

Findochty to Inverness

Part 1

Neil Jenkins, the prospective owner of Jenna a 26 ft Westerly Griffon, had contacted me through the Westerly Association to discuss the pros and cons of this type of boat.

He and his wife, Tina, joined me aboard my Griffon, Heart of Gold one weekend in July and was so taken by the performance that he decided he would go and see the one for sale in Caley Brokerage, which was lying in Findochty.

I did not hear from him for some considerable time after that initial contact and was surprised to hear that he had contacted Gwyn for assistance in sailing his new acquisition from Findochty to his home port of Lochinver. As I had the first contact with Neil, Gwyn asked if I would complete the first leg of its journey to Inverness.

I readily agreed and was picked up from home on a Tuesday night and after dropping off Tina? (his wife) car at Muirton Basin in Inverness, we arrived at Findochty around 19.00.

Neil had told me that the boat came complete with a survey and I assumed it would be in pretty reasonable condition. My first impression of the boat was not the best, many of the deck fittings were secured by mild steel nuts and bolts and brown lines of rust from these fittings gave it the look of a sadly neglected boat.

I was to learn that the previous owner was a farmer, which would explain the boarding ladder which was obviously recovered from an old Combine Harvester, it was worse than useless as it was secured to the Push pit with a rope which would be well out of reach for anyone unlucky enough to trying to get on board from the water.

I had agreed to fit a new Impeller to the water pump and a new fuel filters this I did, before we went for an evening meal at the local hotel. During the meal I explained the morning? passage plan to an attentive Neil and Tina. I planned to leave the harbour at 05.30 so suggested it might be a good idea to turn in early.

Back at the boat I had the forward cabin whilst the owners slept in the main cabin. Many Westerly? of this age normally have drooping headlining, not this one, it had been ripped out leaving the broken down foam stuck to the fibreglass, still the bed was OK and I drifted off to sleep.

Wednesday 05.00: I awoke to the sounds of activity in the main cabin and after confirming that they were dressed I emerged to have a cup of coffee before setting sail. It was obvious that neither Neil or Tina were used to sailing with the tide as they seemed to take for ever to get themselves organised, I became increasingly more agitated as the clock ticked by. **06.00:** I practically threw Tina and her belongings off the boat, slipped the lines before we became tide locked in the harbour as the tide was now falling quite rapidly.

We were well clear of the harbour when the first problem arose, the engine spluttered to a halt! We quickly rolled out the foresail and although it was keeping us moving it was a very tired looking sail, we then hoisted the main to find that it was in a worse condition than the foresail.

I left Neil at the helm and went below to determine the fault with the engine, it had been drawing air at one of the filters and I adjusted the seating on the bowl, bled the system and fired her up.

With barely a slight breeze, right on our nose, I suggested we keep the engine going but it cut out again and I found that it had still been taking air. I quickly found the problem and bled it again to find that it was running quite smoothly.

As we passed the mouth of Lossiemouth Harbour the overheating alarm came on so we had to put in to determine the problem.

I removed the thermostat housing to find that it was working fine but the whole thing was blocked with a black sticky mess. On closer examination the waterway was blocked by an old piece of impeller and after removing that, clearing the waterways and started to replace everything, I then discovered that the ?ring was completely useless so went in search of a garage to source one. The guy at the garage also gave me some jointing compound to replace the housing.

By the time we got all this done it was close to 10.00, we had done 12.5 Nautical Miles, only a quarter of the way to Inverness, so the passage plan was out of the window!

Trying to make the best of a bad day, we set off again with renewed hope. All went well until around mid-day when the overheating alarm starting buzzing again and Neil could see water in the bottom of the boat, he lifted the floorboards to see that we were indeed taking water, I asked for the handle to the bilge pump and started pumping nothing! The pump was not working!

I told Neil that the only thing to do now was get a bucket and start baling, as soon as he started this he told that the water was warm. A quick check in the engine compartment revealed that where there should have been a coolant drain cock on the engine block, there was an old bolt covered in sealant jammed into the hole and held in by a block of wood against the injection pump.

We were halfway between the South Sutor and Burghead at this point and I decided to make straight for Cromarty, Neil spent the rest of the trip baling and I spent the rest of the trip wishing I was on my own boat.

We did manage to get to Cromarty at around 14.00 and Neil asked what are you going to do now?

I am off to the pub said I!!

The following weekend I did a temporary repair to the block and we made the uneventful trip from Cromarty to Caley Marina where an engineer would complete the repair before Jenna continued her journey through the canal and onto Lochinver, not with me aboard, I might add

George Selvester

14/11/09

Part 2

Bill and I visited Jenna in Caley Marina on the Caledonian Canal, the Wednesday before we were due to sail so as we could look around and find where everything was. As George had left her, so we found her, in a pretty sorry state although the raw water drain plug had been fixed and the engine started easily. This boat desperately needed a lot of TLC both inside and out.

