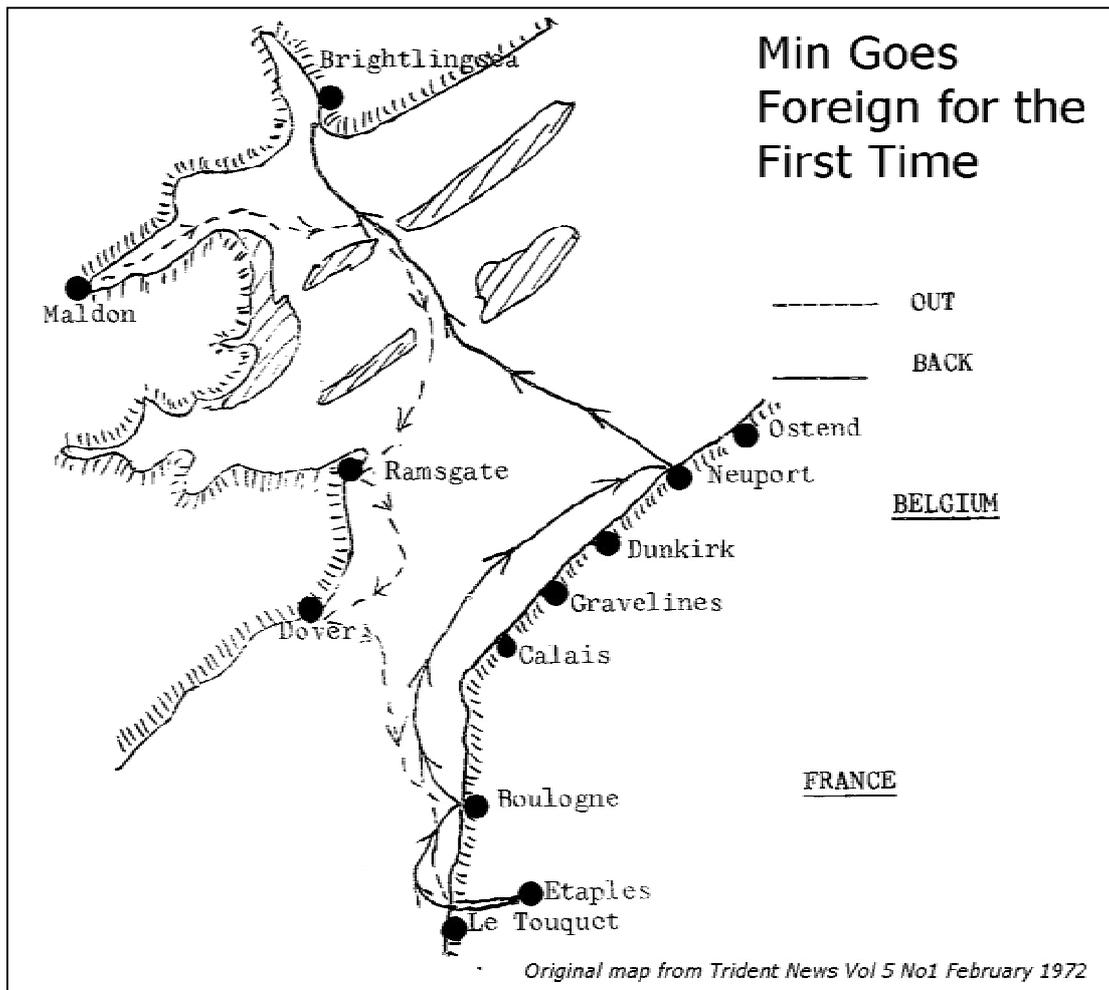


FIRST TIME FOREIGN FOR *MIN*



Mick Coleman's 1971 winning Marcon Trophy Log



***Min* to France and Belgium**

Marcon Trophy Winning Log 1971

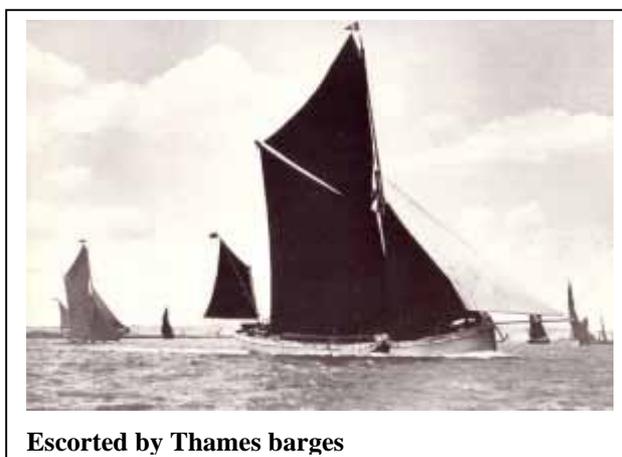
Mick Coleman and *Min* No 62

For the first time *Min* and her crew were to go foreign. General Morris had proposed that *Min* and *Sumitra* cruise in company from Maldon to Boulogne then on to Le Havre. *Sumitra* could in fact only make the first week, and thanks to the weather and not a navigational boob, *Min* finished her cruise at Nieuwpoort.

As *Min* is lightly crewed, Ann my wife, June aged 7, Tim aged 10 and Dad of course, each day's sail was to be well within our capabilities, with due regard to the weather.

We left Maldon at 0730 on July 31 bound for Ramsgate where we were to meet *Sumitra*. The forecast was for winds SW force 4 which for the most part would mean a reach across the Thames Estuary.

An escort of Thames barges (actually it was the annual barge match) led the way to Bradwell where we ate a good breakfast and made ready for the journey. Within the hour we were off again, picking our way across the sands, using the engine where the course took us too close to the wind.



Escorted by Thames barges

At one point we became so absorbed in the activities of the Southend lifeboat effecting a rescue of a yacht's crew from the East Barrow, that we just touched ourselves, but very quickly regained deeper water. This part of the estuary is no place for inattentiveness.

On we went, past the Mid Barrow - now removed - down the South Edinburgh channel towards North Foreland. The wind increased to force 5 making it necessary to take in a few rolls to be comfortable. The red sails that we had been chasing were now recognised to be those of *Sumitra*.

