



HALFWAY AROUND EUROPE ON OUR OWN BRAND NEW YACHT!

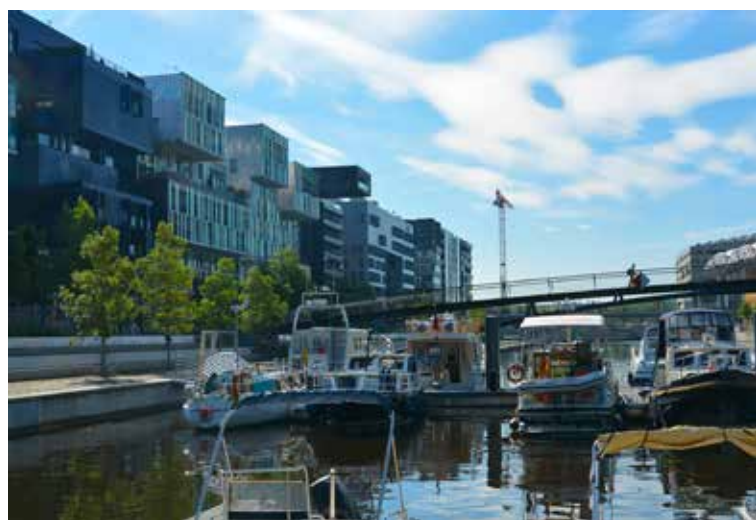
Text and photographs: Randolph Nott

MANY WILL THINK WE ARE MAD. WHY REPLACE A THREE-YEAR-OLD GRAND STURDY 40.9 BY A BRAND NEW YACHT? HOWEVER, THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DECKBRIDGE IN THE CLASSIC MODEL SERIES GAVE US THE IDEA OF TRADING IN OUR HIPPO FOR A HIPPO III!

We opted at the time for a Grand Sturdy in the Longtop version, because we were looking for a yacht with as few steps as possible – a sort of floating bungalow. What's more, we hardly ever used the roof – with the exception of the Variodeck roof. And that was precisely what persuaded us to choose this new yacht: the easily accessible 'upper deck' on the basis of the modern Grand Sturdy design, together with the smart use of space for storing the dinghy.

So that was the background to this first voyage, on which we would be bringing our new pride and joy to its homeport. Our HIPPO II was launched on 2 June 2016 along the Saône in Saint-Jean-de-Losne, France, and fitted out by H2O. All transport safety features had to be removed, the mast has to be erected and the dinghy had to be lifted on board using the boat's own mast crane. During these activities, the H2O staff were extremely supportive and friendly and we were offered a free berth in the boatyard's own marina. When you think back to 2016, two things probably stand out: the train strikes in France and the floods

along the Saône and the Rhône. Despite the strikes, we were fortunately able to reach our destination without any problems. However, we had to delay our departure because of high water levels. After all, we had to avoid having to negotiate too many floating tree-trunks and other trash. But in the end, we were able to cast off on 6 June and start our voyage! Even so, we still had to face several minor restrictions, because various berths where we wished to go sight-seeing were flooded and were therefore inaccessible. Not all locks were operating either, and in some cases



vessels were even led directly across weirs. Given that we were seafarers with limited experience on inland waterways, this promised to be an exciting voyage!

In the port of Chalon-sur-Saône, another skipper drew our attention to the Halte Nautique Confluence, a special marina in Lyon that was not included in our French inland waterways guide. (Although this guide is not always accurate and even refers to marinas that have been closed for years, it nevertheless remains a useful and almost indispensable guide.) On Friday 10 June, we cast off around 10.50 a.m. and reached the confluence of the Saône and the Rhône after 1.5 kilometres. Here, too, the high water had not yet disappeared completely and particularly near the many locks a large amount of driftwood had collected that had been carried along by the flow. This meant that despite our careful manoeuvring, the coolant filters had to be cleaned every day.

