

# MIN'S 1972 CRUISE TO HOLLAND



**Mick Coleman's second Marcon  
Trophy winning log**



## A Cruise to Holland

Mick Coleman – Trident No 62 *Min*

Crew: Ann, wife, Tim aged 11, June aged 8.

This year the skipper had no choice as to our cruising ground. Following a request by the children last season, to visit Holland, a non-committal answer was seized upon, and a rather subtle campaign was started resulting in father being morally obliged to go.

As usual the cruise was planned with short easy stages and with rest days declared as and when the weather or Ann decided. After a few delays, that for once were not due to the skipper, all was ready. We left Maldon at 1600 on the 31 July; the wind was very light and the prospect of using the motor for hours on end at the start of the cruise was not welcomed, so for the first night Bradwell became our modest aim. We anchored close by Bradwell power station at 2000, and after a meal the crew settled down.



Before long however, the skipper got fed up with the continual hum of Bradwell's generators so at 0100 on the 1 August *Min* was underway bound for Ramsgate. The Thames estuary looked very black, no moon or stars, and that faint dividing line between sea and sky was missing. The skipper began to feel very uneasy, the forecast was good, but the Westerly wind changed to a variable and then died, this, added to the blackness, did not seem right. The first flash of lightning with its resulting clamp of thunder decided the issue. *Min* would not play ducks and drakes in and out of sandbanks in this weather, so the course was altered towards Brightlingsea. In fact the weather didn't amount to much, although the news next morning was of damage and flooding in Norfolk.

At 1400 the rain fell in torrents but the forecast promised a Northerly force 3-4, and with the sky starting to clear we set off for Ramsgate once more. At first the motor was used, the wind was so light that there was not steerage, soon however we were saying nice things about the BBC for once, the wind came in Northerly force 3-4, and we enjoyed a most wonderful sail. At last we felt that we were really starting the summer cruise. Ramsgate was reached at 0100 on the 2nd and a rather tired but happy crew ate and slept.

Our next step was to be Dunkirk, so at 1000 with the forecast North force 4-5 off we went, in spite of a slight drizzle. The wind was in fact from the North but it soon increased from 4-5 and was gusting 6: this caused no concern as the sheets were well free, but now the clouds opened and we then failed to appreciate the joys of sailing. It was decided to go to Dover so the course was altered accordingly.

What a miserable trip this was, the rain now was really heavy, but we did find time to feel sorry for the poor souls camping on the Downs, after all we were enjoying ourselves in this lumpy wet part of the world. Dover was reached after what seemed a lifetime, but in fact we were all secure at 1300. The weather looked set to stay poor for ages, consequently it was thought to be a good idea to move into the inner basin.



**Dover Castle overlooks the harbour**

Dover Castle overlooks the harbour from a great height, and no sooner were we secure in the inner basin, than June demanded that a visit to the castle was the best way to spend what remained of the afternoon. Well I suppose that we had been sitting doing nothing for the past two days; suffice it to say that Mum and Dad .felt the effects of walking up to the castle in every muscle for days afterwards.

At 0400 on the 3 August, a weather report was obtained from the harbourmaster; North West force 4-5 moderating 3-4, so we decided to leave. We cleared Dover entrance at 0600 on course for Calais, and for once British Rail (ferries) were nowhere in sight, I imagine that this was due to a strike or something, we felt quite hurt. The wind was as forecast, and all was well for the first two hours, *Min* was going well in spite of a rather large sea. The size of the sea was to be expected with a force 4 over a 3 knot tide, but *Min* rode the waves well. Then slowly the wind started to increase.

This in itself caused no concern, but *Min* started to behave • in a way that I've never experienced with her before. Occasionally when a wave top slapped the side it coincided with an extra puff of wind; when this happened she slewed off course about 20 degrees and took some time to come round again, the helm became very heavy. This was not a broach, she felt very stable and did not loose any speed. I suppose we were doing about 5.5 knots.

I sat with rather a detached air waiting for it to happen again, it did at about ten minute intervals but slowly this time interval decreased. I was thinking along the lines that this was something to do with bilge keels and this particular wave formation, quite oblivious to the fact that the wind was slowly but steadily increasing between the stronger puffs. It then dawned on me that

perhaps with a few rolls down things might get easier. But up till now it had been a nice fast ride, in fact Calais was not too distant.



