

# DOUBLE WHAMMY

## – was it just a coincidence?

Picture the scene if you will.....

On Sunday morning, two friends drive to meet us in Hythe Marina. After coffee and a chat, we decide on the spur of the moment to go for an alfresco lunch at Mercury Marina. There's a brief opportunity to open up the engines in Southampton Water, before settling down to the 6 knot speed limit in the River Hamble. It is very rare for us to have 4 people on board, so are we imagining that the engines seem to be working harder.....?



Solaris settling down for the homeward trip

After a pleasant lunch, we drop our guests on the outside pontoon at Hythe and set off towards Calshot and into the western arm of the Solent. The weather is warm and sunny, with a gentle breeze. Even so, there is always a moment of anxiety as we round Hurst Castle – what will the conditions be like across Christchurch Bay with a strong Spring tide against us? It is a relief to see smooth water – with barely a ripple, so we settle down for a comfortable crossing, aiming to make the 18:30 bridge. There are the usual few lobster pots around North Head buoy – and the usual mutterings from the skipper about the fatherless people who put them there! As we pass one of the buoys, we suddenly see a thick rope – about 30 foot long and about 1.5 inches in diameter, trailing away from the buoy and right in front of us. Too late – we hit the rope.....

While crew starts muttering silent affirmations 'I am calm and confident...', the skipper thrusts the throttle levers into neutral, stops the engines, kicks up the out-drives and peers over the bathing platform. No rope is visible around the props, but the blades on one set of props are bent. The skipper returns to the helm and slowly increases the revs to get back onto the plane but an ominous vibration is felt – confirming the prop damage. After some experimentation, the boat settles into a reasonably comfortable 10 knots, with one engine doing 2000 revs and the damaged one doing 1000 revs. At this speed, the effects of the adverse tide are more noticeable and the 18:30 bridge is no longer guaranteed.....

The skipper is cursing, but the crew is relieved that the journey home is continuing – albeit at yacht speed! Good progress is maintained until we reach Christchurch Ledge, when an alarm sounds. The crew tries to keep calm – guessing it is an overheating alarm from the stricken engine.



Crossing Christchurch Bay at 10 knots

It turns out to be the bilge alarm. The crew is instructed to take the helm while the skipper lifts the cockpit floor. He finds water up to the bottom of the engines and starts using the hand

bilge pump to assist the electric one. By now the crew starts mentally rehearsing the VHF procedure for a May Day call .....

The level of water in the bilge is reduced and the journey resumes with periodic role switching – the crew helms the boat, while the skipper pumps the bilge. The boat clears the Haven at 18:10 - so there is still a chance of making the 18:30 lift - if there are lots of boats queuing. We join the end of the queue and limp back to our berth. Should we now organise an emergency lift out – to prevent the boat sinking on its moorings.....?



Heading home at Yacht speed.

The skipper pumps the bilge dry again and then we wait for an hour to see if any more water comes in – but it doesn't. The skipper then turns on the engines again and water pours in! So we conclude - with relief - that it must be a leaking hose rather than a cracked hull – which should be cheaper to repair! We decide it will be ok to leave the boat in its berth overnight and plan a full investigation the next evening in better light. Needless to say, the skipper just pops down to Cobb's Quay on the way to work – just to check .....

After closer inspection, the skipper discovers a hole in the heat exchanger. Surprisingly it is not the result of corrosion – but a manufacturing fault concealed by paint and hose clip for 3 years! So did hitting the rope dislodge the paint on the hole – or were the two problems unrelated? Perhaps we already had a lot of water in the bilge when we arrived in the Solent? We will never know, but the moral of this story is.....

Check your engine bay after every trip.....

Ivor Moorhouse (Skipper) & Carol Turner (Crew) of Solaris C35