



Cruising

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Bruce Burman

Choosing my Pride and Joy

DO YOU EVER WONDER how it is that most yacht owners are happy and even enthusiastic about the qualities of their chosen yacht when there is a bewildering choice available with significantly different attributes? How did they come to chose it? When my family was growing up taking summer holidays aboard our Sadler 25 and later a Contessa 32, my sons and I would wonder aloud at how it was possible to be seen aboard some unlikely looking boat, never mind exude enthusiasm for it. To close the subject, we would have to admit that it was someone's pride and joy.

The military trained me to make dispassionate appraisals and then to act on the outcome. Not that the outcome is always spot on, but at least I can explain rationally why I am enthusiastic about owning a particular yacht. Well, you may ask, explain why you changed from a Contessa 32, regarded by most thinking yachtsmen as a legend in its own time, to an American built Shannon 38? Designed by Walter Shultz did you say?

I need to first explain some background. Once my children had found other consuming interests like the opposite sex to distract them from the joys of sailing with their parents, I began to look further a field from Brittany and NW Spain for sailing adventures. I tested my resolve by trips to the Azores and later Madeira finding a real liking for open ocean passages. Whilst the Contessa sails superbly and has wonderful sea-keeping qualities, it is a bit small for really long passages. After 10 years and 20,000 miles, I put her on the market-just to see if she would sell you understand.

Within a very short time I had half a dozen

potential buyers, one of whom was deemed good enough to continue to look after my cherished Contessa. Never mind the protestations about undervaluing her from my eldest son whose interest in sailing had re-emerged. The deal was done and after nearly 20 years keeping a yacht in commission I had only a mooring to rent.

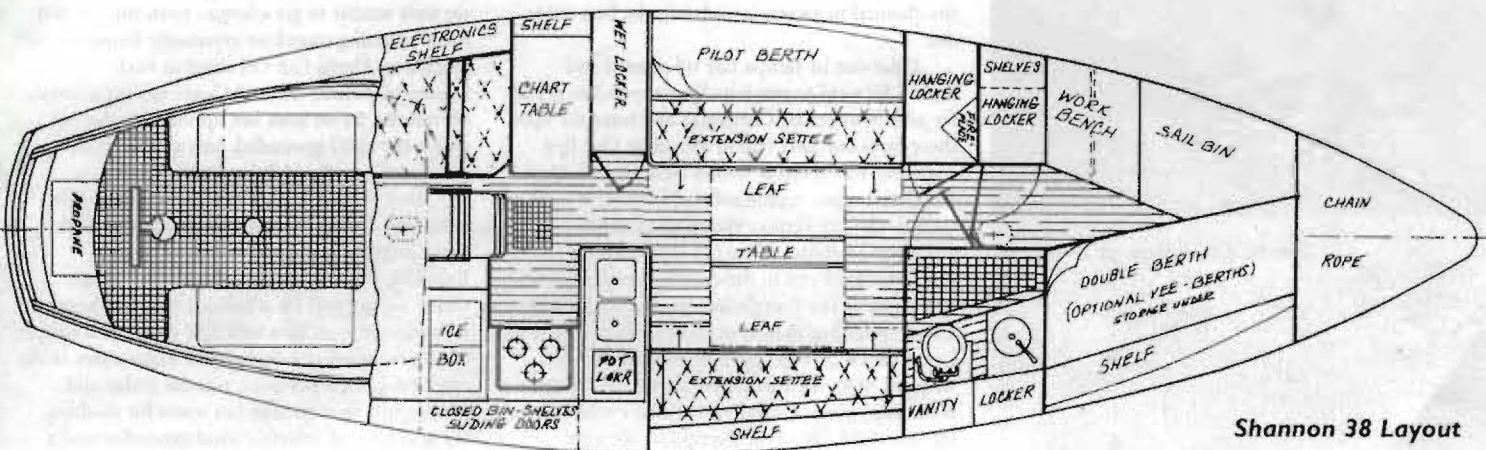
To help make the difficult choice of which yacht would best suit my aspirations, I listed the essential criteria necessary for my choice. The criteria need not be in any order since every one must be present in the chosen yacht. Additionally, there needs to be a list of desirable criteria which does have to be arranged in order of priority. Some essential criteria are simple enough and perhaps the easiest to settle is price or a least an upper limit. Cutter rig was another straightforward feature but keel and rudder configuration were a bit more taxing and it was easier to say what I didn't want such as spade rudder and a bolt on keel. My budget meant I would have to go for an older yacht. Features such as large fresh water and internal fuel capacity combined with good ventilation and sturdy opening portholes, soon widened the search to the USA. Buying outside Europe added other essential criteria to cope with the Recreational Directive which requires all yachts registered in the EU to have a CE mark or be exempt. Exemption meant I had to have proof that the yacht had been in European waters prior to the enactment date or those in the Area of EU Economic Activity which include Bermuda and many of the Caribbean states frequented by American cruising yachts.