Once round the North Foreland the tide turned against us and the wind freshened to force 6. Things became rather uncomfortable and wet. Not a moment too soon Ramsgate Harbour came into view, but one look at the swaying masts in the outer harbour caused us to continue round the bay to the peaceful (and cheap) anchorage in the Stour. It was 2100 as the stew was put to warm, the salt scraped from our faces and John Morris's whisky thankfully drunk.

At 0330 we roused our reluctant bodies from warm bunks and in utter blackness picked our way across Pegwell Bay, motoring as there was no wind at all. Dawn exposed an ugly sky over the land, the wind suddenly came in from the SW, and rapidly rose to force 4. At 0630 we were approaching the South Goodwin about a mile astern of *Sumitra* when the BBC forecast S to SW force 5-6 possibly gale 8. As



Cliffs east of Dover

one, two Tridents altered course and after running the gauntlet of British Rail steamers, lay snug alongside near the inner basin at Dover.

A ravaged sky, full of savage promise passed without so much as a drop of water, leaving us to await the 1155 forecast, in bright sunshine. In spite of the forecast, the skippers decided to have a bash. There was very little wind now, and what puffs there were came from the SE. At 1215 two Tridents motored out of Dover. Five uneventful hours later, still under power, we were inspected, at a distance, by the French police launch from Boulogne.

June and Tim became excited as Q was hoisted for the first time on *Min*, and Mum and Dad of course felt no emotion. *Sumitra's* crew filled glasses, waved flags, tooted hooters and insisted that we went in first. We now realise that this was to make British Rail chase the hare.

