



Arriving safely in Cherbourg after navigating the formidable Alderney Race

BACK TO BLIGHTY

The uncertainty of travel during Covid pushes Gilbert Park to bring his Nimbus back to the UK

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efore Covid came along, I had enjoyed two glorious summers cruising the Med aboard my Nimbus 365, *Let's Go*. I have a house in Aigues Mortes, near Montpellier, and the boat has

been moored there since I bought her.

In the late summer of 2021, however, I decided enough was enough and, not knowing what the future held, I decided to sell my French house, car and other possessions. But my wife and two grandchildren (aged 6 and 9) adore the boat so I agreed to keep *Let's Go* and bring her back to the UK.

I went down to Aigues Mortes in September and saw our boat for the first time in two years – she was a wreck! Two winters of Mistral winds and rain containing Saharan sand, plus two summers of Mediterranean sun baking the sand and dirt into the fibreglass and teak had destroyed the sparkle she had when I had left her. The curtains and covers had protected the interior from sunlight, but the intense heat had meant some of the adhesives holding the roof panels up had failed and they had fallen down. On the upside, the dehumidifier had

done its job, so there was no mould, and the cushions and other interior fittings looked in acceptable condition.

First things first – she was in dire need of a deep clean. I jet-washed her twice to get most of the muck off and used five litres of neat teak cleaner to restore the decks.

The fuel was next. Fortunately, I had filled the boat up in 2019 and put some preservatives in the fuel when I prepared for winter. Knowing there would be a lot of gunk collecting in the filters, I changed both and found the primary

filter full of horrible fibrous black stuff. However, thankfully the engine filter was clean and the fuel in the tank was also clear of debris.

PLAN OF ACTION

I had a clear plan of action for the boat now. Take her to Cap d'Agde, then put her on a lorry to St Malo where I would meet her and bring her back to the UK.

I thought I ought to take her on a quick test run before the trip to Cap d'Agde, so I took the boat out on a day without wind or current.

The engine ran fine but she wouldn't steer to port. I used the bow and stern thrusters for a while in the hope it would clear, but it didn't. Instead, the bow thruster overheated and cut out and I had to get the *capitaine* to help me back to my berth. Fortunately, I had learnt to dive a long time ago and had sufficient diving gear on the boat to clear the fouled rudder myself.

Thankfully my trip to Cap d'Agde on a wonderful Mediterranean day went without a hitch and I managed to squeeze in for my 2pm lift with the

Squeezing in to the lift bay at Cap d'Agde



I jet-washed her twice to get the muck off and used five litres of teak cleaner to restore the decks

Let's Go began her long journey back to the UK from the French port of Cap d'Agde



One of the Fastnet racers returns to Cherbourg at dusk



fenders tight against the bay wall, leaving just enough room for the stops. The next time I saw her was on the hard in St Malo.

The day after my crew (James) arrived in St Malo there was a weather window that would allow us to get out and start the journey home. We decided Granville was the place to go and enjoyed a few days in this charming town before dropping our lines and taking on the infamous Alderney Race to Cherbourg.

RACE TO CHERBOURG

The early morning start meant that we got the tide right for the Race. James had the helm all the way through the Race, which was calm except for the very top where we slowed down a touch to keep things comfortable. Around the corner lay our destination - Cherbourg.

The marina was empty when we arrived. We soon found out why - the Fastnet race was due to finish here anytime soon. In the marina and on land there were lots of celebrations that we had to pass through to get anywhere, and due to Covid we had to present our "Pass Sanitaire" whenever we left or boarded the boat.

Brexit also caused problems. We had arrived by ferry into St Malo where our passports were stamped. Now we wanted to leave, we had to get an exit stamp and record of departure. Failing to do so would cause problems the next time we wanted to cruise to France.

The next day had perfect weather to cross the Channel so we traipsed off to the office with all

the forms completed, expecting it to be a quick five-minute job. Wrong! The stamp was not in the office but at the marina because of the Fastnet race. Some heated radio discussions ensued between staff, and we were told to sit and wait. After about 30 minutes a white Transit van screeched to a halt outside, an officer emerged clutching the stamp, punched it on our passports and screeched off again. We were free to go!

CROSSING THE CHANNEL

We had made the right decision about the weather as the trip across the Channel was just like being in the Med again; warm sunshine and not a wave in sight. Once in British waters we had to obtain customs clearance. Not having done this for some time I re-read form C1331 and noted that under prohibited items there was a section that said: "explosives (including fireworks) must be declared". Pyrotechnic flares are classed as explosives and although I have avoided carrying any, the liferaft I have on board has them fitted. When I tried to declare them, the Border Force officer clearly didn't know what to do and after a brief silence just told me to take my Q flag down!

It was early evening when we reached the visitors' pontoon near my home in Emsworth where James knocked up supper and we enjoyed a couple of beers to toast a voyage well done.

The return wasn't quite the end of the story, however. When the boat was lifted in order to fit a missing part, the engineer found a whole catalogue of problems ranging from the fitting of second-hand rather than new parts, missing parts and poor workmanship - all of which I had paid a company in France to complete. After several months of negotiation I had to employ a bilingual lawyer in Paris who got me my money back. It's a shame this spoiled the memory of what had been an enjoyable trip. However, after all the stress I am looking forward to a summer of cruising.

OUR BOATS SOON TO BE FEATURED...



Nordhavn 43, Freedom, Seattle, USA. Our American liveaboards update us on their exciting cruising plans for 2022.



Princess V48, Privilege, Miami, Florida, USA. Elliott Maurice, who recently reported on his Great Loop voyage in the pages of MBY, joins the MBY fleet with his Princess V48 and soon-to-arrive Axopar 22.



XO 250 Open, Cortado, Poole UK. It's launch day for Deputy Editor Jack and his XO and there is cleaning to be done and new kit to install.