

Boatman Tells of Cruise From Morehead to Florida

(Editor's Note: In the following article, Bill Price of Lewis-Price Buick Co., Morehead City, tells of his experiences during a boat trip along the Inland Waterway from Morehead City to Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. He was accompanied by his two sons, Mark and Bill Jr.)

By BILL PRICE

Sunday, July 31, 1960, was God's Day for sure as the dawn broke just after 5 a.m.

This was the eventful day, the beginning of the voyage of our new "Wanderer," and we pulled out from under Larry Cannon's boat yard shed, at Morehead City, just at 6 a.m.

Everything was quiet and serene as we went out of Pelletier Creek into the sound just north of the Morehead Biltmore Hotel, and turned south. The two diesels never sounded better. What an exhilarating feeling!

We passed Broad Creek, with Mark, the 14-year-old, at the helm, and it was our anticipated hope to make Myrtle Beach, 130 miles to the south, before sunset. I climbed atop of the cabin to hoist my "Fabulous Fisherman" pennant which Tony Seaman and Ted Garner of the Sanitary Restaurant, had given me the evening before.

On Saturday afternoon we had sailed the "Wanderer" down to Tony's dock, christening her with a bottle of coke. Our first experience with the bottom came, as it does with every boatman who travels "the ditch" as the water is affectionately called, just 20 miles south of Morehead.

We slid across a bar momentarily, as evidently, we passed too close to the buoy. In our Inland Waterway Guide, a must for every boatman, it mentions that yachts drawing more than 4 feet of water are subject to having scrapes with the bottom, though of course, the intracoastal waterway is supposed to be 12 feet deep.

Shortly after lunch, and we had excellent cooking facilities aboard, the weather started threatening with rain showers, and about that time the left engine started acting up.

First, the temperature of the engine became erratic, and this was followed by a dropping off in the rpms, and finally she quit altogether.

Lifting the engine hatch cover gave an opportunity for the engine to cool and after some 20 minutes or so it was restarted only to act up again in some 30 to 40 minutes.

By this time we were approaching Southport and it was raining hard. We progressed down the Cape Fear River, which can get pretty rough at times.

We decided to re-fuel at Southport and check the engine before continuing on, as it was now mid-afternoon. The left fuel tank seemed to take more oil than necessary but this was attributed to the increased consumption which might have been caused by laboring hard while running.

By now we decided to move on, but doubted making Myrtle Beach, especially with only half-power, though both engines worked out of Southport for awhile.

While standing in the bow, as we passed through a pontoon-operated bridge, it was noted that the boat was listing to the starboard (the right), so I went back to the stern, lifted the after hatch and saw that the bilge was filling with oil.

Checking the engine room compartment confirmed our suspicions that a broken oil line was pumping oil directly from the fuel line into the bilge. This revealed the source of our engine trouble.

With the broken line she was taking in air as well as oil and this was causing her to overheat, and ultimately stop.

Just before dark, about 7 p.m. Little River loomed up ahead and we docked for the night. The dockmaster told us that there was no diesel mechanic there but that there was a fisherman who had a diesel engine in his fishing boat and we could check with him the following morning.

The end of the day was delightful. We had a steak dinner at the Wayside Motel-Hotel, the owner being the dockmaster and his wife, an English lady from Cheshire. As I had spent some time in that section three years ago with my friend Norman Fidler, we had some pleasant exchanges of mutual experiences.

By 9 the next day we had made repairs. My son Bill had come up from Myrtle Beach to join us, and we were ready for what proved to be a delightfully pleasant afternoon down the South

Carolina portion of the waterway.

A beautiful sunset found us entering Georgetown, S. C. harbor, where the dockmaster's first comment was "he could see us coming from afar off because our navigation lights were of such size and intensity."

So many of the boats you see today, even the larger ones, are sporting streamlined running lights, not much larger than a man's thumb, and this seems to be a hazard to our waterway program rather than a blessing.

Tuesday morning we were up and away from the dock by 7 o'clock with heavy clouds and rain showers for the run to Beaufort, S. C.