The moment of decision was prompted by British Rail - we were not forgotten - and a new antagonist in the form of a hovercraft. At this point *Min* took it into her head to cut across the bows (or is it nose) of the hovercraft in an attempt to ram British Rail. They were in fact a safe distance off but I realised at last that there was far too much sail up, a fact even more obvious when I went on deck to take some rolls in.

The sea was - for me - very big and the wind a good force 5 with frequent gusts of about 6, but with 5 rolls down things settled down and Ann and Tim raised a smile. June, who had shown great confidence in the skipper by remaining asleep in the forepeak until now, appeared full of smiles in the hatch, sorry to have missed the fun

but delighted to see Calais so near. A rough passage seems to have no effect on this child, in fact it seems to be the only time that she actually takes an interest in sailing, taking great delight in helping to steer. The wind continued to increase but by now the tide had turned and the sea remained more or less the same - bl\*\*\*\* rough, but we were soon into Calais and by 1040 were moored in the outer basin.

The outer basin at Calais is no place for a weak stomach, and strangely, rolling about on a mooring affects the family far more than anything at sea. Anyway at the first opportunity we went into the inner basin. It was our first time into Calais and the family were rather keen to explore. Our first impression was one of disappointment, the children's because the local fair was out of bounds (Mum and Dad could not face it after the crossing) and ours because nobody could recommend a decent eating place.

We felt too tired to wander around searching so we decided to eat on board. During the evening Tim notice *Zangano* in the outer basin: two Tridents in Calais - almost a rally!

The next day was declared a rest day by Ann. Next morning the 4th dawned with a near gale force wind, it appears that the Almighty was to confirm Ann's decision for a rest day. We met Mr. Thomas the owner of *Zangano*. He and his family had spent a rather restless night in the outer basin, in the hope of making an early start, but the weather wasn't very encouraging. For us the day was spent wandering around Calais including a visit to the dreaded fair. Tomorrow we would move on, weather and Ann permitting.

At 0800 on the 6 August we left Calais in company with *Zangano* bound for Dunkirk. The weather was perfect and remained so in spite of some nasty looking clouds to windward. In fact with a steady South westerly force 5 it was a wonderful sail and we were secured in Dunkirk by 1500. The evening was turned over to the children who had been looking forward to a slap up meal. For once there were no arguments and every scrap was devoured and two very tired but full children were soon asleep on our return. This meal was a great talking point between them for the rest of the cruise - we really must feed them more often!

Sunday was declared a rest day by mutual consent, and the children were turned loose on the Dunkirk beaches. The result of this move is that we now have most of the beach in our bilges. The day was quite a success mainly due to the French in laying on such things as parachute jumping and stunt flying to entertain the masses and of course to advertise something or other. During our stay the fresh water bag burst again, this happened two years previously also at the start of a cruise.

On Monday 8 August we left for Ostende. The weather was again perfect although the wind was perhaps a little light, but at least it was up our tail. During the trip, soup made by the skipper was declared foul, even he can't muck



Ostende yacht harbour



soup up, and investigation proved that the water taken on in Dunkirk was to blame, it was undrinkable. The skipper didn't feel so bad about the burst water tank now.

Almost into Ostende we dipped our ensign to a Belgium warship and much to the children's delight, and Ann's surprise, the dip was returned; of course the skipper knew that the Royal Belgium Navy was civilised, but having made the statement beforehand he kept his fingers crossed. At this time Tim was logged for kicking the compass for the second time, I suppose that the position of the compass - on the lower washboard - does make things awkward for small legs.

By late afternoon we had cleared customs and were snug inside the harbour. Twenty-four hours of Ostende was enough, the children loved it because the beach was close at hand, but being moored just below the main street makes us rather nervous of the stuff thrown over the top. The next morning, 8 August, brought forth a Southerly force 6 gusting. "Lets got to Blankenberge," said Ann. "It'll be a piece of cake."

True the tide was fair, and the wind was a little offshore, things should be all right. Well, suffice it to say that any rough turnout is now regarded as a "piece of Ann's cake".

Blankenberge harbour was very crowded, but we did find a small spot to moor in spite of a most unhelpful harbour master. The town was rather an interesting place, a sort of common market Southend could describe it. The small streets were full of lights, people and noise.

