

Challenge does it again!

Robert Allen, (Sealegs2). reports

When she sailed from Liverpool to Brest last year Challenge logged 451 nautical miles, thought to be her longest trip ever. Then, in December, she left Bristol for the London Boat Show and steamed 552 miles non-stop (in 58 hours I believe, Ed) before making fast in the King George V Lock in the East End's docklands, thus breaking her own distance record.

Much work was carried out on the boiler in Bristol through a huge effort by the engineers - not least by Chief Engineer Martin Alien - who spent at least three days burning the candle at both ends to prepare Challenge for her London voyage. All the while they knew there was only a three-day tidal slot to escape from Bristol Docks due to the lock gates being refurbished.

Deteriorating weather

However the work was completed on time and Challenge made good time to Land's End, where she turned eastwards and raced the length of the English Channel just hours ahead of a weather front and deteriorating conditions.

Successful Boat Show...

As at our first Boat Show in 2004, this year's visit was again a great success. We had the coal-fired, twin-engined estuary tug Portwey (and VIC 56) alongside us for the majority of the show and both vessels took part in joint sails past. They must have made an impressive sight from the shoreline.

...and a new home

When Challenge left London in mid-January she was bound for her new home at Shoreham.

Turning south out of the Thames Estuary, Challenge met a winter gale. She handled the heavy weather with dignity and an easy motion which was a credit to her designer and builders. However, because of the direction of the gale and the relatively shallow water in the approaches to Shoreham it was decided to ask Dover Port Authority for permission to anchor in the port's deep-water anchorage.

Helpful Dover Harbour

Instead of allowing us to lie in a relatively exposed position, Dover suggested an alternative and their launch ushered us to a very sheltered berth with two modern tugs and a dredger. We were made very comfortable indeed and our thanks to Dover Port Authority seemed so insignificant compared with the warmth of their hospitality to us.

We were in Dover for two nights and left early on the second morning. Wind and sea were still fairly high but Challenge, as before, behaved impeccably. Her powerful engine was undaunted by the conditions and pushed us on with apparent ease and, surprisingly, with excellent economy due to the engine-room staffs constant efforts to make every litre of fuel bum more efficiently.

We locked into Shoreham Harbour and lay alongside the wharf made available for Challenge by Ready Mixed Concrete at their depot at Portslade. Thank you Ready-Mixed Concrete.

Yet more maintenance

Before we set sail on our next voyage to Dunkirk there is more work to be done on her boiler. Some tubes are being changed as part of a programme which should result in all Challenge's tubes being replaced within two or three years.