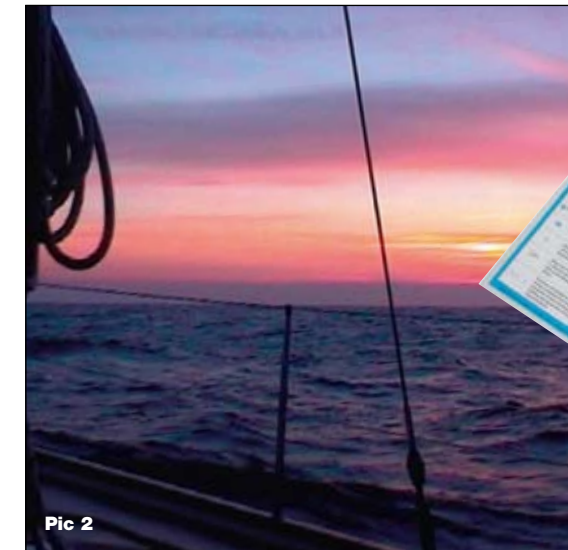
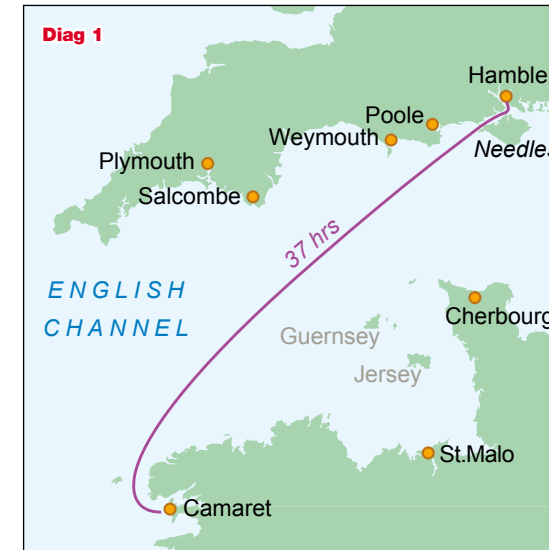


Photos – Main pic: Dorothy Lee under sail. Pic 1: Radar. Pic 2: Pre-dawn – the coldest time of day. Pic 3: Channel light vessel. Pic 4: VLCC.

Diag 1 (opposite): Camaret to Hamble.



# Cruising across the Channel



In which the intrepid **Duncan Wells** successfully concludes the trip from Pornic in Brittany to the Hamble in his newly-acquired Hallberg Rassy 352 – then promptly sails into trouble while enjoying a weekend jolly in the Solent.

**H**aving been lucky with conditions in the Raz de Sein we left Camaret in time to arrive at the Chenal du Four by 1400 and for the tide to sweep us through (**Diag 1**). We who cruise in the Solent have the Chichester Bar and Needles Channel to contend with, both of which can kick up rough with a strong opposing wind and tide. I suspect that the Raz and the Four would be worse in similar conditions, because of the long swell involved there.

Anyhow, it took us 2 hours to get to Le Four lighthouse and from there we had 5 hours of favourable tide that helped to push us round the outside of everything and up to the Gulf of St Malo. We would go round the Channel Islands and make for the Channel light vessel at the western end of the Casquets TSS, a passage that would take 37 hours, during which we would have the tide with us for 3 tides and against us for 3 tides, more or less cancelling each other out in the long

run. We ran 2 hour watches with Martin and me on 'A' watch and Michel and Nick on 'B' watch. There was no need to run a dogwatch system, because we wouldn't be on passage for long enough (**Diag 2, p70**). After one watch change during the night, Michel said he had saved our lives by avoiding a fishing boat that was trying to run us down. They seem to do that, don't they? While they concentrate on fishing, you try to keep out of their way and monitor them like a hawk, both by eye and by radar (**Pic 1**). Even so, every course alteration you make is matched by them, which puts you firmly in their sights again. Ah well.



Incidentally, above the nav station there are both a white and a red light. The red light is designed to protect your night vision without disturbing the sleeping crew, although it makes it difficult to read charts. I always bang on the white light to see anything properly (**Pic 2**).

## CROSSING THE CHANNEL

We passed close by the Channel light vessel at the Western end of the Casquets TSS (**Pic 3**) and saw very little traffic really (**Pic 4**). Sometimes when crossing the Channel the traffic is so dense that you have to get as close as possible to the ships in their lane in order to duck under one before being caught by the next one coming up – but not on this occasion (**Pic 5, p70**).