Saturday arrived and we stepped aboard with our kit bags at 8.00am. I immediately went down to the canal office to sort out the transit licence while Bill prepared the boat for our departure.

Having completed all the formalities, we cast off just before 9.00am to make our way along to Tomnahurich Swing Bridge for the first opening of the day. We tied up at the bridge pontoon and I walked along to have a chat with the operator, who, very kindly, agreed let us through immediately. Moving sedately through the still waters, we arrived at Dochgarroch Lock where, again, we were let through very quickly and then continued onto Loch Ness.

The wind only ever blows in two directions along Loch Ness, either with you or against you, and, as usual, it was right on the nose. The loch was quite choppy to start with but after passing Drumnadrochit, it calmed down and we made good time.

Arriving at the Fort Augustus around 4.30pm, I went off to find the lock keepers who were in the process of locking down two Irish fishing boats. They said that if they could get the fishing boats to the bottom by 5.00pm, they would take us up immediately. We were in luck and managed to get to the top

in a record time of 30 minutes. Chatting with the lock keepers on the way up, they said that it had been a very busy summer and some boats had to wait two days to get past this flight, which left some very unhappy people who had chartered cruisers. In the event we did not need to hurry as, later, another fishing boat had paid for a late locking down in order to catch up with his pals, who were already at the bottom.

The evening was spent getting some supplies, fetching extra diesel and oil, eating a couple of fish suppers and taking some refreshments in the local British Legion Club, Bill and I both being members.

The next morning, we left Fort Augustus at 8.00am and arrived promptly at Kytra Lock for the first locking at 8.30am. Unfortunately, the lock keeper was not so prompt and did not arrive until after 9.00am, but it did give me a chance to chat with another boater coming the other way in a lovely 1936 motor launch; all brass and varnished woodwork.

After hardly any delays at bridges or locks, we made it all the way to Fort William, down Neptune's Staircase, again in record time of 45 minutes, and into the sea lock ready for the morning. We had continuing problems with the overheating light coming on but when Bill went below and felt the manifold it was quite cool.

I had calculated that the tide at the Corran Narrows turned in our favour at 11.00am so we planned to leave Corpach at 9.30am. Leaving the sea lock on time, we motored down Loch Linnhe almost into a head wind but with our main sail up, and arrived at Corran, right on schedule. Keeping to the western shore, to avoid the chop from a brisk west-south westerly wind, we continued down the loch but still encountered some unpleasant seas where there were gaps in the surrounding hills.

We had just reached the entrance to the Sound of Mull, turning north east towards Tobermory, when the engine died. Bill immediately dived down into the cabin and started examining the engine while I pulled out the genoa and started beating into the wind.

An hours work on the engine produced no result as there was diesel getting to the inlet side of the injector pump, but none coming out of the other end. By this time we had tacked across the Sound of Mull three times and needed to take a decision where to go. We could continue tacking up the Sound but it was unlikely that we would reach Tobermory before the forecast Force 7 wind arrived. Loch Aline was five miles in the right direction but only had moorings and no facilities, also being surrounded by hills, the wind tended to be unpredictable. In the end, we turned tail and fled downwind towards Oban, where there was a marina and, at worst, a lifeboat.

The wind behind was increasing all the time so we made good time with just the main sail up. I radioed Clyde Coast Guard and asked them to inform the ferries coming out of Oban that we had limited manoeuvrability in the narrow approach and to watch out for us. A very helpful MCA lady said that she would call the marina and ask for a work boat to be available if we needed it.

We sailed into Kerrera Sound and looked in vain for the work boat. There was no alternative but to sail up to a mooring but I missed the buoy in the now very strong winds. A couple on shore pointed to a pontoon which was at the right angle to try an approach to windward so we sailed up and I misjudged the first approach and needed to come around for a second try. This time we were successful and, very relieved, tied up the boat.

Bill and I spent a very cold night on board and the next morning we arranged for an engineer to look at the engine. His conclusion was that to repair the injector pump would take at least a week so Bill and I packed up, took the water taxi across to Oban and then the bus back to Inverness.

Gwyn

7/12/09

Part 3

At long last Jenna was ready for the third leg of her delivery.

Neil had phoned me and said she was back in the water at Oban, with a refurbished engine. I had to delay a week for other commitments, one of which was sailing in the Nairn regatta on Saturday, with Bill and Neil as crew. The Sunday morning saw Neil and Tina arriving at my front door at 8.00am, in their yellow Renault Clio, crammed to the roof with various bags and gear. We managed to shoehorn Tina and my bags into the back seat and set off for Oban, via Loch Ness and Fort William.

There was hardly a car on the road, so we made very good time, taking a T & P break in Fort William, arriving in Oban about 12.30pm. We then had to wait for the water taxi across to the marina on Kerrera Island. Back aboard Jenna, she was still extremely untidy but hopefully, with an engine that would carry on working for another few years.