Although we had been impressed by the Sablons lock with a drop of 14.5 m, that was nothing compared with the Bollène lock with a drop of 22 m! We have to admit that before the voyage, the large number of locks unsettled us. But in the end, we were relieved to discover that the VHF contact and the passage through the locks themselves went smoothly, all the more because all locks on the Rhône are equipped with floating bollards. On several occasions, we were joined in the locks by a péniche and we were able to talk shop with the skipper while waiting. A péniche is a French barge, and they are often converted into houseboats. Thanks to their standard dimensions (38.5 m long and 5.05 m wide), these inland waterway vessels offer a great deal of space and some have splendid layouts. The skipper of 'our' péniche gave us a useful tip about a special marina in Avignon, which we otherwise would probably have missed. And that's how we ended up berthing along the river bank behind the famous bridge ('Sur le Pont d'Avignon'), alongside – strangely enough – another Linssen and with a view of a third Linssen!

Avignon is a real highlight for tourists and so we gave ourselves enough time to stroll through this splendid ancient city and to visit the Palais des Papes and other historic buildings. On Wednesday 15 June at 8.30 a.m., we embarked on the final stage of our voyage along the French inland waterways. At 10.15, we reached

Halte Nautique Confluence marina in Lyon



The Bollène lock with a drop of 22 m

our final major river lock at Beaucaire. By now, passing through the locks, the thought of which had been unsettling before our voyage, had become second nature and they were no bother at all. At 2.15 p.m., we arrived at the Port Louis lock. As this lock, which is combined with a swing bridge, is operated only every few hours, we had to wait until 4.15 p.m., after which we sailed into the marina just before 5 p.m. In France, wearing life jackets in locks is compulsory, and this was a rule that we always obeyed – up until this final lock! The anticipation of finally being able to sail on the Mediterranean was so great that we totally forgot to put on our life jackets. This led to a sharp reprimand from the lock keeper via the loudspeaker system!

Berthing along the river bank behind the famous bridge at Avignon





The famous fortress in The Count of Monte Cristo, the novel by Alexandre Dumas

In the Golfe de Fos, we could finally take our place among the big boys. The sea lanes in the direction of Marseille are frequently used by seagoing vessels. Our destination that day was the Frioul archipelago. Here, we berthed in the marina that looks out on the fortress in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the novel by Alexander Dumas, with Marseille in the background. From there we took the ferry next day to Marseille. We were advised to do so because the Marseille marina was so busy – and it proved to be a good tip! Unfortunately, this voyage report offers insufficient space to describe all the highlights in this city. Just like in the other places we visited, we first took a sight-seeing bus to gain a general impression of the city, after which we explored on foot.

The next day we continued our journey, first to Bandol and from there to Cavalaire-sur-Mer. The distance from Bandol to Cavalaire-sur-Mer is 42.3 nautical miles (NM), or a relaxing day trip. We later increased our daily distances to 70 NM. It should not be forgotten that a Linssen is an easygoing and comfortable yacht and not a speedboat! A speedboat could cover 70 NM in less than three hours, provided that the weather is favourable and the sea is calm. Our HIPPO II may be slower, but it can also sail in conditions in which other boats prefer to remain in the harbour. In rough swell, the RotorSwing stabilizer, which we gifted ourselves when we acquired this boat, more than proved its worth.

Following Cavalaire, we continued our voyage along coastal towns such as Cannes, Nice, Monaco and San Remo. The calm sea and the splendid summer weather meant that we could enjoy our deckbridge to the full. We gave the fashionable resorts a miss and berthed in the marina of Loano. Here, we naturally replaced our French courtesy ensign with an Italian one. From Loano, we sailed right across the Gulf of Genoa to Lavagna, which was a distance of 48 NM. We occasionally came across seagoing vessels on

the way to Genoa, but far fewer than in the Golfe de Fos. It was now Friday 24 June and we wrote in our logbook: 9.10 a.m. cast off in Lavagna, heading: south-east / 76°. After 28 NM, the cliffs of La Spezia came into view, which meant that we had reached the Ligurian Sea. La Spezia is the capital of the Italian Province of Liguria (Riviera di Levante) and at the end of the Ligurian coast, the thermometer indicated a water temperature of 24°C! We continued to head for Porto di Pisa on the south side of the Arno estuary. The friendly woman at the marina pointed out that a trip of just 12 km along the Arno takes you to Pisa. And that's how we came to use our e-bikes for the first time, which until then has been conveniently stored in the 'cellar', in other words the storage space below the cockpit. The trip from the marina to the city was not particularly pleasant and we saw almost nothing of the River Arno. Pisa was crawling with tourists and evidently they thought it was extremely amusing – the Asian visitors in particular – to pose with outstretched arms against the tower, so they appeared to be supporting it on the photo. For us, this was a strange spectacle, but perhaps this didn't appeal to the North German sense of humour.

