

A PACE OF YOUR OWN

The journey is as important as the destination, and it seems there are as many ways to enjoy cruising to new places as there are owners of boats

Text and Photos: **Peter Cumberlidge**

As a youngster I was lucky, in those long, carefree summer hols, to be shipped aboard a wide range of cruising boats, motor and sail, as cabin boy or foredeck hand. In that pleasurable way I learned to appreciate many different styles of cruising and soon found that I never minded what kind of boat I was on. It was meandering from place to place I really enjoyed, those magical arrivals in a new harbour or anchorage after a passage at sea, even if only a few miles along the coast from the last port-of-call.



My early cruises were all quite slow, certainly when sailing but also because even power boats rumbled around at less than 8 knots. The first motor cruise was helping to deliver a converted motor fishing vessel (MFV) from Worcester, of all places, round to Dartmouth. This fine old ship had a beautiful Gardner engine, whose aristocratic exhaust I can still hear echoing around Worcester basin as we locked out.

This trip was full of variety – gliding down the Severn through Elgar’s England, a night in Gloucester docks, pushing along the Sharpness Canal with the river tantalisingly close. Then into the tide-swept estuary to thread the Bristol Channel sandbanks

down to Barry then along the north Devon and Cornwall coast before a longish, boisterous haul around Land’s End and the Lizard to Dartmouth.

Later, I relished cruising aboard semi-displacement boats built in tough pilot-cutter style. A friend of my father owned a Nelson 40 which would cut a purposeful path to Cherbourg and the Channel Islands in quite brisk weather. Her accommodation was fairly austere, but the seakeeping and sense of security were impressive. And when even faster, more luxurious boats came along, who could fail to appreciate the home comforts and quick passages which ushered in a new and increasingly popular style of cruising.



In this article I talk to owners of some very different types of motor boat about how they enjoy using them and where they like to cruise. Two of these boats are pretty large by most standards, but as unlike as the tortoise and the hare – a 1930s 73ft classic and a powerful, luxurious Sunseeker Camargue 50. We also see that you can roam far and wide in quite modest sized boats, or derive a great deal of pleasure by pottering close to home even in a large one!

'SLOW' CRUISING

I'm a long time fan of displacement cruising, which covers a multitude of boat designs and styles. Converted MFVs were my first experiences and there are still plenty around. Strongly built with deep keels and high bows, their forte is being able to stay safely at sea in bad weather. With a single slow-turning engine, large prop and huge fuel tank, a genuine MFV yacht can 'heave-to' if necessary, chugging slowly into heavy seas at a slight angle until conditions ease.

While many designers have drawn on the MFV concept, few contemporary 'trawler yachts' bear any resemblance to fishing vessels and hardly any are slow. Nordhavs are really the new equivalent in

terms of sea-keeping and range. They were conceived as small ocean-going ships which an experienced couple could cruise round the world and liveaboard comfortably for long periods. All Nordhavs have a safe range of around 3,000nm at speeds from 7-8½ knots depending on hull length.

Aesthetically, slow cruising is quieter, less manic and somehow more in tune with the natural rhythms of the sea. Heading offshore in a displacement boat is a gradual, quite soothing process, giving you time to gaze around and take stock of the weather and likely conditions further out. It's also easier to adjust to the sometimes very striking contrast between being on dry land and bobbing about on the briny.

With 25-knot passages you are often chasing to get somewhere before the weather changes or a marina gate shuts. But cruising offshore at 7 or 8 knots, your progress is judged by different values and you are, quite simply, at sea, savouring the wide horizons. The easy, predictable motion of a slow boat at sea helps tune out the clamour of life ashore, and on longer passages the simple pleasures of just being under way can replace any eagerness to get somewhere else.

CHICO CLASSIC MOTOR YACHT

Jane and I love to cruise aboard comfortable classic motor yachts and one of our favourites is *Chico*, a 73ft G L Watson design built in 1932 by James N Miller and Son. This elegant little ship is powered by two 120hp 6LXB Gardner diesels and has a range of about 1,700nm. Her owners, Gus Geddes and Sue Maclachlan, live in Edinburgh but keep *Chico* on Scotland's beautiful West Coast.

