

THE FIRST 100 HOURS

FEATURE

Maire Park describes what happened to her and her husband Gilbert's test boat, the Nimbus 365 they called 'Let's Go', when they sailed along the south coast of France ...

Gilbert and I had spent January trying to decide what boat to buy. Gilbert visited Lymington and saw a Nimbus 365 and read the report first published in the January edition of *Powerboat & RIB* magazine. Then we both went to the London Boat Show and saw close up several other boats. Only the Haines 32 came close to our needs. So two days later we both went back to Lymington and had a sea trial in the Nimbus. Despite a Solent chop, I found the boat comfortable, and as the Haines couldn't be ready for us in time, we decided on the Nimbus, despite it being the first single-engine boat I have ever owned. We did find one that was three years old and fully equipped in Amsterdam, but in the end we decided on a new boat – after

a bit of negotiation with Steve from Offshore Powerboats.

Our intention was to move the boat to our mooring in Aigues-Mortes. A survey was carried out by Jim Pritchard, who found a few minor faults that were rapidly corrected. We had the most important modification done before she left – a stern throttle. This, combined with the remote for the bow and stern thrusters, was to make stern-to mooring easier. We used Boat Transport to move her to Port Camargue, and in early May she arrived. The test of a politician is the first 100 days of office, for a motor boat its heart is the engine, so this article is based on the first 100 hours of engine use. Like any first 100 days for a politician, there was good and there was bad.

The first trip we undertook was in early May to a familiar marina, Saint-Mandrier-sur-Mer, which has a frequent water bus service to Toulon. Then it was off to discover somewhere new – Cassis. It was a great discovery – a small, bustling port with a market and great restaurants. We even did a 'Petit Train' trip with its fascinating



history guide. After a couple of days we went around the corner to the Calanque de Port-Miou (calanques are huge gorges cut out of the limestone with deep water right up to the cliffs). It is a great place to pick up a buoy at the bow and moor stern-to a ring in the cliff. We particularly remember this part of the trip because it was the day of the royal wedding and we dressed the boat with all the flags we had (mostly gin pennants) and a bit of bunting, and toasted the happy couple with some fizzy stuff.

The next trip was a weekend visit to the large port of Sète. The new marina and helpful staff made this a very enjoyable weekend, and again there were nice restaurants and good shops – and lots of sunshine. We went on a boat trip around the canals and really enjoyed the history and the views.

The best moment? There are just too many to mention them all.

My children and grandchildren visited us at half-term and provided the opportunity to officially name the boat Let's Go. My granddaughter entered into the spirit of the occasion by practising her speech for several days beforehand and organising new clothes for the event. My grandson, not to be outdone, built Let's Go 2 from some pontoon blocks, fenders, chain and anchor. When you are three years old, having a boat is so easy! We also had a great day trip in the boat with them to a local beach, where we anchored up and enjoyed the beach, lunch and messing around in the dinghy.

We then went on a three-week trip to the Rade d'Hyères, a group of very beautiful islands. Hyères was another find. Near the marina there was a Sunday market and plenty of shops as well as the inevitable collection of restaurants and three chandleries. An easy 30-minute bus journey took us to visit the old town of Hyères on a Saturday. A huge street market occupied the centre of the town, selling not just fresh produce but also some clothes – and Gilbert bought a pair of stylish mid-calf shorts. As his back was also a problem, a walking stick was purchased too ... The joys of getting old!

After this, the island of Porquerolles called. We had been there before – it's a good starting point to cross to Corsica. We decided to use a buoy rather than moor up on the visitors' pontoon, which had no electricity. The island has many wonderful walks and we went up to the castle overlooking the harbour – it was a hot and thirsty walk, but the views were stupendous. However, sitting in the cockpit of the boat, watching the world go by, and in particular the entertainment of the harbour



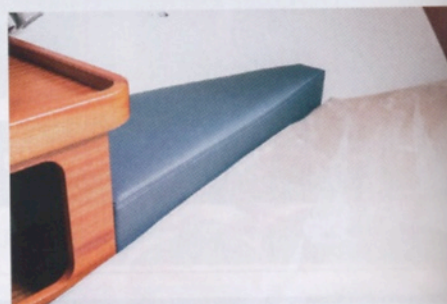
PIC ABOVE: Hyeres. Threole sur mer. 100 hours boating. Lifeboat.

with big ferries travelling at speed, small boats not sure where they were going and RIBs whizzing through was something we never got bored with.

It was then off to Port-Cros – a small island with a large pleasure harbour. Again we chose to pick up a buoy. The Capitainerie gave us an interesting set of rules – no generators and only 20 litres of water per boat per day. The swimming off the back of the boat was fantastic, with lots of brilliantly coloured fish

and corals seen in the gin-clear water. The harbour front was more like something in the Caribbean. The World Cup was on and the noise from the bars and cafes was incredible.

