



Clyde to South Coast and return passages in a 12-Metre, says PETER HAWARD, can be wonderful sailing...

A few minutes after the boom broke it looked a little chaotic on deck

Commuting a Twelve

SOME 640 miles must be sailed by a Scottish yacht if she is to leave the Clyde and compete with the English in the Solent. The passage constitutes a substantial cruise by most yachting standards. It has been my good fortune to be entrusted with moving *Sceptre** from Sandbank to a southern English port or back on five occasions, the last four connected with her trial horse races against *Sovereign*. Even if you call me a cynical, money-obsessed, professional yacht delivery contractor, I can still only sum up these commisions with one phrase—wonderful sailing!

From one aspect this 12-Metre commuting is a menace. It dulls your enthusiasm for lesser yachts. Joining a 4 ton auxiliary sloop after a voyage in a 12-Metre provides a doleful contrast. Even so, nobody must ever refuse a trip in a Twelve on that score.

Sceptre is an unusual Twelve, having an exceptionally large working cockpit which compresses the below-decks accommodation into virtually what is one large fo'c's'le, the floor of which has a steep gradient towards the bows. This varnished surface is covered by a fitted canvas carpet, secured at the edges by lacings to screw eyes, an essential feature to prevent the whole below-decks space being a glacier. In specification the rough-and-ready dormitory includes saloon, captain's cabin, bosun's stores and fo'c's'le. But in fact it is fairer to say that on passage *Sceptre's* crew bed down under the foredeck of a huge half-decker.

Underneath the big working cockpit are a w c, wash basin and galley. From the former, at the after end of the narrow alleyway, one can observe how the handles of the coffee grinders, situated in the cockpit above, are hooked up to the winch drums they operate; also how these two mechanisms are linked together by a chain drive so that four crew, two per coffee grinder, can direct their manpower to one winch drum.

In racing trim *Sceptre's* big working cockpit is entirely open, but when her present owner bought her, no doubt with her frequent passages south in mind, he had a portable doghouse built which, when shipped, covers the forward half and is a godsend to the crew during their watches below. It does not interfere badly with the winches except those for the halyards, which are at the forward end of the cockpit. Main halyard and one foresail halyard reeve through the forward doghouse coaming, but the second foresail halyard and spinnaker halyard do not, so that if these latter are required they must be changed with the first foresail halyard.

I have seldom set a spinnaker on *Sceptre* because for cruising a Genoa goose-winged on the spinnaker pole serves very well in following winds. A scratch crew of five will find the arrangement easy to handle, the luff of the sail being hanked on the forestay and unlikely to get out of control. I rig the pole with a topping lift and fore and after guys and reeve the sheet through an outhaul block bent on the end of the pole. It is then very simple to change the Genoa

* *Sceptre*, America's Cup challenger 12-Metre, built in 1958 by Alex. Robertson & Sons, Sandbank, to designs by David Boyd, M.R.I.N.A. 35 tons T.M., loa 68.9ft, lwl 46.5ft, beam 11.8ft, draught 9.1ft.



'The wind freshened to Force 6 as we reached the end of the Irish Sea'

(Photo by Stephen Webb)



from the leeward side to windward on the pole and vice versa. When lowering it is best to haul it from the pole to the sheltered position behind the mainsail, where it can easily be stowed without it touching the sea. Admittedly there is a blind spot of some 10 degrees when a Genoa draws well neither to leeward nor goose-winged but a cruising yacht can afford to set a course that will avoid it.

Readers of *YACHTING MONTHLY* will have read the account of my first voyage in *Sceptre*, when her owner purchased her as she lay at Southampton. After that her permanent crew undertook various trips to the Solent and back, on one occasion enjoying a very fast passage indeed. One return voyage treated them to the unnerving experience of being becalmed in dense fog off Land's End for some 17 hours which was swept off the sea only by a full gale that blasted them up to the Irish Sea smartly in a smother. After the early trials on the Clyde with *Sovereign* in 1963 I took her to Weymouth, giving the permanent crew more time to prepare for their racing programme.

As dusk settled over the Holy Loch we sailed past Hunter's Quay and commenced a beat down the Clyde in long and short tacks. I had an experienced crew of five with me: Maurice Durman, Adrian Wensley Walker, John O'Neil, Murray McGregor and Doctor McKennen. At first the wind was gusty and variable, but once past the Cumbraes we found that clear of local interference a steady sou'wester, Force 6, was the order of the night. Under passage mainsail and small working foresail, *Sceptre* was going great guns, dipping non-stop into the steep popple in her path.

