



It wasn't the boat she had been looking for, but one visit was all it took to realise her dream of becoming a water gypsy – and she got her very own engineer, too

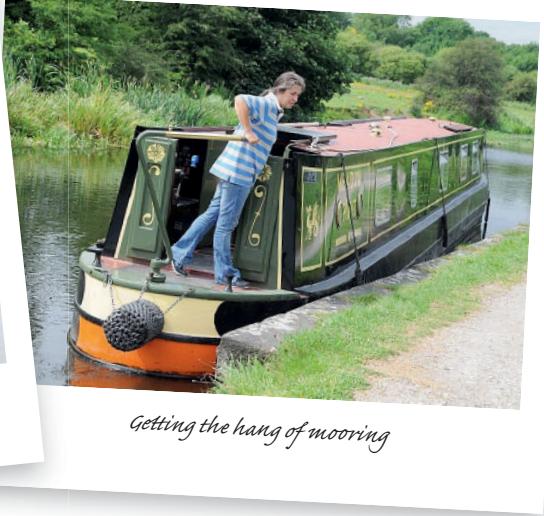
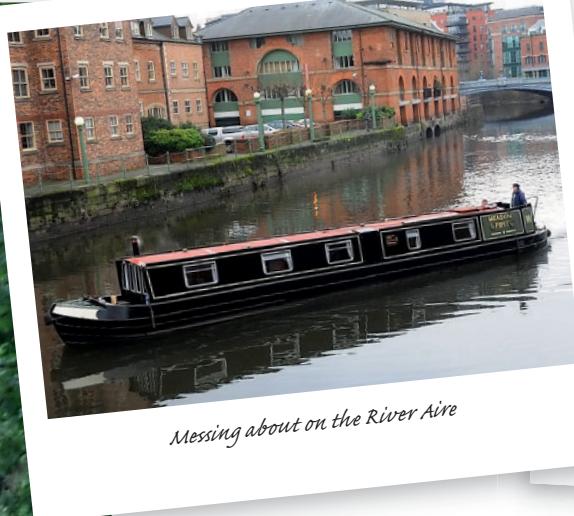
WORDS AND PICTURES BY  
**POLLY BROWNE**

**M**y story starts in Leeds where I lived in a flat overlooking the River Aire. I was intrigued by the colourful narrowboats that cruised regularly past my window and it soon became my ambition to live on one. As a taster, I persuaded some friends to join me on a narrowboat holiday and we went for a ten-day cruise on the Shire Cruiser hire boat *Northumberland* on the Rochdale. It rained almost solidly for the whole ten days, but I still loved it and was hooked.

Next came a trip to see the bank manager.

"If I rented out my flat would you lend me the money to buy a narrowboat?" I asked. To my amazement and delight he said "yes". After many happy hours drooling over boats on the internet and visiting marinas, I found the one for me. It was an ABC Leisure ex-hire boat from Anderton Marina; well used but built to last, and if after a couple of years I was still happy living afloat, I could then upgrade to the boat of my dreams.

The boat was called *Little Tern* and was 60ft long. Now I had become aware from our holiday that boat length was an issue on



some locks in Yorkshire, so to check up I went to visit a lock-keeper at Salter Hebble; sadly, there was no sign of him, so I left him a note: "Dear Mr Lock-Keeper, please can you help me..." Within a few days he was on the phone advising me that a 60ft boat would fit through the locks easily, but 60ft 1in would have no chance. I called the manager at Anderton and have since learnt that the engineers spent some time measuring the exact length of *Little Tern*; 60ft 2in was the conclusion – the deal was off!

The manager did suggest an alternative – *Meadow Pipit*, a 58ft boat, but the layout was not what I wanted; what the heck, it would be a nice day out to go and look, even if I didn't want her. As soon as I stepped inside I knew she was for me, she had such a cosy feel. The paperwork was quickly sorted, the survey

**Left:** On the beautiful Leeds-Liverpool  
**Below:** Between the tunnels on the Trent



done and I moved onto her on 1 March 2008.

At this point I realised I knew nothing whatsoever about boats in general, let alone narrowboats, so a friend of mine, Sam, who has a sailing boat came to stay with me for my first few days on board. We arrived to find *Meadow Pipit* moored outside the

## What's in a name?

Our thanks to Tom Misselbrook, who tells the cute tale of how their boat was named: "When we bought our boat the name was only relevant to the previous owner so I invited my wife to come up with an alternative name and she decided on *Tethers End*. I am often asked by other boaters where the name came from and I have to admit that my wife chose it "because I drive her to the end of her tether!" Hopefully the calm and relaxing atmosphere on the waterways will keep her happy and peaceful during the times we cruise the canals."