We were hoping to go off and anchor for a day or two after this, but it had all started going wrong as we approached Hyères for the first time. The depth finder decided to stop working as we did a bit of tricky navigation between the île du Petit Ribaud and the mainland. In Hyères we contacted Volvo Penta



ABOVE: Inside the top Galley. The bow is very easy to get onto and off. Black water stopcock. A handy place for glasses, book and tablets next to the bed.

(VP) and they replaced the transducer. Four days later it went wrong again, limiting our ability to come into shallow water and anchor. It took three months for Volvo Penta to resolve this. Shortly after this, the domestic batteries were almost flat because the engine was not charging them. Not only could we now not anchor, we couldn't even pick up a buoy!

We went off exploring and discovered Sanary-sur-Mer, where we plugged into shore power with relief! The day we arrived was the first day of their summer festival – lots of arts and music as well as the night market. There was also boat jousting in the harbour, which was great fun to watch. Inexpensive high-quality restaurants abounded and we tried several. The shops were also probably the best we had come across in a small town, and I found a lovely dress (in a sale) but decided I wouldn't buy it, as there was no special occasion coming up soon. Instead we have to go back when there is ...

We came home early, partly because of the two problems, and also because it was now July and the price of a buoy had gone up overnight from €30 to €52, the temperature was on its way up and the French holidaymakers were on their way down to the area. It was time for us to go back to England.

We arrived back in September to find the

pelmet lights had fallen down because it was too hot for the glue! After sticking them back up, it was off for another four-week trip, with Gilbert taking the boat to Antibes, while I joined him there a week later. Gilbert got to Cannes and decided that he would anchor in the Îles de Lérins, 5 miles offshore, for the night. As he anchored, a warning came up saying the exhaust temperature was too high and engine power had been reduced. He had to contact a VP workshop. Gilbert thought about this overnight and the next morning decided to look at the impeller. It was in bits. To make matters worse, VP had supplied the wrong spare. Gilbert called the coastguard and they put out a pan-pan, but got no response. As high winds were forecast for that night, they took the decision that he could not stay where he was and sent a lifeboat to tow him in. In France, unless it's a matter of life or death, you pay for lifeboat tows, and this one cost €400.

The rest of the trip was fairly uneventful except for the discovery of a lovely small port called Théoule-sur-Mer, which had the best restaurant of the trip, and a second change of black-water pump in Hyères. We were planning to spend another two weeks on the boat but the forecast for the rest of October was

pretty miserable, so we came home.

Through all our trials and tribulations, Offshore Powerboats were very good at helping us with all the warranty issues. They even offered to reimburse the lifeboat fee when the VP dealer refused to. This made me realise that many problems were due to the failure of the main agents, highlighting the need to persist, and if need be, go to the head office. The Simrad agent, however, took weeks to solve the problem of updating the autopilot, and VP took months to solve the problem of the depth finder and had sold me a part that didn't fit, necessitating the assistance of the lifeboat. Sometime later, I'm happy to say Volvo Penta agreed to reimburse the recovery costs.

So far we have used Let's Go for 49 days. The engines have worked for 108 hours and travelled 802 nautical miles. We have used 2,077 litres of fuel at an average fuel economy of 2.59L/m. The most impressive bit of kit we installed was the Simrad 4G radar, which even picked up fishing pots for us to avoid. The most useful thing we switched on was the neutral beep for the engine. The best modification was the small hatch in the engine box that makes it easy to check oil, cooling



LEFT: Cover popper.



Gilbert & Maire Park

water and the seawater strainer. The worst moment was when Gilbert realised the impeller didn't fit and he was going to need rescuing. The best moment? There are just too many to mention them all.

So after the first 100 days, there is a lot of good and just a little bad to discuss. I hope that by next season all will have been fixed and the bad recedes into the distance as we generate many new happy memories of anchorages, blue sky, clear water and great food, and just enjoy being at sea in our boat – Let's Go.



LEFT: Lift the chart table to reveal a TV!

WHY THE NIMBUS?

Gilbert Park discusses the reasons behind choosing the Nimbus 365 for their adventures ...

We read with great interest the article 'Dodgy Hips', hoping to get some tips as we had just been through the process of choosing a boat to see us through to an even older period of our lives in the Mediterranean. It was useful, but appeared less relevant to the needs of us oldies suffering from degenerative disability. I am 68 years old (I am not allowed to tell you my wife's age!), and for the last eight years have spent much of each year in small motorhomes and motor boats.

At the end of 2017, it became apparent that we needed to replace our current boat. Extensive research was undertaken on the Net and through perusing magazines. We also wrote down what our specification for the boat would be and had a checklist for each boat we visited. This enabled me to get together a shortlist of boats for my wife to see.

The London Boat Show loomed and most of the boats we had on our list were present at

the show. These included the Beneteau Swift 35, the Haines 32 and the Jeanneau Leader 33. I also went to see the Nimbus 365 before the show. All of these are stable, trustworthy boats that we could feel confident in as we lived on board in the Med for up to two months at a time.

