*(Mikes memories part9 book3)*

The Propeller Company had lost the services of the propeller calculator and had reverted to looking up past history of boat sizes in relation to propeller size and several factors would not have been taken into account. So this boat had been installed with too small a diameter propeller which caused cavitation that introduced extra power required of the engine hence the loss of 50 rpm in the fast speed run. By removing a further ½” magnified the power required. It was the marine course in Geneva that revealed all in later months.

Another occasion I had worked continually without a day’s break and experienced a desire to be freed up for the weekend. So you can imagine the anticipated build up of the break was joyous and by 5 o’clock on that Friday afternoon I jumped into the van and was about to insert the ignition key when the field Service office door burst open and the supervisor Joe burst through with a very serious red face and said, “ We have a problem – a new power boat has been delivered to St Hellier, Jersey this morning and whilst demonstrating its manoeuvrability to the good and the great in the harbour had suffered a major marine gear failure (and yes you’ve got it in one) it is so late that we are unable to book you a flight out of Exeter so you are booked to fly out of Southampton first flight in the morning. So it’s an early start next morning not a lie in but up with the blackbirds to Southampton. My brief received between Jersey Airport and St Hellier was equally intense.

Plans were in position for a birthday party celebrating the arrival of a new Fairy boat. All Fairy boat owners had been invited to assemble with their boats to the inner harbour of St Hellier on Saturday morning with mooring drinks at the Yacht Club and when refreshed to set off in a group to St Malo in Brittany for the weekend celebration. In fact at this moment in time the party was assembling and was advised that there had been a slight hitch and that the Cat man would be arriving from England in the morning and should correct the problem. Then all will be go! Using todays term no pressure then. When I got to the waterside and observed the collection of power boats moored alongside in anticipation of the forthcoming jolly together with the owners and ladies one realised how far the original event had travelled before reality had set in. Particularly when the South Pier manager, Gerald, walked over looking ashen and said, “I hope to God you can pull this out of the bag”. We shook hands and I went below to examine he bowels of the problem. It was quickly apparent that this was no quick fix as a clutch plate had shattered and centrafugaly spread and jammed the drive astern gear solution, remove marine gear and needed to be returned to Exeter Depot for rebuild. The news was received with much disappointment and fury all directed at the manager. Fortunately it was decided to continue with the party as all were gathered and full arrangements had been made.

I continued to remove the marine gear for transportation greatly assisted by the South Pier shipyard which had a well organised team. The weather over that period was exceptionally hot and sunny. I unwisely decided to work shirtless so by the afternoon a bottle of calamine lotion was purchased and used to cool my very hot back. By Monday the gear was despatched via a boat motoring to harbour. Due to local fog the airport was shut down so I was taken to the harbour and located a coaster that was on a passage to Southampton that night. So I signed on as a supernumery with a Captain Edwards as a non-working crew member of MV The Loon Fisher. I spent part of the night sleeping in the sick bay and part admiring the fortitude of the Bellman standing out in the bows dressed in storm clothing and covered in damp fog particularly constantly peering into the mist of impending danger.

We docked at Southampton and I must have looked odd walking alone between the shipping containers carrying a very heavy holdall looking for an exit. I was quickly arrested by a Customs officer and taken for questioning and a strip search. A degree of satisfaction spread over me when I was standing in pants only whilst the Customs officer passed around the bottle of calamine lotion for tasting and judgement proved satisfactory and I returned with the marine gear that was rebuilt and taken back to St Hellier and refitted without further dramas.

Life continued with repairs and warranty work as required with normal six weekly marine work continuing in Jersey. I was then called to another fast patrol boat, a 45’ Keith Nelson hull which was used for river police and a pilot boat. I was engaged on a top overhaul to the engine, removing cleaning, replacing and sealing air intake inter coolers. One turbocharger needed rebuilding so an exchange unit was flown over. This tale is not about engineering or technology. It is about things that unexpectedly happen that cause disruption, I think you must stop and take time to think how do I get this back to the norm with minimum action. Taking up the story the replacement turbocharger was flown out and delivered to South Pier shipyard. Douglas Park, a skipper to the Duchess of Normandy, an area patrol vessel, agreed to deliver the unit to me by using his harbour runabout.

