

*The gruff old gaffer is even franker than usual this month . . .

FRANK
ROBB
MEETS
HIS . . .

WATERLOO . . .



YACHTS spell Romance. Escape. The freedom of the seas. The lure of the fragrant Spice Islands. Perfume of frangipane blossoms wafted across tropical waters from fabled atolls. Scented lei-leis of exotic flowers draped about grass-skirted Hawaiian beauties.*

Ah!—the witching call of Nature!
With that beautiful preamble off my chest, we now descend to a lower anatomical level and consider this witching call of Nature at rock-bottom (if that's the term I want—and I think it is).

Because when Nature calls you gotta go. And when you gotta go you gotta have some place to go to. And in small sea-going craft this involves design problems that are fundamental—in more senses than one.

In the course of my trade or profession I get letters from characters living hundreds, or even thousands, of miles from the sea shyly confiding that they are in process of building a sea-going yacht or have conceived the notion of doing so.

It is easy to read between the lines; basically these bodes are not seeking technical advice so much as some sort of assurance that they are not round the bend. I have a stereotyped reply. I point out that with reference to the values of our rat-race civilisation they are certifiably insane—but that with reference to any sane set of values their "round-the-bend" course could be a clean straight line.

And in the course of this correspondence ever so often a delicate question raises its lid—

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE LOO?

So let us can the gossip about fragrant spices and perfumed blossoms, gird down our loins and approach this unromantic but important appurtenance sternly and stern first.

In small boats the "Ladies and/or Gents" is known as the "heads" (because in the old sailing-ship days this convenience was situated right up in the bow (the "head" of the ship) and the term has lingered on.

The Instant Loo

Historical research shows only that early small-boat sailors were uninhibited. Their approach was: So you've

got the urge? Well—there's the gunwale and the wide sea. Go to it.

There is much to be said for and against this attitude, and in this thesis it must be dealt with in some detail because it still persists aboard small commercial fishing vessels—and many yachts with indigent owners.

The advantages are obvious and important. It is, in effect, the "Instant Loo", readily available to all and sundry—and no queueing up. It obviates drilling holes in the bottom of the boat, and requires only two apertures—which are both self-sealing and self-maintaining.

But there are—especially in this more prurient-minded age—a number of serious disadvantages to this attitude.

Viewed as an attitude it is inelegant, and if the boat is bucketing around in a seaway there is a chance that an ice-cold wave-crest may caress the shrinking flesh. This constitutes an absolutely breathtaking experience, and in many persons it engenders a state of mental and physical trauma that simply closes the door to further business until things have warmed up again.

In addition, if you have mixed company aboard you will find that the ladies invariably take exception to powdering their noses in this fashion, and, social-wise, the Entertainment Committees of most yacht clubs deprecate the practice. If indulged in, say, at Cowes (although Uffa and the Duke might guffaw) you would almost certainly receive a stiff letter of protest from the secretary of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

Further criticisms are that the posture demands physical agility (you gotta hang on, huh?), and also ballistic calculations involving the amount of freeboard, the roll and pitch of the boat, obtrusion from gunwale and other imponderables.

It is definitely not suitable for people suffering from physical infirmity, senile decay, and/or mental irresponsibility, and as this category covers about 90 per cent of practising yachtsmen, we shall have to consider other methods.

The Chinese (as usual) made the first real advance in this field, and it becomes necessary to investigate their ancient technique and to explain its working.

Any spar that sticks out horizontally from the stern of a boat is called a boomkin—pronounced and usually spelt "bumkin"; in Chinese it is called a "ping". Some thousands of years ago they hit on the idea of broadening this spar into a plank wide enough to enable them to carve a bum-

kin-size hole in it—and lo and behold—the "heads"! (Even if it was at the stern.)

Damn' clever, these Chinese. This was a major breakthrough; it obviated many of the discomforts of the early system outlined above, and brought at least a small semblance of dignity into the proceedings—although I think it would still cause tut-tuttings and raised eyebrows at Cowes.

It also enriched the language to some extent, being immortalised by Confucius in his famous saying: "Sailor who walk plank come back much enlightened"—and it almost certainly gave rise to the term "ping-pong".

In our Western civilisation, dedicated to gracious living and false values, this ingenious compromise didn't fill the bill. ("My dear—I mean to say—four inches above the knee is all very modish—but just how conspicuous can you get?")

And so boating folk today demand some comfort and privacy during their periods of communing with Nature. This raises to two basic questions: Where?—and—How?

Dinghies

Dealing with "Where?" and starting with the smallest sort of boats, if you take your lady friend sailing in an open 14-ft. dink and one or both of you get caught simultaneously by a flat calm and an urgent desire to see a man about a dog then all I can say is that both of you should have exercised a little foresight by spending the paltry sum of a penny before shoving off—thereby avoiding subsequent hind-sight.

