

Captain's blog start date 17042015...and so it begins....by Keith McDevitt

Well it's a new and second sailing season for Skipper Keith having survived 2014, which on reflection was a bonus. Come the annual dinner the experiences throughout the season gained him numerous plaudits. Indeed he was nearly top prize winner with three trophies under his belt, a first for a sailing newbie in the clubs long history no doubt.

Surely this is worthy of a prize for such an accomplishment. Indeed Skipper Keith was beaten only by George S who takes it all very seriously.

Admittedly there was little competition for two of the prizes, firstly the Pathetic Paddle which hadn't been presented for a decade, this is for being the club numpty. It appears that the Pathetic Paddle is more often than not presented posthumously. Following such an honour was the Cruising Log trophy presented for giving everyone the written evidence to justify the former prize.

But Skipper Keith actually won a proper race as readers may remember, the Driftwood Trophy, and a mighty fine trophy it is. Won fair and square due to finely crafted judgement and skill on the day...the day there was no wind and it was literally he who drifted quickest wins.

So here we are, a new season is upon us and trophies to be had.

Now not content with the winning Leisure 17 Skipper Keith upped his vessel to an Invader 21 towards the end of season on the grounds that size matters so another 4 feet should make an impressive improvement on performance next season.

Well with 8 weeks to crane in did Skipper Keith not hear of another little opportunity to gain a few additional lengths. Yes it was all in the timing, right place at the right time (or wrong place at wrong time and time will indeed tell). Skipper Keith, always one for a challenge, heard that wooden built Riptide 31 named Ramillies was up for sale. Measuring 34 impressive feet

from stern to tip of the Bow Sprit with 50 big horses in its diesel engine, it was just the kinda power to get Skipper Keith out of trouble.

In truth the selling point wasn't the impressive length, girth and power but simply the pirates wheel in the cockpit. Super cool.

A deal was hatched between Skipper Keith and Ramillies owner John G which involved an undisclosed amount of used bank notes folded in a manner known only by the hardest of drug dealers, the exchange of Skipper Keith's Invader 21, his Ford Mondeo and towing plate.

Skipper Keith, getting caught up in the excitement of hatching the deal, also threw in his partner Varrie on account of her having an additional discountable asset value given she was still young and fresh.

Luckily John G realised Skipper Keith was getting over zealous and pointed out that throwing Varrie into the deal was appreciated but as he already had a younger one of his own it really wasn't necessary.

Word quickly spread of the deal hatched on the pier and it became quite clear, by those that held a view on the matter, that the club was divided into two camps over this acquisition.

Camp 1: the OMG Skipper Keith with a bigger yacht. Please make him see sense,
And

Camp 2: the OMG Skipper Keith with a bigger yacht. Can you please not moor him near mine?

Being somewhat thick skinned this troubled Skipper Keith not a jot....what did bother him was the realisation afterwards of the freaking additional set up costs. None of the chain or strops previously owned were of any use to him now, and having kept the club afloat through the purchase of two sets of chains in season 2014, now he needed a large amount of 16mm chain,

much stronger and thicker strops, a huge buoy and much larger shackles. Pop Up Phil and Eva's face shone as they looked at Skipper Keith, so much chain; such a cash cow.

Anyhoo trying to reduce some of the costs Skipper Keith went to Jimmy Green Marines ebay shop and bought some running line and some 16mm shackles which were in the sale. Pop Up Phil took one look at the shackles, which did not have the required blue coloured pin, and shook his head in a disapproving manner. Clearly not meeting the club specification requirements he suggested they were worthy of chucking straight into the Forth, as for the running line, well that's a story for later.

As it happened, and clearly after a lot of hush hush discussion out of Skipper Keith earshot, a decision was made to create a 'new special spot' for Ramillies, as far away from the club as possible and in what appears to be the very front of the middle pier approximately one third of the way between Limekilns and Bo'ness... out of harms way.

It was a bit like housing a sex offender to the community, he needed to go somewhere, just nowhere too close to anybody.