There were a few basic criteria to be met. The boat had to be less than 12m in length as we have found that with bigger craft you can't get into some of the smaller ports we enjoy visiting. The draught had to be no greater than 1.3m to let us gain access to our mooring in Aigues-Mortes, and ideally with less than 3m air height (with any mast folded) to get under a bridge without waiting for it to lift three times a day. They all had to offer safe and comfortable hulls. A side door was essential for two oldies to moor up, as was one double berth that could stay made up permanently – more would be a bonus. For entertaining, a galley-up layout was preferred, and it had to be comfortable enough to live on for two months at a time.

Each of these boats had lots to offer us, but many were excluded when we went to

see them and went through our checklist.

Having dodgy knees means that as the cartilage wears out, you can lose the ability to know where your feet are without looking at them. This means that steep ladders and steps ruled out some of the boats, including the Swift Trawler. This was disappointing because the new version of this boat ticked many of the boxes for us that the previous model hadn't. It also offered a lot of boat for less money than many others. However, the flybridge option had steep steps and lots of additional maintenance, so we decided it was not for us. Steps also ruled out some of the older second-hand Nimbus boats we had seen.

We reckoned we spend a third of our time in bed, so the layout of the master cabin was crucial to our enjoyment. We had to be able to get in and out of bed at the side and get to the heads easily in the middle of the night. Nearly all of the beds met this criterion, with the Haines having by far the most spacious cabin of all the boats. It was able to do this because it only had one bed; there was no mid cabin. The Jeanneau needed a small infill to make the bed up to length, and once this was in and the

Good aftersales support is vital, and here the French scored the highest.

sliding cabin door shut you couldn't get around the bed, thereby ruling it out.

By contrast I probably only spend one to two per cent of my time in the heads, but this belies its importance! A large comfy loo seat is preferable to a narrow, buttock-squeezing seat and a large bowl for the middle-of-the-night pee. Since we are in the Med, a holding tank is an essential (sometimes legal) requirement. This means dumping the contents at sea. The seacock for emptying the tank should be readily accessible. On a previous boat I had to stop the boat, lift up the helm seat and climb into a tiny space to access this control. Many boats seemed to have this stopcock in the mid cabin, where you had to lie flat on the bed and remove a panel to get at the valve - not easy in a pitching sea. By far the best set-up was on the Nimbus, which had an electric switch in the heads to operate a pump system.

Getting on, off and around the boat is another serious problem with ageing sailors. A wide bathing platform works, particularly if connected to at least one wide deck without a step. By far the best side decks we have ever seen are those on a Corvette 320, but stern-to-mooring would be more difficult because of the access to the bathing platform. A wide, easy-to-move-around bathing platform with lots of handholds is essential when coming in stern

ONBOARD OUR NIMBUS



PIC ABOVE: Rear Bathing platform. Side deck Corvette. Steep ladder. Toilet, and everything you need at the helm.



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first, possibly in a strong crosswind, and there's nobody on the dock to help you.

The Jeanneau has an interesting afterdeck with a sliding sofa that could increase the size of the bathing platform, and a side gate to the deck. Many of the boats had a step between the cockpit and the side deck that involved turning at the same time as stepping down – a definite negative point. Some of the ports we visit have high quay walls, and rather than moor stern-to it's easier to moor bows-to so there is only a small step down or up rather than a steep gangplank heave up or run down. Again this needed a clear side deck and a small bowsprit so there was an overhang. This was essential so we could moor off safe in the knowledge that the bow was not going to bash against the wall.

Clipping covers on, particularly using press buttons, is difficult if arthritis affects the fingers. It becomes difficult to stretch the cover and apply pressure to clip it on. Clips that have a small hook built into them to allow the edge of the top part to be locked into it and then pressed down are useful (see picture), as are covers that have slots and the like.

When going along, a forward-facing helm seat is essential, and we could manage this in nearly all boats. Handles where you need them, not just for going along in rough weather, but also to overcome the early-morning stiffness of joints, should be found in



other places. A separate shower was essential as we have had enough of wet rooms.

Fortunately, almost all the boats had this.

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All our previous boats had been twin-engine boats – just in case something went wrong with one. However, we became aware that more and more boat owners are going over to a single large engine. We were prepared to make this change on the basis of reliability, as well as fuel and maintenance economy. We decided not to have outdrives as they are too

complicated and, in our experience, go wrong.

So what did we choose? Based on our research and the visit to the London Boat Show, we wanted to buy a Haines 32, but it couldn't at the time have the engine we wanted fitted, so we plumped for the Nimbus 365. It wasn't at the show, but after the glowing test report in Powerboat and RIB, two days later we went for a sea trial in the boat and liked the very boat featured in that article. To cap it all, Steve from Offshore Powerboats was open to a bit of negotiation and we struck a deal. The rest is history... **PBR**