My advice—based on some experience—is:
(1) Ship the oars and pull for the nearest land with the strength born of desperation.

(2) Fly the International Code Flag Signals:
A. (I am undergoing a speed trial.)
S. (My engine is going full astern.)
V. (I require assistance.)

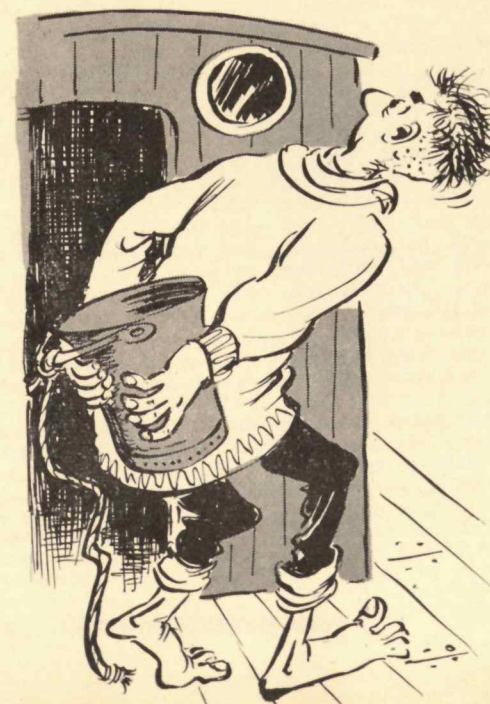
(3) If neither of the above courses seems likely to be of avail, have a frank talk with your passenger. The text should be your conviction that there should be no secrets between friends.

OR

(4) Incontinently capsize the dink accidental-like and precipitate both of you into the concealing sea. (You can always right the dink afterwards and apologise for your clumsiness.)

Decked Boats

Here again let us start (as usual) at the bottom with the smaller boats—say, up to about 22 ft. In the majority of these it is not possible to install a marine toilet with its attendant plumbing unless you stock the thing in the middle of the cabin—which means that what you've now



got is not so much a yacht as a rather expensive floating privy. The answer here is—

The Bucket System: Don't go into a tiz about size and shape—a bucket-size, bucket-shape is O.K. Tie about 4 ft. of 2-in. rope to the handle. Provide paper. You're in business!

I have lived with this bucket system for prolonged periods, and it works well enough. But don't think that by merely buying a bucket and a roll of paper you have done your duty to your crew—or, shall we say, enabled them to do their duty. If you persist in this delusion you will sooner or later become, literally, unstuck owing to a phenomenon known as—

Kicking the Bucket: Small boats and their crews are both likely to have from time to time violent movements—which are imparted to the bucket from opposite ends. Buckets are unstable receptacles, and if these movements happen to coincide there is every likelihood of all three—boat, bucket and bucketeer—being sharply projected in different directions. It needs little imagination to realise that this constitutes a disaster akin to the accidental detonation of a hydrogen bomb—with all the attendant complication of the fall-out.

As usual, I have the answer—which is to ensure that the bucket fits into some rigid frame so that it cannot be accidentally overturned. And—while you're about it—you might as well provide some sort of a seat.

You will by now be beginning to appreciate that there is more to this apparently simple bucket than meets the eye (unless you use a mirror?), and we have not yet mentioned the fact that unless the bucket is emptied from time to time your boat will eventually founder in circumstances of unspeakable horror.

There are two ways out of this. You can . . .
(1) Lay down a law that any penny-spenders shall immediately after disbursement empty the bucket personally.

OR

(2) Dictate that whoever happens to be on watch at some specified hour of the day or night shall undertake the task.

On the hole I prefer system (1) because it always leaves you with a clean sheet, so to speak. However, if you decide on a "once-a-day" clearance, make a firm note of this: fit the bucket with a *tightly*-fitting lid—and see that the lid is used. I do not want to go into detail here; I merely point out that in very small boats in a short steep sea the force of gravity occasionally operates in reverse.

Which brings us to . . .
The Chemical Loo: These are well-known to caravaners and are deservedly popular in small boats. They are—basically—a glamorised bucket with distinctive features, and to that extent contribute more to gracious living.

When installing and when in use the same rules apply—

(Continued on page 46)

MY Waterloo . . .

(Continued from page 45)

bolt it down firmly and see that the lid fits tightly.

Medium-size Boats (25-ft. to 40-ft.)

Here you have more scope. You can tuck the heads right up in the forepeak of the fo'c'sle well out of the way, and you can, if you wish, install a . . .

Marine Toilets: These can be obtained in various styles and colours, but they all have the same price—expensive. I have had from time to time dark thoughts about forking out something like forty-five quid for an adjunct that serves one purpose only and is, to put it mildly, essentially unproductive.

