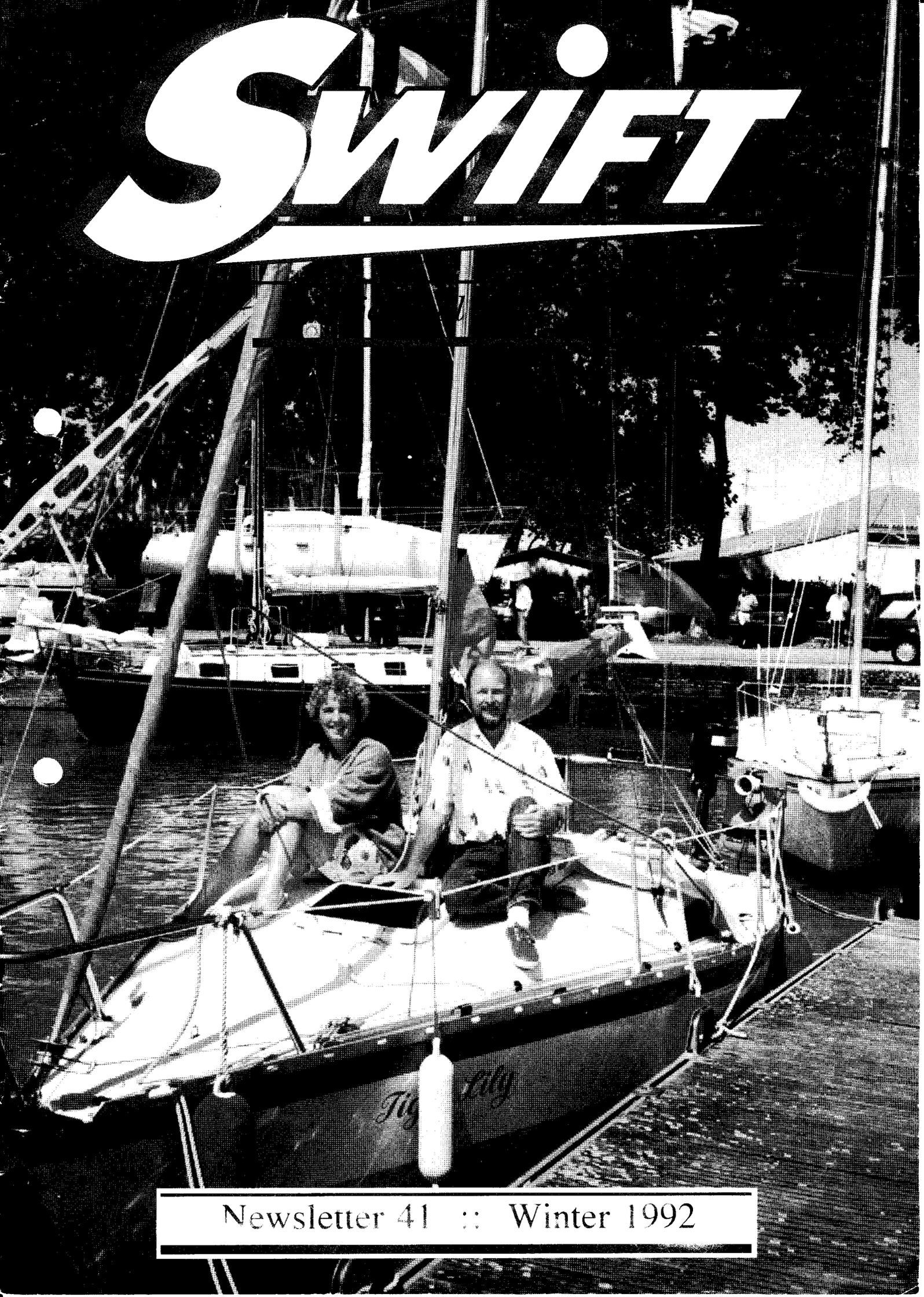


# SWIFT



Newsletter 41 :: Winter 1992

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# ***Tiger Lily 'En Charanted'***

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- ***Alan and Heather Murphy recall their seventh consecutive year's trip abroad with their Swift 18.***

**LA ROCHELLE**, lying half way down the French Atlantic coast is 350 nautical miles from Plymouth. For yachts sailing from Britain to Spain, it is the last French port which is accessible in all tidal and weather conditions.

Most visiting British yachts use La Rochelle only as a stop-over port during a longer cruise. This is a pity as it lies at the centre of a very interesting cruising ground. Within a radius of 10 miles there are 3 picturesque islands and 2 river estuaries. They form part of the Charante-Maritime Region of France and are close to the famous vineyards of Cognac. Being south of the river Loire the summer weather tends to be much better than Brittany or Normandy. The offshore islands of Ile d'Oleron and Ile de Re protect the waters round La Rochelle from the worst excesses of the Bay of Biscay.