**Why not write in to tell us how your boat was named?**

Email: [editor@canalboat.co.uk](mailto:editor@canalboat.co.uk)

Write: Canal Boat Magazine, Archant Specialist, 3 The Courtyard, Denmark Street, Wokingham, Berks, RG40 2AZ.



# ME & MY BOATS

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marina hemmed in by two other narrowboats. Sam and I took the obvious decision to adjourn to the pub for the rest of the day and discuss tactics.

The next day we woke to hangovers and high winds. After a full breakfast we felt brave enough to try taking the boat out and soon learned how difficult narrowboats are to handle in the wind!

The first challenge was a series of tunnels, and after hitting the side of the first one as we entered, we gradually got the hang of the steering. I wasn't too concerned; I had booked *Meadow Pipit* into the marina paintshed for repainting in April – allowing me a month to learn how to drive her first, and if we did anything wrong other people would assume we were hirers anyway.

After a couple of days out on the boat Sam and I took her back to Anderton. With a heavy heart I watched Sam leave knowing that I was to be alone on a boat that I knew nothing about in a strange marina with people I hardly knew.

I needn't have worried – they couldn't have been more kind; I spent most evenings either with the hire boat housekeeper putting the world to rights over a bottle of wine, or in the local pub picking up boating tips from engineers and other boaters.

I was determined to learn as much as I could, and quickly discovered the best way to get assistance with anything mechanical was to sit in my engine bay, ignoring the shouts of "get out of there you'll break it!", and after about 20 minutes one of the engineers would be sure to come over to see what I was doing and help out. I was made to feel so welcome and given so much help and advice that when the time came for *Meadow Pipit* to go into the paintshed, I felt quite lost and hated the idea of leaving my new home and friends for a whole month.

Her new colour scheme was taken from another boat called *Lyra* that I had seen on the internet, whose owner had been kind enough to give me all the colour references. After what seemed like an eternity, the painting was complete and I could return to my beloved boat. I was delighted with her new looks, but terrified of driving her in case I scratched her. I persuaded one of the engineers to reverse her out of the paintshed for me and moor her up in the marina again.

When one of the other boaters from the marina invited me to follow him to Middlewich for some lessons on single-handed locking,

I put my fears to one side and accepted. The lessons went well and I managed to negotiate the locks on my own – in fact, the hardest thing was stopping other people doing them for me once they realised I was on my own. When I got back to the marina the next day a welcoming committee was waiting – I think they had actually been quite anxious. Chris the painter inspected his paintwork and found the chip I had made on one side; under careful instruction I primed and painted over the damage and now you wouldn't even notice it's there.

When the time came for me to set off back to Leeds I really didn't want to leave. I took the long route via Nottingham on the Trent & Mersey and the tidal Trent, arriving in Leeds in July. But *Meadow Pipit*'s engine had overheated on the Trent and she needed to have an additional skin tank fitted. Now who was I going to get to fit the skin tank? Anderton Marina of course. I set off straight back across the Pennines in August, this time over the Leeds-Liverpool.

Four and half years later I am still living on *Meadow Pipit*, and apart from having added a solid fuel stove, she is pretty much as she was when I bought her. All ideas of upgrading to a new boat have disappeared – she is perfect and I love my new life. I have cruised the majority of the canals in the north of England; I adore being able to move my home wherever I choose and discovering the canal system and the history that goes with it. I have also acquired my very own engineer too – one of the Anderton mob who has moved onto *Meadow Pipit* with me and set up his own mobile narrowboat repair business, Yorkshire Boat Services, which is based in Leeds.

One thing is certain, this water gypsy will not be returning to life on land anytime soon! CB

## IT'S YOUR TURN TELL US ABOUT YOUR BOAT

TELL US ABOUT the boats – or just the boat – in your life. Your story should be about 1000 words and must have suitable photos.

They can be prints, transparencies or high quality digital (that means at least a 5



Sharing a lock with the very hire boat which started it all off



The boat came with a free engineer



Five years later and still loving it

megapixel camera set on its highest resolution). Write in or email to [editor@canalboat.co.uk](mailto:editor@canalboat.co.uk). All photos will be returned.

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