But let us try to be fair: I have dark thoughts about forking out money for anything at all, and in addition these appliances are more complicated than stationary shore-loos, the reason for this being that in boats in this size-range the outlet is necessarily under water and the contents must be pumped out against pressure—and that in turn means that somewhere along the line there must be a pump and some sort of valve or stopcock arrangement to prevent the sea rushing in.

At first flush it might seem that there is not much to cavil about in this connection, but there are disadvantages.

For one thing the installation of a marine toilet involves making a hole (usually two holes) in the bottom of the boat, and this is something that no designer or owner contemplates complacently, because it is another "something-to-go-wrong".

Secondly, the correct operation of the various valves, levers, seacocks, etc., requires a short course of instruction before proficiency can be attained—and in this caper there are no half-measures; you reappear on deck radiant in the knowledge that you have discharged your duty—or creep up shamefaced, corner some clued-up member of the crew, and ask him, whisper-wise, to nip below and operate the machinery.

These things can become devilishly complicated.

Some years ago, when I was owner/skipper of a commercial fishing boat, a close enemy presented me (with an enigmatic smirk on his face) with an absolutely fabulous marine toilet which he had acquired by foul play from a surplus-war-store submarine. I was initially enamoured.

It was solid phosphor-bronze throughout; it weighed about a hundred pounds; it was designed to expel its contents at great depths underwater by means of blasts of highly-compressed air and—not to go into technicalities—

this involved a whole array of the aforesaid valves, seacocks and so forth, all of which had to be operated in a set sequence to ensure success.

The makers of this elaborate device had not overlooked this matter, and beneath or alongside every lever or handle was a beautifully engraved bronze plaque explaining its use and order of operation in the sequence.

There were a dozen or more of these exhortations.

I persuaded the crew to remove earlier encrustations and to burnish the thing with steel-wool and Brasso until it shone like the Peacock Throne, and neighbouring skippers would visit simply to admire it, catch up on their reading, and—purely incidentally—drink my gin.

Functionally it was not a success because my crew were a bunch of enthusiastic but illiterate Zulus who never got the hang of the necessary sequence of operations. And one thing about this loo was that if not operated strictly according to instructions it was liable to backfire with appalling violence and discharge its contents but everywhere inside.

This is an extreme example. The average marine toilet, reasonably maintained, is functional and adequate.

Bigger Boats (60, 70, 80-ft.-plus)

No real problem here. You have space to play with and you can, if you wish, shift the heads from the fo'c'sle to some nook or cranny in an unoccupied position—complete with a door that opens and shuts and a small library to occupy your waiting moments.

Over about 70 ft. and if you have a large crew or a paid crew you should consider another of the sayings of Confucius: "Two heads are better than one."

NOW NOTE THIS: These marine toilets invariably come with a glossy and easily mislaid pamphlet explaining how to install and operate them. During the brief period before the pamphlet inevitably gets mislaid most owners and crews pore over it and assimilate the operating instructions. They then conveniently (inconveniently?) forget that guests aboard have not had the benefit of this instruction and have to ascertain the operating procedure more or less by instinct—and this (as noted previously) can lead to embarrassing situations.

The thing to do here is that immediately you receive the pamphlet and before you mislay it (which is usually a matter of a few hours) you should copy out the operating instructions in large bold letters on a sheet of some waterproof material in words of one syllable readily understandable even by mentally-retarded persons and women.

Stick this lot up on a bulkhead or door in the direct line of vision. If necessary, number, letter or colour-code the various levers, valves, etc.

This makes things about as foolproof as possible. But *nothing is damn-foolproof*, and you should bear in mind that marine toilets if not maintained will sooner or later reverse their function and scuttle your boat.

To guard against this promote one of the crew (it may even have to be yourself) to the rank of Acting Rear-Admiral (without pay or allowances). His duty in this exalted rank will be to examine the loo at specified intervals (once a month, anyway), report on its condition, and recommend such action as may seem necessary to keep the thing functioning and in good kilter.

We have now pretty well exhausted the discussion of the heads in the context of a loo—but marine toilets can be endowed with versatility denied to their land-bound counterparts. There is one model, for instance, which doubles-up as a bilge pump—which I think is a marvellous space-and-money-saving idea.

Then again, when raging gale seas render the deck untenable, you can retire below and occupy your time by pouring used sump oil into the bowl and diligently pumping it out to create a nice smooth oil-slick around your boat.

That pretty well covers the subject from hawse-hole to breakfast. What it really amounts to is that the loo, once installed, should be maintained in cleanliness and good order so that you, your crew and your guests will be enabled to emulate the ancient Egyptian pyramid-builders and preserve that inscrutable smile on the face of the Sphinx.

Illustration by
DAVID MARAIS

