

Techno troubles

Gilbert Park's maiden voyage in his Mitchell Classique 28 culminates in the rescue of two men from the water after their yacht sank



Owning two boats was a blessing. My Nimbus 365 was kept on a nearby dry-stack, while my Trusty T23 was on a drying mooring in front of my house in Chichester Harbour. However, the required maintenance, to say nothing of the cost, was becoming increasingly difficult as I grew older.

So when I saw a vessel that would dry out, fitting between a wall and some piles on the mooring by my house, I began to

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gilbert Park is a regular PBO contributor. He taught himself to sail in a Mirror dinghy on the River Tamar. He has owned numerous boats over the decades including RIBs, cruisers and several boats in the Drascombe range; arthritis meant a permanent move from sail to power boats. He now owns a 28ft Mitchell, moored at Emsworth.

wonder if I should downsize to one boat. One day I was moored up at Town Quay, Lymington, in my T23 and walked to Yacht Haven marina.

Carpe diem

I decided to take the coastal route back and spotted a twin-engined Mitchell Classique 28 for sale, it seemed to be just the boat to fulfil my needs. I could sell both my boats and buy the Mitchell. Mooring charges would be the immediate saving – I would only have to pay £19 a year to Chichester Harbour Conservancy. I spoke to my wife who, to my surprise, agreed. Both the other boats sold quickly.

Once the Mitchell was at her new home there were a series of urgent fitting out jobs suggested by the surveyor and some not so urgent ones. A fortnight later she was ready for me to spend a couple of nights on board. Everything seemed fine.

A solo trip to the Isles of Scilly was planned while my wife went mother-sitting. I had paper charts for the trip but I decided to use up-to-date digital charts.

The boat has an old Raymarine C80 plotter, that takes compact flash cards. I had two Navionics current SD cards, so I bought an adapter to compact flash. It didn't work! I contacted Navionics who agreed to sell me a new compact flash set of charts and to take back the SD cards.

Maiden voyage

So, late on a sunny Saturday afternoon I slipped from the mooring and anchored further down the harbour. Sadly the new Navionics card kept freezing the screen,



The Mitchell 28 berthed outside Gilbert Park's home

so I decided to use the old card and charts.

The weather forecast was for sunny days so no problem with visual navigation. Sunday I was off when I got a call from the people selling my Nimbus and the only way to deal with it was to go to the Lymington Yacht Haven and sort it out, instead of going to Portland as planned.

The next day I left early with a good tide and decided I'd go to Dartmouth direct at 8 knots to see what fuel consumption was like on a long trip. It was a beautiful day and calling up the National Coastwatch at Portland Bill they told me the Race was benign. So I went straight through – no problem. They also confirmed that they were getting a good echo from the new radar reflector I had fitted.

A few hours later, as I was approaching Dartmouth, there was a big ship on my port side. Radar indicated we had crossing



At anchor in Falmouth Harbour in the centre of the town – at £10 a night it's a bargain and it gives you the use of all the facilities of the marina

'It was time to prepare for a night entry into an unfamiliar port. But first, cup of tea and an emergency Kit Kat'

see me. I had not fitted automatic identification system (AIS) but I planned to do so, as it is a great safety feature.

After Dartmouth, it was off to Falmouth (at 13 knots) to refuel and go across to the Islands. Interestingly at 8 knots fuel

paths, so I called up the ship to say if we got close I would go astern. The man on the bridge said thanks because he could not see me on radar. This still puzzles me because I have checked with other people and they can

consumption was 1.5lt/mile and 2lt/mile at 13 knots, both measured in similar wind and sea conditions.

Happy distraction

There were two problems with the planned trip to the Isles of Scilly. One was the weather, with wind and waves coming down the Irish Sea to the area between Land's End and the islands. The second was I fell in love with Falmouth.

The next day it was off up river to Malpas and then time to start a relaxed journey home. First stop Salcombe.

About 90 minutes out of Falmouth there was a loud vibration coming from

the port side, as if something heavy had broken loose in one of the lazarette lockers. I checked around and found nothing. I looked at the port shaft. I could not see anything apart from a load of water coming in from the stern gland (another job the surveyor said needed doing next time the boat was out). When I felt the shaft it was too hot to touch and there had been a smell of burning.

