

Back to the future



She looks positively antique but, like *Grey Merlin* which we featured in January, Bill Stanton's *Romilly*, is another Nigel Irens-designed 'wolf in sheep's clothing' – a boat which combines modern lines with traditional aesthetics. Too good to be true? Bill looks back on last year's summer cruise and draws some interesting conclusions.

“As I write these words, *Romilly* is still laid up, but it won't be long before I start polishing the Copperbot and getting her ready for the season. I'm hoping it will be as much fun as last summer, when we sailed our new boat down to Cornwall for her first coastal cruise. As you can imagine, we weren't quite sure what to expect...

RIGHT: *Romilly* lies close to the wind when you haul the main luff down tight. **BELOW:** With three onboard, our 200-mile cruise would be a thorough test of her capabilities.



Picture by Wild West Marine Photography

The plan was to sail to the Fowey Classics, then join the feeder race to Falmouth Classics and have a leisurely coast-hop back to Salcombe. Although my wife Sue and I had slept aboard for the occasional weekend, this would test everything properly, because there would be three of us (which meant our friend David Goldsmith sleeping on an air-bed in the cockpit) but also because of all that gear which insists on accompanying you as soon as someone mentions the word 'cruise'.

Romilly's narrow waterline makes her initially sensitive, so you must take care when filling the generous spaces beneath the cockpit benches, and also make sure she doesn't trim by the bow – which can happen if you overload her. Under the cockpit benches go the outboard and fuel tank, the anchor and cable, fenders, warps, an Avon 7 in its valise, a three-gallon water container and a stowage box containing oil lamps, a single Gaz burner and a small kit of stainless pans – all kept in place by 'dodgers' or jammed behind the deep toe-rail at the edge of the sole boards. Above seat level, the rolled-up cockpit tent stows beneath the side deck, the beaching legs lie in the quarters and, under the after deck, the kedge and an

OWNER'S CV

Name: William Stanton

Occupation: Drama lecturer and writer

Age: 52 yrs

Experience: 40 yrs

Home port: Salcombe

Previous boats: 35ft West Solent - his first boat; 19ft Memory day sailer; Drascombe Peterboat, *Romilly*

all-important mushroom crate packed with boxes of nibbles. The bilge makes a good cold cellar in which to stow cans of fortifying brew.

We crossed Salcombe Bar at 0940 on a rather grey morning with wind WSW 3. With a neap tide turning against us, we began to work to windward. As we passed Bolt Tail with our first can from the 'cellar' we asked Notus, god of the south wind, to try a little harder. He wasn't listening, but Zephyrus was and sent us a westerly 3-4 for our pains. Classic summer cruise, we said, ten days with the wind on the nose.

Romilly will lie close to the wind when you haul the main luff down tight and we made good progress in a series of close fetches to port, which enabled us to stem the tide, then the occasional starboard tack to get another offing. *Romilly's* better tack seems to be to port because the mainsail lies on the starboard side of the mast, so we were lucky not to weather-bow the tide much.

As we passed Plymouth we saw Greg and Lavinia Powesland's delightful 1885 *Colinette* working inshore round Rame Head, looking every inch a little

PRACTICAL BOAT OWNER



Picture by Wild West Marine Photography

Victorian yacht with her long spars and cotton sails. All those inches, in fact, which have taken Greg eleven years to restore. The sight of her and another two gaffers leaving the Sound gave us a pleasant sense of anticipation – that old and new classics were emerging from creeks and harbours all over the South West and working their way towards Falmouth.

By 1630 the tide had set us east of Looe Island, so we swallowed our pride and motored clear to catch the dying breeze, then beat as far as the Udder Rock buoy before donking the last four miles into Fowey, to enter at 1945 in company with *Celine* (a Heard 23 footer) from the Yealm. A good day's sail, with 47 miles on the log. I don't like using the outboard and usually sail with it stowed and the fairing plug in (prop drag costs half a knot) but that 5hp was the

difference between getting into Fowey or not. Poor old *Colinette*, engineless as first built, was stuck at Looe, where she remained uncomfortably weather-bound on a buoy outside for 36 hours.

We also had an uncomfortable night of it in Fowey, rafted up on a buoy with *Celine* and Peter Lucas' fine little 1902 *Ripple* from Dartmouth (also engineless) because a southerly blew up, straight into the harbour mouth, and had us all rolling through the middle watch. I got up at about 0230 and lowered *Romilly's* plate, which helped damp the roll somewhat. David, blissful on his air-bed at the after end of the cockpit seat, snored gently on.

