

My relationship with the Netherlands dates back to a time when I thought that owning a motor yacht would be absurd as I was too deeply into sailing yachts. Never say never ... It was love at first sight when I saw the plans for the Linssen Classic Sturdy 360 OC (open cockpit) which was then just about to come on to the market.



Grüezi Holland!

Love at first sight

Text Josef Walker

We immediately sold our sailing yacht and “furnished” ourselves with a 170 foot motor yacht in Maasbracht. Of course, over the years this was spread over four brand-new Sturdys, which were used almost exclusively in France, except for our current Grand Sturdy 430 MK II.

It was only logical that I should prepare by immersing myself in the very extensive literature sometime before I left for France. Books by Jan Werner (Delius Klasing), Manfred Fenzel (Edition Maritim) and others take you to the most beautiful destinations. The comprehensive maps published by the Dutch ANWB (ANWB is the Dutch equivalent of the AA in the UK) are very detailed. The same is true the electronic map for my plotter, which I treasure very much.



“Ship’s Bible”

An essential item to have on board from the start is the ANWB Wateralmanak 1 containing police regulations and many useful tips. It’s a kind of “ship’s Bible” with over 800 pages. These regulations have recently become available in German as well. With over 900 pages, the ANWB Wateralmanak 2 contains everything that you have to or would like to know at any time, e.g. when a bridge is going to be raised again or all the details of over one thousand harbours! You can find both books everywhere where there’s a nautical shop. They are of course in Dutch. However, with some goodwill, this is seldom a problem. Things are much more difficult when it comes to understanding what people are saying. I’d also like to mention something that always gives me some consolation: the fact that someone from Limburg in the South can hardly understand what someone from Friesland in the North is saying.

“...Burdaard on the Dokkumer Ee...”

The total length of 170 feet comes from the fact that our latest yacht is actually 44 feet long.

Over 3 years or 500 operating hours have passed since we left Burgundy and headed for Holland via the Rhine-Rhône Canal, Rhine and Meuse to Maasbracht. That’s about 1,150 km and 148 locks. This journey could only be achieved in 10 days with a good friend. In the literature on waterways, the Canal du Rhône au Rhin is described as one of the most beautiful. I’m not the only one who feels that way.

Holland at last!

In terms of area, Holland is almost the same size as Switzerland. Holland is just 243 km² bigger but contains almost 9 million more people. Instead of the Alps, there is water, water and even more water, some of it even below sea level. And that is exactly what has long drawn me to Holland.

Internet

You can also find excellent information on the Internet. Many harbours now provide wireless Internet access free of charge or for a small fee. However, it’s worth visiting one of the telephone shops that you will frequently encounter. There you can buy a USB stick for a few euros containing thousands of megabits from a leading company for your laptop. Get the salesperson to log in the device for the first time with your laptop straight away. Otherwise you could quickly have a problem. As we know, data transfer via roaming can quickly lead to a situation where you can no longer afford to fill up with diesel later in the journey!

Cast off!

Maasbracht – virtually the birthplace of Linssen yachts – is practically the most southerly navigable point in the Netherlands. But it's also the largest harbour for working vessels on inland waterways.

Three giant locks, which are currently being enlarged, form the section of the Juliana Canal which leads upstream (south) towards Maastricht and the Belgian border. This means that our route into the low countries takes us downstream on the Meuse to the north. Our journey had hardly started when we encountered a fairly large water sports area. With its various lakes and many marinas, Roermond is very busy, particularly at weekends. Sailing boats, which have priority, can make progress quite difficult for motor yachts. However, it's a very special feeling being in the middle of this throng.

A particular feature in this area are the extremely high dolphins to which the landing piers are attached. The Meuse can rise to quite a high level (usually in winter), which is also true of practically all other major rivers. It rises so high that some of these dolphins have now been extended upwards and are a good two storeys high. Otherwise, the Meuse is a wonderful, peacefully flowing river. It has soft banks with countless water birds, as well as horses, cows and sheep. Apart from the sections on which sailing at high speed is permitted. There you have to watch out behind as well! Otherwise you may find yourself back on the "towpath" because a bigger boat has rushed past, frequently with its cylinder outlets open just at that moment.

In between, quite a distance away, is a lock. No, not one but three close together which are almost always in operation. There's no shortage of locks here! However, passing through a lock occasionally gives you the jitters if your own stern is just in front of the red strip of the sill and the stern of a freighter is equally close to your bow. However, it is surprising how carefully the captains of freighters with a cargo weighing a couple of thousand tonnes set off. Here and there on the banks, amusingly designed signs from Rijkswaterstaat – the national body with the yellow boats used to maintain the waterways – are highly effective. Their website, www.rijkswaterstaat.nl, is well worth a visit.