On the afternoon of the 9 August we left for Breskens, the wind was still southerly and rather fresh, but was showing signs of decreasing. Once more we were in luck, it was a fair wind for us. Zeebrugge was soon abeam and right on cue British Rail



greeted us with another slight scare near the entrance, but we were soon to learn that even BR have nothing on the ferries that ply between Breskens and Flushing.

We arrived in Breskens in the early evening, time enough to discover that it is not the most lively of places. However, the marina was good although rather expensive.

We left Breskens early in the afternoon on the 10 August. Flushing is rather a short distance away, but the nervous energy used on this stretch is out of all proportion to the distance covered. The ferries are blunt at each end, they have two bridges, two funnels and they are driven by demons. Added to this is that there appear to be at least a hundred of them, not forgetting the normal traffic to and from Antwerp. So life becomes hectic. We saw one poor yachtsman almost run down, it was a very close thing for him and frightened the life out of us.

It was a relief to get into Flushing and tackle our first lock. This was not the ordeal that I had expected and we were soon on our way along the Middelburg canal towards Veere. Soon after starting up the canal another Trident was spotted coming towards us, it turned out to be TOA Chairman John Lambert waving a little red bottle. Unfortunately it was not quite the place for a prolonged chat so after a few ribald comments we each continued on our way.

We arrived at Veere at 2000 What a beautiful place it is. The entrance to the old harbour is wonderful. It is a very narrow entrance with on one side "a castle with

candles in the windows”(June’s description) and plain - hardly plain - wooden breakwater. As one progresses through the entrance it opens out into a snug and colourful mooring, and we got the feeling that we had moved back two hundred years.

The atmosphere of this place at last convinced the children that we were actually in Holland, the one

windmill seen during the canal trip had not impressed them, although the locks and the canal itself had them excited.

On our wanderings around Vere we came across one old cobbled street where an old old lady in costume was scrubbing the front step; she wasn’t dressed up for the tourists, and was obviously delighted with the flashing smiles and very polite greetings by the children.

Having spent almost two days at Veere it was time we moved on so off we went bound for the Zierikzee. The sailing was wonderful, if a little slow, in fact we would not use the engine for fear of shattering the peace (in any case it was playing up). Consequently, the Marina at Kortegan was the furthest we could reasonably get that day. There are several marinas here and we later found that we had chosen the biggest, most well organised and most expensive one. Ah, well, we’ll know next time.



Zieriksee

Early on the 12 August we left Kortegan and were soon through the lock and into the Ooster Schelde and with a very good breeze to help us we were soon nearing the roadbridge. This is a wonderful piece of civil engineering and is most impressive, but as we approached we were convinced that *Min* would never get under. We seemed to hold our breath for ages but we were through with miles to spare.

Within a very short time Zierikzee was in sight and then for the first time since leaving Dover it started to rain, but this did not spoil our enjoyment of yet another beautiful place.

In Zierikzee we made our first bad mistake. June was allowed to purchase some clogs - which fitted! Clogs worn by a small girl doing a clog dance in the confines of a



“We arrived at Veere. What a beautiful place it is...”

Trident saloon do little for the varnish or for the nerves of parents. Tim, of course, had to go one better and acquire a fishing rod complete with hooks. Fish hooks in the cockpit of a small boat are things that the skipper is not too keen on, but the mackerel that we ate later in the trip did much to retrieve the situation.

On the 14 August we reluctantly started back towards home. Veere was our first stop where we stayed overnight before continuing to Flushing. We had been plagued with engine trouble since entering Holland, so at Flushing, whilst Ann removed the children from earshot, the skipper now wearing his mechanic's hat, started to virtually tear the engine apart. Nothing was found and it gave us many anxious moments until we returned to the Thames where it ran like clockwork.



**Vlissingen - or Flushing to the British**

We left the marina at Flushing at 1000 on the morning of the 16 August, motoring into the lock with a very sick engine. Once clear of the lock we crept out of the harbour and away from the ferry route hardly daring to breathe, but somehow the engine kept going. Once clear we hoisted sail and started a fine sail to Ostende. The wind was Northerly force 4, but it decreased gradually and finally petered out just before we reached Ostende, so for the last few miles the motor was nursed and threatened until we got into harbour. The time was 1500 when we secured.