A new sinker had to be sunk especially, this was covered off within the winter work party and poor Erik was picked to help Skipper Keith dig it in. Perhaps to ensure it was sufficiently far enough out from the nearest potential victim of any berthing disaster... Coincidence that Erik's boat was the one direct behind.

Phil's instructions were clear, "it's exposed out there so dig the sinkers in deep." Well it's pretty muddy out there and Skipper Keith and Erik began to dig, and dig and dig. Eventually thinking they had a hole sufficiently deep, around 3 feet, they plopped the heavy concrete sinker tyre in the hole, jumped up and down on it repeatedly to wedge it in, and looked down upon it with some degree of satisfaction despite their being covered in filthy stinking mud from head to toe... "now that ain't coming out in a hurry" said Skipper Keith.

Just at that Pop up Phil popped up, as he does, looked down at the sinker and shook his head, "much deeper he sighed, it will get a right good sweep of the wind out here so needs to go deep". Skipper Keith and Erik looked at each other, then at the sinker then at Phil, then at the hole, then at each other then at the sky.

The sinker was a tight fit, it wasn't going to be easily removed. "It won't be easily removed" said Phil stating the blooming obvious "but it will have to go deeper, and better be quick, tides on the turn". Phil spun round and stomped back to the rest of the work party who were working on sinking the barrels for the new pontoons. He had mistakenly left the other group unsupervised and the guys were busily watching Christine, who had lost her wellies in the mud and fallen face down floundering like a flatfish in a shallow pool. Interestingly nobody was rushing to assist poor Christine who was screaming like a girl, which she is, and thus entitled to do. Skipper Keith thought this was clearly some strange Work Party initiation ceremony for Christine, the only female member of the party.

So back to their issue. How do you remove a frigging heavy concrete sinker from a tight muddy hole that it's wedged into...answer is... you can't; the suction makes it impossible. Poor Skipper Keith and Erik had to dig a hole twice as wide to get under it. At one point Erik, not the tallest chap in the club but certainly the best cook by a mile, disappeared down the hole and was lost from sight lest his wee hands waving frantically as he tried to scramble out the mud pit now head height, well his head height.

Not another inch, they were done in, the sinker was as far as it was going and they still had to fill the hole back in. Exhausted but good job done. Best sinker sunk ever, should be a trophy for that.

This was all very well until a week later when Skipper Keith got up at 6am to beat the tide and fit his newly acquired heavy, expensive chains in the new muddy mooring point.

Dragging such heavy chain out in the mud was a challenge and took all the strength Skipper Keith had but once there he found the first three mooring hooks about a foot under the mud, easy peasy, then to the new one recently dug in.

Skipper Keith found its location without a problem. Being a canny lad he had tied a piece of string around the sinker hook and to a wooden stake marking the sinkers location.

This is where a problem arose. How to connect a massive chain to a hook three feet down in the mud without digging the complete hole again. Answer... Nigh on impossible and to make things worse the hole kept filling with water.

When located, the hook was so far down that Skipper Keith's arms couldn't reach without submerging his shoulders also. The rubber gloves covering his wrists seemed so irrelevant at such depths and the water so cold and stinking because of the disturbed mud. Working a wrench on chain and shackle in such conditions was near impossible. "Pop up now Phil, I dare you" thought Skipper Keith once or twenty times as he dropped the shackle and pin time after time. This was impossible.

But at times of great stress when the body is ready to give up one can call on an inner strength. What would it take to get the shackle tightened around the hook so far down in the cold mud. Three foot down Phil, two frigging feet further down than any other sinkers thought Skipper Keith. It may just have been the exhaustion setting in but for a shameful moment thinking he was securing the chain around Phil's neck to prevent him from popping up seemed to do the trick.

Eventually after an age the chain was on and shackle secured. Ready for the new buoy.

Mooring secured. Chains and buoy fitted, Ramillies sanded, filled, painted, varnished and antifouled. Check list complete ready for crane in at last.

And so to crane in day.