It was wet, dark and chilly on deck, while below the sticky tape arrangements that were supposed to seal the foredeck hatches had broken down under the continuous bombardment with slop. Water was cascading through these besides finding other routes, and sleeping bags, blankets, spare clothing, kit bags and cheap suitcases were avidly sponging up the plentiful supply. For the next five days most of the crew remained in oilskins. Only the galley and alleyway to the toilet could offer a dry spell and at dawn I had a sleep on a mattress here, but crew traffic seemed heavy and lacked lane discipline.

By 0515 we had beaten to windward of Ailsa Craig. Putting about for the longer board towards Stranraer

Loch, we were delighted to note signs of the veer. It developed quickly. Very soon we were pointing towards the North Channel; next the sheets could be freed. By dawn a westerly wind, Force 6—with a mean true velocity of 25 knots, calculated from my anemometer—spurred *Sceptre* into a romping reach round Corsewell Point, Craig Laggan and Black Head.

From there she set her course for the South Rock Light Vessel. Her crew slowly began to recover from the tough night, snatching poor-quality sleep where they could, still in dank clothes under oilies, some choosing the wet sails on the leeward side of the working cockpit, where the portable doghouse protected from spray, if not the occasional trickles.

I said: 'The boom's breaking!' Wensley replied that it had always looked like that, but cross-examination discerned that only during the previous watch, his turn at the helm, had he noticed the pronounced bend at a point between two metal strengthening pieces that were fastened each side along this important spar.

Perhaps we should have quickly rigged splints out of whatever spars we could lay our hands on, but whatever our action the mainboom was already in need of extensive shipyard repairs. Instead we continued to watch while the Force 6 reaching wind drove the yacht through the Irish Sea at a foaming pace, her beautiful hull riding the beam sea with ease and grace. Her passage mainsail and small jib imposed no strain: She was not hard pressed, but very much in her element, relaxed and doing exactly what she was supposed to do.

Crouched in the working cockpit the navigator works out the course. Note the two coffee grinder sheet winches

(Stephen Webb)



Then the boom broke. I was perplexed. No error in handling could account for it and I wondered how the waiting skipper at Weymouth, all set for a busy racing timetable, would react when we arrived with two pieces of mainboom instead of the ready-for-use job, hung at its goose-neck.

The first thing, however, was to continue to our destination. All hands dropped the main and hauled the cleanly fractured spar out of the sea. The break was about one-third the way from the mast. We cast-off the foot of the sail from the track and sheeted it loose-footed. Hoisting, I was delighted to see how well it set for both windward work and reaching. We were lucky that it was a small sail and not the racing main, which would have been too long in the foot to be sheeted without a boom.

The wind eased as we progressed past Dublin Bay and, at 0420 on Friday, we passed the Tuskar Rock, the SE tip of Ireland, setting a course for the Longships in a gentle breeze. A day of light airs and calms followed, but by 1800 the radio forecast spoke of more Force 6. In anticipation we stowed our big Genoa and set our working foresail.

While doing so we noted that the halyard tail, where wire splices into rope, had lost a complete strand; therefore, we changed to the second foresail halyard. This had to be passed under the dinghy, which was lashed upside down between the mast and working cockpit, and rove through the fairlead in the doghouse coaming.

Three hours later the forestay tack fitting fractured and all the luff hanks parted, leaving the foresail secured only at its head and clew. With some difficulty it was stowed and sent below to have its hanks seized on later.

Meanwhile we jogged along under mainsail alone, close-hauled and now not in the desired direction. The wind had backed SSW, thus squeezing us towards the North Devon coast. It had increased to Force 5. Soon the midnight forecast was predicting S to SW Force 4 to 5, later veering W to NW and increasing Force 5 to 6. In anticipation of the veer we put about to gain westings. It seemed as if the approaching trough was not steep and would quickly pass. When that happened we would be able to head clear of Land's End, perhaps even with a free wind.

This was the same disturbance which, the next afternoon, treated the 1963 Fastnet Race to its hectic start. Up Channel it gathered into itself more vigour. Nevertheless for us on *Sceptre*, half-way between Ireland and the Longships, it was a rough night. In the early hours of Saturday morning I twice aired my anemometer and calculated the wind to be Force 6. One gust recorded reached 35 knots.

