes of water soaked everything beneath. Worse was the join between



'Not a big boat to be facing that sort of weather'



Engineless, Teal carried oars for motive power

the coachroof and the hatch coamings, which leaked incessantly. The only dry part of the cabin was the forepeak, and there we crawled, shivering, when we were off watch to try and get some rest. We had to share that tiny space with any of our clothes that were still dry enough to be worth saving, and the ship's guitar – which, remarkably, stayed dry through the trip. Julian's sleeping bag got soaked fairly early on, so from then on we took turn about with mine.

By the time it got dark we were carrying just the small jib. We were making fast progress, but it was increasingly uncomfortable as the waves built up and combers came crashing down from the side to soak the helmsman. I had rigged a line between the two masts as a lifeline. We could clip our life-jacket lanyards onto it, so there was no danger of being swept overboard.

In the small hours, as the heaving, lurching and spray increased I decided it was daft to try and keep sailing the way we wanted to go. Life would be much more comfortable if we just took all sail down and drifted with the gale. I joined Julian on deck, inched my way forwards on the tiny heaving side decks, and clipped myself on by the mast. Julian bore off downwind and I precariously wrestled down the flogging jib and stowed it in the canoe. The wind was now driving us north-west, perpendicular to the course we wanted, but the motion was vastly better now and the

waves crashing down into the cockpit much less frequent. I streamed a thick warp behind us to slow us further, and took the helm for a while to let Julian rest.

The night was pitch black, and our world was reduced to our tiny heaving craft and the light of the navigation lamps reflecting off the foam and spindrift. We took our turns hunched in the back of the cockpit, our backs to the full force of the gale. As we rose on a crest it would batter our oilskins and scream through the rigging, but the waves were big enough, and Teal small enough, that when we were in a trough we were sheltered. An occasional jog at the bilge pump kept the blood moving, for without a self-draining cockpit we needed to pump out every wave that climbed aboard.

It didn't last all that long - over the course of the next day the wind gradually died away, and turned squally. Ironically, by the evening we were becalmed.

This was the centre of the depression passing over us, and I knew the wind would swing round to the west and increase again soon enough. But it gave us time to cook a hot meal and recover slightly.

We were slightly unsure of our position after the wild night. At one point I had discovered weed round the line of the Walker log that Mick had given us as we left, so we had almost certainly gone quite a few more miles than it had recorded, but it was very hard to judge how many, or in which direction. We made the best guess

"we needed to pump out every wave that climbed aboard"

we could of where we were, and steered for a group of oil rigs that, if we saw them, would let us fix our position again. Thankfully we did, but

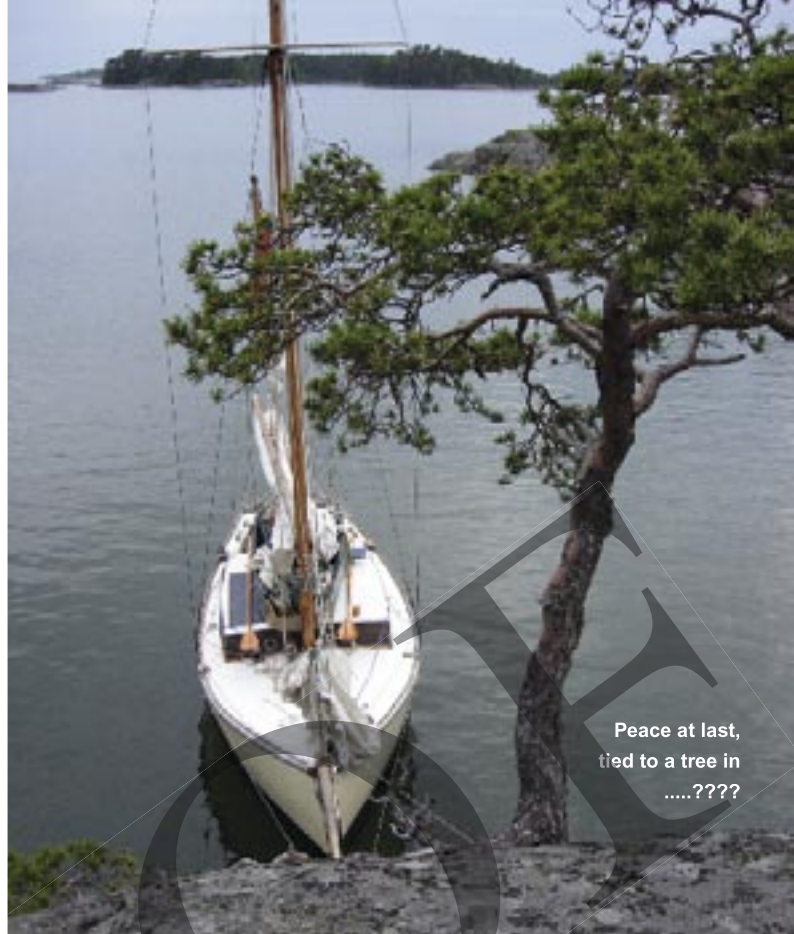
from here there would be no more oil-rigs, buoys or any other markers to navigate by until we reached the Danish coast. I tried to be particularly careful in making our dead reckoning as accurate as possible.