Probably, the most interesting sight was the birds of various kinds, some unknown to me, while the most beautiful were the white herons, feeding along the banks and standing in the marsh grass.

On passing one drainage ditch, narrow and extending back into the marsh a hundred feet or so, there must have been 50 or 75 of these birds, all white, standing in the shallow water, evidently feeding upon the insects and small marine life.

Along about now, the pesky green flies made the wearing of shorts impossible as they can really bite, as anyone who's ever been to the beach realizes.

Aerosol spray cans of insect repellent however, proved to be quite effective against them, so we sprayed liberally.

How Noah was able to keep these two insects (and the two mosquitoes) aboard the ark without swatting them will always be a mystery to me! I know what I would have done.

By noon we had lost the flies when we passed under the Charleston bridge, a high structure with a clearance of 32 feet, across a beautiful harbor.

We almost misinterpreted the channel markers in the broad harbor and got into shallow water but with the aid of our very explicit charts, compass, and direction finder, we were soon on our way again.

These modern aids to navigation are certainly indispensable. Probably for the intracoastal waterway the most valuable instrument we have aboard is a depth finder, an instrument which has a scanning disc very similar to what we know as radar, with electrical impulses being sent from the boat to the bottom. The time it takes them to bounce back to the hull is electrically recorded on a flashing light bucket against a scale of feet or fathoms for measuring the depth of water under the hull.

Wednesday dawned cloudy with low scud and the threat of rain, though the day was comfortable at 77 degrees. This was the day we spent cleaning up and polishing some chrome until early afternoon when it happened.

Mark had called my attention to the fact that the oil pressure on the left engine had dropped somewhat, the engine temperature had risen, though very little, yet the rpms were holding steady.

After watching for a period of time and believing that no fur-

ther troubles were evident, the situation eased off and we went back to our chores.

All at once a terrific chatter set up in the left engine, and I rushed to the bridge and stopped the motor. Not being far from St. Simons Island in Georgia, and Olsen's Yacht Yard, we proceeded there to tie up and spend the night.

St. Simons Island, more often known as Sea Island, Ga., is a tourist mecca. Mr. Olsen, the yard owner, is a delightful person, and by 8 o'clock, Thursday morning he had his diesel mechanic aboard.

The diagnosis—broken bearings. After consultations and distant phone calls it was decided to proceed on one engine, to Ft. Lauderdale, our destination, as parts were more readily available at the Miami warehouse. This being the first day actually that the weather was bright and sunny with the dawn, our spirits were brighter and we left Olsen's about 10:30.

Since leaving Morehead our breakfasts had been a real treat as our friend Champ Lewis had brought aboard the evening before we departed a dozen or so of thick slices of ham which he had prepared for us.

Thursday passed delightfully and after eight hours of running, we tied up at Jacksonville Beach in Florida.

As we were going to try to reach Lauderdale by Sunday evening, we figured it meant three days of dawn to dusk running, so at 5 o'clock Friday morning we were away from the dock, in the dark. Our strong searchlight and placid waters made the dawn experience one never to be forgotten, and soon we were headed south beyond Ponte Vedra, and on to St. Augustine.

Have you ever tried water with sugar on your grapenuts? Neither had I. After bragging while on our 14-year-old chef, he calmly approached me after leaving St. Augustine and asked me if I'd like to have water on my grapenuts as there was no milk.

At first I demurred, just out of good common sense, but later when he came up the steps with his own, eating avidly, I acquiesced, because I wanted breakfast of sort sort.

Frankly, not only because necessity is the mother of invention, I found them reasonably good and recommended them to you if you ever run out of milk!

South of St. Augustine we paralleled the beach strip which carries Highway A-1A, and noted that road machinery was hard at work as this highway has been in need of major repairs for some years.

Summer is not the usual time for the yachtman going south, and seems to bring incredulous questions from those whom we tell we're headed south.

Nevertheless, there are several reasons for going to Florida at this particular time, the main one being that vacation months are the only time that a trip like this can be made with children. Such a trip in summer likewise, has its good aspects, there being little traffic on the waterway.

