

Norman Invasion

Lymington-Honfleur-Rouen 29th April - 1st May 2005

Late last August, Chris and I cruised up to Rouen and immediately fell in love with the place, so we decided to run a cruise there this year to share the delights with fellow RIBsters. Early Spring 2005 and we had been looking in diaries and calendars and deciding when to go, when the phone rang and John Puddifoot was on the other end.

"Why don't you arrange the cruise to Honfleur and Rouen for the Early May Bank Holiday weekend?" he suggested, "Because that is the weekend of the Rouen 24 hour Powerboat race."

Date decided, we sent out a flyer and e-mailed club members to see what interest there was. Next step was to set about arranging hotels in Honfleur and Rouen and because this was a major holiday weekend these had to be booked and paid for, and cancellations were only accepted up to seven days in advance. Oh well, if the weather was too bad we would go across on the ferry.

Numbers fluctuated somewhat but eventually the cruise comprised of Chris and I with Jim and Yvonne Mackintosh in Seahound V, John and Mary Puddifoot in Mystic Dragon with guest Gordon Compton, and Michael Comminos with his son-in-law Tim Woodhead in Shiver me Timbers. Charles Blois had wanted to join us in Ribaleta but he was delayed as his plane had caught fire whilst leaving Antigua and he had to wait for another flight out.

We met on Friday 29th April off the Lymington River, confirmed our course and set off for The Needles in sunshine. As we rounded the headland we ran in to thick fog and had to reduce speed drastically. We kept in close radio contact with each other as we crossed the channel. The fog was in banks and we stopped in a clear area to have a coffee and chat to break up the journey.

We arrived in Honfleur in sunshine (much to everyone's delight), locked into the harbour and found a place to moor against a pontoon near the wall in the old harbour in town.

Tall medieval type buildings surround the harbour, most of which are restaurants. We really were spoiled for choice regarding where to go to eat and enjoyed a superb meal sitting on the harbour side enjoying the company and the views.

On Saturday, Mystic Dragon and Seahound V set off, out of the lock and up the Seine to Rouen. The journey was made far more interesting by reading the Seine pilot book as we journeyed upstream, looking out for places of interest. We stopped for refreshments about halfway down in a delightful town named Caudebec, which had a large pier on the river, which you could moor up to.

Approaching Rouen, we passed through a commercial port area, with many of the huge barges that had passed us being unloaded or loaded with their cargoes. As we approached the town we could hear the engines of the race boats and we could see marshals preventing traffic from proceeding up river. We edged our way slowly forward and they suddenly spotted us. It was great ... a RIB came haring towards us with the marshal standing in the bow waving his arms and a flag – who needs to speak French? We explained that we wanted to see the race, but were told, "Non. Closed." To our utter amazement a huge barge carrying coal went steaming past us and was escorted up the edge of the course, by a RIB with a flashing yellow light, with boats racing past at a great rate of knots.

Eventually the marshals escorted us back down river a little to a pier near the Maritime Museum and motioned for us to moor up there. We were slightly concerned about leaving the RIBs there, but really had no other choice and, after making sure they were secure, we headed into town to find our hotel.

After a wash and brush up, we were drawn by the sound of those engines and went to watch some of the racing. John Puddifoot presented his RYA Powerboat Racing Manager's business card at the gate and after much deliberation, we were all allowed into the VIP area as guests of the Rouen Yacht Club. The men were given a tour of the pits area whilst the women were feted with champagne and canapés. Oh the life!

The event had its own newspaper and we were told that some 600 officials were involved. The drivers competed for 2 hour slots before a change and there were 2 classes of boats competing. The whole operation was extremely slick and professional and attracted large numbers of spectators.

The next day we cruised back down to Honfleur, stopping for lunch at La Bouille, which was one of those sleepy lazy villages, before joining up with Michael and Tim again back in Honfleur for yet another superb dinner.

Before the trip back on Sunday we called into Le Havre for fuel and then set off for home in very reasonable, fog-free conditions.

Helen Strickland
Seahound V