The veer came at 0100 and we put about to lie the course for the Land's End corner again. Ten minutes later four slides parted near the head of the mainsail and within seconds fifteen more went with machine-gun rapidity, the sail suddenly billowing to leeward, loose-luffed. The top three slides at the headboard held, being seized with wire, and this was fortunate because, had they not done so, it is likely that the halyard would have jumped the masthead sheave and jammed, making it impossible to lower an uncontrollable sail. As it was, the sideway strain on those gallant remaining slides created so much friction on the track that it took us 25 minutes to get the main down. By bearing away to gain good headway, then luffing and momentarily spilling the wind, taking care not to get in irons, we were able to inch down the wild canvas.

Elsewhere I have mentioned a school of thought

which believes that spreader lights should not be fitted to yachts because strictly they do not comply with the regulations for preventing collisions at sea. We gained control of that mainsail on a pitch-black night in a Force 6 wind, mainly assisted by oaths and two weak torches. You do not expect spreader lights on a racing 12-Metre, but had we anyone from the above-mentioned school aboard (which we had not), I suspect we should have made a convert.

With much of the mainsail in the working cockpit for repairs we brought up the Tilley light from the galley, where at night we always kept it burning and lashed to the cooker. A heavy sea was running and *Sceptre* was forereaching slowly, under bare poles, being fresh out of sails for the moment—or at any rate her crew was robbed of an overwhelming inclination to set any.

Bits and pieces of wave tops were slopping aboard at intervals but these were only of nuisance value. However, when we had refastened ten slides a complete tumbling creamer timed its run just right and burst over *Sceptre*, a torrent engulfing the sailmakers, snuffing out the Tilley and pouring below to fill the recently emptied bilge to above the toilet floor. Two of us hastily manned the pump and threw it back into the sea was 430 emphatic strokes. Then we gave up and, leaving the watchkeeper to watch the forereaching, each burrowed into whatever wet niche he could find and slept.

At 1010 we set the working foresail, its hanks re-seized, and lay a course 210° (13° W deviation). By midday the mainsail was repaired, bent, reefed and set. The wind was NNW Force 4, with drizzle and poor visibility; this later cleared in two hours. Then we shook out the reef, morale rising.

On my first trip in *Sceptre*, and again during this one, I had noted deviations up to 25°. At times the deviation changed almost as much as the course, affording the compass some ambiguous arcs. This distresses a conscientious navigator. I determined to plead the services of a compass adjuster for the return trip.

At 1815 the Longships was abeam. There remained the run up Channel which we enjoyed before a moderate breeze and in good visibility. At once we found that our loose-footed mainsail would fold up if the wind drew within 30° of the stern. We had to tack downwind.

The next morning, Sunday, off Start Point and in Lyme Bay, we passed many of the off-shore fleet tacking to windward. Their race had had a tough beginning, but now in easier conditions and under all available canvas they were footing it as fast as possible for that rock off SW Ireland. We were ending our 600-mile voyage. In the afternoon we sailed close round Portland Bill and into Weymouth Bay.

At once we received absolution regarding the mainboom.

'We realised it was cracked but we never thought it would break on you. We have a nice steel one at Southampton, which is now near at hand!'
Howard could hold his head high—so far!

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About five weeks later I joined *Sceptre* again with another crew to sail her back to Scotland. Particularly with yachts like Twelves, which are definitely not single-handers, it is important to have a crew who can offer a basic knowledge about sizeable yachts and are able to pull their weight in a team. Suitably fitting is Chris Barnett who had sailed many miles with me

and Bob Dayman from Sydney was with us, and for a year it had been justifiably hard to tell any good yachtsman from 'down under' that he would not be a natural on a Twelve. With Bob you did not think of it. David Browning, Ron Dibden and Julian Rowse completed the ship's company.

Before setting sail from the Clyde I had gone over all items of equipment with Bob Bruce, *Sceptre's* skipper, and had asked plenty of questions to refresh my memory of the passage I had made three years previously. Then I had carefully explained the procedure for hoisting the sails and working the gear to my crew. It had paid dividends—now I perceived how much. This time we left Weymouth without due attention to these preliminaries and my new crew, experienced though they were on other yachts, demonstrated the shambolic result.

Having been towed out of harbour, sails crept spasmodically up the tail spar. Delays were due to ignorance about which way the winch drums turned, the puzzle of the over-riding turn, lack of manpower on the coffee grinders, experiments with its gears, neglect in carrying the lee runner to the shrouds, failure to check away the down-haul tackle and timidity and lack of co-operation in changing the loaded main halyard from the coffee grinder to its own winch drum.

