

PHOTOS: GRAHAM GIBBS

A very long shakedown cruise

Selene Fair in the Trintella Association Regatta on the Oosterschelde in typically blustery conditions



ABOVE: Trintellas rafted up six deep at Veere

Graham Gibbs gets to know his new boat on a long passage from Wales to Holland

My first yacht, a retirement present to myself, was a modern plastic job, but I soon wanted something more traditional. After many miles travelling to view wooden boats, I finally bought *Selene Fair*, built in 1961 in the Netherlands, with a steel hull and wooden everything else. She is 28ft overall, with a long keel and lovely sheerline. Despite weighing twice as much as a Folkboat everyone who sees her says she is pretty. She had been comprehensively and beautifully renovated by Chris Miller at Preston Marina about a decade before, but had been allowed to deteriorate in his boatyard by the subsequent owner. I moved her to Conwy for some essential repairs over the winter and set off in March 2012. I had decided not just to sail her home to the Hamble but to carry on all the way to the Oosterschelde in the Netherlands, where the Trintella Association (she is a Trintella 1, the very first Trintella) held an annual gathering in May.

On the first leg, to Holyhead, there was snow visible both in the Lake District and on Snowdon and my crew and I huddled from the sleet under the sprayhood. The chartplotter turned out not to have a chart in it and the depth sounder didn't work, which made getting out of Conwy on the ebb a bit tricky, especially as the engine

failed before we even left the marina. The reefing lines jammed and the ancient bottom-action primary winches let go alarmingly at awkward moments, but apart from that all seemed OK. Well, it was a shakedown cruise.

From Holyhead through Bardsey Sound to an anchorage at Aberdaron was dramatic, with snow visible on Cader Idris 40 miles away to the south-east as we sat at anchor with the bay to ourselves, shivering. The next day

we crossed to stay overnight on a buoy in Fishguard and then on to Milford Haven, through the swirling waters and fine birdlife of Ramsey Sound. We left *Selene Fair* at Milford Haven Marina and went home to warm up.

A week later, I was back with a new crew for the next leg, which was planned to involve anchoring at Lundy Island and in the pool at Padstow, then round Land's End to Newlyn and Falmouth. But the conditions conspired against us. We had a rolly night on a visitor's buoy at Dale and set off with the tide before dawn. The worsening forecast would have had us stranded in Lundy and not even able to get into Padstow, so we headed straight for Land's End, rounding Longships 24 hours later just before dawn, accompanied by a fishing fleet returning to Newlyn. We were in Falmouth by early afternoon after a passage of 145 miles. By the time we had secured *Selene Fair* to a pontoon the wind

was howling and we were clearly going no further for some while, so we headed home again for a rest.

From Falmouth to the Solent I sailed solo, 200 miles in three days, stopping at Dartmouth where I enjoyed fresh seafood and good beer at the Ship Inn at Kingswear, and Portland, where I was too tired even to go ashore. The third day, to Portsmouth, was a little too exciting, with sensible amounts of sail suddenly becoming reckless spreads of canvas as violent rain squalls struck. *Selene* was making 8 knots over the ground against a strong ebb approaching the Needles, with bow waves passing at head height past both sides of the cockpit, which was not relaxing. Once past Hurst and into the Solent I tucked behind Keyhaven, hove-to, reefed and calmed down before pottering on to Haslar more sedately.

Except for a short beat into Falmouth, the wind had been behind the beam all the way from Conwy – an unlikely sequence which compensated somewhat for the horrible conditions. And with a new crew, Fod, with whom I had last sailed 34 years before, our luck with the wind continued all the way to Holland. The engine broke down beyond my ability to sort out on the way to Eastbourne and we had to nip into Brighton to get it mended. Crossing the Channel two days later, we were buzzed by a helicopter as we entered the Dover Strait TSS and intercepted by the French Coastguard as we entered Boulogne. Miraculously, I had everything in order. They were bemused by the handwritten Part 1 Ships Registry from

1964 and sceptical that we should be travelling so far, in such a small boat, in such conditions, without having criminal intent.

It rained in Boulogne, where we had *fruits de mer* to cheer ourselves up, and it rained and blew all the way up the coast to Dunkerque, and yet again as we continued to Breskens at the entrance to the Westerschelde.

We, like most British sailors I suspect, sailed straight past Belgium to avoid any problems with red diesel. The Breskens harbourmaster appears to go home at teatime and not return until late the next morning. In contrast we arrived late and left early and despite phoning around and searching could find no one to pay. We dined on Dover sole in the yacht club, washed down by white beer, with spectacular views across the estuary to Vlissingen.

Instead of going north through the canal and via Middelburg, we followed the huge sand dunes round the coast and into the Oosterschelde through an enormous lock in the vast sea defence barrier. Arriving at Colijnsplaat two months after leaving Conwy, we were greeted very warmly and offered oysters and champagne by the gathered Trintella owners, to a rousing *For He's a jolly good fellow* sung lustily in curiously accented English. We were the smallest and oldest Trintella to make it to the rally, the first Red Ensign for some years, and the longest travelled: 771 miles. Some shakedown! ▲

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Graham Gibbs

Graham has cruised about 2,000 miles a year out of Hamble since 2009 and now enters classic events in *Selene Fair*. His ambition is to take part in the Classic Channel Regatta.

