

Gilbert's Jeanneau holding firm at anchor



LOCK DOWN SLOW DOWN

Gilbert Park takes to the slow lane aboard his Jeanneau Merry Fisher during a West Country cruise

Lockdown gave me the chance to do some jobs on my Merry Fisher 855 that I had fortunately moved to the mooring next to my house. I decided I wanted to become more confident at anchoring, so I researched anchors. Having downloaded the template and made sure it would fit I opted for a Rocna anchor and decided to test it on a trip to the West Country.

I had always wanted to visit the West Country using my Merry Fisher and I decided that I would do the whole trip at no more than 2000 rpm and with a speed through the water of 6.5 knots maximum. This is the boat's displacement speed and hence the most fuel-efficient. Normally the twin 150hp outboards use 2.7 litres per nautical mile at cruising speed.

I set off having brimmed the petrol tank in Cowes and spent the first night anchored in Studland Bay, outside Poole Harbour. The next day was Portland Harbour, which is so large it took me nearly an hour to go from the entrance to the dock! I found that by limiting my speed to around 6 knots I had used 1.7 litres per nautical mile, one litre less than at my usual cruising speed. Anchoring outside of the marina is free, so I dropped the hook and slept very well.

I had done a passage plan based on the Reeds information about going around Portland Bill using the tidal flow and it worked a treat! Going with the flow allowed me to do 8 knots at 1,800rpm and this lasted all the way to Beer, my next destination.

I anchored at Beer and couldn't resist going to The Anchor pub for, well, a beer. The anchorage is exposed to the east, and an easterly breeze (up to F5) came up during the night. However, the anchor alarm didn't sound suggesting the Rocna was working as it should.

The weather was going to change in 48 hours so I decided it was time to head back as I had achieved my aim of visiting the West Country. It was a bit lumpy to start with as the easterly

was still blowing but as I neared the Bill the current started to grab hold of the boat again and, once through the race, carried me all the way back to the Solent.

UNHURRIED PACE

As I arrived, the gloom of the last few days disappeared and the sun came out, casting some wonderful light on the Needles and the cliffs of Alum Bay. I decided to anchor for the night in Totland Bay and watch the sun set.

The next day I made the short hop (against the tide) to Cowes to refuel. This time the fuel consumption was even less at 1.38 litres per nautical mile. Why the difference with Portland? Tidal streams – I had followed the directions from Reeds from Portland back to the Solent.

Did I enjoy travelling so slowly? Yes, I had lots of time to keep up to date with navigation, hazards and prepare meals – I even baked some bread. Seas were slight but this and the low speed meant I could move around the boat safely and lack of hard landings at speed also meant my back didn't play up!

So will I buy a Nordhavn or the like? No, my wife comes cruising with me in the UK, but for her being at sea is not the enjoyable part it's the arrival, so it's 17 knots when we are together.



Gilbert's new Rocna anchor kept him steady in an F5