I'd taken the lead on the nav by now, because we were heading into my home waters, although there was nothing to do except avoid other ships and the Isle of Wight. We arrived bang on the Needles fairway marker (**Pic 6**) – hardly surprising with GPS to guide us – and in the correct sector of the Needles light (**Pic 7**). As we sailed up the Western Solent, Michel continued to ask me the colour of the lights, although I was now marking them off on my list. I was tempted when asked "What colour is she?", about a starboard light, to reply "Still green, old chap", but thought better of it. Eventually I

asked him, "I know you wear glasses, Michel, but do you have extra difficulty when it comes to lights?" "Oui. I am, 'ow you say, colour blind." That would probably explain it (**Pic 8**).

## STRIDING AHEAD

We managed a top speed in the Channel of just over 9kn through the water and 10.2 over the ground under Nick's helmsmanship, which I've still

not bettered. *Dorothy Lee* with her long fin keel had required just enough weather helm for you to feel in control and sailed beautifully. At that point, Martin asked what weather helm meant. "It's opposite lock," I replied. "The wind is trying to round the boat up to windward, so to maintain your course you need to head the boat to leeward. To windward or to weather is the side of the boat from which the wind is blowing. If your main is set on the port side, the windward side of the boat will be starboard. The port side will be to leeward."

To steer a boat you need a helm, either a wheel or a tiller. You pull a tiller up to windward, or to weather, to turn the boat to leeward, hence 'weather helm'. Conversely, you turn a wheel to leeward to maintain your course. The stronger the wind the more likely you are to need to apply 'weather helm'.

A little weather helm is desirable, because it gives life or 'feel' to the tiller or wheel and if the wind is squally, it's nice to know that your boat will round up into the wind in a gust and thereby ease herself. Excessive weather helm usually means that you're overpressed – carrying too much sail – or that the sails are out of balance, as would be the case if the main were over sheeted and the jib was under sheeted. This will make the boat heel, which makes the rudder less effective and gusts of wind will turn the boat towards the wind.

Helm down to leeward – with a tiller – will turn the boat to windward and take the boat through the wind for a tack. Often you'll hear the helmsman cry 'helm's a-lee' to indicate that the helm is

## HANDY COCKPITS CARDS

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Pic 5

Pic 5: The *Condor Express* passes on her way to Poole.  
Pic 6: Needles Fairway buoy. Pic 7: The Needles. Pic 8: Reach buoy – still green.  
Pic 10: We motored home carefully with the backdrop of a beautiful sunset.

down and that you're going for the tack. Helm up to windward will turn the boat to leeward and take the stern through the wind for a gybe.

The trip had taken four days and we had sailed for 60 per cent of the time. It had been great fun, a great success and more or less incident free – if you ignore our collision in Camaret with the Gendarmerie Cutter – and 'incident free' is always a blessing when it comes to boating.

*Dorothy Lee* went into a shed for a while to have one or two things fixed and I ended up spending a small fortune on her topsides. There was evidence of a fair clout to port and I wanted a specialist to smooth over the gelcoat, which was successfully accomplished. It was certainly a massive improvement. I also replaced the standing rigging. The insurance company was keen that I should do that, although I'd intended to do it anyway. And then about 18 months later, we had an interesting episode.

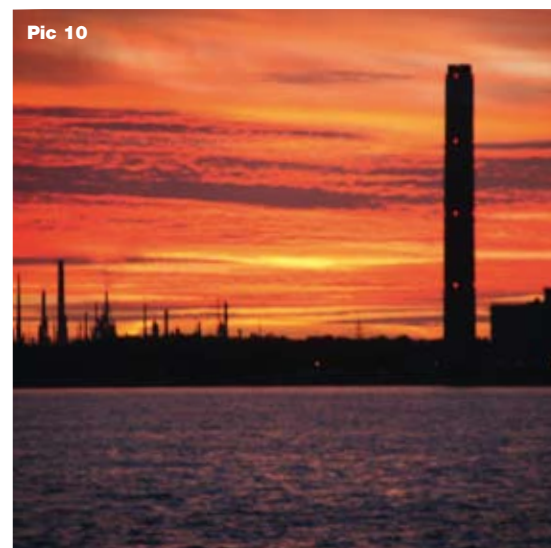
**A CAUTIONARY TALE**

Having made full use of the excellent hospitality available at the George Hotel in Yarmouth and over-nighted in the harbour, mid morning found us with a northeaster blowing F5 on our way back to the Hamble. Of course, because we were heading NE up the Western Solent the wind would be blowing from the NE. I've never known the wind to give me an even break. Perhaps the wind was telling us to 'go west'. Still, it was Sunday and as weekend sailors we were homeward bound. Mind you my crew, an Irish friend, and I were in need of some fresh air and, we reasoned, tacking back would keep us on our toes. I handled the ropes while my friend took the helm. We had a wonderful sail, *Dorothy* simply sped along. She seems to need at least F4 to get going and this was perfect. Later in the afternoon the wind increased to F6. We were expecting this from the forecasts in the morning and throughout the day. We had full main and No 2 genoa up. We would normally reef at F6, especially if the wind strength was scheduled to increase, and if we were setting off into a F6 we would automatically set the No 3 genoa and put a reef in the main until we could see what conditions were really like at sea.