The evening forecast, fainter and nearly drowned out by static, gave another gale warning for the eastern North Sea, as the depression continued cartwheeling to the east, swinging the winds round to the north-west in its wake.

A day later, and as the dusk broadened the winds were steadily rising as we closed with the Danish coast. It's very barren, and south of the entrance to the Limfjord at Thyborøn there is no harbour for over forty miles. We



The Walker log was fouled by weed in the North Sea



Peace at last, tied to a tree in????

picked up the loom of a lighthouse, flashing a group of two flashes. I looked at the chart – yes, there was a light marked with 2 flashes every 15 seconds at Bovbjerg, to the south of Thyborøn. That must be the one we could see, although it put us rather further south than I had expected. Still, we couldn't go into Thyborøn in the dark, so we would just sail slowly up the shore and stooze around until light.

Being in no hurry we shortened sail right down and headed up the coast. Midnight found us off the next headland and the lights of a small town, where we hove to. But something was nagging, for what we were seeing didn't quite match up, and beyond this headland the coast seemed to trend round to the east. My mind was grey and woolly with tiredness though, and I didn't stop to puzzle it through. We hove to, and I went below to try to get some much-needed sleep.

I didn't have long before Julian woke me urgently. The waves were slowly pushing us ashore, and he had found it hard to judge the distance in the dark – now it seemed we were suddenly getting close to the dunes, and the waves were steepening as the water shelved. In the dim half light we could just make out the wobbly skyline of the dunes, and they did seem terrifyingly close. It was freezing cold, I had run on deck wearing very little, and had immediately been soaked by a wave that broke over us, but

it was essential we get *Teal* sailing again and claw offshore. It meant going hard on the wind, the least comfortable and wettest point of sailing – and the wind had risen to a near-gale again. Shivering violently, I set the sails as Julian steered, and gradually we clawed off the coast.

Julian had at least worked out why the coast didn't match what we were expecting. In addition to the light I had seen marked, there was another light a few miles north that flashed 2 flashes every 20 seconds. I had assumed my counting was bad, rather than checking the chart more carefully. Instead of being ten miles to the south of Thyborøn when we made our landfall, we were in fact a few miles to the north, and had compounded our mistake by sailing even further north so we now had to sail 25 miles back to the south again

“we needed to pump out every wave that climbed aboard”

to get to Thyborøn. Still, at least we knew where we were, and we would have had to hang around all night in any case as we couldn't go in in the dark, so it wasn't the end of the world.

The sail back down the coast was exhilarating. It was blowing a full gale again and the seas had built up enormously. We swooped up and down, one moment our little cockleshell hidden completely in a trough, the next rising until we were on top of the world.

I had been reading the entry in the almanac for Thyborøn. ‘There is a bar over the entrance’ it warns. ‘Do not attempt to enter in onshore winds greater than force 5’. The wind was very considerably stronger than that, and even if it should moderate it would take a long time for the waves to die down sufficiently to make the bar safe. I didn't want to risk suicide; we should probably wait around offshore.

As we approached the entrance, we spied another sail in the distance. We weren't alone! She was only the second yacht we had seen since we left the English coast. She was a long way ahead of us, and to my surprise she turned in and headed across the bar for Thyborøn despite the conditions. She was well ahead of us, so we couldn't see how she fared, but if

Maiden voyage in Maldon



she was able to go in, why shouldn't we? We were very tired, cold, wet and miserable – how good it would be to be anchored safely in the quiet sheltered waters of the Limfjord! It was very tempting to trust to fate and keep going. I gave in.