At 17.35 we were alongside in Boulogne, without the help of a marvellous character with a red spotted handkerchief and a De Gaulle nose, who gave us a chorus of “*non non*” just as we got settled. The next day, having cleared customs and arranged for the duty-free, was spent wandering around Boulogne and turning the children loose on the beach. In the afternoon through a mix-up with glasses young June drank neat wine and became mildly intoxicated, something she won't do again in a hurry.

Tuesday's forecast was no good for the intended trip to Le Crotoy, instead we left in the afternoon for Le Touquet, just 10 miles along the coast. It proved to be a wet slog, beating into a force 3 in pouring rain, with a tide in theory under us. Motoring seemed even wetter but at last we finally made the entrance to La Canche, in time to follow the fishing fleet up to Etaple. We had a couple of unscheduled stop where we ran out of water but there was sufficient for Poofa and Frank (John's daughter and her boyfriend) to entertain us with their water larks.

It was clear that we would dry out at Le Touquet, but were informed by the fishermen that shallow draft boats could lie afloat at Etaples - just. At the owners' invitation we each shared a mooring with two small cruisers, it might have been better for our peace of mind had we anchored. A few yards away upstream towered a road bridge, against which both tide and the gale-force wind were now blowing and which seemed intent on crushing us. The sudden roar of a jet taking off just the other side of the sea wall did nothing to ease the tension. As next morning's forecast was not good we motored to

Le Touquet intending to take the ground. *Min* who sits square on her bilge keels was to support *Sumitra* who is a centre-boarder the best laid plans etc. ensured that both crews instead of sightseeing spent the day floundering in mud, winching first one then the other Trident upright. With miles of sand around we had to find mud, home from home to East coasters. But still we did have our duty free to help us.

By the time we had cleaned up at the club the tide return and we went back to Etaples but this time anchored for the night. The wind had eased and it was raining steadily. Thursday was spent relaxing around Etaples and sampling their local restaurant.

A jolly afternoon was spent with one of the small cruiser owners and his 'woman' (an amusing mistranslation), fiancé actually, aboard *Sumitra*.

The following day winds were still SW Force 3 but moderating; this was against the forecast which was for force 4-6. It was too late to go further down the coast, *Sumitra* had to change crews back at Newhaven, so reluctantly we decided that Calais was the direction to go.



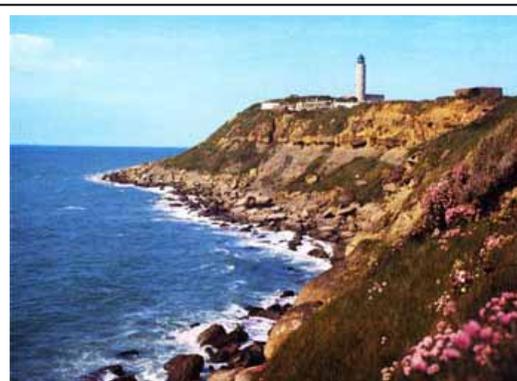
River Canche at Etaples

We left Etaples at 1200 and made our way to the wall of breakers that marked the mouth of La Canche. If it had not been for the reassuring sight of dozens of dinghies gaily surfing these enormous combers, we might still be there. The high winds that had been blowing in the channel had built up quite a sea, which apart from looking impressive, made *Min* go up and down like a high speed lift. We motored through this far more easily than we expected and were soon rolling most

horribly, with no wind to steady us it was most unpleasant. Boulogne was not far off so plans were again changed and we thankfully went in and stopped that terrible rolling.

At 0430 on the 7 August, much to our sorrow, *Sumitra* and her crew left for Newhaven. We were told later, by an incoming yacht, that she was last seen well-reefed going like a bomb towards the English coast. After the cruise we were to learn that things got too rough and *Sumitra* put back into Calais. *Min* and her crew stayed in Boulogne generally having a restful time, and closely watching the weather.

