

New chapter with a New Custodian

I know I've previously referred to owning the Green Dolphin, but in reality I am just the newest custodian. Edwin rescued her from a shed in Northern Ireland and gave her back a new lease of life that allowed him and his family 24 years of sailing her. I see my job, as the new custodian is to make sure that Green Dolphin II is maintained and enhanced if necessary in order that she keeps going for another 24 years, and in a good state to pass on to her new custodian when the time comes. This should be my further contribution to ecology in making sure that she never has to go to a breakers yard.

So, with the boat purchased or I should say new custodianship purchased, it would be sensible to think that I made a checklist of things to do and about now, it's probably time to take a look at the non-existent checklist to see how I'm doing

Some previous sailing experience. Tick

Competent crew. Tick

Radio licence. Tick

Day skipper theory and practical. Tick

~~Boat~~ Custodianship purchase. Tick

Now, this is where the work starts.

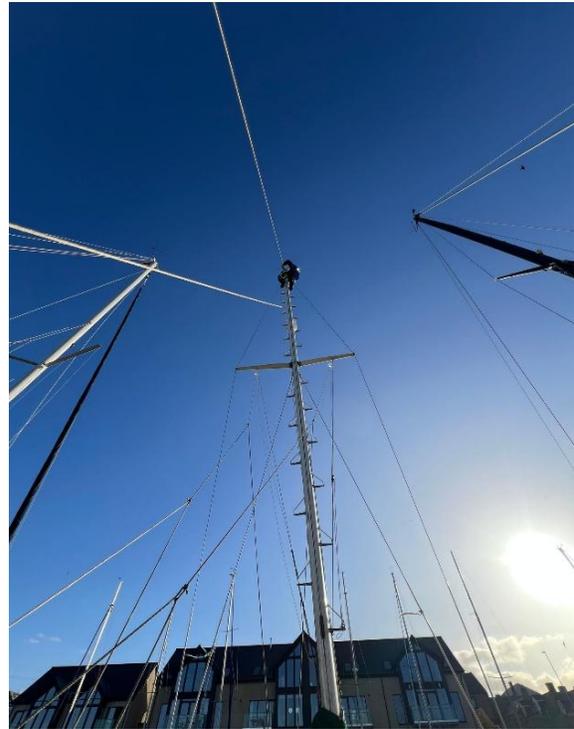
Edwin was a lovely guy and his boat is testament to his fastidious nature. If there was something that the boat needed then it was there. Flags, triangles, Anchor signals, lights, autohelm, depth, speed transducers, bow thrusters, tender, storm jib, sea anchor, the list goes on. My first task was to empty the boat, see what we needed and put it back on. I was bound to miss something, so anything I wasn't sure of went into my garage...and then ended up going back on board in most cases.



Anyway, the first real task was a trip to the top of the mast to replace the bulbs up there with LED's. The sailing tri-colour wasn't working and as a first off I thought the bulbs would need replacing....not sure why. The fuse would have been the easier option. I think I just wanted to use the Bosun's chair. Anyway, With Grant's safety help, the mast was climbed and a bulb safely replaced. I only had one. In hindsight that was a bad idea. There were two bulbs up there. One for the anchor light and one for the tri-colour. Obvious when you think about it, but sigh. I came back another weekend with Greg and changed the other one.

So, bulbs replaced we checked the lights. It was daytime and we couldn't tell. No matter. We can sail with the deck lights...Port light was corroded to death and needed a different type of bulb than the one I had bought. Arghhhh. The time had come for the boat to be moved nearer home and nearer the marina chandlers.

The end of March was the end of the Green Dolphin harbour time. She was paid up for Winter and although Amanda was happy to let us stay until we were ready, the trips up North were a trek and always, there was a tool or equipment that I didn't have with me. It was time to move.