On Sunday 26 June, we continued along our familiar south-east heading. The wind had picked up and our weather app indicated a swell of 0.7 m, which was exactly what we were experiencing. This Apple/Android app called Windfinder is a real must! The information provided is very accurate. We had intended to visit the Sali marina (near Gagno), but we failed to take account of the fact that on Sunday afternoon at around 4.30 p.m., the day-trippers return with their boats to the marina, so that everyone is jostling for position. The strong wind and the shallow water at the marina entrance meant that waiting any longer



was risky, so we decided to continue our voyage to Punta Ala. It was almost 7 p.m. when we arrived at this marina, and with a charge of EUR 150 this was the most expensive overnight stay of our entire voyage! Whether the marina staff were aware that we no longer had any real alternative is a moot point ...

The next day, around the Argentario peninsula, we experienced heavy seas and high swell again, but fortunately we soon reached the Cala Galera marina. Our next stop was the marina of Riva di Traiano and the next day we sailed along the Tiber estuary. The shipping traffic here was considerable. In the evening, we berthed at the Marina del Nettuno and the next day – it was now 1 July – we moored at the Torre del Greco marina near Naples. Weeks later, an Italian from Salerno told us that this was one of the most dangerous places in Italy to berth at and that you should avoid wanting to stay the night there. We stayed until 4 July and had a great time. We toasted the victory of the German over the Italian football team with our Italian neighbours on the same jetty. Torre del Greco seemed to us to be a favourable location because there were easy train connections to Pompeii and Naples. Unfortunately, we did not climb Vesuvius, but we did have a good view of it every day from our yacht! You could write an extensive travel report just on Pompeii and Naples, because there is so much to see! We also visited Paestum and Herculaneum, which just like Pompeii was swamped during the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79.

The next stage of our voyage took us to Marina di Camerota, which was a distance of 74.1 NM (NB the daily distances were increasing greatly!), and the following day we headed for Cetraro in Calabria. Our stop in the Tropea marina was also the point from where

View of Vesuvius



we would enter the Strait of Messina.

This strait is generally considered to be very treacherous and was an important obstacle for General Montgomery during the allied invasion of Sicily in World War II. However, the weather forecast for us was very good. We could sit back and enjoy this voyage while watching the swordfish catchers at work. This type of fishing only occurs in the Strait of Messina. The ship's captain stands high up in the crow's nest and ensures that the boat is positioned favourably for the harpoonist, who is on a long bowsprit. You occasionally read about collisions with these fishermen, but that is probably attributable to the carelessness of the pleasure boaters. In other words, if you stay within the navigation channel and keep your eyes open, nothing can happen!

In the Strait of Messina, we berthed in the Reggio di Calabria marina. This was by far the worst marina of the entire voyage! The old port was overcrowded and we were urged by VHF to sail on to the new 'marina'. This is located in an industrial port and consists of just a few floating jetties. This was hardly a place to relax because ferries were mooring and casting off every hour, which caused not only choppy waters but also a lot of noise. It is only calm for a few hours at night. That was reason enough for us to cast off at 6.40 a.m. and to head for Capo Pellaro. After 7.4 NM, we left the Strait of Messina and 17.1 NM later (exact position: 37° 54.447 N, 015° 45.617 E) we headed east (90°). After another 31.5 NM near Galati we turned north east (40°) towards Porto delle Grazie, a marina with excellent service. We enjoyed ourselves so much here that we decided to rest for a day before heading out to sea again on Sunday 10 July. However, at 2 p.m. our relaxation was interrupted by a hefty commotion. A DSC alarm indicated that a vessel was in difficulties at position 35° 50 N, 014° 30 E. Given

our position, however, we were too far away to offer assistance. At 4.55 p.m., we reached the old port of Crotone, from where the next day we crossed the Gulf of Taranto to Santa Maria di Leuca. This was 72 NM across open waters, so that no land could be seen for most of the day! On this crossing we decided to push our HIPPO to the limit and open the throttle right up. At 2,800 RPM we reached a speed of 8.5 knots and at 1,950 RPM the speed dropped to 6.5 knots.