We weren't overpressed, but had wind against



Pic 7



Pic 10

tide – and were about to tack onto starboard. I was facing the stern. I released the sheet, the bow came round and I was about to harden up the new sheet when my friend shouted: "Turn on the engine, turn on the engine!" I did as I was told. Then he screamed: "It's the mast; it's bending."

The engine was running and I looked out from under the sprayhood to try to get a peep at the mast, but because my friend had turned the boat back on to port, I thought I'd better re-load the lazy sheet onto the winch, so I couldn't see the problem.

"The starboard shroud has come away."

"And the top of the mast is bending over. I'm going to hold her on port to keep the pressure of the wind on her." "I'll drop the sails."

I quickly furled the headsail and started getting the main down. I could see the shroud swinging free. The mast was being held up merely by the pressure of the wind. With the main down and motoring slowly ahead, I went up and had a look at the problem. We didn't have much sea room, because we were closing the



Pic 12



Pic 9

Isle of Wight; that's why we were in the process of tacking. We were in the Gurnard area, so I knew there was plenty of water. There was no clevis pin on the end of the shroud or in the chainplate deck fitting. Had it sheared? My friend put *Dorothy Lee* onto autopilot while I gathered some cordage to make a lashing. According to Michel, her previous owner, there's a saying that goes with my boat, "*Dorothy Lee*, she has everything."

Once upon a time we thought we might have a good chance of winning the Round The Island Race. We had a bandit rating and, come race day, had removed anything that was strictly for cruising like the generator, the anchor chain (we kept the required chain and warp), several spare anchors, a tool kit that makes mine at home look amateur and even allowed the fuel and water tanks to run to the minimum; we had the boat sitting a couple of inches higher in the water.

Anyway, in preparation for this great event, which saw us rip the cruising chute and the No 2 genoa and limp home under storm jib, because we'd left the No 1 and No 3 genoas on the dock in our frantic desire to lose weight, someone had asked if we had a cunningham? We needed an extra tight luff on the main apparently. We didn't, so I rummaged around and found the bits and bobs

necessary to make one up. I came up on deck, proffered the goodies and declared, "*Dorothy Lee*, she has everything."

"In which case I would like a brandy and champagne," I heard someone say.

Ducking down below again, I found the calvados that had been left by someone in the saloon table and a bottle of fake champagne (Pic 9).

And so, sitting on the deck getting a dousing from the waves as they broke over the bow and with freezing fingers, I wondered if I would have a spare clevis pin. Leaving my friend in charge of the shroud and on watch, I ferreted down below and came up with a couple of clevis pins and some split pins. It didn't take a moment for the two of us to replace the clevis pin and secure it with a split pin. We gave the shroud a little tension, but not too much and motored back to the Hamble, not daring to set any sail (Pic 10). We had no idea why the shroud had come away. Had the clevis pin fallen out (impossible)? Had it sheared? The mystery was cleared up the next morning when I checked the rigging and noticed that the clevis pin from the starboard shroud was sitting in the scuppers on the port side. No sign of the split pin. What I did notice when I checked all the other clevis pins was that out of six fixings, three had split pins that had not been bent back and gelled. They were just sitting in the holes, keeping the clevis pins in place, but if the boat jumped they could easily come out, which is precisely what happened.

We'd been sailing like this for a year. I know that because it was exactly a year earlier that the rigging company had taken our mast off and given us new rigging. I went white at the thought of what might have happened.

The representative from the rigging company went white too, when I told him. They could have been in for quite a hefty insurance claim on the one hand and on the other it was a matter of grave embarrassment for them to have failed to finish the job (Pic 11).

Needless to say, perhaps, they put the matter right immediately, but the harsh lesson is quite clear. Always take a moment to walk around the boat and check that everything's in order before you sail (Pic 12).



**CHARTS AND PILOTS**

Imray Charts C10 *Western English Channel Passage Chart* 1:400,000 and C3 *Isle of Wight* 1:52,500. Both at £17.

The Pilot Book is Imray's *The Shell Channel Pilot: South coast of England, the North coast of France and the Channel Islands* by Tom Cunliffe, price £35

**BOOK OFFER**

10 per cent off to ST readers who quote this article when ordering the pilots from Imray on 01480 462114. www.imray.com



Pic 11: Split pin back in place and bent back. Pic 12: All in order on *Dorothy Lee* as she sets sail again.

**"I went white at the thought of what might have happened"**

**Diag 3**

How a Dog Watch System Works				
	Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
First watch	2000-0000	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1
Middle watch	0000-0400	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2
Morning watch	0400-0800	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1
Forenoon watch	0800-1200	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2
Afternoon watch	1200-1600	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1
First Dog watch	1600-1800	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2
Last Dog watch	1800-2000	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1