



Text: Gabi de Graaf-Weerts; Photographs: Tom and Reggie Janssen

## “JUST TURN THE KEY AND OFF YOU GO”

SETTING OFF ON HOLIDAY IN THEIR LINSSEN 43 SL TWIN NO LONGER REQUIRES MUCH PREPARATION FOR TOM AND REGGIE JANSSEN FROM VENLO, OTHER THAN BUYING SOME GROCERIES AND PACKING A CHANGE OF CLOTHES. THEY HAVE BEEN CRUISING THE WATERWAYS OF EUROPE IN A LINSSEN YACHT FOR 25 YEARS NOW.

They started in October 1989 with a Linssen 35 SE, moved on to a Linssen 38 SC in 1995, and since 2001 their chosen vessel has been a Linssen 43 SL Twin. Tom and Reggie have always been especially attracted by the rivers and canals of France. Besides all sorts of other trips, the couple have invariably set off each May – since back in 1993! – for the fishing village of Le Grau-de-Roi on the Mediterranean, then spending three weeks cruising back to Venlo through France, Switzerland, Germany and/or Belgium. Sometimes their route takes them via Basel and sometimes via Paris. “I now know all of France’s waterways,” says Tom Janssen, “except those to the west of Paris, and I’ve never followed the Nivernais canal.”

### ALL THE GOOD LUCK IN THE WORLD

But why go straight down to Le Grau-du-Roi every year? It’s because Tom and Reggie don’t want to miss the annual feast of Saint Peter, the patron saint of fishermen. Le Grau-du-Roi then becomes the exciting venue for processions, water jousting, horse racing, and (bloodless) French-style bullfighting. Tom and Reggie are particularly impressed by the ceremony to commemorate the fishermen who never returned home from the sea. Fishing boats bearing a statue of the Madonna and flowers sail

out a short distance into the sea, where they form a circle and pray for all the victims of drowning. But as soon as the last “amen” has been said, they race back into port as fast as possible, because the first boat to arrive is the winner.

Horse racing and bullfighting are also a regular part of the feast of Saint Peter, with the young men of the village running through the streets after the animals. Tom explains that the idea behind the tradition is that if you grab a horse’s tail and let yourself be dragged through the streets, you will then have all the good luck in the world. “But the area around Le Grau-du-Roi is wonderful anyway,” he says with pretty villages built out in the marshes with money from the Marshall Plan.”

After so many years of cruising, Tom and Reggie naturally have a real fund of stories to tell. Like the time they were on their way to Le Grau-du-Roi, and at Fontenoy-Le-Chateau a night-time storm caused a tree to fall across the waterway. “There was an Austrian couple in a boat ahead of us,” says Tom. “They had all kinds of stuff on board – a saw, a large chopper, and even a great big axe. One of them sat on the fallen tree and started sawing. When he had almost sawn through, he decided he would break the last bit by pulling at the tree with his boat.

‘You’ll never manage it with that little boat of yours,’ I said, ‘but we can do it with our 9.5 tonne Linssen.’ Sure enough: we cranked up the engine and at the third go we broke through the tree!”

### A NIGHT IN A DARK LOCK

Tom has another story about the time at Sedan, in northern France, when they were forced to spend the night in a lock. There was a German chap with a motor cruiser who was in a real hurry to get home and who asked Tom to help him get through the locks quickly. “He had been sailing behind us for quite a while,” says Tom, “and he’d seen that I was good at operating the French locks. It only took me 7 or 8 minutes to get through. I told him that he wouldn’t manage it that same day because the locks were about to close.” But the German fellow pressed me to help him, so we continued on at top speed. All went well until Sedan... “I pulled on the beam to open the lock gates, we entered, and all at once the lights went off. So there we were down at the bottom of the lock. We had to wait until the next morning. With a smile, Tom says that the lockkeeper looked very surprised when he found them there in the morning, by now at the top of the lock.

Tom and Reggie think that the River Saone and the Briare aqueduct over the Loire – at the end of the Rogny lock staircase – are among the loveliest places in France. “The aqueduct is only 5.5 metres wide, so we only just fit,” says Tom. The aqueduct is 662 metres long and until recently was the longest in the world. Tom and Reggie say it’s definitely worth a visit.

### POT HOLDERS AND BABY BOOTIES

After all these years of cruising, Reggie Janssen is now a familiar face on the waterways of France. One reason is the crocheted and knitted articles that she makes – pot holders, ducklings, baby booties... because handicrafts is Reggie’s favourite pastime. She sells her creations during the couple’s trips. “Last year, there was someone who came over to me and said: ‘I remember you – you were here in 2004 too. I bought three of your ducklings.’ And

### “JUST TURN THE KEY AND OFF YOU GO”

right away he bought another three!” The proceeds go to buying coffee and cake for the senior citizens’ association in Venlo.

Tom and Reggie’s latest trip with their Linssen 43 SL Twin started in Venlo and went via the Linssen Yachts harbour at Maasbracht (near Maastricht), down through Belgium via Liège, Huy, Namur, Dinant, and Hastière to the French border. It continued via Fumay, Deville, Mouzon, Stenay, Consenvoye, Verdun, Saint-Mihiel, Commercy, and Pagny-sur-Meuse to Toul. The return leg back to Venlo was via Metz and Neumagen (in Germany).

There’s one thing that Tom wants to emphasise: “I was originally a car mechanic, and during my trips I’ve fixed a lot of faults in the boats of other travellers. But none of them was a Linssen Yacht. And our own Linssen yachts have been just as reliable. Over the years I’ve probably done about 7000 hours of cruising and I’ve never had any problems. Each time, it’s just a matter of ‘turn the key and off you go!’”



Tom Janssen (79) – the former proprietor of a garage in Blerick – and his wife Reggie (80) have been cruising in various Linssen yacht for 25 years now. They bought a Linssen 35 SE in October 1989 and moved on to a Linssen 38 SC in 1995. Since 2001 their vessel of choice has been a Linssen 43 SL Twin. When they aren’t cruising, Tom is a volunteer harbourmaster in Venlo. Tom and Reggie have two sons, two daughters, and seven grandchildren.