The 8 August dawned warm and sunny with winds S.W. force 4-5. We left Boulogne at 0930 bound for Dunkirk, timing the passage to pass Cap Griz Nez at slack water. From here a spring tide helped us to reach Calais at 1300, by 1430 Gravelines was abeam. Dunkirk was reached at 1630 but we were enjoying the ride so much that stopping was out of the question. The wind held steady at about force 4. But as we passed into Belgium and hoisted Q, the tide eased and for the last hour turned against us. We put into Nieuwpoort at 2030 tired but exhilarated. I suppose we all get one sail in a season that sticks in the mind above all others; this was ours.



Cap Griz Nez ("Grey Nose")

The beaches at Nieuwpoort, in keeping with our sail, were wonderful, and we spent the last few days of our cruise enjoying them. We still have a ton of sand in the bilges.

Fishing was the main occupation of the children, but how does one talk them into throwing fifty assorted fishes and crabs back when they are determined to take them home? The obvious method makes the skipper very unpopular.

The weather during these days although warm was very windy with winds up to force 7. Friday the 12 August was the best forecast for a return home. We did not really intend to

return in one hop, but the forecast which was SW force 4-5 decreasing and backing force 2-3 was just about right for us. It meant that conditions would improve towards the end of the sail, putting a long trip within our limits.

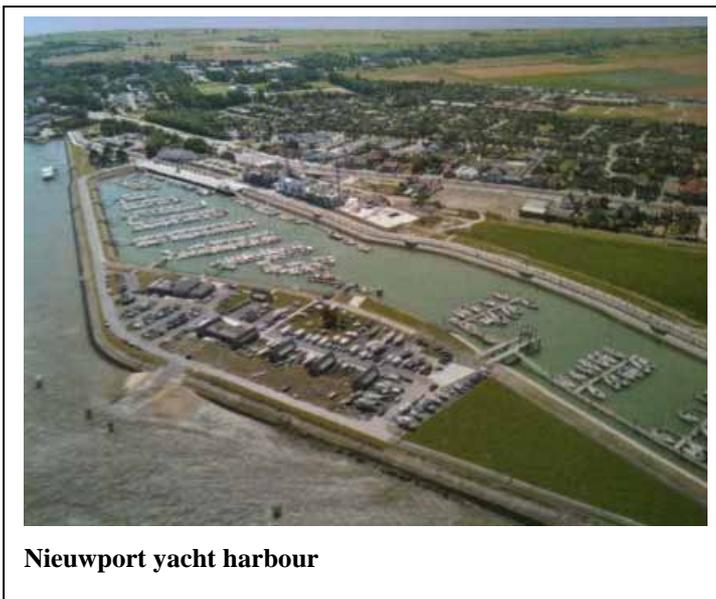
At 0720 we left Nieuwpoort on course for Margate, or if possible Brightlingsea. Close-hauled with 4 rolls and a working jib we had a comfortable ride. Things livened up a bit as the banks were crossed but this was soon over and things settled down to a routine of eating, drinking (coffee) and plotting; visibility was good so things were quite restful.

Navigation went well and at 1430 Sandtette was abeam and Mid Falls appeared at 1430, both when expected and more or less where we reckoned they should appear. The only thing not going to plan was the weather; instead of backing and decreasing it stayed SW and increased to force 5. As the Thames Estuary was reached it was time for the 1755 forecast. For the first time they were spot on, no sooner had the words "SW5, increase to force 6 imminent" been uttered than we were almost laid flat by a squall. To reach Margate now meant a beat in rather choppy water. We suspected that the next day would be no better (it was far worse) and so decided to press on to Brightlingsea.

The last stage of the passage was very trying, we were tired but the thought of the sands kept us very alert. The wind gusted 6, the sky threatened but things did not deteriorate too much. We arrived in Brightlingsea at 0200 and a very tired crew turned in. Next morning we cleared customs and motored the last hop to Maldon and put *Min* back on her mooring. Our first-time foreign was over; next time would not have the same magic, but if the BBC gives us the same accuracy on its forecasts next year we are in for some excitement.

Distance covered approx 300 miles
Engine time 36 hours
Sailing time 40 hours
Average speed 4 knots - OK then 3.961
Petrol used Too much - 20 galls

Mick Coleman



Nieuwpoort yacht harbour