Although *Chico* can sleep ten in five cabins, she is easily handled by a couple who know the ropes. Gus and Sue run holiday charters around the Scottish islands, but they also enjoy cruising by themselves in a relaxed, civilised style. At her normal 7-8 knots, *Chico* is quiet and restful under way. The Gardners murmur far below, almost inaudible on deck. The wheelhouse feels like a proper ship's bridge, where the skipper can ponder charts and pilot books in peace.

At 80 tonnes *Chico* is too heavy for most pontoons, but Scotland has countless quiet, sheltered anchorages to choose from. As Gus told

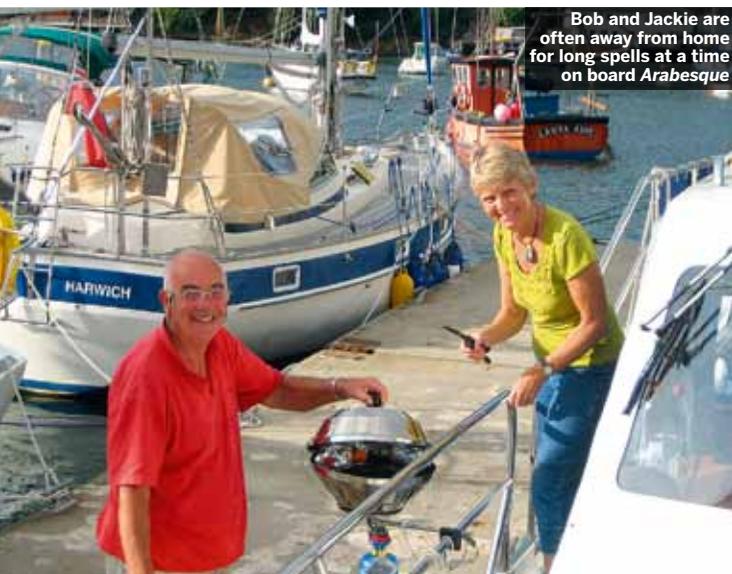


Photo: Derek Croucher / Alamy



"We usually cruise for a couple of hours in the morning, anchor for lunch and then go ashore for a walk"



Displacement cruising doesn't get more stylish than on board *Chico*, a 73ft G L Watson design



Nor does it come more comfortable – this is *Chico's* forward cabin

me: "Anchoring is easy with a good windlass, plenty of cable and an anchor we trust. We have a large fridge and deep-freeze, a good generator, over 2,000 litres of fresh water and a decent wine cellar. We don't need to restock too often and the views from the saloon in a Scottish sea loch are out of this world."

Sue said that *Chico's* cruises include plenty of shore time: "There are so many places to explore off the West Coast. We usually cruise for a couple of hours in the morning, anchor for lunch and then go ashore for a walk before setting off for our overnight anchorage."

Favourite harbour Tobermory, Isle of Mull.

Favourite anchorage Craigaig Bay, Isle of Ulva.

Arabesque on her legs, which allow her to explore places other boats can't reach



Golden cruising rules "We always go with the tide. Flexibility is also crucial – be prepared to change plans if the forecast isn't suitable. Our anchor is always down in good time for drinks before dinner!"

SEMI-DISPLACEMENT CRUISING

Because hull design is now so sophisticated, the term 'semi-displacement' is quite difficult to define, but broadly refers to moderately fast boats that have a fine bow entry, quite rounded bilges and some flatness aft to create lift. Traditional semi-displacement hulls are generally narrower than planing hulls and tend to operate at speeds from about 10-20 knots. Their more rounded sections help improve performance and sea-going comfort at slower as well as fast speeds.