To recap the scene, all boats in the harbour were normally afloat and went aground at low tide of 2-3 hours. To set the scene it was a beautiful afternoon with a spring tide washing up to the top of the tide at approximately 7 o’clock with sun shining across the water surface.

Douglas threw a rope across to me with the words, “Lift on that one when ready as I have tied the package in a tight rope parcel until the package was midway between the boats and open water. Suddenly the rope went slack followed by a glug with a multitude of bubbles rising to the surface. A stunned silence between us followed by me asking the question, well knowing the answer, but it gave me time to recover. The response was 2 am tomorrow morning would see the tide recede down enough for me to walk out in the harbour and retrieve the package. So that evening I had a very uneasy dinner at Mrs Cornish’s and did not change out of working kit but walked across to the Folly and had a couple of drinks with the boys and then went back to my room and watched the clock. At 1 am I put on a sturdy evening coat and walked out into the night and made my uncertain way down into the dark harbour. You could imagine every shadow that bounced off the dark pillars in the moonlight was a demon ready to cause me harm. So I quietly made my way to a pillar and stood very quietly in the shadows keeping my eye on the surface of the harbour floor and quickly walked out and retrieved the package putting it in my sack and walked back to the Guest House. I have wondered how I would have responded to the questions which might have been asked by a patrolling policeman. A lone man walking through the streets of St Hellier carrying in both hands a valuable turbocharger from power boats in the middle of the night I reason I could have spent the night in a cell until the truth was confirmed. However next day the unit was dismantled, washed of seawater and relubricated and installed to continue to work as required. Between my marine work I was attending the motorway section of the M5 and M4 carrying out maintenance as required working in that location a week at a time from Banwell to Edith Mead. If parts were required we collected it in the early morning from our Melksham Depot.

It was noted that in the warmer summer week the flies and mosquitoes multiplied from the wet reed beds along the flat marshy land caused much stomach problems among the machine operators working in that area. At that time I was called to fly out to Malta to correct lack of boost pressure in a turbocharger with intercooler in use in the boat which had limped down the Adriatic to arrive in Silema Harbour. It was an 80’ yacht with a beautiful name, The Phyllis Serena. I went aboard this wonderful pristine boat into the bowels and opened a round hatch into the black hole of the engine to be greeted by a noise like jingle bells. I found myself standing knee deep in a mixture of empty one pint size oil tins and pull off slips. It became apparent that no maintenance or kindness was ever given to this engine. However the unit required an oil top up. Someone would find a car garage and purchase an armful of one pint oil (any oil) and return to the engine and fill as required and throw the empty can together with tin foil slip on to the engine room floor and walk away. Sadly this state of affairs had caused the internal components to work in mud so the turbocharger together with the intercooler was removed and taken to a workshop and I dismantled and rebuilt after a thorough degumming. The engine sump was removed and the mud like black oil scraped out and the engine rebuilt. To think it cost a lot of money to send me from Exeter to Malta to correct this problem and someone had been employed as an engineer to this boat yet maintenance never existed over many years.

Let me tell you about the workshop that had kindly been offered for me to use together with all the tools needed. I was driven then by the boson, Charlie Greengrass in a Mini Moke. My first impression was of quite a large galvanised corrugated shed with the roof completely covered in live and growing course green grass. When I opened the door and walked in I saw the green grass had caused the roof to rust through. When it rained the rain would run through the funnel shaped hole and hit the centre of the workshop floor. Modification had been made to the system. A hammer drill had been used to cut a gutter from the leaking water across the floor under the door and across the outside pavement and in to the street. The workshop was empty and clear but around the wall hung new cabinets containing thousands and thousands of pounds worth of USA snap-on tools not used and brand new.