

Lamb to the slaughter – launching Maralyn

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AVING SPENT THE WINTER repairing and refurbishing Maralyn, my newly acquired Shetland 535, it was decided to launch her at Mistley Marine and a date was set. The day dawned cold, wet, misty with a Force 4 onshore wind.

After struggling to leave the dock and hitting a large metal port carrier, our engine broke down midway to the hook. Not too bad, you experienced, hardened sailors might say; but to a novice on his maiden voyage with only one engine and no oars to use – Ahhhhh!!! However, after a bit of a panic our little craft drifted onto a mooring in Thorn Reach, where a repair was made and we finally reached her new mooring along Middlebridge Creek.

Once recovered from my first voyage, and feeling a little more confident, I set off on a bright but chilly April morning in a small pram dinghy. This I had borrowed from my friend and mentor Graham Pontet and, with the aid of a small outboard I had just overhauled, made my way along Middlebridge Creek to the little Shetland moored not far from the railway bridge. Now, being a land lubber and not previously having had to worry about wind and tide, I came alongside but before being able to make hold, was

whisked along by the incoming tide. At this point I made a frantic grab at the transom, forgetting everything I had been told and found myself sitting in water instead of a dinghy.

As Ponty's dinghy submerged, taking with it not only my rebuilt outboard but also my shoes, fuel tank, and binoculars, not to mention my lunch, I was left floundering in winter clothing and wellies. Falling into water is considerably easier than getting out, especially trying to climb aboard a swinging boat. Realising I could just touch bottom I decided to save my boots and keep them on. One little trick I've learned, by dropping an outboard down to its working position you can then use it as a step to climb up on.

Once aboard and boots emptied I motored over to the quay. There I was, standing in a very large puddle, dripping wet in my stockinged feet, I was greeted by Ponty, who's powers of observation I was beginning to doubt, with "thought you were going out today, Mike?"

After replacing the non-repairable engine whilst moored on the visitors buoy, not a good idea, as several mislaid smaller items are still in the channel somewhere, I realised changing engines of different types will leave unwanted holes in the transom. However, with

my still limited knowledge and armed with a bag of DIY goodies, a brand new pair of waders, an oar for support and Ponty to help and guide me, we set off from Cattawade bridge to walk to my mooring.

With Ponty being the lighter, he soon had a substantial lead over me, plus he had found another occupation by way of a yacht that had broken its mooring in a strong wind a couple of nights earlier.

I decided to leave walking in the relatively hard-bottomed channel and walk in the now exposed muddy edges. I soon found out you do not walk where boats have been swinging. As I stepped into the smooth circle, it engulfed my leg almost to my thigh. Within seconds my lovely, new waders had almost vanished, my cries of help to Ponty fell short of the distance he had now put between us, and in the desperate struggle that ensued I stepped out of one of my waders, fell forward into the mire, I sliced through my thumb on a shell. At last I managed to get free and eventually reached my boat by now totally exhausted.

On his return, Ponty found me sitting breathless covered in mud and bleeding profusely. I commented "I don't think I'm cut out for this sort of thing" to which he replied, "don't worry this happens to everyone".

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