



Sheena Log

Woolston to
Cherbourg
Aug 31, 2007 to
Sept 2, 2007

Prologue

In the late summer of 2006, when approaching my mooring off Woolston in Southampton Water, there was an ominous clatter from *Sheena's* engine which then stopped never to start again. For the first and last time I sailed onto my mooring. Fortunately, my crew picked up the buoy first time.

Sheena was hauled out that weekend and took a spot in Southampton Sailing Club's compound. There followed a search for a replacement for the broken Yanmar YSE 8. Dickies of Bangor were offering an excellent deal on the Yanmar 2YM15 so I had one shipped to my then house in Caversham. I learned later that Dickies were destocking in preparation for the sale of the site in 2007.

I spent weekends and days off in the autumn and winter of 2006 and the spring of 2007 replacing *Sheena's* engine. It was often quiet in the compound. One day I turned up and the whole area was deserted. An unexploded WWII bomb had been discovered 20 yards away!

The new engine completely changed my cruising ambitions. Previously, I'd been content with Chichester to Poole but now a cross-Channel passage was a possibility. One limiting factor was fuel. *Sheena's* replacement stainless steel fuel tank's capacity was just 10 litres. I stowed away an extra 60 litres in cans just in case.

Outward

On the morning of Friday August 31st 2007, Southampton Sailing Club's escort boat was being maintained by two committee members. This was a lucky break for John, *Sheena's* navigator, as he'd brought several heavy bags, his laptop, PDA, GPS and sundry other electrical items – so a damp trip to *Sheena* in the dinghy was gratefully replaced by the luxury of a dry RIB ride.

Skipper David had been busy that morning fixing a Radome atop a pole clamped to the push-pit; having bottled

out of the added risk of relying on the number one eyeball on a night passage



1. Radome Resplendent

Off they set at half past noon. There was nearly an early end to the trip when the skipper noticed they were shipping water from an engine hose. A quick turn on the hose clip and all was well once more.

There was nothing much to report for a while; John took the boat through the Needles channel without a hitch and plotted a course to steer designed to drop *Sheena* up-tide of Cherbourg. Night fell, the wind picked up, and the sea state moved to a rather immoderate moderate. Harnesses were clipped on and the crew settled down for the night passage. The odd ship outside the routes and the shipping routes themselves proved worry-free with the radar and John's experienced eye. Earlier in his career, the navigator had been associated with powerful military grade radar; "*sufficient to bring down a bird at half a mile*" he said with a twinkle in his eye.

Although there was nothing wrong with the original course, leeway and a little helm fighting put *Sheena* down-tide towards Cap de La Hague and directly off

Port Racine as she closed the lights of the Cherbourg peninsula.

The course should have been checked mid-Channel but the boat's motion precluded any but brief forays into the cabin.



2. Cluttered but Comforting

There followed a protracted approach against the tide to the western entrance of the Grande Rade. The navigator picked up the leading lights without difficulty but *Sheena* was hard pressed to motor-sail the course into harbour.

A Brittany ferry appeared to hove to outside the harbour for three quarters of an hour as *Sheena* crabbed her way in. A proper gent thought the skipper, until the navigator pointed out that it was likely that the ferry had arrived early and was not due to dock until dawn.

Sheena crept through the quiet of the Grande Rade at first light. By the time she had ghosted into the Petite Rade and then into the yacht harbour, it was easily light enough to pick up a visitor's pontoon.

Time for breakfast out of a tin; as the navigator remarked: "*I've had better meals in France but none more welcome*". The crew snatched a few minutes sleep, showered, paid for the berth and took on more fuel.



3. Just In Case They Think We Were Holed Up In Newtown Creek

Return

Sheena set off on the return journey at 1100 hours (BST).

A course was plotted to drop *Sheena* into the Needles fairway. The auto-helm was pressed into service and it proved much more accurate than the manual helming of the outward journey.



4. Auto-helm = Happy Navigator

The first 20 miles or so were plain sailing in a slight sea with time enough for a substantial cooked lunch. Then the crew settled down into the routine of the return passage.



5. The Skipper Showing Off His Culinary Skills

Night fell as *Sheena* closed the Isle of Wight. The sea picked up and *Sheena* took lots of spray on a bouncy ride. The skipper was all for taking the North Passage but the navigator, PDA plotter in hand, convinced him that the safe passage marker and the sectored light of Hurst Castle were moments away.

Once into the Solent, the sea was smooth and, with the moon out from behind the clouds, it made a serene sight as *Sheena* nosed into Southampton Water. She picked up her mooring where the rivers Test and Itchen meet in the early hours of Sunday 2nd September.

Epilogue

Sheena was sold the following year to a retired senior fire officer. She was replaced by *Cornish Chough*, a lift-keel Seal 28.

One Friday evening we drove down to Southampton Sailing Club intending to stay the night on *Cornish Chough* and make an early start to the Island in the morning.

Sheena's mooring was about 75 metres away from *Cornish Chough*. As we rowed out to the boat, I saw a dinghy alongside *Sheena*. In the twilight, I thought the new

owner must have acquired an inflatable judging by its light grey colour.

The following morning I looked over to *Sheena* and realised that the dinghy wasn't an inflatable. Instead it was a capsized rigid tender. Immediately I rowed over. As I approached, I could see what looked like a small pick-up buoy below the surface. It turned out it was the new owner's drowned head. Things were a little busy on that stretch of water for a little while afterwards.

The executors sold *Sheena* to another member of the sailing club. A skilled craftsman, he refurbished the boat to a high standard and sold her a couple of years later. I last saw *Sheena* as a resident of Sparkes Marina in Chichester on East Cowes Sailing Club's first Meridian Cruise.

184 miles
33 hours
15 night hours
Highest wind F5

Sheena: Atlanta Viking 8.5
(Macwester 28); Bilge Keel;
1976