

COOL BLUE III LOG TO AUGUST 2018

Having been based in Mercury Marina on the Hamble for many years we decided that since we would like to do the East Coast and the Thames in 2018 we would base ourselves at Chatham MDL Marina, saving a substantial amount of mooring fees and taking advantage of the MDL Freedom Berthing scheme

Apart from obtaining Imray's latest charts and East Coast Pilot, I found the Port of London (PLA) website to be of great value together with their free publication "Tidal Thames Recreational Users Guide". Navigation, speed limits, rules and regulations including going through the Thames Barrier are easily followed for the stretch all the way from the Medway up to Teddington.

For navigating above Teddington, MDL do a "River Thames Map of the River and Paths" and upon a visit by road to the three marinas, we were provided with a copy together with "A Cruising Guide to the River Thames and Connecting Waterways" published by British Marine Federatio

We set off on 25th March 2018 from Mercury Yacht Harbour.

Passage	The Journey	Destination / Location
Hamble to Eastbourne 25 th March 70.6 Miles 5.0 Eng.Hrs	Depart 1100 – Arrive Eastbourne 1600. Light Westerly – Fairly calm – Mist clearing – Sunny Spells. Took the Looe channel around Selsey Bill. From Selsey had to head slightly north off the straight track to Beachy Head to keep clear of the wind farm.	Eastbourne Premier Sovereign Marina (1 Night) – Good shelter & access through one of two locks at all states of the tide. However, had to hold for locking in for over half hour. Good facilities and multiple eating & shopping.
Eastbourne to Ramsgate 26 th March 61.2 Miles 3.7 Eng.Hrs	Depart 0630 – Arrive Ramsgate 1000. Light Westerly - Slight chop – Sunshine. One mile from Dover radioed Dover Port Control for permission to cross the two entrances to the harbour. Clear visibility therefore very busy Ferry traffic easy to avoid.	Our previous experience of Ramsgate was – "Can be uncomfortable and facilities not good" – So since conditions were so good we decided to have lunch, wait for the favourable tide around NE Foreland and set off at 1400 hours for the last leg to Chatham.
Ramsgate to Chatham 26 th March 44.1 Miles 3.3 Eng. Hrs	Depart 1400 – Arrive Chatham 1700. No wind – Flat calm – Sunshine – Excellent for motor cruisers but nightmare for sailors! Took the Copperas channel inshore route along North Kent coast which although shallow (1 to 2 metres at times on a low water neap) is fine provided buoys followed. Took a wide berth around Sheppey and Sheerness to avoid mud flats before turning into Medway. From Sheerness to Folly Point no speed limit but thereafter 6 knots up river.	Excellent marina with fine facilities, services, nearby restaurants and shops. Short walk to Chatham Naval Dockyard & Museums and good bus service into Chatham, Rochester etc. Good rail service to London. Recommend visits to Dockyard, RN War Memorial, Upnor & Rochester castles and Cliffe nature Reserve. Chandlery 10 minutes drive by car only.