Finally sail was set and off we went, out to the Shambles L.V. to avoid Portland Race, the Channel close to the Bill being unsuitable at the time.

Night fell. Then came reports that puzzled the navigator:

'Red flashing buoy 4 points on the starboard bow.'

Knowing about no such thing near the Shambles, I went on deck.

'Well actually it seems to be fine on the bow.'

'You're not keeping a good course.'

'Yes I am—Cap'n!'

'Like hell you are! It's now dead ahead.'

'I'm on course now'—all dignified.

From the working cockpit a voice rang out:

'Green flasher to port... check, a red flasher.'

The helmsman said: 'Our red flasher has turned green. Do buoys have different coloured sectors?'

What on earth was going on? Was Trinity House indulging in a great practical joke, or was this an exercise by Super Wreckers Ltd? With *Sceptre* broad reaching in a light breeze and slipping over the dark sea at a good speed, I felt singularly indisposed to fall in with the joke principle. It seemed loaded in an unfriendly way against us. Then suddenly Haward's small-size grey matter computer processed the data. Helicopters from the aircraft carrier we had sighted a while before were operating at zero feet, apparently at random, but no doubt on an important naval occasion.

As luck would have it, we were having trouble with the side lights and David and Ron were still stripping and cleaning the switch plug in the forepeak. Unlit, we were sliding stealthily amongst a mock naval night battle, our 90ft stick emulating a stumpy barrage balloon cable. Not that our navigation light, a bi-coloured affair on the pulpit, would have dazzled a

* Aircraft navigation lights usually flash, unlike those of ships which are fixed.

helicopter pilot at the best of times. We pumped the Tilley lamp to full brilliance and lashed it on the dog-house roof; then graced by some Gaelic charm, unmolested by choppers, *Sceptre* sailed serenely out across Lyme Bay.

There followed 3½ days of light-breeze sailing in visibility ranging from moderate to fog to test the navigator. Mostly only basic principles were used. There was no auxiliary engine to maintain a constant speed, no RDF nor any of the pin-pointing radio devices that many seafarers expect these days. But we had a radar reflector to alert modern navigators around us, a patent log to tell us how far we had gone and a 100ft Ferrograph to act as an early warning system against the crunch. Finally, since her last voyage, *Sceptre* had that greatest advance since the lodestone—a mariner's compass whose deviation had been mostly eliminated by an expert, the rest listed.

At 1800 on 23 September the BBC reiterated its suggestions of around four hours back. They predicted that the variables would become SW, Force 4 to 6 and locally 7. The ghoster Genoa was stowed and the tough No 1 Genoa set. The racing main was sent below, the smaller passage main bent and hoisted. When I estimated the Rockabill abeam away to port the yacht was tramping along in the haze. Lazy days were over; suddenly *Sceptre* was doing what vigorous people imagine yachts do.

Just before two in the morning I began to think prudence must interfere with wonderful progress. We were running out of Irish Sea. Genoa goose-winged on the spinnaker pole, main guyed forward, we were all trussed up on our downwind run. The mean true wind was steadily rising beyond 15 knots, the visibility problematical in the black night.

Seventy miles astern our position had been approximated by the Codling diaphone; now somewhere through the drizzle, closing at nine knots plus, the South Rock Light Vessel was due to soothe my nerves. It bided its time and gave a mystery noise in the rigging its moment, forcing me to think about Strangford whistle buoy that should have been well to the west and out of earshot. I thought the moaning sound came from the rigging, but had to submit to the fear that told me it might mean we were several miles nearer Ireland, roaring downwind to a rocky death trap near Strangford Narrows.

Panic or prudence, the price of error would be too heavy. The Ferrograph was switched on and in order to make the yacht more easily manoeuvrable from sudden danger we dragged down the big Genoa and brought the pole inboard. Exactly as the operation was completed the South Rock Light winked its three sly smiles through the darkness, just where it should have been.

But the increasing wind steadily made up for the loss of speed, reaching Force 6 with a heavy rain squall when veer time started. Black Head, the Scottish side, was abaft the beam when the BBC dawn forecast said gale warnings—Force 8 to 9 were in force for Irish Sea and Malin, veering west to NW and decreasing slowly to Force 6 to 7.

The gale part did not materialise as far as we were concerned, but when we reached the shelter of the Clyde Force 7 cold front type weather gave *Sceptre* a lee-sail-awash, sprint finish. Wonderful sailing!