With both engines in neutral, I pondered what to do. The nearest port was Fowey, but they had nothing to lift the boat with if there was something wrong with that shaft. I decided on Plymouth and tried the boat with just the starboard engine. The maximum she could do was 6 knots. It would be dark as I approached, a harbour I had never entered at night.

Growing concern

The problems were mounting. I thought I should just tell Falmouth Coastguard in case the situation got any worse. They were extraordinarily helpful and besides finding a berth for me, they asked me to call every hour with course and speed.

The boat was on SafeTrx so they could get all the information about the boat and the equipment. They also asked for AIS (which I did not have) and for my Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) and call sign. The radio did not appear to be connected to a GPS source and never had MMSI put in. I did know this and decided it was not on the urgent list so I did nothing about it and instead took my DSC mobile



ABOVE Safe and sound (if a little cold) at Northney after their rescue



LEFT Imagine loud vibration and smell of burning. A carbon brush that was fitted to connect to the prop shaft for galvanic protection, damaged a brass bolt when a Nylock nut loosened

VHF with a Tango callsign and its own MMSI, which solved the problem.

It was time to prepare for a night entry into an unfamiliar port. First things first, a cup of tea and an emergency Kit Kat (plus getting more out ready). I do have a checklist for night sailing so I cleaned the windows inside and out, checked the torches, made sure I knew how to dim the instruments and plotted a route to

Plymouth Yacht Haven on the chartplotter, after I had read a 2022 *Reeds Almanac*.

The thing that worried me was the electronic chart being out of date (but I did have an up to date Reeds Chartlet). Looking at the plotter and the chartlet it was not clear if all of the very large mooring buoys for warships had lights on them. I did think of writing a proper pilotage plan on a piece of paper but decided against this as it would only be one more distraction.

I arrived at the western entrance as it was getting dark. I switched on the navigation lights and had a horrible thought. I had switched off the port engine, but left on the radar, fridge, gas alarm etc etc. Could I have flattened the domestic battery they share and then have instruments and navigation lights fail? I decided to restart the port engine purely as a generator.

Going through the harbour in the main channel in the dark was fine, except for the nagging feeling about an unlit buoy. Speed down to 4 knots, side window open and head popping out through that to see what was in front. I got to the Yacht Haven safely, tied up and had a beer.

Clear culprit

The next day I was lucky. Mervin the marvellous mechanic was able to visit the boat after lunch. That gave me time to



Use of the boarding ladder on the boat was obstructed by the dinghy

The harbour master and Hayling Rescue beached the stricken boat on Hayling Island where the owner was able to retrieve it with his trailer later



look at the shaft. The cause of the vibration was immediately obvious. The carbon brush on the shaft that was meant to connect it to the anodes had worked loose and being brass had worn part of itself and the brass thread away.

How I did not spot it is a mystery to me. Even at sea, it would have been a quick and easy fix. I left it for Mervin to see, he removed it and repacked the stern gland. I learnt a lot from this and some of the points are shown in the panel (below left).

Job done off to the Sound to try the boat at full speed – the noise had gone and only the expected minimal water leak. Back to Dartmouth. Refuelled and planned to go back to Newtown at 13 knots. Round the Bill (inshore route this time) radar reflector checked as working.

Then it was time to head back to Chichester Harbour. As I entered the harbour I had to decide to either anchor at Itchenor or go home. The weather forecast was not good, so I decided to go home.

Capsized yacht

Halfway up the Emsworth Channel, I could see something in the water. As I drew closer I could see it was a capsized sailing yacht. I moved away from it at first in case there were ropes that could get caught in my props. As I came around the side of it I saw two men and a dog in the water. Judging by the flotsam they had been there for some time. I drifted back to get closer to them.

At this time I did think of pressing the red button on my radio but was unsure if it would send a DSC distress message, so I opted for a quick verbal Mayday with a position and that two men and a dog were in the water. As I closed, I threw them a line and hauled them to the boat.

