

# On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson



Roy, the yard foreman, pulled a lever on the Travelift and the little boat rose gracefully off her trailer. Pulling another lever, he guided the machine onto the well piers.

"Ok!" he shouted. "Do whatcha gotta do!"

He lowered the boat until she hung with her bow at eye level. The Blonde, (my wife) and I walked out on the pier, wine glasses in hand. We toaster her, and the Blonde dribbled a little of the Chablis on her bow, which I promptly rinsed off, not wanting to stain the varnish.

"Okay, *Mustard*," she said. "Go get 'em!" It was not the most eloquent speech for a launching, but then this wasn't a christening. Walking off the pier, I gave Roy the thumbs up and the Travelift roared into life. We watched as the little boat caressed the water for the first time in over forty years.

"Lemme know how she's doin'," Roy said as he walked past us on his way back to the shop. "She'll make up in a few hours," he added.

Like any planked wooden boat, *Mustard* leaked like a sieve when she first went into the water, this in spite of my soaking her down good with the yard hose for the past two days while getting the ten million things done in preparation for her return to her element.

She looked just grand.

One of the neat things about old wooden boats is that when they are restored, they truly can be made to look like new, that is, of course, because

you replace bad stuff with new. On some of the better-looking, older, restored wooden boats very little remains of the original. Everything is usually replaced gradually. So you can think of wooden boat restoration as truly a work in progress. Try that with a 20-year-old fiberglass boat.

We've been working on this project for several years now. *Mustard* is a Century Sea Maid, eighteen feet long. We found her laid up in a New Hampshire barn, where she had been for forty years. She was in pretty rough shape, her engine sporting a large crack due to no one's draining the block when she was trundled into the barn after her owner passed on. Her bottom has been completely replaced. All her metal trim was restored and re-chromed. Her engine crack was repaired "old school", and she is finished bright, just as she was in her prime.

I was like an expectant father. With a wave, the Blonde jumped into her Mini-Cooper and went off to work. It being a Wednesday, the yard was quiet, which is why we chose to do this mid-week. Knowing that it was going to take a while for all her seams to swell up, I'd hoped that Roy would let her sit in the Travelift's slings at least until the portable pump could keep up. It took four hours before I felt comfortable enough to go and get Roy.

"Why don't we wait 'til after lunch?" he said. I hadn't realized that noon had crept up on us.

"Sure," I replied, knowing that the longer she sat there, the better. "I'll be right here."

Back aboard *Patty O'*, I threw together a quick sandwich, even though I wasn't really hungry. Grabbing a bottle of water, I was soon back sitting on the Travelift pier with my feet hanging over the water.

Roy appeared and climbed into the Travelift's cab. I had already rigged lines fore and aft and Charlie, one of Roy's yard boys, took the stern line and I handled the bow. Slowly Roy lowered her all the way into the water and gently backed the Travelift out from under her. Now she was truly in her element. Once she was tied to the floating dock next to the well, I stepped aboard for the first time. It was almost like she was welcoming me.

I gave it another half-hour and then, with Charlie running the yard's work boat, we got her tied off next to *Patty O'*. I really appreciated being able to do this. We're not going to permanently moor her there, though. I'm not about to lay out the money for a second forty-foot slip, so once she's all

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