	Approx. 1 hour from Sheerness to Chatham.	
April to June	3 Casual cruises down Medway.	Brief visits to Queenborough (Limited pontoon and buoy mooring) and Stansgate Creek (Anchoring only). Further option would be Swale but Medway tends to be a commercial river.
Chatham to Burnham on Crouch. 28 th May 50.2 miles 3.4 Eng. Hrs.	Depart 1100 – Arrive Burnham Marina 1500. NE Force 2 to 3 – slight chop – Visibility 4 to 5 miles. Followed the Swin and then Middle Deep channel between Maplin and Barrow Sands to Whitaker buoy NE of Foulness Sand. Being 5 miles off shore, rather boring and uninteresting although careful navigation keeps one occupied. Turn West from Whitaker for the 14 mile trip against the tide up to Burnham marina.	Pleasant location. Easy access at all states of tide. Helpful staff. Good Chandlery on site. Reasonable restaurant and bar at reasonable prices. Short walk to Burnham shops, yacht clubs and pubs. Only disadvantage is that it is 14 miles to the sea and then to go North or South, wide berths required around mud banks (Foulness to the South and Buxey Sand to the North unless taking short cut at high tide between Buxey Sand and Ray Sand).
Burnham to Woolverstone 31st May 40.3 miles 4.2 Eng. Hrs.	Depart 0930 – Arrive Woolverstone Marina 1400. NE Force 4 – Moderate sea but wind over tide so uncomfortable – Visibility 1 to 2 miles. Exit Crouch and head North through the Wallet channel to Medusa and then Pye End and Harwich. 8 miles up River Orwell to Woolverstone Marina. On route, off Clacton, port engine failed so had to continue on starboard engine to Woolverstone at 10 to 12 knots (one benefit of having 2 engines). Managed to get local Yanmar engineers to carry out diagnostic check which showed a fuel problem. Eventually cleared the supply line from the tank to the primary filter by “blowing” down the line. Still a bit of a mystery but could be something in the tank blocking the outlet. If it happens again, will have to open up the tank for inspection.	Friendly and helpful staff. Attractive location and next to Royal Harwich YC. Convenient for Orwell cruising and access to adjacent rivers Deben, Stour and Hamford Water. Small limited chandlery on site. Food in RHYC and on site restaurant but limited menus. Pleasant riverside walk to Pinmill where excellent pub / restaurant is located. Disadvantages are that it could be uncomfortable in any moderate or strong wind from anywhere other than from the south. No local shops and 15-minute walk to buses for Ipswich. Since we went back to Chatham by train to bring the car up to Woolverstone we toured the local interesting areas visiting Snape Maltings, East Bergholt Gardens, Dedham and Flatford Mill which is now somewhat overgrown since Constable painted it.
Woolverstone to Chatham 10 th June 58.0 miles 4.0 Eng. Hrs.	Depart 0900 – Arrive Chatham Marina 1300. NE Force 2 – Slight to moderate sea but with following tide, very comfortable. Re-traced our route back to Chatham at 18 knots.	Chatham – See above.

<p>Chatham to Limehouse Marina. 2nd July 48.5 Miles 4.1 Eng. Hrs</p>	<p>Depart 1100 – Arrive Limehouse 1500. NE Force 5. Choppy in Medway then lumpy exiting Sheerness and for 30 minutes uncomfortable before turning West into Thames when able to surf in good conditions. Called London VTS for permission to pass through Barrier but no problem. Locking in at Limehouse approx. 2 hours either side HW.</p>	<p>Difficult to spot the entrance to the lock if you don't have chart plotter. Tide "swirls" around in narrow entrance. Book in advance. Limited sanitary facilities when considering the number of live aboards mainly in narrow boats. Surrounded by high rise flats. Convenient for shops and train / bus services into London. Convenient for getting favorable tide up to Teddington. (But not on return). Cost per night for 29 feet approx. £50. Unfortunately, 70% of the marina was covered in a carpet of duck weed and looked like a football field. Before leaving I spent an hour and a half clearing the weed from the raw water sea cocks to the engines. I carried out the process twice more further up the Thames.</p>
<p>Limehouse to Teddington Lock 3rd July 23.0 miles 2.6 Eng. Hrs.</p>	<p>Depart 1330 – Arrive Teddington 1715. Sun & hot. Interesting journey through the centre of London. Occasionally choppy due to wash from river traffic and keep lookout for floating debris. Important to get to Richmond, which is half an hour before Teddington, when sluice gates are open 2 hours either side of high tide. Teddington is the top end of the tidal Thames and where river fees are payable to carry on up. The charge for our 29-foot boat was £154 per month paid at the lock office. It is based upon the square meterage.(Length x Beam)</p>	<p>We decided to spend the night on the tow path moorings after going through the lock. A 24-hour stay cost £7.00. The following morning before carrying on up river, we took the 1.5 mile walk back down river to Ham House (National Trust) where a pleasant coffee shop is situated in the attractive gardens. Unfortunately the House didn't open until 1200 hours so we decided to put this off until the return trip.</p>
<p>Teddington to MDL Penton Hook Marina 4th July 14.75 miles 2.6 Eng. Hrs.(NB. Running one engine at a time)</p>	<p>Depart 1200 – Arrive Penton 1700. 6 locks. Sun & hot. All standards of houses, houseboats and boats. Some luxury residences but others not much more than sheds. Surprised to see so few decent motor cruisers. Got used to going through locks when unmanned. Electrically operated and OK once sequence worked out. Lock keepers start at 9.am but sometimes off sick or at lunch between 1 an 2 pm.</p>	<p>Excellent new sanitary facility (2 pods + 1 WC) together with laundry all on the NE side although a little remote. However, main block sanitary facilities not up to normal MDL standards. Services and chandlery on site. Fuel available. Buses to Staines and Woking nearby. No local shops. Bar and restaurant limited menu. Major disadvantage is that Heathrow aircraft noise is excessive particularly between 8.0 and 11.30 pm! Decided to get the 40-minute bus journey from Staines back home to Camberley for a weekend. Weather getting hotter.</p>
<p>Penton Hook to MDL Bray Marina 10th July 14.37 miles</p>	<p>Depart 0830 – Arrive Bray 1500. 8 locks. "Scorchio". More of the same and of course more locks which were approximately half hour apart. Stopped by Staines bridge on the public mooring and stocked up at the large Sainsbury nearby. Couldn't</p>	<p>New sanitary facilities limited in number and distant from most berths (5-minute walk). Old facilities limited and not up to normal MDL standards. No laundry. Fuel available. Excellent riverside restaurant offering 15% discount for berth holders.</p>

