

Boats, Beers & Bands

West Stockwith Rally 2013

Friday

For myself the revival of this once popular event started with a 4.30am alarm call on Friday 20 September. With summer in its latter stages it was pitch black on arrival at Keadby Lock, where owner and captain of the Humber Super Sloop 'Spider T' Mal Nicholson, having already completed his pre-trip checks, was awaiting the arrival of crew and passengers. The lock keeper was ready at 6.00am and we prepared to cast off. As the bridge swung and we headed towards the lock he called to inform us we were at level water with the River Trent and could go straight through.

For Mal and the crew final preparations for this event started on the previous Wednesday with the releasing of the mainsail from the mast hoops, removal of the boom and gaff and lowering of mast to accommodate the bridges on the way up river. The first of these, Keadby Bridge, was met within minutes of leaving the lock, timed to be under well before high tide to give good clearance, which proved to be only three feet (one metre). About 20 minutes later we reached the M180 flyover and clearance here was about six feet (two metres).

At the helm for our trip up river was Frank ... who had worked the river for many years, it was obvious that he was in his element and enjoyed every minute. Also aboard was Ken Collier, chairman of West Stockwith Yacht Club and organiser of the event, Ken ... John Steggles and my wife Lesley who would be holding a small exhibition of paintings and prints on board.

With a full moon to our starboard side, we passed East Ferry and at about 7am as the sun rose on our port side you suddenly realise why you volunteer for these events, what a beautiful morning for a trip up the River Trent! Our aim was to let the spring tide carry us to West Stockwith with minimal revs on the engine for steerage, arriving at the top of the tide we hung off the jetty until the tide turned and slipped into the lock about 9.30am.

Mooring up in prime location across from The Waterfront Inn, we set about getting the mast up, the boom and gaff back in position, running rigging in place and sails hoisted. Crewmembers Julian and Ernie joined us by road to give a help-in-hand and by mid-afternoon the sails were set. Following this, a succession of visitors from the Yacht Club, pub and other vessels taking part in the event boarded 'Spider T' took a tour of her Edwardian interior and watched a video or two of her recent exploits.

In the early evening the rest of the crew made their way home, Mal's wife Val arrived followed by a quick wash and change before a good meal at The Waterfront Inn. By the time we had eaten it was dark and we discussed the pros and cons of leaving the sails up overnight, finally, airing on the cautious side Mal and myself dropped all the sails and lashed them down, just in case a breeze got up in the night. Then it was off to the Yacht Club to sample a few of those special brews brought in for the Beer Festival.

Saturday

Opening for public viewing was not until late morning so it was a leisurely start with a hearty cooked breakfast on board 'Spider T'. In the middle of hoisting the sails Mal and Val were called on to attend the official opening of the event. Starting with a meet and greet the guests with breakfast rolls (yes, a second breakfast!) in the club house and continuing with an official opening outside the Chesterfield Canal Trust tent with Canal & River Trust representatives followed by the official naming ceremony of a little canal tug.

The opening ceremony introduced by Ken Collier, chairman of West Stockwith Yacht Club, was shared between Danny Brennan, east midlands chairman of the Canal & River Trust and Robin Stonebridge, chairman of the Chesterfield Canal Trust, who explained their visions for the future of the waterways. Then moving down to the waterfront where Katie Jackson of the Canal & River Trust explained how they are introducing the waterways to school children with

canal side nature trails and a boat naming competition. Year 5 and 6 of Misterton Primary School came up with ten names and east midlands waterways voted for the winning name. Katie then introduced Molly who presented the winning name 'Blue Cuckoo' on behalf of Misterton Primary School to the crew of the tug.

With the official proceedings completed it was back to 'Spider T' to hoist the mainsail and, with light winds forecast, the topsail too. This, being the first time I had been involved with hoisting the topsail, was an interesting exercise. With the full sails set we opened up to visitors, literally hundreds and hundreds of visitors, all day long they filed aboard some gushing with questions, others quietly looking around but all were 'wowed' by what they saw. Finally at about 6pm we were forced to put a barrier across to stop the flow and enable us to tidy up the ship, lower the sails and hoist the string of colour-changing led lights to show her off during the evenings events, these being the Beer Festival at the WSYC and live bands, including The Torn, in the grounds of The Waterfront Inn.

Sunday

Another leisurely start as we weren't open to the public until about 10.30am. A warm sunny day greeted us as we lowered the lights and packed them away before another hearty cooked breakfast. Then we hoisted the sails once more and prepared for the visitors, surely we would not be as busy as yesterday?

Late morning we had look around the stalls, walked along the canal side for a while and watched the water-skiing display by Marnham Boat Club members. Then it was back to 'Spider T' to give conducted tours and answer questions for the remainder of the day. The sun continued to shine and the visitors came in their droves from near and far.

Around teatime we lowered the sails, bagged the topsail, foresail and jib, removed the gaff, boom and mainsail and lowered the mast in readiness for the return journey. In between this we had to break off several times to give a more visitors a tour of the ship, not only did we match Saturday total but increased it by half as much again!

By the time the mast was down we had built up a large thirst so it was off to the WSYC to sample some more of those special brews with a short interval to slip over to The Waterfront Inn for a steak dinner ... mmmm nice.

Monday

Morning mist and heavy dew soon turned into another warm bright sunny day at West Stockwith. We completed final preparations for the trip back down river and walked over the road for a hearty cooked breakfast at The Waterfront Inn (there seemed to be a pattern here).

With passengers and crew on board we headed for the lock at about 11am and out onto the river as the tide ebbed, the clear blue sky had filled in with clouds but it was warm with light winds. Frank ... was at the helm once again and we reached Keadby Lock right on time at 2pm. Once moored up it was back up with the mast ... yes we've been here before!

Personally, what I expected to be a rather mediocre weekend turned out to be an exceptional weekend. In spite of the work involved in getting 'Spider T' to this event the warm welcome, friendly locals and many, many interested visitors really did make it rather special ... bring on next year!!

Dave Everatt
Spider T crewmember
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