Now, here is where I drew on some of the recent few years experience that both Greg and myself gained on his twin engined Cleopatra, a 10meter cruiser with 2 massive lorry size Penta engines. Like most of you, I had no idea what a Cleopatra was, but google will enlighten you. I also had no idea how a marine engine worked, but in our case bad experience and incompetence taught us the many things we need to know about marine engines. The bad driving we mastered with experience, although the steering was just like steering the submarine...It takes time to respond, so you just have to anticipate, and the rope work competency was gained on the competent crew course and many hours practicing on holiday. The best lesson I got from this was, "Get someone who knows what they're doing on your first voyage/passage" ...and that's where John came in. For completeness I have added a picture of Greg's boat which we have had many fun adventures/excapades on. I have included a rear end view and a picture of us moored in the centre of Norwich at the Icini pub.



Now, Gerry (the agent and very nice man), put me in touch with John, his neighbour, who lived and breathed boats. John (Kessock pier) was the best thing I did for the boat. He pointed out what I had missed, what I didn't know, what I should know, what to use, what not to use. He was the boating Guru that Greg and I never had in Norwich.

So, Early in April, John (the sailing Guru from Kessock Pier henceforth to be known as John Kessock pier to preserve anonymity), Martin (Snickers) and myself set off early doors on a Friday morning. You may remember Martin (Snickers) from the Day Skipper's course. I had emailed all the guys from the course to see if they wanted a wee trip. Martin, to his probable eternal regret, responded in the positive and the pair of us shared a train up to Lossiemouth late Thursday afternoon for the inaugural Green Dolphin II Sandy owned sea trip. There followed several hours of fuel and food purchase. We carried the fuel from the garage and the food from the co-op to the boat. I resolved to never have to do that again, so the boat now owns a sack barrow. (This is one that we retrieved from Hazel's dad's several years back. Never been used and I even had to build the wheels on. It must have been an Ikea flat pack purchase). Fuel and food on board we toileted and went to bed. Early departure planned, we got up at 5am for shower and breakfast and set off at 6am. We couldn't leave it much later or we would get stuck in the harbour until the next high tide.

The Wind was coming straight at us and as we really wanted to get the boat South in reasonable time, we motored. The wind was fairly strong in our faces and the waves were high and rolling. I had made up rolls for the trip and I'm sure we all had one early on for breakfast and tea.....that was the last we ate and drunk until 8am on Saturday morning at Peterhead!!!!

The rolling waves ranged from about 80 degrees off of our bow (so pretty much side on) to about 30 degrees off of the bow. Just right for maximum discomfort. Recognising the symptoms early I took a 30 minute nap around lunch time and that saved me for sure. Martin and John hadn't nipped it in the bud early enough. John tried a nap when I got back, but that made him worse. Martin went to the toilet, but that was a trip below and belowdecks was where the queasiness was at its greatest.

We all stayed above decks for the whole of the day. We'll call that Mal Mer day.

We were originally going to carry on down the coast through the night and just power on, but making the decision to berth up was not a difficult one. We ostensibly went for a fuel stop, but once that decision was made then the one to stay in harbour for the night was an easy one.

While John went for a walk we went for a clean up and straight to bed. Still no food and drink. By morning our appetites had returned. Bacon rolls, coffee, tea, juice. We were back among the land of the living. I quickly changed the fuse for the tricolour and checked the lights. All were working. We were definitely good for night sailing now.



Having changed direction (now heading South) we thought we might get a bit of a hand from the wind, but no such luck. Not only had the wind slackened off, it had also changed direction and was not in a helpful angle. We motored. With the weather dry and the waves pushing us along, this became a very pleasant part of the journey. I even went below and made us a proper meal. Goulash or stew or something. Anyway, not only was it edible, but we all ate it, and biscuits, and more biscuits and stuff.

This time we didn't stop, we took it in turns for a sleep and carried on all the way in to Port Edgar under the Forth Bridges (Edinburgh for the uninitiated) We arrived at about 3:30am ish. The views from under the bridges were worth the whole trip :-)



Sunday morning we slept in, which was to be expected really, but John thought his next train was at 1 in the afternoon. I got on the trainline app and got him booked on one at 10, booked the taxi and saw him off to catch the train at Linlithgow (the first stop for the train on its way north fortuitously). Martin left to have breakfast with his family at the Marina and I tidied and got the boat organised to be left for the week. Today was going to be a rest day. Definitely no working.

