

## **The Delights of 'Rebell'** by Brian & Ann Main

For some years Ann and I had been searching around for a shallow sailing cruiser which could creep up every tiny creek around our home base, Bradwell-on-Sea at the mouth of the River Blackwater in Essex. We had begun our cruising back in the 1970's in a 21 ft clinker built Dauntless which drew only 1 ft 10 ins with the plate up. As our three children grew, we moved up to a 30 ft Dallimore cutter which had the weight and power to take us all across the North Sea to France, Belgium and Holland for our summer holidays. However, when they eventually left home we experimented with a number of smaller boats, trying to recapture the fun of creek crawling, but each one proved unsatisfactory for one reason or another. Our first, a Mirror 16, was excitingly fast but proved to have a thin bottom, and had to be sold after she nearly sank on her mooring.

The Devon Yawl sat nice and low on her road trailer, but was very heavy, and rather cramped for sleeping on the floor. My daughter's delightful little Silhouette was comfortable and fun, but rather slow to windward. Probably the best was a Leisure 17 which had good accommodation and performance, but even she drew over 2 ft, which made her awkward to haul out, and she stood uncomfortably high on a road trailer. When I retired we bought a 23 ft Hunter Duette intending to make long cruises to distant places, but were so content to sail around Bradwell that we soon changed down to a 21 ft Pandora. At the end of the 1998 season as we took her up to the Blackwater Sailing Club to lay her up ashore for the winter, the club steward Tony showed me an unusual little 'cruising dinghy' which was up for sale by a club member called Stanley Dean. The more I looked, the more enthusiastic I became! Only 17 feet long and with a minimum draught of just 10 inches, her tiny cabin held two full length quarter berths and a fixed marine toilet! When I showed her to Ann we immediately decided to see Stanley who fortunately lived nearby. In under half an hour Rebell was ours!

### **Getting to know her -**

The first thing we found out was that Rebell is a delight to sail. This means that Ann now enjoys helming as much as I do, and we share the pleasures of passage making. Also, now that I can confidently leave Ann on the helm, we can share many other tasks such as anchoring and sail changing on a much more equal footing.

Rebell gives all the exhilaration of a dinghy and points high to windward, but her internal ballast and weighted centre plate give a reassuring stiffness. Her well balanced rig and long tiller (which has to reach over the large stem locker) makes control finger-light. Her long skeg gives directional stability so that the helm can be left for short periods, or locked with a bungy cord to give enough time to put in a reef, to change a head sail, or to eat lunch. In a rising wind it is wonderful to be able to reef the mainsail in the safety of the cockpit. Head sails too can be changed in total security, wedged firmly in the fore hatch.

Our second great discovery was that Rebell has far more living space than we would ever have imagined. There is ample sitting headroom for the two of us, with the added pleasure of all round views through the eye level windows. We have no difficulty stowing our cooking gear, clothes, etc. At night, the cockpit tent on its built-in hoops quickly gives

us a large extra cabin for sleeping (rarely!) or to stow loose gear. Mostly we eat out in the evenings, mooring close to some attractive pub, so a single Gaz stove screwed into a biscuit tin on a wooden base is quite enough for our modest cooking needs. We can use this in the cabin or (better still) in the cockpit in fine weather.

### **The joys of small scale cruising -**

Being new to 'dinghy' cruising we hope we will not bore you by waxing lyrical over things which most DCA members probably take for granted, but which are new experiences for us. Without voyaging greater distances, Rebell has made our cruising ground larger. Now that we can explore and moor up in narrower shallower creeks, there are more places to go to on our home river, the Blackwater. We also get more sailing time because we can leave our mooring at dead low water instead of waiting the usual 1 1/2 hours of rise needed with our previous boats. We can tow her to distant cruising areas, and in these new and unknown places, finding an anchorage or mooring is so much easier in a small shallow boat. From Rebell we have unsurpassed views of seabirds and other wildlife, and greater opportunities to swim from the boat in uncrowded waters. Sailing itself is more exciting because we can feel Rebell's immediate response to every gust or wind change, and we are so much closer to the water as it rushes past. In addition to all this, a small boat gives a greater sense of achievement when completing a passage by simple pilotage, perhaps conning our way over some very shallow sand spit to moor up close to the shore at our chosen destination.

So far, in addition to cruising our neighbouring East Coast rivers, we have towed Rebell to two distant cruising grounds. The first was the Deben, where we launched from the convenient and helpful Robertson's Boatyard above Woodbridge, and based our week around the excellent 'Maybush Inn' at Waldringfield. Our second and more ambitious trip was to the lovely Helford River in Cornwall. There we launched from the equally pleasant and obliging Gweek Boatyard and moored off Helford for our holiday. We are quickly learning how best to launch and recover the boat, and enjoyed these two trips so much that we are eagerly looking forward to the coming year. Our tentative destinations are Falmouth Harbour, or perhaps Chichester Harbour. We will also try to meet up with some of the numerous DCA East Coast rallies.

Those of you who know Rebell will be glad to hear that she has delighted us so much that we have written an article about her for the March issue of the Practical Boat Owner, extolling the joys of small boat cruising.

We hope that she will continue to give us as much pleasure for many years to come.

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