Friday dawned grey and blustery, with the southerly still blowing F4-5. The day's fun was a sail-past in Fowey harbour, followed by a 'pleasantly casual' race around buoys just outside, as the

Classics programme put it. And off we all went, beating up to the harbour entrance and swooping back again, *Romilly* single-reefed and no mizzen, round and round until 1430, when we made a flying start to the race in short steep waves, but failed dismally to recognise any of the buoys in the grey heave and scud outside. So we scooted back into the harbour and had a sail up the river until the echosounder showed under two metres, then beat back to the buoy.

Sailing all the way

It was a modest day's sailing, and great fun to do the whole thing without the engine, showing that *Romilly* will bash her way to windward in steep seas, when the hatch is tight shut and the crew need their oilskins, or sail gently up a river between wooded shores with the plate half up. Everyone who participated in the Classics sail-past was given a bottle of wine by the Gallants, for which we were most grateful.

The early forecast for the Friday's feeder race to Falmouth was not encouraging, SW 4-5 going W 6-7 after lunch. We had a good early breakfast beneath the cockpit tent (orange juice, bacon butties, coffee, rolls and jam) then nipped ashore to the Fowey Gallants' loo for the last time. (We avoid bucket-and-chuckit in harbour, although the specimens drifting past announced that either South West Water was working overtime or else every yacht with a sea lavatory was using it). I decided to get away before the race start at 1000, hoping to be well round Dodman Point before the weather deteriorated. *Romilly's* cockpit has to be taken into account in decisions like this, even though when Nigel Irens did a buoyancy test on her last winter, she floated with the cockpit full, with the water level just below the main hatch washboards.

Prepared for the worst

We beat out of Fowey at 0920 under reefed main and mizzen in full oilskins, lifejackets and everything well stowed, the chart in its plastic wallet on the seat. Outside of course we met two-foot wavelets and a SSW F3, so we quickly shook out the reef and, as on our passage to Fowey, laid a series of long port tacks to the Dodman. But those classical jokers weren't finished: Helios peeped between the thinning clouds (where was that black menacing wall, advancing from the west?) as we passed outside the feeder race 'gate' at Gwineas rocks. They were ideal conditions, our only regret being that we hadn't waited for the start of the race. But then, we thought, as we took more comfort from our cellar, if it had blown up as forecast with a W F7 on the nose...

We sailed straight on to Falmouth in bright sunshine and entered at 1420, a passage of five hours. The race winner,

Romilly: a new breed of boat?

The 22 foot *Romilly* is the smaller sister to the 29-foot *Roxane*, which was conceived as a one-off act of whimsy by Nigel Irens, who's best known for designing stripped-to-the-bone, race-going multihulls. It was his designs which formed the basis of the mighty ENZA, in which Sir Peter Blake and Robin Knox-Johnston stormed round the world in a mere 74 days in 1995. But he wanted to design something much simpler — which combined the best of the old with the best of the new. To achieve the desired result, he employed the latest computer design techniques to ensure she would be quick, nimble and stable, then mocked up a wide variety of life-size saloons to arrive at the optimum accommodation plan. As soon as news of the project slipped out in May 1994, he was deluged with letters from all round the world expressing support for his project and a desire to buy. A mould was taken and a GRP version offered for sale late that year. In early 1995 Irens followed up with the smaller *Romilly*, the first example of which was delivered to Bill Stanton in June 1995. Irens wanted this to be a boat for the average man, so priced it keenly at £18,000 +VAT. The original builders, Dart-



Designer Nigel Irens



ington Boat Works, planned to make a dozen boats a year, but being built to such a high standard, there can't have been much profit in it. Even after they raised the price to a more realistic £21,500+VAT, and having completed ten boats, the company still ran into financial difficulties.

In January the rights passed to Bridgend Boat Company of Newton Ferrers ((01752) 698333), who are now looking for orders to justify building a run of at least three for Dartington's final list price.



fraction of a knot out of the boat, until the wind began to pick up at lunchtime.

Almost home

Then *Romilly* began to gurgle along, still beating inshore, and as we worked our way round Burgh Island, in came a blanket of fog. We beat round Bolt Tail, carefully timing our tacks and making a not-too-intimate contact with the shore at the end of each starboard tack.

The wind died at last and we motored gently round Bolt Head to enter Salcombe, where we were met by a sight we had gloriously escaped on our cruise, a welter of motor boats treating the place like the M25. It reminded us (as if

we needed it) that we had just sailed over 200 miles in our little boat, using just 15 litres of fuel in the process and enjoying the company of an extraordinary collection of classics, restorations and replicas, all drawn together by a love of the tradition of sail and by two summer events which celebrated the skills of seamanship.

What did the trip tell me about *Romilly*? She's quick, of course — not just in speed, but acceleration. But more than that, for a small boat she's very good at sea, her motion through waves is like that of a much bigger boat. In short, an excellent boat to sail!

