

STOP PRESS.

Our President, Mr. H. H. McWilliams is at the moment on an extended tour of England, America and the Continent and as you can imagine, has found time to make a thorough study of sailing matters overseas.

We have just received an article from him which has proved to be so interesting that this issue of the Log has been held over so that it could be included.

You will surely agree that we are very lucky with our sailing in sunny South Africa.

S P R O G S I N E N G L A N D .

There are an increasingly large number of 14 ft. ply-wood craft in England these days, mostly sponsored by various Yachting and other journals. Classes of these are to be found in most of the waters which would be suitable for Sprogs, and so it is understandable that the Sprog has had to make its way entirely on performance and quite apart from the press "boosting" that brings success to its competitors. It is unfortunate, therefore, that on account of its low price, many Sprogs are built and sailed by beginners, and raced against comparative experts in other types of design, although, of course, it was for that very purpose that it was originally conceived.

The result is that at regattas one frequently finds Sprogs making a poor showing, while other designs (which would do no better if similarly handled) put up a much better performance.

Nevertheless, now and then someone with the experience and skill to race the boat as it should be managed, administers quite a shock to those who are apt to regard the Sprog as a freak and by no means a fast and stable craft.

Soon after my arrival here I went to Portsmouth to meet Dave Burgess, the enthusiastic Petty Officer in the Navy whose letters have often appeared in the "Log." I found that he had brought his boat "Stormz" from Devonshire and was keeping it at Littlehampton where he was racing in a

small class of about five Sprogs with the newly-founded Arun Yacht Club.

I was invited to the opening of the new "clubhouse" of this lively and hospitable fraternity, where I found the interest in the Sprog extremely keen. They have converted a large Naval motor vessel into a practical and altogether delightful club; at high water it is afloat, but when the tide falls 14 ft. (as it does on the south coast) it comes to rest on the mud of the estuary.

The difficulties experienced by this club in getting their boats afloat and ashore, and to and from the starting line in the open sea, are enough to put anyone off sailing! The tide runs through the narrow mouth of the River Arun at a speed of six knots, between high timber piers. One cannot sail in these conditions, so every boat has to be towed against the current.

One of the first people I met on my arrival at the opening party was "Hutch" Hutchinson, from Redhouse, who had his ancient but still seaworthy Sprog sent over a year or two ago, and who has made several coastwise trips, not usual for boats this size.

I spent the weekend there, and Dave lent me his Sprog for the Sunday morning race and offered to crew for me. Together with the rest of the Sprog fleet we were towed out into the sea, where a slight breeze was springing up and the threat of rain seemed to be averted. Actually, the sun peeped out for about half an hour during the race, but conditions were not by any means inviting.

There were about four or five Fireflies, a couple of 14 ft. G.P.s (a hard-chine plywood design, sponsored by a well-known journal) a couple of 14 ft. Internationals, and 12 ft. National dinghies, with a few nondescripts.

We made a perfect start at the windward buoy but the Commodore who was trying to beat us to it, and who was over too soon, obliged us to bear away, and so we fell in astern of another Firefly, which since the wind never freshened, we were not able to overtake.

We had some fun with the other dinghies, and a nice scrap with a Firefly, but crossed the line second, so far ahead of the other Sprogs that we could not even see which

was which.

Dave's boat seemed lighter than the others and was certainly better tuned but in such light conditions there should not have been such a vast difference between the leader and the rest of the bunch.

I went down specially to Babbacombe where there is a thriving Sprog fleet of over a dozen, and which is perhaps the most go-ahead of all the Sprog bodies at present. Unfortunately, it poured with rain the whole time, and my visit to the club was not the success I had hoped for. The boats are kept high on the shingle beach, on which they are brought ashore, surfing in on the small breakers. They told me - and I don't believe them - that the shingle does less damage to the bottom of the hull than sand!

The boats were very well built and finished, and from what I could see are every bit as good as ours. Now and then they are damaged by stones falling from the high cliff behind the beach, and this, together with launching problems, must provide constant headaches to the owners. We simply don't know how lucky we are - with the weather, and the ease with which we can go sailing.

