



Murphy's Law strikes again

Gilbert Park struggles with impeller replacement with a storm approaching as his calls for help clash with a busy lunch hour

It was a lovely Saturday morning in Cannes and it seemed just the right time to spend a night swinging on the hook by one of the islands five or six miles away.

So I left at about 1030 and arrived half an hour later in my Nimbus 365 Let's Go. The water was gin clear and you could see the bottom easily in six to nine metres of water. There was a lot of Poseidon grass and I tried to find a patch of sand.

I thought I had and dropped the hook, but it didn't hold with a little reverse. So I tried again and this time the hook seemed to bite. While doing this the Volvo Penta engine screen showed a warning 'Exhaust temperature high. Engine speed reduced. Consult Volvo Workshop'. It asked me to press OK so I did and the alarm went away and I thought no more about it – after all the engine had only done 89 hours. I set the anchor drift alarm.

Later, that evening I decided I ought to snorkel the anchor to make sure it was sufficiently embedded for the night.

To my surprise it was sitting on top of the grass and moving gently with it. The whole afternoon I was swinging in place held only by the anchor chain! Up anchor and a repeat of the previous anchoring attempts and eventually all seemed well. I snorkelled it again as the sun was setting and this time the anchor had dug in. Again, the same engine alarm went off.

My boat is the first long-range boat I have owned with a single engine, a Volvo Penta (VP) D6 with an underwater exhaust. I anguished over that decision

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gilbert Park has been sailing for more than 40 years and has worked his way through almost the entire Drascombe

range. Boats with sails were proving difficult with age so he made the switch to motor boats.

and read lots and came to the conclusion so long as fuel and cooling were looked after they should be OK.

A couple of years ago I did the four-day MCA Approved Engine Course to ensure I had the knowledge to be able to do basic repairs. I also spent time with the VP dealer ensuring I knew where and how to change filters, belts and the impeller. I also got essential spares from them.

I thought about the alarm overnight and wondered if I could get to Antibes (eight miles away) or if I should return to Cannes. In the morning I checked the weather forecast and a storm was coming in that night so it was time for a decision.

First I needed some more information about the alarm. I checked the water level in the fresh water system and the seawater filter, both were OK, so then I decided to take a look at the impeller. I removed the cover and felt inside – it was in bits. Good call I thought, as I had taken the precaution of buying a spare with the boat.

I extracted all the bits I could and the remaining shaft and put them in a bag for

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later examination.

The new impeller didn't seem to want to go in. I had greased it with glycerin and fitted cable ties around it, but it just wouldn't go. By now the sweat was dripping off my forehead, it was hot but I was also anxious to know what was going wrong, especially as I didn't want to damage my new impeller. Then I compared it to the old one. It was immediately apparent the size of the splined channel was far too small and it

RIGHT Gilbert Park's Nimbus 365 *Let's Go*



Let's Go under tow from the French lifeboat off Cannes



“It is found that anything that can go wrong at sea generally does go wrong sooner or later...”

Murphy's Law (first described in 1877 by Alfred Holt) had come into play.

was never going to fit. The boat was completely disabled. Murphy's Law (first described in 1877 by Alfred Holt) had come into play.

‘It is found that anything that can go wrong at sea generally does go wrong sooner or later...’

Pan Pan calls

I rang Volvo Penta Action Service who were very nice and did speak to an engineer, but they couldn't help as it was a Sunday in the South of France. The best they could offer was to send a part out the next day for me to fit. However, I needed to move before then because of the expected storm.

I was not alone in this anchorage: it was a hot, Sunday afternoon and half of Cannes, Antibes and the surrounding

towns seemed to be there. It is no exaggeration to say there were several hundred boats there. I saw that one of them was another Nimbus 365. I paddle boarded across clutching the old impeller. The owner and his wife were in the middle of what looked like a truly delicious lunch but didn't mind being interrupted (indeed they even offered me a glass of wine). I asked if by any chance they had a spare impeller. Unfortunately not they said, they got theirs changed every year and saw no need for a spare.

They telephoned the coastguard for me who was very helpful and put out two Pan Pan calls for a tow at about 1300. There was no response to either, even from the professional skippers who were manning the superyachts a few hundred metres away. It seemed that no one had their radios on during lunchtime. The coastguard was also aware of the incoming storm later that night and said that I shouldn't stay where I was – they would send a lifeboat.

As this happened during the Southampton Boat Show, I was able to speak with Steve from Offshore Powerboats (from whom I'd bought the boat) by telephone throughout the morning. He was very supportive, but clearly there was little he could do from that distance.