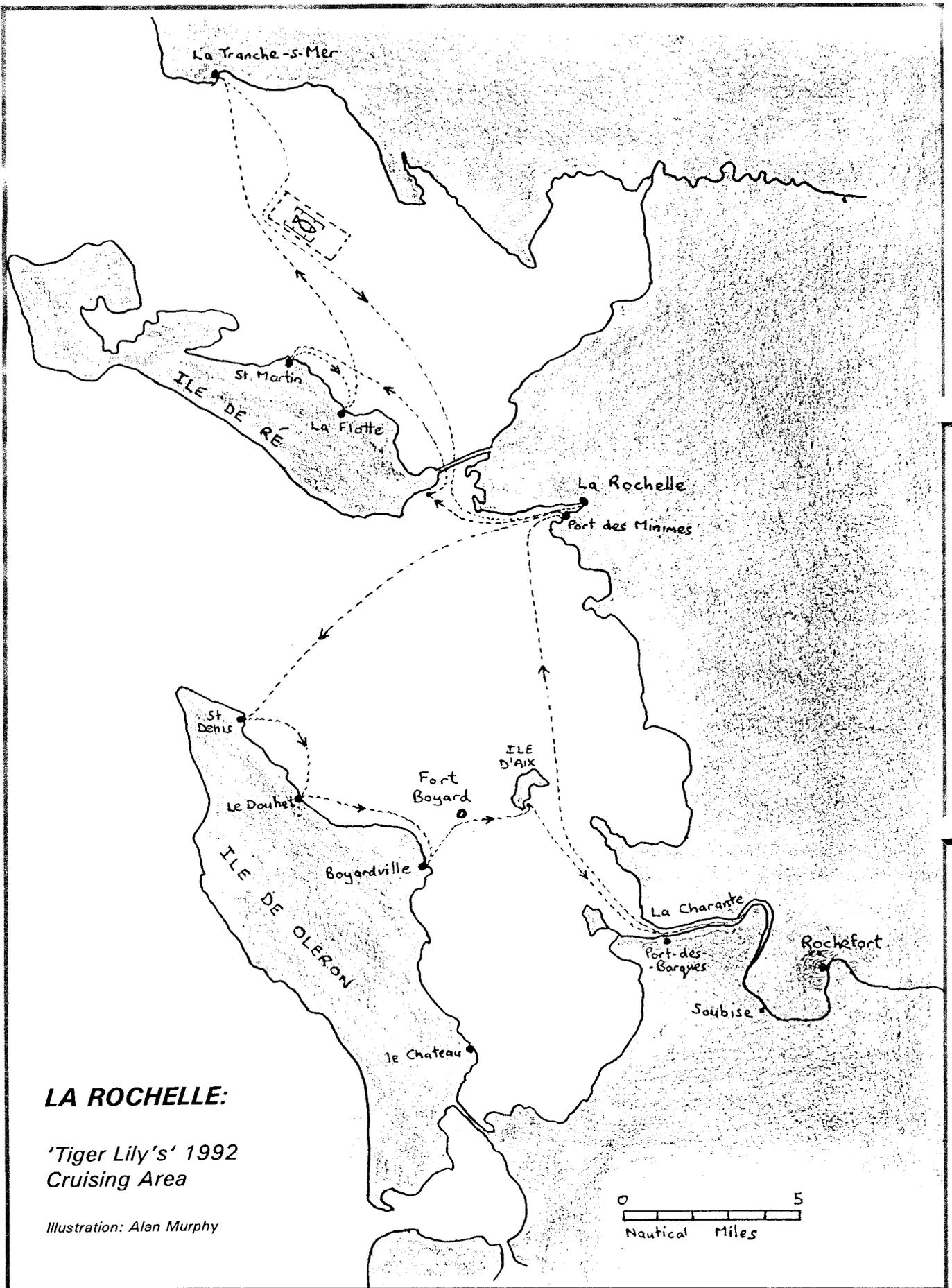
We only had 13 days available for our cruising holiday this year and as La Rochelle is less than 300 miles by road from Cherbourg, it seemed to be an ideal trailing destination. The main disadvantage is that many harbours in the Charante-Maritime are only accessible close to high water. However, having to plan our breakfast according to the tide tables seemed a small price to pay for the prospect of better weather, exploring the smaller harbours, and sipping French wine.

Port des Minimes is a 3000 berth yacht marina about 1 mile from the ancient town of La Rochelle and little research was needed to confirm that it was the obvious place to launch 'Tiger Lily'. The threatened French lorry driver's blockades turned out to be a non-event and within 20 hours of leaving home we were studying the large slipway at the northeast end of the marina. A mass of yachts were using the slipway to clean their hulls, but the tide was fast coming in and by the time we had erected the mast and made Tiger Lily ready, there was plenty of room to launch. The car and trailer were parked close by and suitably immobilised. Within 24 hours of leaving home we were safely moored on an empty pontoon enjoying a glass of French wine with our meal.