They were all wearing buoyancy aids, including the dog. The dog was first up and the buoyancy aid had a handle which made it easy. The boarding ladder was down but the dinghy in davits meant the space to climb up was too small so I had to undo some of the ropes holding it in place to provide access.

Once they were all safely on board and the heater was on full power I made

another Mayday call giving the Coast Guard more information. Although I had given Lat and Long they still wanted to know which harbour I was in.

Things happened quickly after that with Hayling Rescue arriving first in their orange rigid inflatable boat, then the harbour master, followed by the RNLI inshore lifeboat from Hayling Island.

Because the casualties were cold and there was a possibility one had inhaled

water when trapped in the cabin, ambulances were arranged to meet us in Northney Marina and for once I was allowed to break the speed limit to get there. Northney had arranged a hammerhead berth for us and because I'd

missed the tide allowed me to stay there (thanks Northney).

Once they were all checked out and warmed they were allowed to retrieve the remains of their boat on its trailer and then go home. Sadly it turned out this had been the maiden voyage for the boat.

I had lent them some dry, but unstylish, clothes I had on board, as well as some money (as they had no credit cards) so they could get home. These were returned a couple of days later along with a delicious apple pie.



Gilbert (right) and rescuee David enjoy a test sail in the repaired boat

The boat was badly damaged during the recovery. Almost exactly a year after the rescue one of the men, David, came to see me with a repaired boat and we went for his first sail since the accident in the repaired boat *Roamer* in Chichester Harbour not far from the accident site.

'Float to live' tips



Samantha Hughes, RNLI water safety manager advises: Calling the Coastguard, either by VHF radio or dialling 999/112 on

a mobile phone ensures that the most appropriate rescue asset – including the RNLI – can be tasked to an incident as quickly as possible, so Gilbert's decision to broadcast a Mayday was a good one. Providing a location also really helps, and although a precise latitude and longitude was given, by adding in a rough geographical location, others listening in on the VHF are able to quickly determine if they can assist in any way.

Falling into the water at any time of the year can be a shock, so it was great to hear the sailors and their dog were wearing buoyancy aids. Our advice for anyone that finds themselves in the water unexpectedly is to Float to Live:

- Tilt your head back, with ears submerged
- Relax and try to breathe normally
- Move your hands to help you stay afloat
- It's OK if your legs sink, we all float differently
- Once over the initial shock, call for help or swim to safety
- www.pbo.co.uk/RNLI_float

Send us your boating experience story

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.

LESSONS LEARNED

Don't forget the bubble wrap

- 1 Non-urgent faults can catch you out. If you investigate a problem and can't find it, if it's safe to do so, have a cup of tea, think, go back and look again.
- 2 I'm planning to get more experience of night pilotage by coming into my home and other harbours in the dark.
- 3 A searchlight is essential for navigating through moorings.
- 4 Main radio must have a MMSI and call sign. Fix a label near the helm.
- 5 Use up to date electronic charts (mine works OK now that I have reloaded the data).
- 6 Fit AIS if you are doing long trips, or even short trips in a busy commercial harbour.
- 7 Don't be afraid to call the Coastguard. A friend of mine rang me up at 0500 once to say his boat was taking on water, he couldn't get the anchor up and the boat was being pounded by the waves. When I said call the Coastguard on the radio he asked me if he was allowed to do that!
- 8 When you give your position as Lat and Long also give a geographical

- position as well. I could have speeded up help from club safety boats and others if I'd done this.
- 9 Make sure your dog has a buoyancy aid that has a handle to lift them up with ease.
- 10 If you have a boarding ladder ensure it is not obstructed. I had secured my dinghy ready for any rough weather I might encounter so it was secure, but this obstructed people using the ladder. I will be moving the suspension points so the ladder area is more accessible and drops and can be easily and quickly removed.
- 11 Put casualties either in a survival bag (available from any outdoor shop) or wrap them in bubble wrap. Not only does this stop them from losing heat it also stops the boat from getting soaked. Mine took three days to dry out!
- 12 Put a credit card in your life-jacket or waterproof jacket. Most people keep wallets, phones and car keys 'safe' in the boat. If the boat sinks when you're rescued you will have only the soggy clothes you are wearing.