<p>3.2 Eng. Hrs.(Running both engines)</p>	<p>understand why there were hundreds of people on the river banks at Runneymede until when we got to Datchet, the RAF fly past came directly overhead towards Windsor Castle. Windsor bridge is one of the lower bridges on the river at 4.01 metres. However, our air draught is 3.6 metres. I approached very slowly with Heather on deck as the lookout. "Stop" she shouted – immediately reverse, drop the 2 aerials to give me 3.4 metre air draught. At snails pace we got through with about 6" to spare!</p>	<p>Rather remote location. Pleasant riverside walks to Bray (2.5 miles - No shops, just very expensive restaurants), Windsor (4.5 miles - Pleasant lunch in Cote by bridge) and Dorney Court (2.0 miles - Very good coffee shop, garden and shop but house rarely open). Buses (Half mile) to Windsor and Maidenhead. Alternative is Windsor MDL Marina but decided not to use since we went into Windsor by bus from Bray and also again it is a little isolated and the wrong side of the river for Thames path walks.</p>
<p>Bray to Penton Hook 16th July 14.37 miles 2.2 Eng. Hrs. (Running one engine at a time)</p>	<p>Depart 0830 – Arrive Penton 0230. 8 locks. "Scorchio". To more safely transit Windsor bridge this time, took off the steaming light to save me another 4" on air draught!</p>	<p>As above.</p>
<p>Penton Hook to Teddington Lock 19th July 14.75 miles 2.0. Eng. Hrs. (Running one engine at a time)</p>	<p>Depart 0845 – Arrive Teddington 1415. 5 locks. More "scorchio".</p>	<p>Decided to stay for 2 nights. Many restaurants in Teddington only 10 minutes walk. Pleasant towpath mooring catering for plenty of boats. Multi-storey flats building sites on opposite side of river were the only downside. Can't believe how they ever got planning permission. Again visited Ham House and this time went in the house.</p>
<p>Teddington to Chiswick Pier Trust 21st July 8.0 miles 1.0 Eng. Hrs. (Running one engine at a time)</p>	<p>Depart 0900 – Arrive Chiswick 1100. 1 lock. More "scorchio". Confronted by many rowers who seem to think they own the river. No waving or acknowledgement, just frowns! Having had port engine problems up the east coast, the starboard engine decided to pack up just before Chiswick. Having carried out the basic engine checks, water intake strainers etc. we decided to depart the following morning.</p>	<p>Book in advance since only 3 to 4 visitor's moorings. Basic sub-standard facilities. £30 per night seemed a bit excessive but did include electric and water. Convenient overnight mooring in between Teddington and London if locking in to St. Kats., Limehouse or South Dock. Local provisions store 5-minute walk. Mooring can be challenging when strong tide running and can be bumpy when river booze cruisers pass. (And noisy!!!) Excessive aircraft noise from jets landing at Heathrow between 0530 and 2300 every 3 minutes!!! RNLI station shares the pontoon and we were awoken at 2 am when they had a shout. Apparently someone threatening to jump off a bridge but police had got there first.</p>
<p>Chiswick to South Dock</p>	<p>Depart 0730 – Arrive South Dock 0930. More "scorchio".</p>	<p>Book in advance. Friendly and helpful staff. Lifting and engineering services. Reasonable sanitary</p>

