

# On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson



Spring coughed and sputtered into life and now the segue into summer is well underway. *Patty 'O* looks as good as ever, sporting a new coat of gleaming topside paint. The bridge canvas we bought last year looks like it just came from the sail loft, which in fact, it has. To us, the cost of having it maintained and stored professionally is well worth it. Not cheap, but you generally get what you pay for.

We've only been on one overnighter so far, unusual for us. This was mostly due to the Blonde's schedule. She spent the better part of the winter semi-laid off from her job. That's an ambiguous term for working anywhere from one to sometimes three days a week. She was lucky; many of the people in her firm had gotten the axe, but it said a lot about how valuable she's thought of because the powers that be kept her on. She's an architect and, if I say so myself, pretty good at what she does.

But now, she's back to working five days a week, and she wants to stay on top of what's going on there, so we've kept close to home. That doesn't mean we haven't been underway, far from it. Two or three nights a week we've been going on what we fondly call "dinner cruises", and that's exactly what they are. Unless she's working on a hot project, the

Blonde usually is home by four-thirty. On the day of a dinner cruise, she'll either pick something up and we'll chow down on the go, or we'll drop the hook and grill. The choices are many. Up the river, past the bridge and the Coast Guard Academy, continuing past the Naval Submarine base. In these times, one doesn't stop in this part of the river. To do so, would attract the attention of some very nervous men with guns who immediately inquire as to your intentions. Anyway, we're using *Patty O'* and discovering that you don't have to travel more than a few miles to enjoy the water. Another plus is that we can invite friends, who normally wouldn't be able to spend a day or weekend with us, but are happy to join us for dinner afloat.

I've been putting in a lot of work on the little runabout we're restoring, too. She now sports many new frames, and her new bottom was getting close to be closed in. And I'm beginning to think that maybe, just maybe, she will see water this summer for the first time in many, many years. It's always been a dream of mine to have a small boat that we could use like a car. We're located in a very good area for that. There's very little that can't be had within walking distance of a dock around here. Not everything, mind you, but enough

so that my goal is to see how little I can use my pickup, once *Mustard*, the little boat, is up and running.

The Blonde's sister and her husband are social butterflies, and host several cookouts each summer. We rarely go for two very good reasons: one, we are usually off somewhere in *Patty 'O*, and two, we're not really comfortable in the crowd that usually come to their bashes. He's a CPA and she's a lawyer and while we get along very well, we just don't have a lot in common. Once or twice a summer they come for a day cruise with us and seem to enjoy themselves, but I'm always trying to think up stuff to say. This year, though, because we were staying close to home, we accepted an invitation to their annual Memorial Day picnic.

There were fifteen or so people there and most of them were professionals, including the Blonde. I was sure I was the only one who

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wasn't. We mingled and chatted with people and answered all the usual questions about living on a small boat. My sister-in-law takes great delight in telling people how her sister lives. Most of the questions were what we're used to hearing, but one, from a guy who, it turns out, had done a fair amount of sailing in the Caribbean, was different.

"What kind of gun do you carry?" he asked. "We always had a shotgun aboard. I'd really feel naked getting underway without one."

It's a fair question, I suppose, in this day and age of Wild West violence.

"We don't carry one," I replied. "Never felt the need."

A look of disbelief crossed his face and he quickly changed the subject.

I suppose the decision to carry a gun aboard is mostly a personal one. But my thought is that carrying a firearm aboard a boat is likely to bring more trouble than it's worth. First of all, there's the problem of what kind of gun to carry. A handgun is out of the question, especially in the area we cruise. While we're based in Connecticut, it's not all that far out in the Sound before you are in

New York waters. And you do not want to be boarded by the Coast Guard in New York waters with a handgun licensed in Connecticut. As all of us know, the first question asked by a boarding Coast Guard officer is likely to be, "Do you have any weapons aboard?"

You certainly don't want to lie to a federal officer, and have your handgun turn up in a subsequent search. You'd really be in hot water. It would be less traumatic if it were a shotgun, but law enforcement officers get nervous around any weapon that's not under their direct control. And do you really think carrying a gun is going to be a deterrent? Ask yourself this: in the event that a bad guy comes aboard your boat at night and makes threatening noises, would you be able to utilize deadly force against him?

A normal person, who is untrained in deploying deadly force, is most likely going to hesitate just long enough to allow an intruder to shoot first. I know, there are people reading this who THINK they are able to act if threatened, but unless you've done it before, you don't know. Most of us so-called "Baby Boomers" have served in the military, and many think that the training they received

there will carry them through. But remember this: about two percent of serving military actually see meaningful combat. The rest serve in some sort of backup function. This does not give you the mindset needed to take another's life, no matter how much you think so. But enough of that.

Tuesday, it was back at it in my friend Ritchie's barn, finishing up the little boat's bottom. Around two, I had measured and cut the shutter plank, the last one to go into place. Sitting in my "thinking chair", celebrating the event with a cold glass of lemonade, I marveled for the umpteenth time of how incomplete our lifestyle really is. Punching up the Blonde's number on my cell, once I'd found it, I asked, "Hey lady, wanna do Italian tonight? We'll drop the hook upriver and be back in the morning."

"You're on," she said. "I'll bring the wine."

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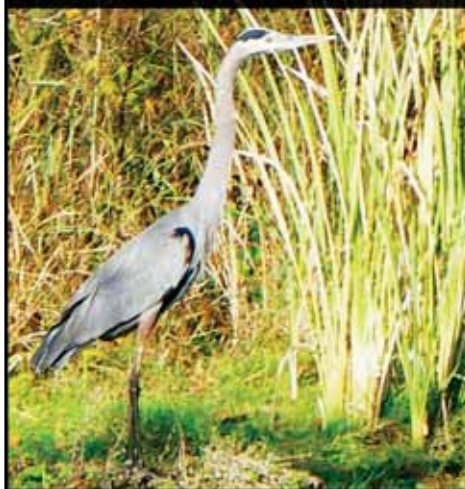
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