First thing to do on Sunday morning was the bridges photos obviously. This would be Green Dolphin II berth for the next month. It needed a photograph :-)

So, what do I need. Find the sail batons. Check. They were one of the things in the fw'rd cabin that I didn't know what they were. Find the Autohelm and connect it in. (A very embarrassing story that I'll save until I know you better). Check Fan belt, oil and water which I knew, and get spare fan belt and impeller, so that you can fix at sea. Several weeks later I found the fan belt and engine oil and fuel filters. Of course there was the transom ladder to purchase and install. One more thing that I had almost forgotten. When I went to take my coat out of the cupboard one of the sleeves was wet. It was round about the same area as some water damage, so putting 2 and 2 together I came up with - Window leakage. That also needed repair.



The most important (and I guess it's important, because he kept coming back to it. If you're going South GET RADAR. Ok, I sighed inwardly. Radar it is.

Radar was a thing that required thought. The monitor at the Captain's/Navigator's desk was good. A few years old, but good. The downside was that to connect radar I would need an older analogue radar and the cable and connectors that go with it. As it is now old, the only option is ebay....I hate ebay. No idea what you are getting, next to no comeback if it doesn't work. However, the rest of the system was good, an old radar would have to do. I purchased from ebay and waited with baited breath. Radome, cables with connectors... it would all be fine.

Next, the Radar monitor links to lots of different stuff, compass, gps, depth transducer, speed, wind speed and anything else that I have yet to discover, oh, and AIS (automatic identification system) which I put in before our passage.

All of this provides a radar screen with all our information and all nearby boats information for us to evaluate. The downside of the whole system is that it is shown on the Captain's/navigator's table, which can't be seen from the helm.

I decided to move the ships navigation monitor to allow it to swivel out into the gangway for ease of use from above decks, plus the swivel could allow it to swivel in to be used and read from inboard. The cables were duly moved and rerouted. Connection boxes installed and the system powered up. I had several attempts at this. The first second and third attempt utilised one of my previously invented, patented and manufactured standandtype devices. For anyone who wasn't around for this part of my life it was an attempt to erradicated wrist and hand repetitive strain injury for computer working. It works for me and I still use it every week, but marketing and sales was my downfall in that venture. Anyhow, mounted sideways the mouse stand seemed to do the trick, although it needed a lot of strengthening and even then sat at a bit of an angle as can be seen in the picture. Clyde didn't seem to mind the angle. The final iteration about a month later came thanks to the designers at IKEA. There were only a couple of extendable monitor mounts that fit the bill, but this seemed to be the best one for the situation. It can be seen in the picture attached. All good so far without the radar attached. Now for radar.



The Radar didn't come in one piece. I had to buy the dome with a little bit of trailing flex, then buy an 11 meter cable, both of these off of ebay. The main reason for buying the flex was that the connector to attach the cable to the monitor was a special one that is no longer made, so it meant that I paid an exhorbitant amount for a piece of cable with the all important connector attached.

The radome arrived and it's a big old thing 18" diameter and about 12" in height. This had to be mounted high enough that we are not going to be irradiating ourselves with the microwaves. I thought about the mast as you would expect. This is quite a heavy beast of 20kg or so and the higher up the mast you go the more top heavy you make it. Mounting position is also a problem. Mounting at the side of the mast like other boats would interfere with the steps. The stays are not meant to take that weight, so would likely be unsuitable. Mounting to the rear was a possible alternative. I searched for an appropriate rear mounting system. £850 from Scanstrut....probably better buying a whole new radar system. However, in the garage was an aluminium piece that was strong and long. I have no idea where it came from, but there used to be two and many years ago I used one to make a roofrack. I tried the aluminium piece for size and it looked ok. Andrew suggested the mounting position and it looked good. I then went about trying to create a mounting structure that would be secure. The overriding factor was that Robert would not be happy if it didn't look good!!!! Sometimes I wonder about youth of today. Ok. My job then was to make something structurally sound and then wrap it up for presentation. How to make an easy job difficult!!!