The Helford River club has given up Sprogs and has sold its fleet of four or five to other clubs, so I did not visit that part of the country.

I was very kindly received by the Porpoise Yacht Club, who are still the Trustees for the class in U.K. I was taken to see their "club" - also a floating one, on the Thames near Richmond, and entertained to dinner, and lent a boat for the Medway regatta last weekend. Although a small club they are hardworking and keen, and indeed they must be, to hoist their boats one by one into the river, rig them, tow them upstream to the line, sail in flukey conditions between high trees on a strongly flowing current, and then, afterwards, to go through the whole performance again! No land is available on the banks of the Thames which can be leased and so they can only keep their craft aboard the barge which is their headquarters, and which is arranged with racks down below where the hulls can be stored during the week. A derrick is used for hoisting, and astern of the barge is the original landing craft which was formerly

their only premises, and which is now converted into wardroom, bunk room, bar, kitchen and so on.

The Medway Yacht Club, at Upnor, near Chatham, staged a very large regatta in which races for Sprogs were included, and this drew entries from all the Sprog fleets, including the South West Sailing Club, which I did not have time to visit. So there were nine boats altogether, for the two races, other races being held at the same time for fifteen other classes. The river Medway is tidal, and very extensive, providing plenty of room and interesting conditions for racing.

The boat parks were an amazing sight, lined with hundreds of different craft. I was specially interested in the Moth, which has been developed a long way from the original design. There were dozens of Fireflies, and a lot of Snipes, Hornets, Herons and Albacores, with numerous other less familiar designs.

After a morning of drizzle it cleared slightly and we got away to a good start in a fresh beam wind. As I had expressed a preference for the only Porpoise Y.C. boat which had the sheet rigged in the orthodox way instead of from the end of the boom to a horse, I was given the oldest and heaviest in the fleet, and it did not take long to realise that I would never get it to plane and that the sails were so clapped out that working to windward was going to present a real problem.

One of their newer boats, closely followed by Burgess, got away and planed into obscurity in no time, and three others looked like passing us very soon. However, we had some fun using suitable tactics to keep them both astern, and by the time we had sailed into open water away from various moored warships and other obstructions, we found enough wind to enable us to surge along quite nicely. This wind proved too much for several of the others and both boats ahead of us came to grief, one capsizing on the run and the other to windward. Dave had a new crew, and in taking in the whisker pole he slipped and fell, at a critical moment, and they took so long to get going again that they retired, while the others were soon joined by two more casualties, and were eventually towed home by the rescue launch.

In trying to decide our correct course amongst the maze of buoys and marks we lost our lead to two other Sprogs, but once we started the beat back up-channel we concentrated on regaining it, and as I had a heavy crew we were able to sit out well and

and gradually work back to the fore, finally splitting tacks at an opportune moment and so getting the better of the most formidable of our two opponents. This small lead was increased and we eventually got the gun, but once again I felt disappointed to realise that four out of nine boats had capsized in conditions which should never have caused the slightest trouble, while not a single boat in any other class failed to complete the race.

I had hoped to organise a small Sprog meeting and have a sort of "pep talk" but the clubhouse was so crowded and there was no room, and I did not even have a chance to show the colour pictures of Sprog racing in South Africa which I had taken along specially.

There is however a move afoot to start an Association run on the lines of curs and I did as much lobbying as I could to try to get this going. I think it will have a good effect.

I tried my best to convince everyone of the need for self-balers, and of the convenience of having the clip-on wheels. I was horrified to see the way boats were dragged about on the ground, and left lying anyhow, and the carelessness generally. Water could be found in almost every boat, since few of the cockpits had bung holes, and none of the watertight compartments were provided with any sort of drainage.

The second race was to have been held on the Sunday morning, but a gale blew up, many of the moored yachts - even the large Dragons - being driven ashore and damaged. Sailing was quite out of the question as the velocity reached 50 m.p.h. at times, and the race was abandoned. It was a dismal sight watching the wretched crews packing their craft in the pouring rain, and trying to sort out their wet belongings.

Yes, we are very, very lucky!

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