Although many Grand Banks and larger motor yachts like Flemings are notionally semi-displacement designs, in practice they tend to be cruised at economical displacement speeds, certainly on longer passages. They have the essential feel of displacement boats and soak up fuel at faster speeds.

To my mind, semi-displacement cruising is almost an aesthetic rather than a technical category, usually associated with boats that have a rugged, working, professional kind of style. Well-known examples that stay popular as used boats are Aquastars, the older Nelsons and more recent Dale Nelsons, early Humbers, particularly the Humber 35, and the stylish Nelson-like Hagg designs such as the 36. There are also smaller boats like the Corvette 32 and later 34, and the sturdy Buchanan-designed Channel Islands 22 and 32.

Boating friends of ours, Bob and Jackie Stevenson, are semi-displacement enthusiasts and keep their Aquastar 38 *Arabesque* on the Itchen at Southampton. Most summers they manage to escape for two or three months cruising.

ARABESQUE AQUASTAR 38 AFT CABIN

Bob Stevenson had a sailing yacht for many years, cruising widely in the Channel, North Sea and Baltic. Then he and Jackie began exploring the European waterways with a comfortable Dutch barge, which they wintered in sunny Provence. Now their Aquastar 38 is ideal for home waters, easy for two to manage and a tough sea boat when the weather blows up. It's interesting that many experienced sailing folk who switch to power opt for semi-displacement hulls with a working-boat style. *Arabesque's* two Cummins 250hp diesels give an economical 16/17 knots at 2,000 revs, and a maximum 22 knots.

Arabesque is meticulously maintained and equipped for longish spells away from base, with a good stock of spares neatly stowed. Interestingly, she carries legs for exploring shallow sandy inlets and drying lagoons around the Channel Islands, Brittany and Isles of Scilly – an *Arabesque* favourite. The long straight keel protects the props and shafts provided she dries out more or less upright. Bob and Jackie definitely prefer anchorages to marinas and the legs open up a wealth of secluded hideaways other boats can't reach.

Bob told me: "We've owned *Arabesque* for ten years and she has taken care of us very well. She is better at coping with adverse conditions than perhaps we are, and in contrast to our sailing yacht, we have yet to feel seasick aboard her!"

Favourite harbour Penzance, because it feels so 'West Country'.

Favourite anchorage Îles Chausey.

Cruising golden rules "Take your time! Don't try to cram too much distance into your holiday. Carry plenty of chain to cope with the tidal range and current at your chosen anchorage, particularly around the Channel Islands or adjacent French coast."

HERON OF GOREY CHANNEL ISLANDS 32

Jerseyman Mick Mollet has been boating since he was knee high and is a loyal *MBY* reader! He and his wife Vi live near Gorey Harbour on Jersey's east coast. Graced by a spectacular castle, Gorey dries at half-tide and has a nostalgic salty atmosphere of boating before marinas were invented. Mick and Vi keep their Channel Islands 32 *Heron of Gorey* here and she sits snugly on legs when the ebb runs away. The legs easily swing up to stow horizontally. *Heron* was built in 1981 and the Molletts have owned her since 1992.

Before Mick retired, he and Vi whizzed over to France virtually every summer weekend. Carteret was their favourite, an attractive marina next to peaceful marshes at the head of a sandy estuary. At neaps, Mick could get away around midday on Fridays, taking a short hour to Carteret in most conditions. At springs they'd leave Gorey in the early evenings as soon as *Heron* floated. Two 270hp turbo Mermaids give an easy 16 knots at 2,200 revs.

Mick told me: "We rarely missed a weekend. Sometimes the forecast was a bit iffy, but then I'd say to Vi let's just go to the outer buoy and have a look, and when we'd done that it was easy just to carry on! Setting off is the main thing."

The Molletts enjoy the Écréhou archipelago for lazy days at anchor in the low tide lagoon. Some weekends in settled weather they'd head south to Îles Chausey and St Malo. Now retired, Mick and Vi spend several months each summer just pottering in Brittany between St Malo and Lézardrieux – an idyllic style of cruising, I'd say.

I always think the main advantage of fast cruising is that it lets you spend more time lazing about!

A fast boat needn't be a huge boat – the Bénéteau Antares 12 is a good choice

Favourite harbour Plouër on the glorious River Rance.

Cruising golden rules "Take things easy, don't travel too far at a time and don't give your wife any frights!"

FAST CRUISING

I always think the main advantage of fast cruising is that it lets you spend more time lazing about! Most owners of fast motor boats don't actually spend that much time under way, burning up expensive diesel, but to be able to use spells of quiet weather to get across the Channel and reach interesting new places quickly is a real plus, especially for family holidays. I also think it's important for newcomers to cruising to appreciate that you don't need a large fast boat to travel to interesting foreign places, as this next example shows.



A typical semi-displacement cruiser, the Channel Islands 32

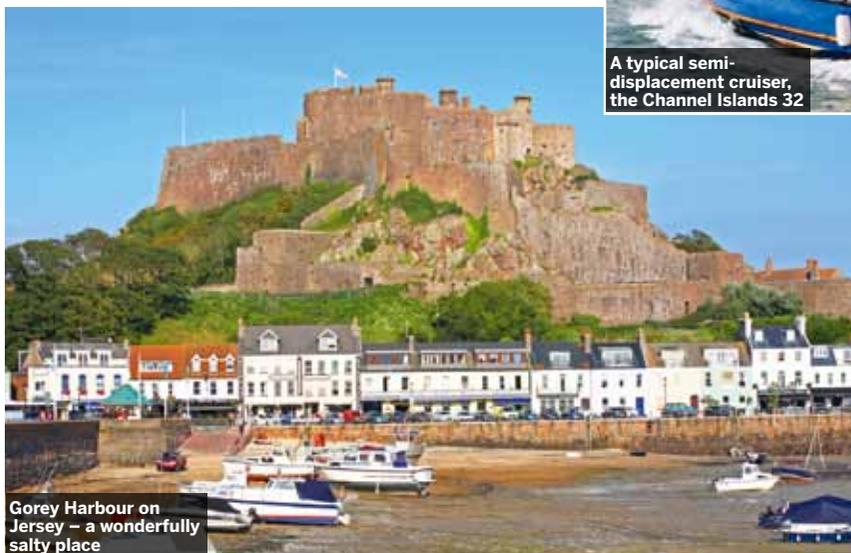
COFARE BÉNÉTEAU ANTARES 12

My favourite Brittany marina at Plouër-sur-Rance is not far upstream from St Malo, a peaceful rural haven in an old mill pool. This is our snug winter base, whose calm rural atmosphere is enlivened by the fascinating cruising folk who keep boats here. One of our neighbours, François Unger, is an experienced seaman who once managed all the docks' engineering at Le Havre. He is also a great Anglophile

and we rarely pass his boat without popping aboard for a morning coffee or an evening glass of wine or rum from his excellent, inexhaustible cellar.

His boat *Cofare* is an unassuming Bénéteau Antares 12, one of my favourite French designs for its seaworthy hull and practical deck layout. *Cofare* has two 370hp Volvo D6 diesels and is fully equipped for offshore passages.

François recently cruised to Copenhagen via the Dutch coast, Kiel Canal and the Baltic. Two seasons ago he went up to the Firth of Clyde, crossing to Plymouth via Guernsey, around Land's End to Padstow and Milford Haven, then on past the Irish coast and Isle of Man. In Ireland he tasted Guinness and in Scotland many fine whiskies! Last summer *Cofare* hopped around the Bay of Biscay to the stunning Basque coast of Spain, exploring as far west as Santander.



Gorey Harbour on Jersey – a wonderfully salty place



Cofare at rest in Ardrossan Marina on the West Coast of Scotland



Peel Castle on the Isle of Man, home to a charming harbour

Photo: Holmes Garden Photos / Alamy

Although quite a modest size by current standards, the Antares 12 is a proper cruising boat – able to eat up the miles at 20-22 knots in quiet weather, but copes well in brisk conditions if the weather doesn't play ball. François is a meticulous planner and his passage legs are carefully researched before he leaves Plouër. To me, his quietly ambitious style is an encouragement for all kinds of boats to venture further in manageable stages. François thoroughly enjoys cruising abroad and that unique

satisfaction of independent travel by boat:

“Each port-of-call is a discovery, of course nobody speaks French! But we meet lots of interesting people and sometimes bump into friends we made on previous trips. Even in mixed languages, there is always plenty to talk about over a drink or two.”

Favourite harbours Falmouth in England and Peel on the Isle of Man, while in Ireland it's Greystones and Howth near Dublin. Scotland's gem is East Loch Tarbert.

Tarbert Harbour on Loch Fyne in Argyll and Bute is a charming spot to aim for



Photo: Andrew Woodacre / Alamy



Hopping over to the Channel Islands – here, Dixcart Bay on Sark – is very feasible

“Some Fridays, a friend and I just go to Weymouth for lunch. The diesel costs rather more than the lunch!”

Photo: John Barratt / Alamy

Golden cruising rules “Fill the ship’s cellar with good wines. Make sure the motors are OK, the tanks are full, the forecast is fair and the crew is smiling!”

**TOSCA BLUE
SUNSEEKER CAMARGUE 50**

Nick Moger bought *Tosca Blue* last April in Cannes and trucked her back to Portland Marina, which is handy for where he and his wife live near Yeovil. Nick always has Fridays free, when he invariably drives down to the boat. Sometimes he just potters on board, but often he’ll go out for a spin around those magnificent sheltered

reaches east of Portland. Last summer *Tosca’s* cruising was mostly local, along the coast to Lulworth Cove or Worbarrow Bay, and into the Solent where Haslar Marina is a favourite, with good berthing for a 50ft boat. “Some Fridays, a friend and I just go to Weymouth for lunch. The diesel costs rather more than the lunch!”

Nick is planning an early season cross-Channel jaunt to Cherbourg, a convenient 63 miles from Portland Marina. The Camargue’s two 669hp Caterpillars give a comfortable 26 knot cruising speed with a maximum of 35 knots, so Cherbourg is barely 2½ hours in quiet conditions. Nick said: “The Camargue handles beautifully at sea. It’s a superb hull and the Cats fitted with five-blade props are great cruising engines and surprisingly economical.”

Later in the summer, Nick and his wife will head down to St Helier in Jersey, a favourite destination less than 4hrs from Portland.

“My best man lives in Jersey and we’ve been going there for years. We also like Sark and staying overnight in Dixcart Bay.”

Sometime in the summer *Tosca* will be off



Tosca, a Sunseeker Camargue 50, has a comfortable 26-knot cruising speed

**Award-winning
Evolution Autopilot**



Raymarine’s award-winning Evolution

Autopilot is noted for its accurate performance, 9-axis sensor technology and simple Automagic™ calibration. Appreciate the ease of installation – regardless of boat size, weight or hull material and experience precise course keeping irrespective of speed or sea conditions with ultimate autopilot intelligence

For more information go to:
www.raymarine.co.uk/mby



down to Cornwall and the timeless River Fal. Nick and his wife have spent many idyllic family holidays at Porthscatho, a picturesque Cornish village facing Gerran’s Bay with a splendid anchorage sheltered from the west. Nick is extremely happy with his boat, and with Portland Marina as a “very friendly, well placed base”. He’s looking forward to many years of relaxed cruising.

Favourite harbour St Helier.

Favourite anchorage Dixcart Bay, Sark.

Golden cruising rule “There’s no point having a boat if you don’t use it!”

I thoroughly agree with Nick Moger’s golden rule, and whatever type or size of boat you own, the great thing is to use her in the way that gives you and your crew or family the most pleasure and satisfaction. And it seems there are actually as many different ways to enjoy cruising as there are boat owners. **MBY**