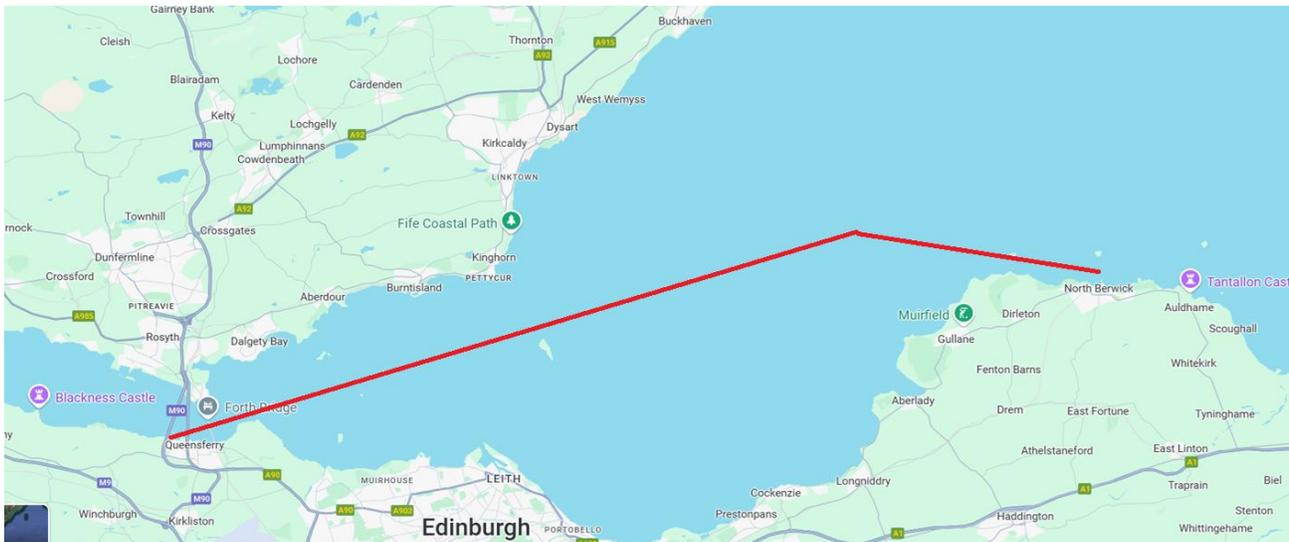


The aluminium was pretty good, but would probably need a couple of cross members. Then for presentation I proposed plumber's pipe. All was set.

All these things take time. What then is the most important? Boat stability? Ease of fitting? Functionality? Or looks?...Looks obviously. Sighhh

I put the Aluminium pole up with the help of Andrew (brother). Then I did some of the cable connections, realising pretty early on that I had picked up connection boxes that were too small. Never mind, there was plenty time to change them on the way down the coast.

Andrew left to go home, and I headed round the marina to get some fuel. Leaving the berth and getting onto the fuelling berth was no problem. The wind seemed to be helping. Fuelled, I headed out to sea. As I headed into the bigger waves I had time to think. I really wanted to take those compensators/arrestors off of the berthing ropes, so that I wouldn't have the throwing problem that I had been having. When berthing at a new unfamiliar berth I really wanted those berthing ropes to be completely free and easy for throwing. Anything (like the arrestors) that would get in the way of throwing should really be sorted now before I got into any trouble. I decided I should quickly nip back to the the fuelling dock, sort out my ropes and then head back out. That was the initial plan, but well, I shouldn't be using the fuelling berth for that and I should really berth back in my own space, so I did.



That was both a mistake and fortuitous I would have to say. I berthed up no problem and removed the compensator/arrestors...then I started thinking. That is always a problem. Don't let me think.

When I get to North Berwick and anchor for the night. Doing any radar installation work will be hard....in the waves. Then I Want to be getting way down the coast to a marina or harbour that can take me. Then I need, not want, but need to be able to stay in the harbour 4 or 5 nights, so that I can go off to work either in Edinburgh or London. As I thought more and more about it I decided that it really required planning. Winging it was not an option. Sigh. The seven P's were mentioned by Euan and on this occasion I couldn't agree more. The Navy version of the 7 P's seemed like a more appropriate version than the sanitised civilian version. If you don't know what they are, look it up. It will save me putting bad language into this monologue.