In addition, most of the homes that we pass are boarded up for

the summer, with their boats swung up in the davits, or pulled up on dry land, which means that we do not have the disadvantage of having to proceed slowly. The wake from a fast boat will play havoc with boats tied at moorings, and there are numerous signs cautioning to slow down—no wake.

We reached Daytona Beach and there are a series of bridges that cross the sound, as this is an extremely long community with its advertised 2000 cottages directly on the ocean.

New Smyrna, will long be remembered as the hottest and the most uncomfortable evening of the entire trip, due especially to the minute sand flies, I suppose they are, that pass through your screen just like it wasn't there.

Spray was very effective but you had to repeat it every couple of hours or so, and in the morning there were literally thousands of the little pesky varminets dead, just inside the window screen.

Saturday's dawn was lovely, and we were away by 5:30, the starting of the engine being the signal for the two boys to shake loose from their bunks and help with the casting off.

They were more conscientious now about this maneuver, checking every detail of equipment carefully, having left our new plastic hose and chrome nozzle on the dock at Jacksonville Beach.

During the early morning we turned west, leaving Mosquito Lagoon and entered the renowned Indian River, by way of Haulover Canal, which we remembered for its swing bridge which necessitated us turning around three times while waiting on the operator to wind open by means of a turn-style affair, the center span.

This caused our first notation on a chart interpreted as "slow bridge," in order that we will allow more time for our three blast signal on the return trip north.

Later in the morning, further

notations were given to the chart where two channel markers were missing, which we report in the evening when we stop.

Of course, summer being slow traffic season along the waterway, it is imagined that the Coast Guard engineers lift a lot of the markers for repairs and replacement.

In any event, its always well to advise the authorities of missing markers on the waterway, the same as it would be courtesy to remind the street department of a broken street light or burned-out stoplight.

Saturday was our longest run, in terms of hours, 14 to be exact, from 5:30 a.m. to just after dark, 7:30 p.m. This late hour found us eager to make Ft. Lauderdale early Sunday, and rather than docking at Vero Beach, which we passed at 6 p.m. we went on to Ft. Pierce.

After passing the bridge at Ft. Pierce, the turn to the yacht basin is sharp to the right, past a long row of high voltage poles anchored in the water. The basin is presumably marked by two 50 gallon drums floating in the water with reflectors. We missed the drums, or at least one of them, and in paralleling the

shore, once again, our depth indicator was invaluable, as the water at low tide was barely four feet.

Although the channel was new to us, we had little difficulty, yet the dock attendant seemed incredulous that we navigated it so successfully.

His second comment was that the boat docked just ahead of us, a 31-footer from Maryland, had attempted to run straight in, meaning crossing a bar, about an hour earlier; had become stuck, and had to be rescued by the Coast Guard.

This is the sort of thing that indicates inattention to the charts and to the Inland Waterway Guide, which are invaluable to the boatman, as the water is very unforgiving of mistakes or neglect!

We approached Jupiter Inlet, one of the nicer and more luxurious Florida developments, complete with yacht club and harbor, golf course, inlet to the sea, etc.

As most of the homes along this route are rather substantial with each having its own dock and craft, the water area is closely patrolled to keep boat speeds at a

minimum, and the "slow-no wake" signs, were everywhere.

This gives you an excellent opportunity to view the beautiful surroundings, and from Palm Beach the trip by Delray Beach, and Boca Raton, on to Ft. Lauderdale, kept one's interest high.

In late afternoon and on a beautiful Sunday, we sighted the fabulous Bahia Mar yacht basin, now the most famous in the country, and probably the entire world, with slips for over 400 yachts, full now and most all year round.

We filled our tanks with diesel fuel at Pier 66 and called an old Navy friend, living at Ft. Lauderdale, who came down and took us for a ride through the myriad of waterways lined with beautiful homes, to his own, where we docked as his guests.

Ft. Lauderdale truly earns its name as the "Venice" of America! What a glorious spot to call your destination, and we all look forward to two weeks in the sun.

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