I rigged the boat for towing – cleared ➔



Let's Go berthed on the end of a pontoon among the superyachts

the decks and put a bridle on the two forward cleats and awaited the lifeboat.

A little while later my telephone rang and it was the lifeboat asking where exactly was I amidst all the boats and what colour was my boat? This surprised me as I had already given all this information to the coastguard.

The difficulty was added to by so many of the boats around me having a white hull. If you are a sailing boat you can use half lowered sails, but in a power boat you may need to use something like an orange sheet to make your boat stand out from the rest.

In a desperate emergency an orange smoke flare could be used. This is now the only pyrotechnic flare I carry – I otherwise rely on electronic flares now.

Eventually, they found me. They were obviously used to this and had a tow line on board my boat with a crew member and their own bridle in about 30 seconds

flat. Up anchor and off we went under tow at about seven knots.

Turned away

As we approached the Port of Cannes the lifeboat called them for berth but the Port turned them away. So we went to the nearby Port Canton where they eventually found a place for me at the end of a finger berth for super- and megayachts.

Once secured, the paperwork had to be done and the tow paid for. Out came the credit card machine from a drawer near the helm. The crew member told me they are now very modern and accept plastic (just as well as I didn't have that much cash on me). French lifeboats will only rescue you for free if there is a danger to life. For just rescuing a boat it's €400/h.

I was fortunate that I was only charged for one hour. The crew were also very good at giving me a receipt for my insurance company (who would have reimbursed me).

Marine Moteurs, who are an authorised Volvo Penta Centre in France, came on board the next day and fitted a new impeller and, at my request, sold me a spare – just in case.

I contacted the authorised Volvo Penta Service dealer back in the UK who was insistent that he had provided the right spare as shown by the computer print out for my engine and, although understanding, refused to pay for the tow.

I had already been in touch with Volvo Penta UK about another matter and they looked into what had gone wrong with their systems. It transpired that Nimbus had asked VP to supply the D6 engine with a water filter attached to the engine. This meant fitting a different water pump to the engine.

Volvo Penta accepted that the computer print out for my boat does show the wrong water pump and hence the wrong impeller part number. I am told this has since been rectified. In addition, Volvo Penta agreed to pay for the towing charge and replacement impeller.

WHAT COULD I HAVE DONE BETTER?

■ I could have snorkelled the anchor much earlier on Saturday. I was lulled into a false sense of security by the drift alarm not going off. Had I done so I would have reanchored, heard the alarm again and possibly found the problem on Saturday afternoon. I suspect I might not have looked anyway until Sunday because the engine would have been hot and I'd have had to wait for it to cool down. However, trying to get help during a Sunday lunchtime when people are either eating lunch or siesta in the sunshine was a bit optimistic so perhaps an earlier (or later) call for assistance might have worked.

■ I also was given a false sense of security by the engine alarm because there didn't seem to be any urgency in the message. It conveyed to me a sense that something was wrong, but it was OK to go on and get home on reduced power.

■ I trusted that the authorised Volvo Penta service dealer would have given me the right parts. Should I have taken the cover off the waterpump cover to check? Should I now check that the spare belts and filters fit? I'd be interested to know what other readers have done about checking they have the right spares on board.

■ I'd been to the Southampton Boat Show just a week earlier and had a discussion with the UK Coastguard about the new system (Safetrx) replacing CG 66 and the value of this for a boat based in the Mediterranean. I was told that if I used the distress function on the phone then they'd forward an email to the local coastguard with all the boat's information on it. Had I done that during my predicament then the French coastguard could have received all my details by email and avoided any confusion.

■ I was surprised that the Lifeboat was turned away from a harbour, but apparently this is not uncommon! I hope it doesn't catch on in the UK.

■ I was lucky this occurred in the way it did. My wife wasn't on board and it happened in a calm anchorage near to the shore. Imagine if it had happened in the middle of the Channel, in the TSS with a sea running and my whole family including grandchildren on board.

LESSONS LEARNED

■ Making sure the anchor is secure should always be the first priority.

■ Carry spares, know how to fit them and if it's a new boat confirm they will fit. If it's a used boat check for any modifications from standard.

■ To sort out any problem you may need to persist and go higher up the management chain in an organisation. The companies authorised by VP are independent of them, but remember you paid for the spares and for your boat.

■ Different cultures may respond in a way you don't expect.

■ Complete the SafeTrx app. It's now free and you no longer need to be a member of the RYA to use it.

■ Send us your boating experience story and if it's published you'll receive the original Dick Everitt-signed watercolour which is printed with the article. You'll find PBO's contact details on page 5.