

IT RAINED ON THE SEINE BUT WE STAYED ON THE PLANE!

⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗ 27th April - 2nd May 2006 ⊗ Rouen Cruise ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗

Ten club boats registered for the cruise but finally, due to a variety of reasons, we were down to four: *Seahound V* with Chris Strickland, *My Pleasure* with Gordon Compton, *Tweety Pie* with Martin Humphray and *Ribaleta* with Sir Charles Blois.

Other members, who were unable to travel the same time as the cruise, made their way to Rouen by various means of transport.

Thursday 27th April

The weather was at its best for a channel crossing. I met up with *My Pleasure* and *Tweety Pie* of Bembridge after leaving a little late due to refuelling problems (Yarmouth fuel berth was closed all day). We departed Bembridge Ledge at approximately 12:00hrs. The crossing was flat with sunshine and we arrived in Honfleur some 3 hours later.

After a pleasant meal that evening in one of the many harbour side restaurants, we retired early in preparation for our trip up the Seine the next day.

Friday 28th April

I was awakened at 8:30 am by Sir Charles Blois in *Ribaleta* who had left Bologne early in the morning having journeyed there from Ipswich the night before. We met up with the other two boats and locked out of Honfleur to travel up river to Rouen, a passage of some 65 miles.

Charles was having fuel problems in *Ribeleta* so his trip was somewhat slower than the rest of the us and he arrived in Rouen 5 hours behind – just in time to join us all in the Chinese restaurant where we had met up with John Puddifoot and his race team, John's wife Mary, Jan Falkowski and Bethan Ancell, who had travelled by car, and Martin's wife Stephanie, who had travelled by train.

Saturday 29th April

My wife, Helen arrived early that morning with Bob and Mandy Nurse via ferry to Le Havre and, following breakfast, we made our way down to the pits to view the race boats.

The Rouen 24 hour race is for 3 classes of circuit boats. They race on a 2 mile course around an island in the river and travel at speeds of up to 110 mph, depending on the class. They have to run all day and night with the race starting on Sunday at 16:00 and finishing on Monday – 24 hours later. Each team has four drivers and they generally change every 2 hours when refuelling. The engine cannot be changed, but can be rebuilt – everything else can be changed.

That evening Martin Humphray organised a table in a wonderful restaurant, the oldest auberge in France, where 14 BIBOA members enjoyed some of the finest French cuisine available.

Sunday 30th April / Monday 1st May

We woke to really heavy rain and after breakfast, put on our waterproofs and made our way to the pits. John P had arranged for us all to get into the hospitality tents and their sponsor Cohin, a French construction company, made us extremely welcome.

We watched the start, along with 100,000 other fans, off one of the many bridges and after the race settled down, we adjourned to the hospitality tent for champagne and canapés. The race continued into the night. The usual mechanical failures were punctuated by boats flipping and a dramatic major fire on one race craft.

Next day as the race drew to a close, 20 boats were left racing out of a fleet of 40 starters.

The race organisers post the number of laps completed by each, these having been counted by a transponder installed on each boat by the race scrutineers. John's team finished the race but had rebuilt their engine twice during the course of the race, so finished a fair way down the list – but they did finish and we all cheered the team loudly.

Tuesday 2nd May

Charles had sorted his fuel problems out, the sun was shining and we departed Rouen for Honfleur, after saying goodbye to the land lubbers who were travelling back home by other means. *Seahound*, now with Bob Nurse crewing, *My Pleasure* and *Ribaleta* met up with *Tweety Pie* outside Honfleur lock and after bidding Sir Charles bon voyage as he set off for Ipswich, the rest of us took off for Bembridge with a 3-4 Northerly blowing us home.

This was the 3rd year of the cruise and we were once again lucky with conditions. Even though it rained on and off in Rouen, a good time was had by all. John Puddifoot tells me that next year his team is going to winwe'll see!

Chris Strickland

Seahound V