<p>22nd July 13.0 miles 2.3 Eng. Hrs. (Mainly on port Eng. Only)</p>	<p>In order to get to South Dock (St. Katherine's would be the same) at 2 hours either side of high tide London Bridge, we had to punch 2 to 3 knot tide all the way. Initially, starboard engine performed but when upping the revs. to about 1200 it again came to an abrupt halt. Labouring along at 6 knots against strong tide. Quite a challenge getting into South Dock lock with just port engine and bow thruster. Great relief in arriving. Marine Mobile Co. resident in South Dock inspected engine and got it going again. Turbo was also discussed since there was a reference to boost pressure, but fan found to be spinning ok. Other things could have been debris around prop?</p>	<p>facilities. Local shops, dining and links into London. Cost per night for 29 feet £42. Only accessible 2 hours either side of high tide London Bridge. Small lock with tight entrance and exit. Mostly live aboards ranging from city workers to tramps on a mixture of boats.</p>
<p>South Dock to Chatham 23rd July 48.0 miles 5.2 Eng. Hrs.</p>	<p>Depart 1100 – Arrive Chatham 1500. More "scorchio"!!! At 0900, exited lock and did a trial up and down the river with Marine Mobile engineer. Notified London VTS of our manoeuvres and the engine performed and reached 26 knots. Re-entered lock to wait for favourable tides and then exited again at 1100. Then it was a successful trip down the Thames doing 15 / 16 knots with 2 to 3 knot favourable tide. Final leg up Medway against slight ebb tide.</p>	<p>As above.</p>

I limited my time above Teddington due to two matters that had concerned me. Firstly, running at 4 knots for three weeks (Approx. 11 hours) is not good for powerful engines which need a blast now and then. Secondly, since I was only in fresh water for three weeks, I didn't bother to change my zinc anodes for magnesium which when considering lift out fees and anodes would have cost circa £700???

A mid season lift out at Chatham on 14th August revealed that although the anodes had plenty of life left in them they did have a brown film which I am told is due to being in fresh water. This was easily removed by wire brushing. The International Ultra 2 antifoul was in excellent condition. I had treated the stern gear with Velox and I would estimate that 10% of it had worn off. It had however repelled growth. The mould release wax on the prop shafts had similarly repelled growth.

On 23rd August 2018 we set off from Chatham to make our way back to the South Coast. Our ports of call would be Dover, Eastbourne, Brighton and finally Hamble. Our voyage from Chatham to Dover was not a pleasant one having firstly had another port engine failure and then, despite having reasonable starting conditions, we encountered the worst sea conditions from about 10 miles north of Dover that I have ever experienced. The last mile into the East entrance to Dover was what I can only describe as a “washing machine” with 20 foot breaking rollers. As a result of not hearing Dover Controls last communication, apparently I held up a ferry for which I got told off. I simply apologised but in hind sight perhaps should have pleaded “Health and Safety First”. Cool Blue nevertheless handled the conditions in her stride despite things being thrown around and us being knocked from side to side.

Seastart efficiently provided a shore based local engineer to get the port engine going again. Seastart (Highly recommended yet again) provide this worthwhile service as far as Ramsgate to the East.

Whilst in Dover we did a day trip on the bus to Canterbury and on Bank Holiday Sunday attended the local Community Fun Day on the sea front which was abandoned at 1 pm due to the foul wet and windy weather. Such a shame having seen the amount of work that had been put in. We left Dover on 28th August 2018 for Eastbourne, then Brighton and finally Hamble. Dover to Eastbourne was again plagued with engine problems, the starboard engine packed up on 4 occasions. However, from there on our trip to Brighton, followed by Brighton to Hamble went without a problem probably due to cruising at just 10 to 12 knots.

We arrived back in Hamble on 31st August 2018. The mysteries of the engine failures have now hopefully been resolved. Upon inspection in the fuel tanks it was discovered that the rubber attached to the underside of the 4 inspection hatches had rotted and fallen into the tanks and intermittently blocked the fuel lines.

Cool Blue 111 has 2 x 260 HP Yanmar 6BY3 diesel engines and our cruising speeds ranged from 4 to 18 knots, averaging out at about 11 knots. Top speed is 28 knots. The final statistics were:-

Total miles = 741.84. Total engine hours = 70.5 Total fuel used = 379.91 gallons.

My normal fuel consumption is between 6 and 9 gallons per hour on the South coast but on just the Thames trip it worked out to a remarkable 2.57 gallons per hour. For the whole year from leaving Hamble in March until arriving back in Hamble on 31st August 2018, consumption was 5.39 gallons per hour.

Marina Mooring fees = Approx. £490. Thames river dues £154. Benefits of being MDL berth holder = Free mooring at Woolverstone, Penton Hook, Bray and Chatham saved a minimum of £750. Free Wi-Fi. 10% off fuel at Chatham and Woolverstone for MDL berth holders.

Finally, if anyone is interested in such a trip, then I would be quite happy to share my passage plans at any time.

Photos taken during the cruise:







