

On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson

The roar of the travel lift drowned out everything as *Patty 'O*, our 52 year old Huckins sedan cruiser came out of her element. Roy, the yard foreman, who was standing on the operator's platform, pulled a lever and the travel lift lumbered off the well and onto terra firma. As soon as the stern cleared the well lip, I was under her, disregarding several warning signs that promised dire consequences for doing just that. Water dripped all over me as I gazed up at the port propeller and shaft. The day before, while coming down the Mystic River, I wasn't paying attention and clipped a floating log washed down by the heavy rain we'd gotten a few days before. I sighed and thought of the repair I was going to have to do.

Patty 'O spends most of her time in the water year-round, only coming out for routine maintenance, or things like this. We'd decided on a short trip to enjoy the first sixty-degree Sunday of the season and revel in the looks from people working on their boats as we got under way and more from folks in the boat yards along the river banks. But on the way back down, I got careless, and as a result, we made the trip home on one engine. Not that the vibration was all that bad, but any vibration needs to be looked at and neither of us was in a hurry, and besides I looked at it as a challenge to get *Patty 'O's* 41-foot length back into her slip with one side down. Now I stood wiping water off my



face, looking at the pretzel that used to be the port propeller, and I could see that the shaft was bent, too.

Roy said some unkind words to me about not waiting until the travel lift stopped before going underneath. I assumed a contrite look and stayed out of the way while Roy and his crew got *Patty 'O* onto timbers and poppets and he stood beside me looking at the damage.

"How'd ya manage that?" he asked, with just a touch of sarcasm in his voice. Roy can be a cynic at times.

"Tree in the river," I said. "Didn't see it."
"Hmmm... looks like the shaft too. Lemme know whatcha gonna do."

Roy walked off leaving me wondering what to tell the Blonde, my wife, when she got home from work. It looked like *Patty 'O* would be out of the water for at least a couple of days, and the Blonde had made it plain when we'd been out of the

water last time that she was not, under any circumstances, going to climb "that ladder" anymore. Inasmuch as *Patty 'O* was our home, it was either climb the ladder or check into the Economy Inn just down the road, but first I wanted to see just what we were up against.

The prop came off pretty easily, but it was evident that it was beyond repair. Oh, I'd take it to the local marine machine shop to get a second opinion, but it sure looked like toast to me. The shaft took a bit longer to pull, and two hours later found me in my pick-up truck on the way to talk to Barry Wilcox, the man to see at Wilcox Marine.

Barry confirmed my diagnosis of the prop and set the shaft up in the jig he used to see how far out of true it was. "I wouldn't attempt to straighten it," he said. "I could, but it'd not be as strong. Boat this size, with those engines..." he didn't have to say any more.

He promised me the new shaft the next afternoon, and said he would order a new 18-by-12 four-bladed prop. That would take a couple of days longer. I wondered if it would be better to put *Patty 'O* back in the water for a few days or listen to the Blonde grumble about hotel living. I decided on the latter.

By the time the Blonde got home, I'd already made reservations both for a room at the

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