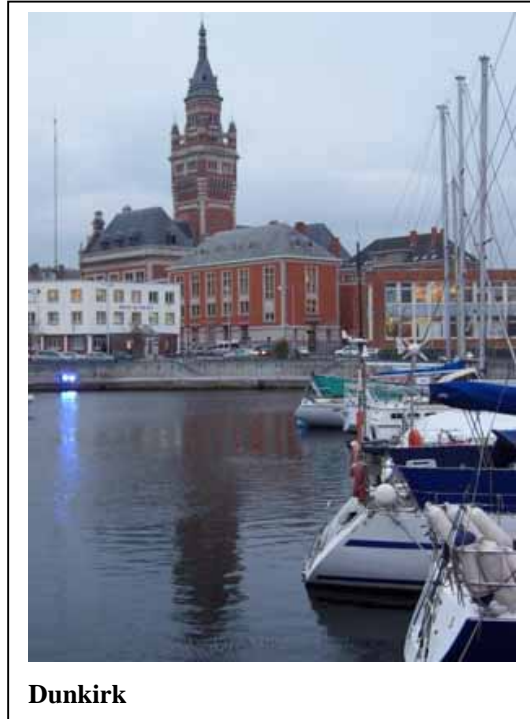
To date we had been very lucky with the weather but now the wind increased to gale force from the North East, which gave us a very uncomfortable time. The sand was blown off the beach into the harbour and thence onto and into the boat, the deck became a mini Sahara. During a period when the wind eased we made an attempt to get to Dunkirk, but the sea was still running very high and we soon returned wet and bruised.

During the height of the gale a small dinghy belonging to the North Sea Yacht Club broke loose just astern of *Min* and proceeded to smash itself against the sponsons. For

once the skipper had decent clothing on; having just eaten, but like a dope he decided to do somebody a favour by securing it. The crunch came trying to avoid getting wet feet; having secured the damn thing, I tried to get back ashore without stepping into the dinghy. The result, much to the children's delight, was to prove that the skipper can swim fully clothed. The hardest pill to swallow though was a lecture by Tim on the dangers of standing on the gunwales of a small boat - he was logged for being cheeky.

The real fly in the ointment was Ann's treatment by the North Sea Yacht Club, she was most rudely treated when she attempted to wash the salt from my clothes in the washroom. She was led like a naughty school-girl to be shown the correct place for washing clothes - a three foot length of hose, outside and in total darkness. Several crews of various nationalities who had seen and enjoyed the whole caper were even more indignant about this than we were, but all protests were treated with total indifference and rudeness by the club dragon. This after rescuing a North Sea Yacht club dinghy.

On Saturday 19 August the wind did decrease but the sea was still very nasty. However, during a discussion with the chap on the next boat it was agreed that the next day would be all right. Having decided that, a few drinks were in order, and having taken them, the turn of the tide eased the sea and it was decided that now was the time to move. So off we went to Dunkirk, arriving some six hours later after a very sloppy ride. For once the skipper felt decidedly off colour, mainly due to breaking a rule about alcohol before sailing - lesson learnt.



**Dunkirk**

Dunkirk was left behind at 0800 next morning. Left behind? Can one ever leave that place behind? It looms on the horizon for hours. The wind went around the compass and back again, but at no time did it get above force 4. The sun shone and Tim caught more fish than we thought we could eat, generally it was a very quiet sail. Visibility was poor as we approached North Foreland, in fact we were a mile off before a visual fix was obtained, God bless DF sets.

The wind now went on the nose and so the engine was started, whilst everybody thought nice thoughts about it. Nice thoughts were obviously the right answer for it ran without missing a beat until it ran out of petrol just outside Brightlingsea. Having put some more petrol in the tank it took ages to restart, but we made it into Brightlingsea and were safely at anchor by 0400 on the 21 August.

At 0930, having cleared customs, the last of the tide was caught to Bradwell where we feasted much to Tim's delight - on mackerel (the boy seems to have some talent). During the early evening we had a peaceful sail up the Blackwater to Maldon where *Min* was left on her mooring,



On reflection it was a very successful cruise. Top marks go to the BBC. for some very accurate forecasts (or have I learnt to interpret them better) and also to the Trident for feeling so safe in what were some of the largest seas that we have experienced.

Next year? Well, Dad has started a subtle campaign - well we didn't see much of Holland, just enough to wet the appetite.

For the record:

Total distance covered	350 miles
Sailing time	80 hours
Motor time	30 hours
Average speed	3.2 knots
Petrol used	16 gallons

