

On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson



It's been a tough couple of weeks. It all started when my old pickup truck began making funny noises. A trip to the local transmission emporium confirmed my suspicions: the transmission was ready to quit.

"It sounds like an intermediate band piston," the nice man said. "Judging by the mileage, I think a re-build would be in order."

"I'll get back to you," I said.

Driving back to the marina, I considered the folly of pouring money into an eight year-old vehicle. I'd bought the truck used, it does have a fair amount of mileage, and I know that sometime during the coming winter, it's going to need tires. Oh, well.

I avoided the problem while we shot over to Block Island for what turned out to be a rainy weekend, which suited my mood. And then, as we were topping off at the fuel dock on Sunday afternoon, I tripped over a dock line and fell with a bag of ice in my arms and broke my left wrist in two places. Of course, the next few hours, the majority of which were spent waiting, took place in the emergency room. The Blonde, my wife, had the foresight not to say a word.

So there I was, on a clear, cool Monday afternoon, sitting in *Patty 'O's* cockpit, a glass of iced tea in my right hand, my left arm immovable in a cast and sling, wondering what was going to occur next. Everyone knows that bad

things come in threes.

Ray, the yard manager had come around to see how I was doing. I somehow got the impression that it was more to see if I was thinking the word "sue" rather than any real concern for my welfare. That might be a bit unfair, but it's what I'd have done in his shoes. I assured him that I was all right and that it was my clumsiness that had caused the accident and no fault of anyone else. My mood even got blacker as I thought about the bright work I had planned to re-varnish this week. Not that *Patty 'O* has a lot of it, but we like to keep what we have looking pretty good. Wooden boats get ratty-looking very quickly if you don't stay on top of things.

I moped around most of the week feeling sorry for myself. On Thursday, I had a visit from my friend Ritchie. Ritchie had been very involved in the re-building of *Patty 'O* after she was rammed by a fishing boat a couple of years ago. He's a cabinetmaker by trade and can fix almost anything.

"Well, don't you look a sorry sight?" he said. I replied with an un-repeatable comment. "I heard you took a tumble. Why don't you both come take a ride to Watch Hill with us this weekend? Do you good to get off this bucket."

Ritchie has an older Luhrs 32 that he is in the processes of restoring. I had towed her back from Watch Hill last summer when he'd hit bottom and bent a shaft.

I told him we'd think about it and get back to him. The thought of being guests on someone else's boat suddenly appealed to me. I got us each a beer and the conversation turned to other things. He got up to leave after an hour and again offered the invitation.

That night, when the Blonde got home from work, she insisted that we go out for a bite. "Sport," she said, "it's time." I knew what she meant.

"Ritchie and Martha want us to go to Watch Hill with them this weekend," I said over calamari salad.

"Hey, that's great," she replied. "Now we can see how the other half lives."

I called Ritchie on Friday morning and we agreed to meet them Saturday for breakfast. Ritchie keeps his boat in Mystic, just a short run to Watch Hill. Actually, where we were going is behind Napatree Point, an area known locally as the Kitchen, at the southern end of little Narragansett Bay. Ritchie's boat, *Summer Place*, is powered by twin Chrysler 318 gas engines, and with the price of gasoline these days, they don't venture very far

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