It is not wise to trail carrying cans of petrol and so the first job is always to buy petrol, local charts and provisions. We combined our shopping trip with a sightseeing walk to the old port of La Rochelle. The 'Vieux Port', guarded by the two towers of Saint Nicolas and La Chaine, is an impressive sight. Many of the shops seemed to be up-market and rather expensive, but it was pleasant watching the boats from one of the pavement cafes which surround the harbour. Every 30 minutes the Water-Bus leaves to make the 10 minute journey back to the Port des Minimes (fare £1).

In summer the Ile d'Oleron, ten miles west of La Rochelle, is popular for camping. Most camp sites are on the west side of the island where the Atlantic swell breaks on the sandy beaches. However the east side of the island has 4 picturesque harbours, but none are accessible at or near low water, so it is necessary to plan one's arrival.

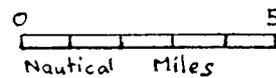
We left Port des Minimes with plenty of time to spare, but lack of wind forced us to motor



**LA ROCHELLE:**

'Tiger Lily's' 1992  
Cruising Area

Illustration: Alan Murphy



part of the way to St Denis d'Oleron, the most northerly harbour. Here the sill carries 2m. of water for 3 hours either side of high water, but once inside there is plenty of depth under the visitors pontoon. We had arranged to meet a friend who was camping on the island and after a couple of telephone calls soon established contact and agreed to meet for a sail the next day.

Port Le Douhet is only some 4.5 miles down the coast and this made it an ideal objective for a short morning sail - short because it was necessary to leave St Denis and enter Le Douhet on the same highwater. The concrete sill at Le Douhet dries within an hour of low water and once inside it is important to leave the yellow post to starboard so as to avoid an underwater obstruction. Close to the harbour a line of restaurants provide a good variety of food.

Le Douhet, like St Denis, is a modern yacht marina, but a few miles further south lies the older harbour of Boyardville. This port lies on a tidal river, La Perrotine, and caters for a number of fishing boats. The harbour itself is locked, the gates opening and closing automatically about 2 hours either side of high water. We used Boyardville for a lunch stop and to buy provisions but not wishing to get trapped by the lock gate, we left to sail via Fort Boyard to the Ile d'Aix. The fort, built by Napoleon and resembling one of the Solent forts, was used as a prison but today is a tourist attraction. The wind was north westerly making the moorings on the southeast end of the Ile d'Aix just tenable for an overnight stop. We picked a mooring buoy fairly close inshore which would allow us to dry out at low water.

Facing the entrance to the River Charante, the mooring was ideal to begin the 17 mile trip upriver to Rochefort. The river can carry a stream of 4 knots in places and so we choose to ride the flood tide right up to the lock gate, which only opens at exactly high water. The river carries commercial traffic and is therefore well furnished with a succession of beacons and leading lines. The lifting bridge just above Soubise has now been replaced by a high road bridge. Just outside the lock at Rochefort there is a waiting pontoon for early arrivals. As the lock would not be opened again until the following afternoon, we spent a full day at Rochefort, exploring the town. During the Napoleonic period it was the centre of shipbuilding for the French Navy and far enough upriver to be safe from marauding English fleets. The 'Corderie Royal' just alongside the river manufactured most of the rope for the French flet but now houses a nautical museum.

Leaving the river is more of a navigational exercise - boats can only exit the lock at high water and by the time they reach the mouth, the ebb stream has set in strongly. This can create a heavy sea at the bar particularly when a north westerly wind blows directly into the river mouth. As this was the case on the day we left, we chose to pick up a mooring buoy near the mouth and wait for the high water slack, occurring at 5 a.m. in the morning. Although still dark at this time, the two outermost pairs of leading lights were visible making navigation easy.

Back at La Rochelle, it was time to check the car and trailer and then take the Tiger Lily into the old harbour in the centre of the city. The narrow approach channel and the 2 imposing towers make the harbour impregnable and it is easy to see why it was used as a submarine base during the second world war. There are a number of visitors berths in the old harbour, but being right in the middle of town, it could be noisy compared to the Port des Minimes.

Tides were now flowing northward in the morning and so it was time to visit the Ile de Re. There is a very convenient daytime anchorage close to the beach at the south east end of the island. A mile north of this spot is the magnificent Ile de Re road bridge - it stretches in a gentle curve for nearly 3 kilometres. Yachts can sail through most of the many arches. Our



- Above: The 3,000 berth marina at La Rochelle showing the launching slipway.
- Below: Tiger Lily inside the old harbour at La Rochelle.



destination was the capital of the island, St Martin. Although the harbour is locked, the lock gates are normally open when the water is above mean tidal level (within 3 hours of HW). As it was Bastille Day, the French national holiday, the harbour was very crowded, but we managed to squeeze in at the far end. It was a lovely warm evening with many people promenading along the quay or sitting at the numerous pavement restaurants. Many French harbours have a firework display on Bastille Day, and St. Martin was no exception. Although not up to the standard of the fireworks display at the end of Cowes week, it did liven up the evening giving some people the opportunity to illegally let off red parachute flares.