At 12.30 p.m., there was another DSC alarm, but no position was given. Whether these alarms were related to refugee boats is a matter of speculation. At 3 p.m. we sighted land and after 72 NM miles we berthed in Leuca at 6.28 p.m. Up until this point, we had sailed a total of 1,313 NM, for which 212 engine hours were required.

Our voyage continued to Porto Turistico in San Foca, which meant we had reached the Adriatic. An unpleasant Tramontana wind made mooring here something of a challenge! When preparing for this voyage, we were daunted by the idea of sailing on the Mediterranean, but we have now come to the conclusion that the Adriatic (on which we have been sailing for more than 30 years) can be far more unpleasant! The next day, we sailed past Brindisi and Monopoli to Marina Cala Ponte, a very well-kept but rather isolated new marina. Here, we hired a car to go and see the famous trulli dry stone huts in Alberobello.

Their very thick walls of solid natural stone with miniscule windows ensure that these trulli offer optimal protection from the sustained summer heat in Apulia. In the winter, the trulli retain the heat produced by the fireplace. Until the middle of the previous century, these pauper huts had been more or less forgotten, but since then they have been experiencing a true renaissance. Several are now rented out as holiday homes. Alberobello calls itself the 'trulli capital of the world' and has been a UNESCO world heritage site since 1996.

Because of a pressing appointment in Liverpool, we had to postpone the rest of our voyage until 23 July. On return, we sailed to Bari where we berthed at Nautica Ranieri. An engine service was now overdue. The total service offered by Mr Ranieri was exceedingly good and the port of Bari turned out to be very busy with a great many ferries. In contrast to Reggio

di Calabria, we had little bother from the ferries while moored at Nautica Ranieri. We got out our bikes once more and cycled to the historic centre of Bari.

On Thursday 28 July, we sailed on to Vieste, our final stop on the Italian coast. The next morning we headed for the Croatian island of Korčula. This meant that we had to cross the Adriatic, and given the high portside swell, we again appreciated the value of our RotorSwing stabilizers. Although the crossing was shorter than the distance we covered the day before, it still involved a voyage of 72 NM! In the late afternoon, we adjusted our heading and made for the island of Lastovo. Unfortunately, the bay offered no opportunity to drop anchor, but we read on Internet that another skipper had been able to berth directly at the customs jetty without any problems. With a 10-knot wind blowing, we reached the jetty at 8:05 p.m. – and were ordered by the police to leave again less than 30 minutes later! We somehow managed to convince the officers that it was too late for a new berthing manoeuvre and that we would clear customs the next day. We were told that in principle the customs worked 24/7, which was evidently not the case here, given that the office was in darkness and the site was completely vacated! The police then pointed out that we were next to the moorings for the ferry, which would result in very choppy waters. How we succeeded in not only staying there but also persuading the officers to help us tie up the boat with extra lines and fenders, was subsequently not entirely clear to us. The fact is

Alberobello with the famous trulli dry stone huts



that less than an hour later, we were startled by loud banging and shouting. It was the customs officer, who had apparently been questioned by the police concerning his whereabouts, and was therefore venting his anger on these stupid tourists with their yacht. We had to use all our charm and powers of persuasion to be able to remain at the jetty after clearing customs until the next morning. This culminated in the customs officer gradually becoming more friendly, completing the crew list himself and eventually even leaving the gate of his well-protected site unlocked, so that we could leave the site on foot the next morning to report to the harbour master.

We had now reached 'our' side of the Adriatic and we could now sail eastwards to the final destination of our voyage, Marina Veruda at Pula in Istria. We had reserved two extra weeks for this part of the journey. However, we concluded that in the summer months, you can better leave the Croatian coast to the Italians, as they tend to throw an Italian-style party for a few weeks. In the same way as these friendly southerners turn into chaotic road hogs when driving, they also become a menace on the water! They are all likeable

types, but they tend to arrange things differently and the rules of sailing apparently don't apply to them. As the old saying goes: laws are made in Rome and obeyed in Berlin!