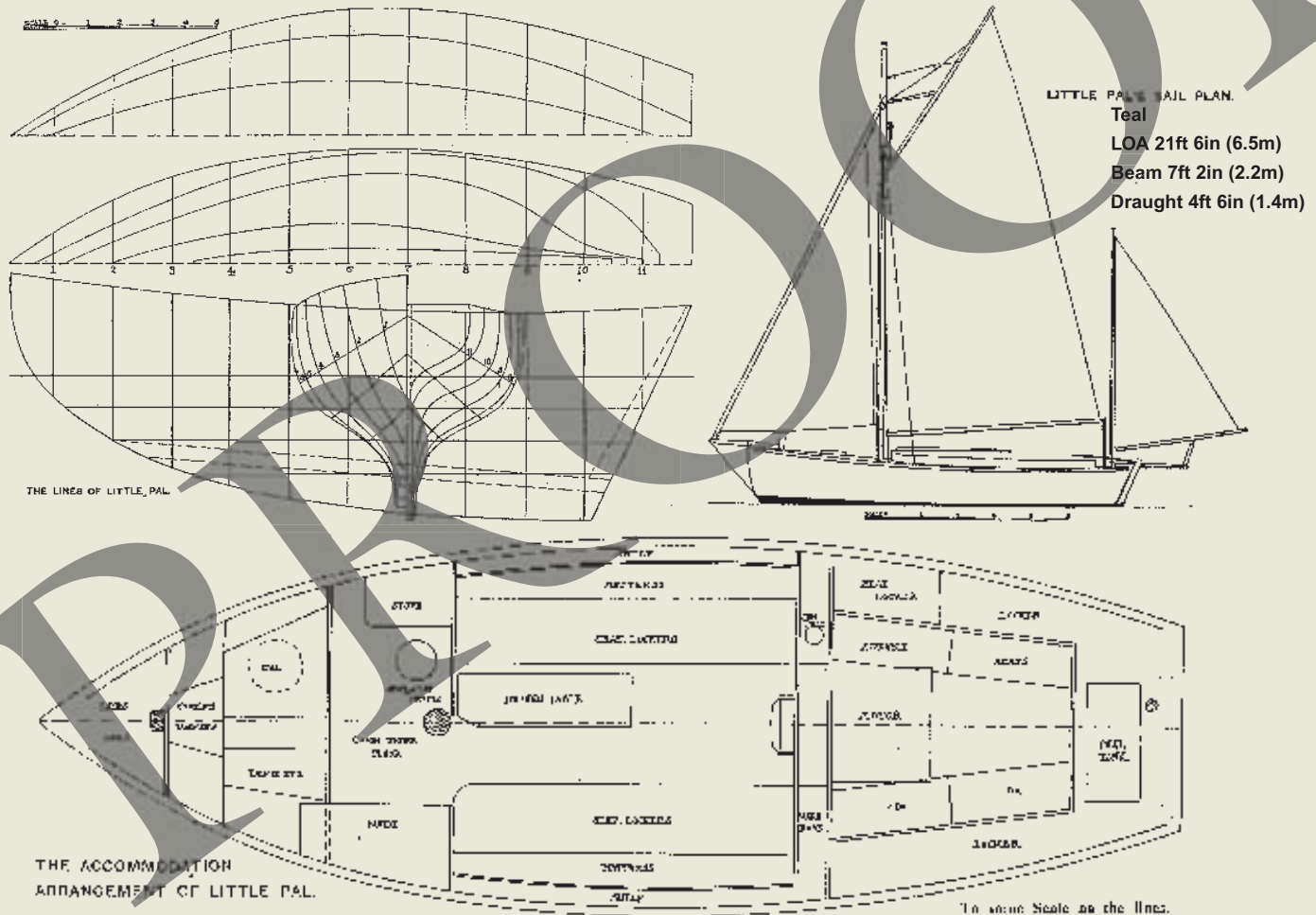
Crossing that bar was the most dangerous thing I have ever done in my life. The last few days, what with the gales and nearly being driven ashore, had put plenty of adrenaline in the bloodstream, but they were like a cosy afternoon cup of tea compared with the roller-coaster ride ahead. The waves were already huge, whipped up by the gales over the long long fetch across

the sea from northern Scotland. Yet as they felt the shallowing sandy bottom come up to meet them, they grew steeper and higher and closer together, until the frothing crests began to curl over and break.