Instead of bridges, there are the "kabelponts" – ferries, which always set off just as we're going past. Make sure they don't rush by close to your stern. An encounter with their steel cable or chain will have disastrous consequences. But not for the ferry...

While we're on the subject of bridges: further north, especially in beautiful Friesland, many bridges are so low that

they have to be opened first in order to allow traffic through. This happens quite quickly and sometimes involves paying a fee. This is paid free of charge into the "klomp" (clog) presented by the bridge keeper as you pass through. All the bridges have a name. This means you can look them up in the "Wateralmanak" to see when they are closed. Jostling in front of the closed bridge at lunchtime – even if the keeper is roaming around again – is a waste of time. You will be allowed through exactly on time. The vast majority of lock



**"...evening calm in Well
on the Meuse in Limburg..."**

keepers and bridge keepers are very pleasant and helpful.

Holland. The land of steel yachts

Once you have tied up in one of the countless harbours, you can safely assume that everything will cost you something but it will be in perfect condition and will work.

However, I often have the feeling that a kilowatt of electricity means a different quantity of energy in each harbour. Depending on weather conditions, a very lively wind can sometimes blow through the harbour. Once again, you can then see that motor yachts can also sail. Unfortunately, the best place to see this is in the harbour basin. Don't be disappointed if there are skippers there who observe very closely how the manoeuvre is carried out without assistance. They assume that the owners of a proud Linssen yacht are also able to sail.

Quite often, this results in pleasant contact with the locals afterwards. Although it is unfortunately still a fairly rare occurrence for them to sail a Linssen, you can feel their pride in the fact that such perfect yachts are built in their country. Actually, Holland is the land of steel yachts. Countless boatyards, even small ones, build very beautiful boats. They are usually completely customised to meet the owner's requirements. Added to these are the wonderful, very old ↵



flat-bottomed boats with their wooden masts and powerful leeboards. Only our great grandparents' generation at best will be able to remember their keels being laid. Dutch shipbuilding quality apparently pays off and is extremely durable.

It's not only in harbour facilities that you can moor but often in the centre of towns as well! Or in the middle of a lake ("meer" in Dutch). All around you is only water, nature and tranquillity! There are islands with long and short berths in bays. The way the jetties are occupied is often peculiar. In the centre is a boat whose name you've seen a dozen times before. This means that no one else can moor in front of or behind the thing, which usually does not have a number and whose speed is less than 20 km/h. Besides nature, there is a container for boaters' litter. In addition, it is often windy, which makes it impossible to read Linssen's Serious Pleasure on the aft deck. But no matter. The interesting magazine will be picked up a few times anyway. If you can't or won't wait any longer, insert the USB stick in your laptop and go to www.seriouspleasure.com. Have fun!

Friesland

The bodies of water in Friesland are impressive, with water levels at different heights. There are dreamlike houses, the floors of which are often only a few decimetres above the level of the canal which is usually perfectly encased with wood. It is impressive how water has been used in this country for centuries. There are directional signs at canal intersections or branches, just like on the roads. This is very useful because there are only cows in front of, behind and beside the canal bank. Or one of the many beautifully preserved windmills, which simply belong here. Even today, the wooden shafts are usually greased with lard.

Once back at home, I'm very soon longing for the wonderful little towns often protected by huge ramparts, the houses built perfectly of brick hundreds of years ago and the windows, which almost always contain a small exhibition. Then there are the house doors, painted in shades of high-gloss black or green or blue. I'd like to make a photo gallery of them one day. For that very reason, I really wish to visit Holland often in future. It is logical that the photographic equipment required can be transported extremely conveniently on the waterways. On our fabulous Linssen Grand Sturdy 430 Mark II "PLAISIR".



Just like Rollo Gebhard, Yvonne and Josef Walker fell in love with the Classic Sturdy 360 OC in 1992 and, after many years on sailboats, decided to switch to a motor boat. He became a Linssen connoisseur par excellence. A customer became a friend. Over the years, the first yacht was followed by a Classic Sturdy 400 and a Grand Sturdy 500 and after using the lake of Neuchâtel and Burgundy as their home port, Yvonne and Josef Walker are now sailing their Grand Sturdy 430 MK II 'PLAISIR' in the Netherlands. Sailing in the Netherlands as seen through Swiss eyes. An interesting perspective, and not only for our international guests.