So, decision to stay for another weekend made, I sat down to work out how far I could get (solo) and where I could harbour/marina and whether it was even possible..

When I reduced the sailing times to daytime only (as it would just be me on the boat) then the numbers were much, much higher than the theoretical minimum. What I mean is that theoretically if I went at 5knots, then over 24 hrs I could go (5x24) 120 nautical miles. That's not too bad. However, if I got up at 6 and left at 7am and sailed until say 8pm then I'm only doing 13hrs, actually lets sail until 9pm and make it 14hrs. Now the distance would be 5knots times 14 hours, 70 nautical miles. So it would take me roughly 2 days (48hrs) to cover the distance that theoretically I could do over one 24hr period.

Now, I also know that in order to get to work to start at 7am on a Monday morning I need to be on a train on Sunday evening either heading to Edinburgh or London. For some remote harbours I probably want to be on the train at around 5pm or for Penzance probably a lot earlier, maybe even 9 or 10 in the morning. So on some weekends I am only going to be able to cover a little over 140 nautical miles and on others maybe nearer 200.

So with only one bit of rough gustomating I had already almost doubled the number of stops I would have to make. Also, if anyone has been to a harbour on the East coast they will see up to 4 meters of rise and fall of the tide (I've been told it can be 9 meters). That's a problem. It means that if I get a harbour spot I'm going to need someone on board to keep the ropes under control. i.e. If we tie the ropes tight at high tide then at low tide the boat would be hanging/dangling against the harbour wall in low tide. In reality the ropes would not be able to hold its 7 tonnes and they would break, leaving the boat to float about at will. The other scenario is anchoring. If I have to anchor there will need to be someone on board to ensure the anchor doesn't drag and do something about it if it does. The other scenario is that I get a marina spot. That would be the safest option. However, I need to make sure we have a space before we arrive.

You can see my problem. One that could have been anticipated a long time before I set off. My excuse for not realising it before is mostly that I was trying to wing it. That's probably the real answer, but there were also mitigating factors. Lets take the number of things I was trying to do at the same time. Also Greg started chatting to me on WhatsApp, so I ended with sending him this picture of the new bridge before I finished my pint and went to bed on the boat.



Number one. John(Kessock pier) said I needed Radar if I was going South. That was an issue that had been taking all of my brain power and my aluminium pole solution I had decided was actually no good. There was wobble and twist on it and I could not be happy going to sea with a 20 kg radome on top of that pole I had put up. In short, I wasn't happy with it. My next issue was the fan belt. I couldn't reliably/safely go to sea without a spare fan belt in case our existing one broke. Andrew told me where to find the fan belt number and together we found it. I resolved to buy a spare. Fortuitously, before I bought one I had the occasion to lift the foremost deckhatch and check the battery. While I was there I found yet another toolbox. This one contained oil filters and a spare fan belt. The only thing I couldn't see was an impeller. No matter I had the spare I had been looking for. All of this took up my spare brain capacity (which is incredibly small at the best of times) and meant that I couldn't concentrate on important stuff like where to berth for the many nights I would need to berth round the UK. I had two deadlines at this juncture that were driving me on. Both of these deadlines were immovable dates.

Date no. 1. The 832 Tiffs anniversary drinking session in Pompei on the 10th of May. 42 years and 7 days after we all met and spent at least a couple of years together. This was the first anniversary we had had (although I vaguely remember a get together maybe 30 or so years ago). Anyway, it was not to be missed. So I had to get to Pompei by the 10th May.

Date No. 2. This date is the other definite immovable one. First two weeks in July every year is our annual holiday in Ardnamurchan regardless of what else may go on throughout the year. This year is no exception. Not for wind, tides, bad planning or anything else that might get thrown in the way.

What I really needed at this time was to cut the Gordian knot (I am stealing this from "The Rosie Project" by Graeme Simsion or it might have been "The Rosie Effect" or "The Rosie Result". 3 of the best and most funniest books I have read).

The solution was easy in the end. When the decision not to sail south at the end of April was made, everything else fell into place.