Running down the face of the waves it took all my strength on the tiller to try and keep *Teal's* head facing forward as the rushing crest bore down on us and turned our world to foam. Then the bowsprit would point skywards and we would slide helplessly into the trough behind, before with a violent lurch the next sea grabbed us and hurled us forward again, to surf down the face of the next comber.

Finally there came a wave so steep I could no longer hold her, and as the crest broke upon us we broached sideways, and half the North Sea poured upon us into the cockpit. How *Teal* turned her head again to meet the next wave stern on, I'm not sure, but I hate to think what would have happened if she had not done so. That was the worst though, and just a few hundred yards further on we were in calm, sheltered water. The North Sea was behind us; ahead was the Baltic. We had arrived.

Next month: Teal follows Arthur Ransome's wake around the Eastern Baltic



Teal's history

Teal was designed and built in 1914 by W E Thomas, a well-known Cornish shipwright, for the writer and artist Percy Woodcock. Percy was not in good health at the time and wanted a small boat, simple to sail, and where everything would be in easy reach.

He originally named her *Little Pal*, but the name didn't stick long - she has been known variously as *Teale*, *Sea Teal* and *Teal* since. An article by Percy describing his new boat appeared in *Yachting Monthly* in May 1915. She also features in *Looking Astern*, an autobiographical look at the boats he had owned.

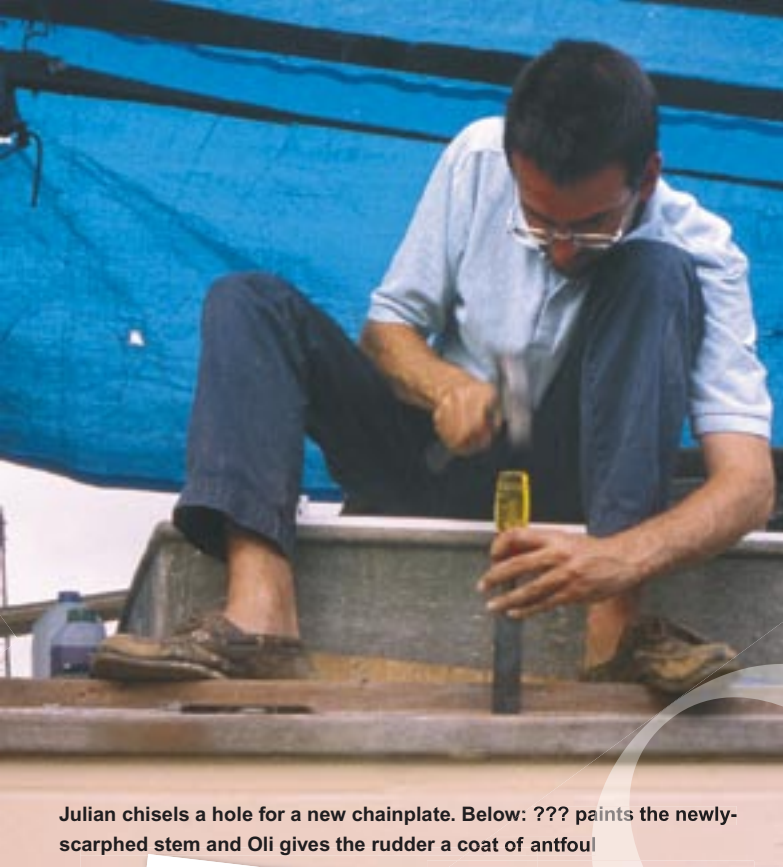
Teal passed through a number of owners in the first half of the last century, until disaster struck sometime in the early 1950s. Her

petrol engine caught fire and the planking on the starboard quarter burned through before she was beached and the fire extinguished. Declared a write-off, she lay abandoned for several years.

Quite who rescued her isn't known, but she appears again in Lloyds register in 1957, her port of registry now listed as Shoreham rather than her original base at Fowey.

By the late 1980s *Teal* was again in a perilous state from neglect, but was lovingly restored by Dave Cockwell, only 17 at the time but who now runs a successful boatyard in Falmouth. His website has a page featuring the restoration. Dave undertook several long passages in her around the South Coast and to Brittany.