I had already calculated the tides up the Sound of Mull, so we left at 2.00pm to catch six hours of the flood, all the way up to Tobermory. It was a, mostly, uneventful trip, firstly up between Lady Rock and the Lismore Light, then up the sound, motoring with the main sail raised and the wind behind us. The only problem came when Neil raised the hatch on the engine, during one of his regular inspections, to find liquid spurting from the starboard side of the engine. He called to me on the wheel, saying water was coming out, so I asked him to take the tiller and went down to investigate. I put my finger into the liquid and found it was diesel, coming from a bleed screw on the injection pump. Doing the obvious thing first, I tightened the bleed screw with my fingers and the leak stopped. We talked about this afterwards and concluded that the screw had not been properly tightened when the fuel system was bled after the reinstallation of the engine.

Tobermory was quiet so we were able to tie up at one of the new pontoons and walk ashore for a pint and evening meal.

The next day we prepared to leave and started cranking the engine but it would not fire. I went below and told Neil to crank the engine some more, while I undid the bleed screw until a good flow of diesel was coming out. As soon as I closed the screw, she fired up and we had no more trouble for the entire trip although whenever Neil opened the access hatch to the engine he had a severe frown on his face, expecting bad news.

The forecast had been for force 4 winds from the south-west and we had planned to leave Tobermory at midday to catch the north going tide around Ardnamurchan. As it transpired, there was almost no wind at all which let us set off two hours earlier. We had a fine motor sail, under a cloudless sky, all the way up to Mallaig. We had talked the previous evening to the skipper, Jonathon, and crew of a Westerly Fulmar 32, also travelling in the same direction. They had set off at four in the morning and were tied up at a mooring buoy when we pulled into the harbour.

I had spoken to the harbour master, Pimmy MacLean, some two weeks earlier about tying up for a few hours, to wait for the tide through the Sound of Sleat. Mallaig is a commercial fishing port and has very limited facilities for yachts, although this will change next year with the addition of 60 pontoons berths. He had said we could tie up and when we arrived, directed us alongside a big, rusty fishing boat from Campbeltown. This necessitated us deploying a rope ladder on the side of the fishing boat, to get ashore. Having returned aboard, from our evening meal and a wander round town, we were hailed from the fisher by a crew and then talked to the skipper who said he was leaving at 2.00am the next morning. After a chat with Neil, I phoned Jonathon and asked if we could raft up to him on the mooring. He was agreeable so we motored the short distance and tied up on his starboard side.

Jonathon invited us aboard to have a look at his boat which was extremely well equipped and very smart. We did not ask him back to have a look at Jenna, for obvious reasons. A pleasant evening then ensued which included apple pie and ice cream and a glass of Lagavulin.

The morning dawned fine and clear again, but we had to delay our departure until 3.00pm for the tide to become favourable in Kyle Rhea. Neil suggested, and I happily agreed, that we spend the time motoring into Loch Nevis to visit Inverie and the famous Old Forge pub. Leaving Mallaig at 10.00am, we leisurely motored into Loch Nevis, passing, on our port side, a statue on a small hill and then, also to port, a cross set on a stone plinth, marking, apparently, the southern end of some shallows.

Arriving at Inverie, we tied up on the western side of a new T shaped jetty, out of the swell, the other side of the jetty being where the ferry docked. When the ferry had left, we walked along the shoreline into Inverie, all of 200 metres and had a tea with fruit scone, butter, jam and clotted cream. There are no more than ten buildings there with the pub, tea room and post office being three of them. After tea we wandered, no more than half a mile, further along the short stretch of road to a bunkhouse, passing a former kirk which, from the outside, had been turned into a beautiful home with superb views down the loch.

After walking back past Inverie, we decided to set off early and sail, as far as time would allow, down Loch Nevis and up the Sound of Sleat. Luckily, the wind had picked up enough to let us sail at over 6 knots on a beam reach. As we gradually turned northwards, the wind came on our starboard quarter and allowed a gull wing as far as Glenelg where, still being a bit short of our target, the engine was fired up and the genoa rolled in.



We made the narrows in good time and shot through at speeds of up to 8 knots. Neil was on the tiller although he had an unfortunate tendency to steer towards the shore at regular intervals whilst looking at the amazing scenery. After the narrows, turning west past the Kyle of Lochalsh and Kyleakin, we passed under the Skye Bridge and into the Inner Sound.

The rest of the trip was uneventful, motor sailing past Crowlin Island, Applecross, Loch Torridon, Gairloch, Loch Broom, and the Summer Isles, the last four being in the dark. From 3.00am, the weather turned colder and

it started raining, making the last leg fairly unpleasant until the dawn arrived with a vivid orange sunrise.

We arrived at Lochinver at 6.30am, where Tina, Neil's wife, met us and drove back to their house where a hot cup of tea, a warm bath and a comfortable bed, awaited us.

Gwyn

19/5/10

More photos at <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/mgwynphillips/Jenna>