I requested and booked another month in Port Edgar. I would go to Pompei by train. Another month gave me time to revamp the inside of Green Dolphin II.

I would ask for a crew member to circumvent the weekly berthing problem. I immediately had someone in mind.

Time to order material and get the seats recovered (thank you to Diamond Stitch in Dalkeith - fantastic job).

Of course, with my non sail, the troops descended and demanded to go out for a sail... I duly obliged



You may notice Clyde's life jacket. You may also think, "hey, it's a dog, dogs can swim. What's he got a lifejacket for?" A very good question, which I'm glad you asked. Over 4 years ago when I first went down to Norwich to join Greg on his new purchase I realised that the broads have high sides. I.e. if and when you fall in, it is very difficult to get back out again. For a dog that is even worse. You need to be able to grab it and lift its whole bodyweight out of the water. If you try it with the collar you're going to strangle the dog and probably slip its collar.

The solution is a dog lifejacket. It has a handle you can grab with your hand or a boat hook and lift the dog clean out of the water with no stress whatsoever. We bought one for Clyde and when he's on a boat he wears the jacket.



A Happy chappy sailing by the bridges



I took the boat seats out to get recovered.

With the boat clear of cushions I had room to paint , using the painting skills impressed upon me by Ecky (painter and goalie and fellow kids football coach at Bonnyrigg Rose) in my 3 weeks of working for him many moons ago. Working for Ecky, by the way was the hardest professional physical work I had done up to that point in my life, even harder than my times as a cleaner. For completeness I should mention that even my painting escapade was upstaged by a country mile during our time (Robert and me) doing industrial Strawberry picking during Covid. A distant memory thankfully.

Old



New



Old



New



I digress. It also gave me time to redo the radar mount, run the cable and possibly get it connected. (which I duly attempted). It turns out that one of our unused scaffolding supporting poles was the very thing. It allows the radome to be kept in a lower position when not in use, and raised to about 2meters when in use. - ideal

Having decided not to travel South I could now look to going back North. Back to Lossiemouth, Sail the Caledonian canal, out the other side , round Ardnamurchan point and on to our annual holiday destination in time for the usual two weeks. The sail round the UK, could then go ahead in an Anticlockwise direction and in slower time. Grant (photographer had agreed to come along) and now with no particular deadlines to be met the trip could become almost realaxing. :-)

The knot had been cut.

Now, as I sit here typing away, the planning part is kicking in. Book the Canal, call Amanda and hope that she's forgotten all about our telling off. Oh, I should possibly explain what that was about, as it would be a shame not to share.



Way back near the beginning when Green Dolphin II was up in Lossiemouth and Greg and I went up to change the non functioning bulbs and attach the sails and put them up for the first time. John (Kessock Pier) came and checked out the boat and told us how to put up the sails. (having never attached a sail before). It's one thing to raise sails that are already there, it is quite another thing altogether trying to work out where everything gets attached, which sail is which and which way is up.

Anyway, it was quite a blowy day in the harbour and the wind was coming from the West broadside to the boat. John said we should tie up with the boat pointed into the wind then he left for a family function.

The tide was in and there were a couple of short pontoons at the end that would allow us to point into the wind. We took the boat over to berth there. We were aware of the tide and resolved that we should maybe get back to our berth about an hour before low tide, as we were pretty sure that the boat slightly bottoms out at low tide.

Anyway, we then had a choice. Do the sails then then go for a pint or go for a pint and then do the sails....I was with Greg. We went for a pint first.

I had a guinness zero, as the boat still had to be taken back to its berth later.

Then we went back. We had not long started doing the main sail when we heard a voice and recived what I would have to call the most polite telling off ever. We were shouted at without being shouted at. I didn't even know that was a thing before then.

It was Amanda (Harbourmaster). Now, to put this into perspective. Amanda doesn't work on Saturdays and she was calling from the other side of the harbour on a Saturday. We should probably be worried.

Amanda. "That berth is for small boats. It's too small for big boats."

Me. "We're just putting up the sails before we move back to our berth"

Amanda. "Are you watching the tides?"

