Seaward Squadron

Torquay Rally Report

30th May – 1st June 2025: Torquay

With an enthusiastic group of Seaward owners in the West Country, who attended the rally in Falmouth last year, along with numerous Seaward boats in the Solent and South Coast area, it seemed logical to arrange this year's rally somewhere in between, which lead to Torquay being chosen.

Known as the English Riveira, Torquay would provide a great backdrop for the rally with the added benefit of me having good contacts in the Royal Torbay Yacht Club, who were able to advise on suitable venues for the Gala Dinner as well as providing a BBQ for us on the Friday night.

The rally dates also coincided with the "English Riviera Air Show" which takes place over Torbay, and so how perfect was that?

In anticipation of entertainment by aerial acrobatics, as well as the social activities with fellow Seaward owners, there were six boats signed up to attend the rally. Sadly, the weather did not cooperate and faced with the prospect of battling into strong westerly winds blowing over the Portland race, three of the boats cancelled.

However, determined not to miss out, the owners and crew of those boats decided to travel by car to Torquay instead. This meant we could all look forward to a happy gathering of friends, both old and new.

Here are the people that joined the rally, with boats shown in brackets for those who travelled by car:

Boat name	Size	Owner's name	Crew
(Little Lucy)	35	John Gibbins	Gaynor
(Sunset)	25	Keith Williams	Kathy
(Sirius)	25	Euan McNair	Liz
Sirdar	35	Tony Giblett	Hilary
Proper Job	35	Robin Griffiths	Roni Williams
Blue Moon	25	John Hambly	

I too had to travel to Torquay by car (the voyage from Hamble would have taken about a week in “Sea Rider”, my little Seaward 23) and like others, I had my own battle with traffic heading to the West Country on the last Friday of the half-term holiday. Consequently, I arrived at Torquay marina rather later than the appointed time of 6pm for the pontoon party.

To my surprise, upon arrival the harbour master told me that only one of our boats was on the dock, the Seaward 25 “Blue Moon”. He said that the Seaward 35 “Sirdar” (owned by Tony Giblett) had been there, but subsequently departed the harbour, he assumed in order to pilot in another 35 “Proper Job”, which appeared from its AIS track to have missed the harbour entrance and was heading for Babbacombe.

Walking down the pontoons, I found a small gathering in the cockpit of Seaward 25 Blue Moon, enjoying a drink together. They explained that due to Sirdar going to the assistance of Proper Job, two people had gone up to the Royal Torbay Yacht Club (RTYC), to notify them that our group would be late for the BBQ.

It turned out that the situation with Proper Job was much more serious than simply missing the harbour entrance, as it was in fact reported to be sinking!

Tony explains in his own words:

Proper Job had overshot Torquay marina, no doubt due to the skipper being preoccupied with the events on board the boat. The owner, Robin called me to say that the engines had failed, and he was adrift to the east of Thatcher Rock. Euan McNair and I immediately set out in Sirdar to tow them in and as we approached it was clear that the boat was very low in the water. We passed a tow and began to tow her towards Torquay but not knowing what the cause of the water ingress was, we soon decided that there was imminent danger and put out a call to the Coastguard for assistance whilst continuing the tow. We advised that we were in urgent need of a salvage pump.

Proper Job under tow by the RNLI

Torbay lifeboat was soon on scene and they took Robin and Roni off and put 2 crew members on board with a salvage pump which soon pumped a considerable amount of water back into the sea. They then took over the tow and we were relieved to hear that no more water was being shipped. We returned to the marina with Sirdar and the lifeboat followed with Proper Job, where further inspection showed that no more water was getting in.

The following Monday an engineer visited and was able to start both engines. A hose on the port engine had failed causing water to be rapidly pumped into the engine room. As I write repairs are scheduled to be carried out in Torquay prior to a sea trial to ensure all is well.

Robin and Roni were surprisingly unphased by everything that had happened to them and joined us belatedly at the barbecue!

Sirdar returns after the rescue of Proper Job

Once Sirdar was safely alongside the pontoon, the main group departed for the BBQ at the RTYC. The staff were most friendly and helpful, despite our late arrival and there was even enough food left for Robin and Roni, who eventually joined us around 10pm, having ensured that Proper Job was watertight after being pumped out by the powerful RNLI pump.

BBQ at Royal Torbay Yacht Club

After a long day and all the excitement, some people sank gratefully into the comfortable bunks on their boat, while others headed to their beds at the Regency Hotel. My day was yet to end, as I had to navigate the narrow lanes of Devon, to find East Ogden where my good friend Caroline Aisher had offered me accommodation.