A few miles down the coast is the drying harbour of La Flotte. We took the precaution of walking there from St. Martin, in order to inspect it at low water. Having checked it and the approach channel, we sailed there later on that day at high water. La Flotte is a little fishing community, but visiting yachtsmen are welcome as long as they do not mind drying out in the soft mud. The ten visitors berths were full, but the friendly harbour master soon found us a suitable spot. A major attraction on the quay was bungee jumping from a tall crane, but this activity was not for us!

Before sailing back to La Rochelle we decided on a long via La Tranche-sur-Mer on the mainland. The passage skirts a fish farming area packed with nets and buoys covering 2km by 1km. It is not advisable to sail through this area, whose corners are clearly marked by cardinal buoys.

La Tranche offers a good sandy beach and a number of mooring buoys, but little else. As the wind was rising when we got there, we decided to make an early return trip to La Rochelle. The northwest wind began to create quite a lumpy following sea. However, with 2 reefs set, Tiger Lily was never pooped and we slid under the Ile de Re bridge into calmer waters on the lee side of the island. It was then only a short passage back to Port des Minimes where we were welcomed by the harbour staff on the visitors pontoon. By now they had come to recognise Tiger Lily and had their control card all ready by the time we tied up.

Our last day was spent gathering souvenirs and generally making ready for the trail home. The slipway was busy throughout the day with people scrubbing the hulls of dried out boats. However by high water they had all gone making it easy to recover Tiger Lily onto the trailer. Tiger Lily is not antifouled and there is always some marine growth after 2 weeks afloat. The task of cleaning the weed from the bottom of the hull was made easier by the presence of a convenient water tap. That night we slept aboard the boat parked on the quay by the slipway. By 7 a.m. next morning we were leaving La Rochelle bound for the overnight cross channel ferry at Cherbourg and 24 hours later she was safely parked outside our front door at home.

This was Tiger Lily's seventh continental trailing holiday. A look at the statistics shows that it was one of the cheapest - marina fees were about £4 per night, and food was about £7.50 per person per day. The 'one-off' expenses of getting Tiger Lily and two crew to and from La Rochelle worked out at £290. We had 10 days afloat, sailed an average of 12 miles per day and visited 12 different harbours or anchorages. There were a number of occasions when we needed to set an early morning alarm in order to catch a particular tide or lock gate, but we never had to change our plans due to bad weather.

Comparisons with earlier holidays are difficult to make, as each area offers its own unique blend of sailing, culture and scenery - suffice it to say that we left La Rochelle 'En Charanted.' ●

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# ***Technical Topics: Trailer stands***

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**ON CHECKING** the wheel bearings, brakes and tyres at the beginning of the season, I noticed large 'flats' on the tyres. Obviously this was caused by the constant weight borne by the tyres during the laying up period of five months. A remedy had to be found. I did not like the idea of using axle stands or bricks because of the uneven ground in the boat park. That apart, I wanted something more substantial, something which would also serve as an anti-theft deterrent and could be used in years to come.

With this in mind, I put pencil to paper and roughed out a few sketches. I settled for the one shown (see diagram on following page). The next stage was a visit to the local scrap dealer. A fee of £5 exchanged hands and I had all the material that I required for the project.

The work was completed in one weekend and fitted later during the week. I welded the sections together but for anyone without this facility then convenient sized bolts can be used with nuts and spring washers. This would probably work out a little more expensive.

My particular type of trailer is manufactured by SBS Limited. However the basic principle could be used for any type of trailer with modifications for the hub measurements.