Sadly, the next owner was unable to maintain her, and soon laid her up. Her condition had once again deteriorated considerably when I found her eight years later.



Julian chisels a hole for a new chainplate. Below: ??? paints the newly-scraped stem and Oli gives the rudder a coat of antifoul



Andy starts to saw off the offending doghouse



Julian?? at work on a spar(?Mast, boom?)



Teal's two-month restoration

"Another one come here to die" grumbled Arthur, surveying the battered hull that had just been delivered to his boatyard in Maldon. "There's the last one that came in looking like that". He pointed at a hulk lying behind my boat, a forlorn carcass of weathered timber with nettles creeping through the planking. "And that was another one." He nodded across the yard at a heap of firewood. It was quality firewood, larch and oak. "Well, I know what will happen in the end - she'll keep me warm for another winter."

I wasn't quite sure what to say. "Um, actually I was thinking of taking her to the Baltic in a couple of months." He didn't reply to this - merely grunted, gave *Teal* another searching glance to assess her calorific value, and walked off down the yard.

I'd left my job in the spring of 2004 and started looking for a boat to spend a relaxing summer cruising to the Baltic. I was quite fussy. My ideal boat was wooden and gaff rigged. She had to be big enough to face the North Sea with a reasonable chance of making the other side - yet she also had to be small enough to handle under oars, as I planned to dispense with an engine.

She had to be cheap, as my savings were meagre, and this almost certainly meant a boat that needed some work. But half the joy of owning a boat is working on her, so I looked forward to the challenge of a modest restoration. On the other hand, if she were too decrepit I wouldn't get away in time to have a good season's sailing.

"I begged for help from all my friends and relations"

The boat I ended up with, *Teal*, had been laid up in Alderney for eight years when I went to see her, with a boatbuilder friend who I thought might be a little more clued-up than me when it came to surveying 90-year-old abandoned hulks.

We stood in front of her and eyed her up. Well, her lines were certainly sweet and weatherly: her stem just a fraction off plumb, sweeping down beneath the waterline to a long, deep keel. The slight rake of the shapely transom stern complemented the lines of the bow. Above deck a simple low coachroof had been spoilt by the addition of a raised section above the companion way, but that could go.



Launch day: *Teal's* keel touches water after eight years



Celebrations and 'engine' trials

However, even from a distance we could see she was in a dreadful state of repair. Cracked, peeling paint was falling off in enormous flakes, leaving large patches of bare wood open to wind and sun. Above decks (which were carpeted in a luxurious growth of moss) the bright-work was even worse. There wasn't a scrap of varnish left on the coachroof, or on the mizzen mast, which was still stepped just abaft the cockpit. But we spent the night aboard, and in the morning I awoke knowing she was the right boat for me.

I bought her for £4000 and had her delivered to Maldon. With some trepidation I clambered up the cradle and onto the mossy decks, trying to imagine her at sea. I opened the hatch and made my way down the companionway. There was a soggy splintering sound and the companionway steps collapsed into the bilges straight through the rotten sole boards. Ah well, my first job anyway was to take out all the rotten wood so it didn't really matter. I set to work with hammer, chisel and saw.

I gradually found all the bits of rot that Brandon and I had missed in Alderney. There were many. Not only had the sole boards gone, but you could poke your finger through the bulkhead separating the cabin from the cockpit, and from there the rot had spread into the cockpit bearers. The decks turned out to be in a worse state than we had initially thought, and the stem and sternpost were also in poor shape, and would need new wood scarphed in.

We had carefully inspected all the spars in Alderney, except one spot – the heel of the mizzen mast, which was still stepped. It turned out to be thoroughly rotten as the mast step was full of rain-

water. And a small chip in the heel of the main mast that I planned to stick a small graving piece into, once planed back grew into a 4ft (1.2m) long scarph.

When there seemed to be as much wood on the pile of kindling surrounding the boat as was left in the boat, it began to dawn on me that this restoration might be quite a big task.

In fact, about the only part of the boat that didn't have some rot somewhere was the doghouse a previous owner had built on the low coachroof to give standing headroom. But that was ugly, so I'd chopped it off anyway. I was never one to sacrifice aesthetics to mere practical considerations. "If one wishes to assume an erect position, one can always go on deck," as that other Baltic adventurer, E F Knight, observed when he took his own small boat across the North Sea.