On Saturday morning I understand that a lot of shopping and eating went on for members of our group. Some had a lot of fun with the statue of Agatha Christie and her dog, while further inland, my hostess Caroline took me on a car tour of Dartmoor, and we visited the wonderful “Cheese Shed” in Bovey Tracey.

Robin with Agatha Christie and her dog

Tony and Hilary with Agatha and her dog

During the afternoon, everyone watched the air show, some from their boats in the marina, some from a park near the shore and some from the sea wall. By this time, I was hiking along the SW Coast Path round Hopes Nose, from where I had a good view of the display. By the time the Red Arrows showed up, I was back in the marina and watched the display with Tony and Hilary on board Sirdar.

The Red Arrows putting on a great show!

With the Red Arrows disappearing over the horizon, the air show finished and an hour later people began to arrive for the second pontoon party of the weekend on board Sirdar. We were joined by my hosts, Caroline and Jules, and as the party progressed, the two “disinterested parties” were recruited to help me select the winner of the John Hickman Cup for Achievement.

This is calculated by a formula which includes the age of the skipper, the size of the boat, the distance travelled in nautical miles and a so-called “solo factor”. The distance travelled was irrelevant because the three boats which had sailed to Torquay had all departed from Plymouth. Driving a car to the destination was discounted because of the specification of *nautical* miles.

The ages of the three skippers was similar, so it came down to the size of the boat (the smaller the boat, the greater the achievement) and the solo factor (sailing alone is a greater achievement than sailing with a crew). As a result, John Hambly won out on both parameters, in his Seaward 25 “Blue Moon”.

Three contenders for the John Hickman Trophy

Finishing our drinks, we trouped on foot to Ollie's restaurant. "The Bit on the Side" (which is an annex for private parties) had been booked for the occasion. There was a pleasant atmosphere, and the staff were friendly and helpful. Upon arrival we were met by Chris Clayton, former MD of The Boat Development Company. Chris had driven from Hampshire to Torquay but had mis-read the rally schedule. While we had been enjoying our drinks on Sirdar in the evening sunshine, he had been waiting for us in Ollie's.

After greetings, introductions and welcome drinks, we were seated at two tables for shared starters, and a main course with choices of sirloin steak, monkfish or roast chicken, all with tasty sauces. Then it was time to present John Hambly with his trophy.

His protestations that he had only sailed from Teignmouth were overruled in consideration of the fact that this came down to meticulous planning. He had delivered Blue Moon to Teignmouth the previous weekend, to ensure that he would not be prevented from attending the rally by bad weather. He was quite rightly a popular winner!

Enjoying the Gala Dinner

I then invited Chris Clayton to give an overview of developments with his factory at Cowes, where Seawards were previously built. He explained that half of the main building is allocated to the completion of what were the Seaward Pilot boats by a company called Absolute Marine, owned by Graeme Howells. The second half has become a Seaward Repair and Maintenance Centre, with an additional offering of inside boat storage.

There is then the joinery section, which is now called Wight Joinery, and is run by two of the previous Seaward joiners. They have diversified their business into domestic as well as marine joinery and are working on some interesting projects. Chris has also renamed and rebranded his boat sales and brokerage company in Hythe, which is now called Compass Boat Sales, where Nick Ward – known to many Seaward owners – has taken over.

This was indeed all welcome news, along with the fact that Chris confirmed all the records for Seaward boats are being safely stored at the factory site. We raised our glasses to the future success of Chris's plans and aspirations.

After deserts, the party broke up with fond farewells. Those staying in the Regency Hotel headed inland, with the boat crews heading back to the marina and Jules (who had valiantly elected not to drink) drove me and Caroline back to East Ogden.

I was in no hurry to get up on Sunday morning, while Jules departed, dressed in Lycra, to train for a bike marathon across Dartmoor (no wonder he had decided not to drink the previous evening!). After breakfast, Caroline drove me back to Torquay, where I had left my car.

I went down to the marina, to find just the two Seaward 35's Sirdar and Proper Job moored in "our" spot, with Blue Moon having set off earlier for Plymouth. Robin and Roni were nowhere to be seen – probably having brunch ashore – but Tony and Hilary kindly invited me on board Sirdar for coffee.

We agreed that it had been another successful rally, which everyone had made great efforts to attend, and that we were looking forward to meeting again at next year's event.

Last of the Seaward Squadron fleet on Sunday morning

Steph Merry
Commodore, Seaward Squadron