John T. Otter, 'Blue Shift' SO165

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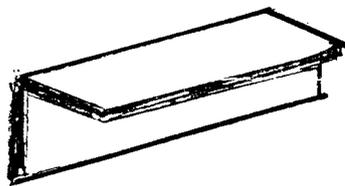
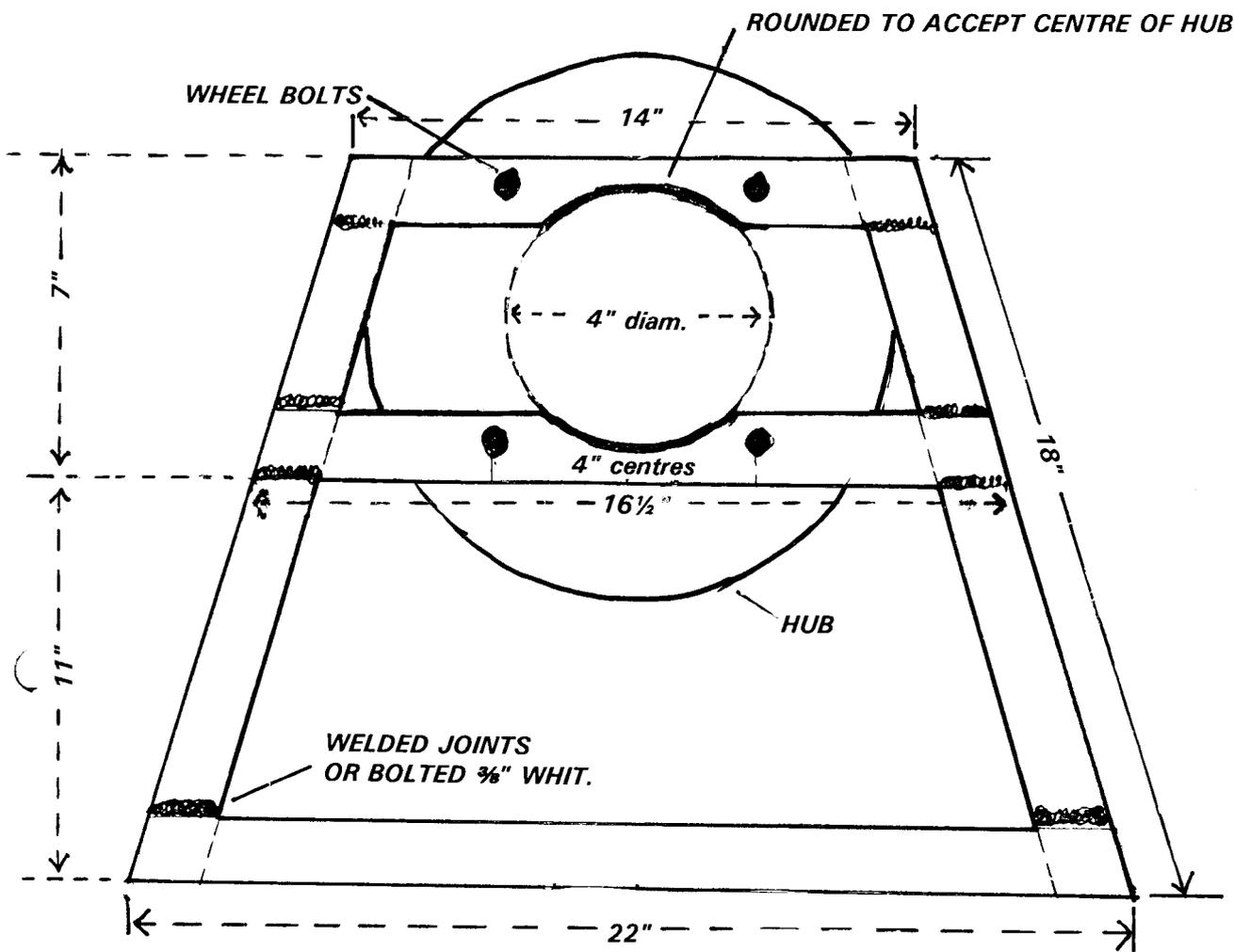


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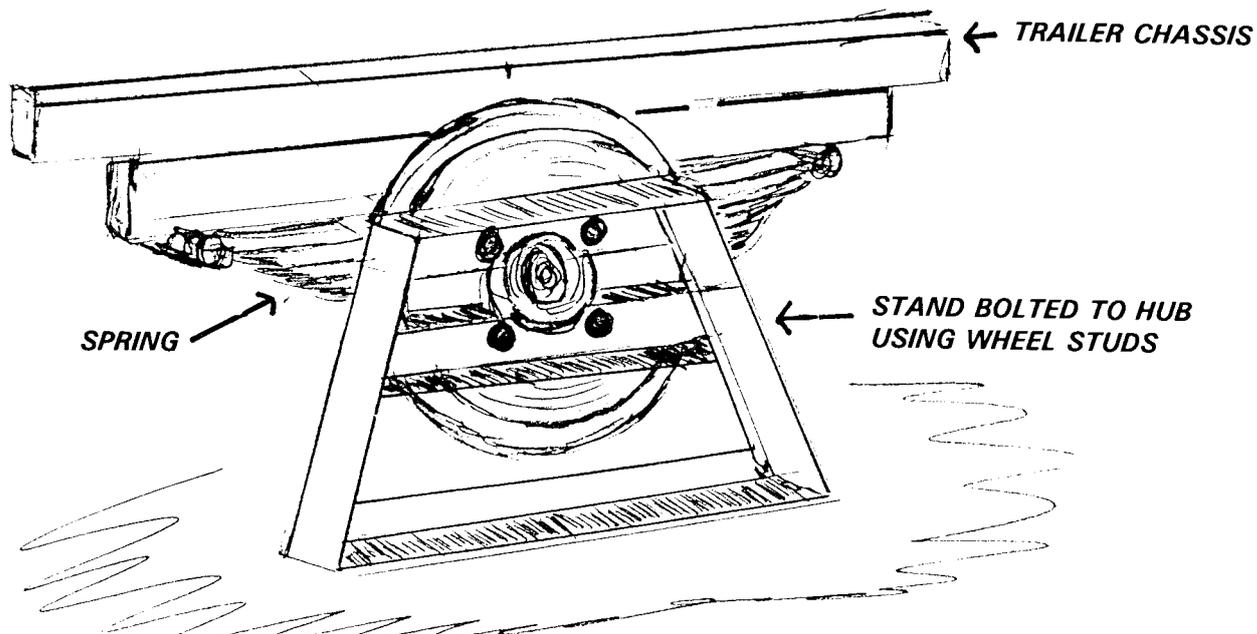
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ANGLE SECTION USED

**MATERIAL USED:** 2 3/16" angle mild steel construction. Can be welded or bolted flat face of stand, bolts straight on to hub using wheel nuts to secure. Hammerite finish.



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# *Progress with Xia Yi*

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**SINCE I LAST WROTE** the year has passed with continued activity sorting out the many problems with 'Xia Yi'. She is still based at Moraira, and costing a small fortune, but at least we are making progress. Letters to Winsor Bros. the builders and Superspeed Trailers seeking assistance and advice produced no results. An approach to Colin Silvester however finally brought most useful information. The plans and notes he sent out to me in China I duly passed to the firm in Moraira proved a great help.

On June 9th I arrived back in Spain for my annual holiday and was most pleased to find I had a boat that was, at last, ready for a good sail. She had been put in the water as requested, appeared dry, and was connected up to the mains electricity supply with all the electrics working. One major problem had not been solved. This was that the Yamaha battery charging facility was not producing enough volts. The firm investigating the problem however gave me a spare battery as a back up in case I ran out of amps. In the event I never needed to use it.

I spent an enjoyable couple of days stocking up 'Xai Yi' with food, fuel and water, then two days local sailing getting to grips with the Autohelm and the Hoods Stoboom. The Autohelm proved invaluable in singlehanded sailing. Freedom to go below, fill a pipe, fetch an ice cool beer from my new Coolbox, while listening to the click click of the helm correcting itself to keep us on course. This does not mean to say that 'George' is infallible. Occasionally things did go wrong, and I would have to rush back to the cockpit to regain some semblance of control.

This year's experience with the Stoboom has given me much more confidence. The main lesson has been to raise the aft end of the boom with the topping lift, much higher than I imagined. The book says - 89 degrees to the mast. I guess 85 could be nearer the mark. At this setting, the main can be rattled up and down with ease. This was particularly useful when I got caught in a strongish blow on the 22nd, but more of that later.

Interestingly the genoa furling system is much stiffer to reef than on 'El Nasr'. I still haven't worked out why this should be, but will experiment further next year. On taking the genoa off at the end of the holiday I also noted that the halyard does not run as easily as I think it should. I am wondering if the problems are related.

But, back to the holiday. One of my Christmas presents had been the Maritek Maritime datapack for my Psion. Over the past few months much pleasure had been enjoyed in far away Beijing planning some cruises down the coast from Moraira. Now I was to put the system to the test. This is when I learned another good lesson. The wretched wind never actually blew as planned, so all my carefully worked out passages were only useful as far as the 'idea.'

After a very bad weather weekend when I holed up in our villa, I got back on board for the serious business of setting off cruising on Monday, 15th June. It was still windy with a very choppy sea, so I used the day to cure a leak from a poorly plumbed Whale foot pump. Not a difficult task, but fiddly and time consuming.

I also tried to reseal the keel lifting mechanism housing on the keel box that has a persistent weep down onto the cabin sole. I improved the situation but the boat will have to be out of the water for a 100% cure.



• *Xia Yi berthed in Club Nautico at Mascarat.*

As a solo sailor, one of the safety provisions I have introduced to my seagoing routine, especially now with the Navico Autohelm, is to tow a very long warp with a fender riding and bouncing at the end. The odd powerboat seems to find this a bit of a curiosity, and several motor over to investigate. However, should I fall overboard, at least I have something to aim for.

When I motored into Altea Marina, the place seemed deserted. First problem was where to park. The only obvious spot was the end of a quay which was the home for some very expensive and luxurious boats. I had prepared for a port side arrival, so after a quiet circle in the middle of the harbour, I came to rest as planned. Altea proved to be a delightful spot. The village is beautiful and restaurants very plentiful. I enjoyed a good evening ashore. The morning continued the good impression. The Marina loos and showers were very clean, and one was welcomed in the Clubhouse. I topped up the petrol supply, paid my overnight dues (nearly £11!), and again at 1100hr. got under way, hoping to reach Alicante.

Wrong! Once out past the large promontory which guards Altea, the wind dropped to a very light breath, and again, on the nose. I was reluctant to motor, so persisted, hoping that the 1 o'clock breeze would materialise. It did not. Then at 1500hrs., I thought I could hear a shout for 'help!' Scanning the sea, all that I could see that might have been the source of the noise was a white object about a mile back. Decision, go back to investigate if there really

Tuesday 16th looked better, but as I was still awaiting the arrival of a bunch of Admiralty charts to arrive from Captain Watts, I decided to give them one more day and so enjoyed a day sail from my base. This was a good decision for the charts turned up the next day bright and early, so now I was fully equipped with no excuse not to set off.

This I did at 1100 hrs. aiming to sail to Altea - as per my Beijing Maritek plan. The wind was light and just about on the nose. Gently cruising along at 2 knots is certainly very pleasant and relaxing, but tacking all the way, with a leeway of about 15 degrees did not make for a 'Swift' passage. However once I was past Ifach at Calpe, the wind backed a little and I was able to get up to 2.5 knots and set course direct for Altea. In all I logged 17.1nms for the 12nms. run a' la Maritek plan and took 8 hrs. 40 mins.

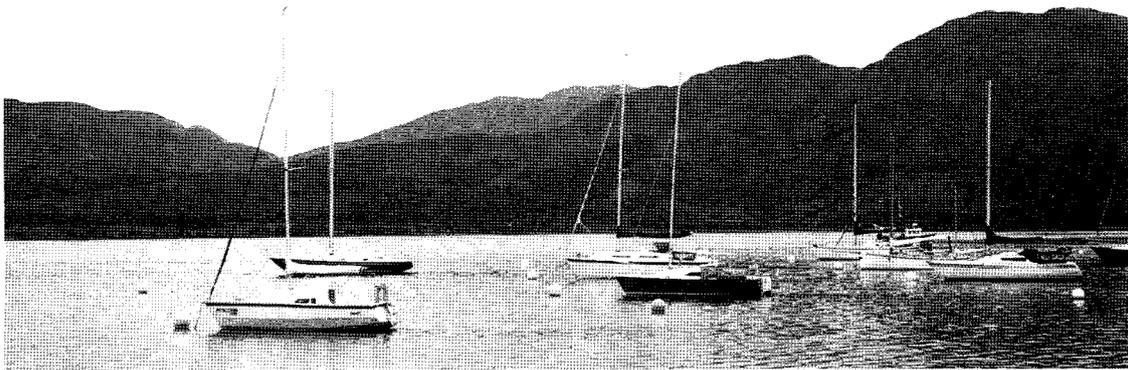
was someone in the water, or go on believing I was imagining it all. I went back, and it turned out to be a very large buoy. No glorious rescue needed, and I was now in a dilemma whether to run back to Altea or get back on track.

Altea was the easy option so back I went, but this time, instead of going into the Marina, I opted to try the recommended anchorage in Brandon's Pilot, just outside the entrance. An excellent decision. I had a very pleasant evening, fed well, and imbibed a couple of very welcome Spanish brandies as I watched the lights of the town come on.

One other amusing incident had occurred during the day. A 55ft. motor yacht 'Burbon' announced on Channel 16 that she had run out of fuel 2nms off Cabo St Antonio, just north of Javea. I could imagine the panic on board. Poor souls, no sails.

Overnighting at anchor is a most relaxing therapy in good conditions. The noise of the fishing fleet departing Altea woke me at 0630, so after the customary Frosty/coffee breakfast it was great to be off and under way by 0800hrs for a change. But it was a flat calm, so motoring was the only option. I found the throttle 'Start' position gave a neat 3kts. so I settled for that and set off south again. Rather than try to go all the way to Alicante under engine, I decided to divert to Villajoyosa, a small town, about half way there. It was an easy 10nms. which was covered in just over 3½ hours.

The Villajoyosa Marina is very small and a bit primitive. As I chugged in, nosing around trying to decide where to go, a very British voice came to my assistance with helpful directions. He turned out to be an expat, living and working at the Marina. This was an expensive berth, again at £11 for the night. No loos/showers but there was electricity on the pontoons so I was able to charge up and feel more relaxed about my power supply. I decided



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to move on next day for Alicante, but the weather turned nasty and indeed I was stuck there for 3 nights.

On Monday 22nd June, the Marina staff said the weather would hold fine, so I set off at last for Alicante. The wind was just too close to allow me to set a course for my destination, so I accepted a run parallel to the coast, noting Campello as a suitable diversion if I could not get round the cape this side of the city. That was a fortunate bit of planning.

I had set sail at 1100 hours, but by 1245, the wind started rising. Now, the pressure had dropped 3mbs. in 2 hours, but I only stored this good information away for reference, not truly registering the fact. I tacked out from the land to give myself more sea room, but when back on my southwesterly heading, the white horses were everywhere and I hove to to reef. Once under way, the speed was not affected, I was still making an easy 4.5kts., much more upright and actually feeling very pleased with myself.

Alicante was however now definitely out of the question. But where was Campello? The Brandon Pilot has photographs showing the Marina from the sea, backed by two very distinctive blocks of flats. I searched in vain, the coastline was festooned with blocks of flats, none resembling the photo. But help was to hand. Earlier a Spanish 'Aduana' (Customs) ship had steamed past on a reciprocal course. She might have been on one of these anti-smuggling sorties they do along the coast. Now she had turned back and slowly overtook me on my starboard, about 100 yards off. I don't know if they were watching me through binoculars, but if they were they would have seen me, pilot in hand, furiously scanning the coastline for Campello. Finally they opened the taps and drew away, aiming for a point about half a nautical mile to the north of my track. It looked to me as though they were going somewhere, when she turned 90 degrees to port and appeared to stop. I stared hard, and yes, just behind her I could see a forest of masts. It must be Campello.

Great stuff, I eased off a bit to starboard, and when about a couple of hundred yards out from the entrance, I hove to, and prepared 'Xia Yi' for entering the Marina.

There was a catch to this exercise. It was so rough and unpleasant that I did not feel brave enough to venture forward to put a warp ready on the bow cleat. Nor for that matter, did I make any ready at the stern. At least I had the fenders out. The omission of the warps exacerbated a problem in the marina later. Anyway, the engine was coping with the waves and I motored very gratefully into the yacht harbour.

I was relieved to see, on the first pontoon opposite the entrance, a Marina official gesticulating for me to berth in a huge gap, worth at least three boat widths, between two very large and expensive gin palaces. I nosed very slowly into the downwind slot, feeling rather pleased with myself that I would allow the wind to press me gently alongside the shining blue hull to starboard.

This was not to be. The marina chap was insisting that I berth 'stern to'. Now, if I had all the warps in position as normal, it would have been a simple task to turn me round end for end, but I did not. My attempts to turn round under power in the heaving space with the wind constantly pushing me in the wrong direction as far as the staff were concerned, were hopeless. I was fearful for a nasty gash appearing on one of the neighbouring boats, let alone doing damage to 'Xia Yi'. Fortunately the Marina staff, who now totalled three, were equally worried.

I did manage a 180 degree rotation, but was quickly back alongside the pontoon, not what

was required. At this stage, one of the staff jumped aboard and indicated that we should get out of that spot as quickly as possible and try a quieter berth. I could not have agreed more. A good burst of power and we were out of the potentially expensive insurance trap. Two minutes later I was safely moored, bows to, in a more peaceful berth on Pontoon 3. Unfortunately no electricity was available at this position - but who cared? It was safe, quiet, and I could relax. It was also pleasant to find the overnight cost was down, only £8!

As it had taken me a week to get this far, I decided that I would, unless the weather was exceptionally favourable, get to Alicante the next day, by bus! A bit ignominious perhaps, but it meant I was to the NE of the cape guarding the approach, and as my return to the north had a deadline, it seemed a sensible option. So Tuesday, 23rd June was spent as a tourist in Alicante. The whole city was preparing for a big fiesta so was very colourful and alive, but most of the big shops were shut.

Wednesday dawned bright and clear with only a trace of cirrus. I decided I would start the homewards trek, but the wind, light as it was, was now back to Easterly, again on the nose. Not to be too depressed I set off and tried a bit of motorsailing. With the throttle set just under the start mark I could achieve 3kts. Apart from the noise, this was acceptable and I was making progress. The sun was great and my tan was deepening nicely.

I passed Villajoyosa and Benidorm. I had thought of anchoring off Benidorm, but the idea of meeting all the thousands of tourists put it out of the question. I therefore plodded on and reckoned I could get back to Altea, or even better, try a new Marina at Greenwich Village - Club Nautico Mascarat. It was a long putter, but put me into a very smart and efficient base. The trip provided me with my longest day, logging 20.5nm and taking a total of 8hrs. 20mins. of sailing, motorsailing and motoring. The cost for this excellent Marina was unexpectedly cheap at only £5 per night - with electricity.

To cope with the many days of very light airs I decided that I should, at long last, experiment with poling out the genoa. Thursday was therefore spent fixing up the necessary rig to get the pole suitably mounted and under control. In the harbour it all works beautifully. I look forward to trying it out in the right conditions next year.

My last day of the trip was therefore Friday, 26th June. It was calmish, wind if any, again up front. I did note with some interest that this Marina gave out their weather forecast, photocopied to each yachtie. OK, it was in Spanish, but a most welcome service. I was under way by 1100hrs, returned past Calpe and Ifach, and tried a sail, but 1kt is just too painful for words.

After a very relaxing couple of hours anchored in Moraira Bay I motored in to find my old berth vacant so moored up as though I had never been away. After the usual tidy up, I sat happily in the cockpit for ages musing over the past two weeks and celebrating my first solo trip down the coast in good Scottish fashion.

In all, I had only covered 80.2nms, but I had learnt a lot. I had visited 4 new Marinas and enjoyed a night at anchor. My windy scurry into Campello turned out to be my first solo in a Force 5. The Med early morning light airs do call for appropriate sails. Next year I will not plan so much that I become inflexible and fail to take advantage of good cruising winds.

Finally, as a postscript, Swift 18, Amadaeus, is still sitting in Moraira Marina looking lonely, sad and dejected. Does nobody love her?