I rang round and begged for help from all my friends and relations, and slowly we began to put *Teal* back together. I wasn't interested in making her immaculate, I merely wanted a strong, seaworthy craft for a couple of seasons' sailing.

Buying her and transporting her to Maldon

had already consumed most of my limited budget and taken longer than I had hoped, so the plan now was to get her sailing as quickly and as cheaply as possible. It was already late April by the time I started, and I was hoping to leave in early June.

We patched up the worst of the rot in the decks and reluctantly laid down a couple of layers of fibreglass to keep them weatherproof and strong. We scarphed

new timber into both the stem and sternpost, and replaced the bottom six inches of the transom. We replaced the sole boards.

We sold the heavy lump of crumbling rust that was once an engine to a chap who happened to pass by one day and carelessly expressed an interest in it, and found a couple of oars instead, previously owned by a Cambridge college. We made some new deck beams and re-roofed over the cabin top where the doghouse had been.

My friend Peter – who had once owned a quay punt himself – kindly volunteered to scarph a new heel onto the mizzen mast and build me a new mizzen boom and bumpkin. He made a beautiful job of the spars, using some old joinery pine that we found lying discarded around the boatyard – the grain amazingly clear and close.

The chainplates, although rusty, looked to have enough metal left to hold the mast up, so I did not plan to touch them. But on giving one a bit of a wiggle while working round it I was disturbed to find it moved. Closer inspection revealed that while the lower parts of the iron plates were fastened with solid galvanised bolts, the fastening through the deck-beam was of copper. The two metals had reacted together, and around the copper the wood was soft and the chainplate wasted to a fraction of its original thickness. There was nothing for it but to make new ones, which I decided to fasten on the outside of the hull, workboat

"There was a soggy splintering sound"



Home comforts (above); and a libation ceremony

style, rather than in the trim yacht fashion on the inside of the planking.

Drilling out the copper drifts holding the plates to the deck beam

I found a rusty discarded length of quarter inch thick steel plate lying just above the high tide mark and marked out the new chainplates on it.

Attempting to cut them out we wore through all the angle grinder discs and jigsaw blades I possessed, until back at Peter's workshop we found that a bog standard hacksaw with a new blade and a lot of elbow grease was by far the most effective method. So effective that after a particularly energetic bout of sawing I stopped to take stock of how far I still had to go, and discovered that in my enthusiasm I had sawn half an inch into the vice that was holding the plate.

The grinder came into its own for rounding the corners until the new chain-



Some can assume an erect position below

and planking was a pig of a job, but eventually I had them all out, and repaired the damaged planking with small graving pieces.

bolt leaving only a gentle rounded dome on the outside. We had just drilled holes for each bolt when Peter's Irish friend Martin dropped by and was drafted in to help. Coach bolts have of course square shafts to prevent them from turning. "So, you want these square pegs to fit these round holes?" asked Martin. We confirmed that was so. "Begorrah," said he, and set to work with a small square file. Several hours (and a great deal of sweat) later, all 12 bolts fitted neatly in their holes.

Another friend, Julian, willingly gave up several weeks of his time to scarp the new heel onto the main mast (with the most immaculate glue line I've ever seen), rebuild the corroded innards of the dinky little brass navigation lights with high powered LEDs, and patiently and quietly do a hundred and one other little jobs. Many other friends came along at the weekends

plates would have passed at a distance for forged iron. I decided that coach bolts would be the most elegant means of fastening, each

"Naturally I was over budget and behind schedule"

– one day I realised with astonishment that no less than seven of us were busy getting in each other's way as we scraped and painted everything in sight. The Maldon fish and chip shop saw its takings soar.

Gradually the other jobs were tackled. We made new spreaders, and fitted new running and standing rigging; rebuilt the galley; removed a large number of steel fittings and sent them to be galvanised; replaced the loo with a Baby Blake bought at a boat jumble; built a pin rail around the main mast and a quarterberth under the port cockpit locker; fitted a solar panel to provide power now there was no engine – and finally painted the decks, varnished the spars, enamelled the topsides, and red-leaded and antifouled the rest of the hull.

Phew. By this point I was naturally over budget and behind schedule. But what could be more traditional in boatbuilding than that state of affairs? There were still a hundred jobs on my list, but they could be done another day. It was time to let my little duck take to the water once again. She was launched on the 10th June, just under two months after I began the restoration.

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