Me, "Yes, we're going to move before too long, we're just putting the sails up whilst pointing into the wind"

Amanda. "I've never seen a big boat there before. Watch your tides, check the bbc site for tides."

Me. "We will do."

Amanda left.

I turned to Greg.

"Greg", says I, "I think we've just been told off".

"Mmmm", says Greg.

Me. " Let's get this mainsail up and move back. If Amanda is worried about tide then we should be more than worried about tide. We'll do the foresail when we get back to our berth, regardless of wind direction."

We hurried to get it done. Swiftly and what we believed to be fairly correctly and then we scarpered back to the sanctuary of our berth to lick our wounds.

On that Saturday I feel that I contributed to somebody else's entertainment. That must be a good thing, keeping other people entertained...surely. It was my contribution to Amanda's probable storybook of nautical near misses and amateur idiocy. I'm sure we will not make her top 40, but top 100 maybe. Anyway Amanda, you're welcome. No need to thank me. Thank Greg. If he didn't insist on that pint we would've been done and gone before you arrived.

...and Greg? No problem. You're welcome..... And yes, I know, it was me who suggested the pint too. Oops.

Later John(Kessock pier) told me and Martin of the time when he and his family (mostly him) misjudged the tide and ended up with his yacht on it's side in the middle of Lossiemouth harbour. With no other option except to wait for the tide. He opened a can of beer and toasted the onlookers.....that made me feel better. :-)

Back to me and Greg. We put the Jib up with the boat side on to the wind. Probably putting a little bit too much tension on the mooring ropes when we forgot what we were doing and pulled a little too tightly and too fast on the Jib ropes, meaning that the boat was indeed trying to sail at the same time as the mooring ropes were telling it a definite no!!

Now, back to the present. I hope Amanda lets us back in. Probably based on Edwin's good reputation, certainly not on mine.

Green Dolphin II in a very short berth



So Lossiemouth in a couple of weeks time. An update and invitation to Edwin and Margaret.

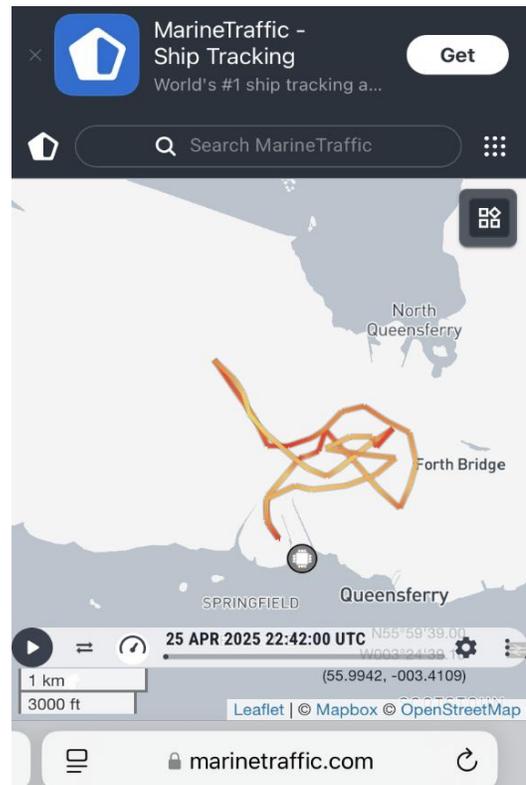
Book the Canal.

Book Corpach marina or Moorings at Fort William Yacht Club.

Check with Hugh for temporary anchorage during Holiday. All to do.

A few small jobs to do on the way North, but with Euan in charge I will have plenty time to do them. The only way to become competent is to take charge Euan....thank you. :-) (I can hear Euan spluttering in his coffee right now even though he's in London at the moment. We'll have fun I'm sure. :-)

And when we leave on the 5th of July on the first leg of our trip we will be switching on our AIS which allows our progress to be charted and followed on www.marinetraffic.com. Hopefully we will have a more straight and sensible track than the one we had when the family descended for a trip. - Attached here. :-)



Quick update. We leave tomorrow and Most importantly. Amanda is letting us back. Yesss :-)