The internet was a crucial search tool. Most

brokers have individual websites but a lot subscribe to one particular international site, Yachtworld.com. Through this site I found some surprising specialist cruising yachts. I became interested in the Alajuela 38 which turned out to have been designed by a yachtsman who had been unable to find a yacht with the qualities he wanted, so he built his own. Soon he was making them for other people and I believe the yard he started made around 100 of these long keeled heavy displacement yachts. I learned about this when I discovered that practically every type of yacht has an owner's forum on the internet. By joining them you learn a lot about the yacht and some of their problem areas, since much of the discussion concerns maintenance issues. One owner in Florida was so enthusiastic about the type that he visited one that I was interested in and crawled all over it to take 60 digital pictures for me, even offering to put me up if I came to see it in person. My interest in the Alajuela began to wane when I found it would not be practical to sit at the chart table at sea.

The best planning sometimes fails to unmask the usual sales hype and skilful photography. Despite careful searches only a handful of yachts in the UK came close to what I looked for. I travelled to the Netherlands only to be seriously disappointed. The weather played a part as it rained enough to reveal leaks in a poorly fitted teak deck on what turned out to be a home completion job done by a person with some very odd ideas about internal layout. By way of compensation my son and I did have a great stop over in Brussels.

With time, I found most of the yachts that got my attention were in the USA. It seems that over



Shannon 38 Layout



Plane Song on her mooring

these serious cruising yachts are built to high specifications with little compromise in build standards. Because they tend to cruise in the warmer climates, a lot of attention is paid to good ventilation. Many are cutter rigged and have large capacity water storage tanks, essential for long distance cruising. The Valiant 40 is one such yacht whose builders claim more have circumnavigated than any other type of yacht. They are semi-custom built and command high prices but I did find one just about within my budget. Once again

the owner's forum on the internet came to my rescue before I got too involved in what was the ideal yacht for me. I discovered that the builders had unknowingly used sub-standard resin during the oil crisis in the 1970s with the result that their output for a couple of years was prone to very bad blistering and this was the reason why the Valiant I really fancied was within my budget.

The Crealock 37 was high on my wish list because I had seen for myself their wonderful sea keeping qualities and very high build standard. Trouble is many others value these attributes and they command a premium on their resale value such that I never came across one near enough to my budget. Then one day out of the blue a very rich friend told me he had toyed with the idea of buying a Shannon 38 and he gave me all the literature on it. It was precisely the yacht I had in mind, designed for two people to cruise long distances and built without compromise. They are still built on Rhode Island, albeit now as a 39 footer and the yard is help personified when it comes to questions from owners or potential owners. Every year they host a seminar for the owners at the yard.

Now my appetite was really wetted and I found a ketch rigged cutter on the Hudson north of New York. After a lot of e-mails to ascertain if the Shannon had been anywhere that would enable me to obtain CE mark exemption, I decided to go and have a look at it. It was said the yacht had been to Russia as part of a peace initiative and had passed through the English Channel and the Baltic so there might be the evidence needed for the exception certificate. There were lots of choices for cheap flights and the dollar-pound rates were much in our favour at the time so a transatlantic trip to view a yacht was not such a big deal. The agent met me at the airport and I had found a good deal for accommodation near where the yacht was at her winter mooring. In that part of the world winter

storage is a serious business and the yacht was completely wrapped in a plastic cocoon. She was a ketch rigged cutter. The owner was rather distant, leaving the business to his broker and a friend who did all the maintenance. An early part of my investigation centres on through hull fittings which on the Shannon are quite the best bronze sea cocks I have ever come across but they had still managed to allow one to freeze up. Other clues made me suspect poor maintenance which coupled with a steadfast refusal of the owner to negotiate put me off any deal. Lots of lessons learned and my enthusiasm for the Shannon in no way diminished.

My search continued mostly through the internet and despite my enthusiasm for the Shannon, I researched other types. A few Shannons were on the market but they were either beyond my budget or there was no possibility of acquiring CE mark exemption. The next Shannon that looked promising was located at St Petersburg Florida. It had taken part in the 1984 OST AR and I quickly obtained the necessary proof. Yacht sales in the US are the subject of a well documented sales agreement which gave me confidence. However, the owner would not permit a survey unless there was an offer which would be difficult to make without first seeing it. Maybe this would be fine if you were close at hand so in the end a deal was negotiated which allowed me to have a surveyor look over the yacht without doing a full survey. His report suggested it would be worth going to the next stage so I set up a visit and a full survey to be done during my stay. I was still required to make an offer and to my surprise this was accepted given it was as low as I dare go without being cheeky. A deposit was paid to the broker.

Fortunately my visit was at the end of the holiday season so accommodation was very reasonable. Again the broker met me at the airport and ferried me about. After looking her over, a test sail and haul out with a surveyor present was arranged. It turned out that the owner, a wealthy businessman, had only started sailing comparatively recently and this was his first yacht. He had discovered that a yacht designed for long distance cruising was not suitable for the sort of day sailing which he and his daughter had in mind. He had already bought his next yacht so was fairly keen to sell. I made a long list of negative aspects of the yacht's condition from my own and the surveyor's observations and met the owner with the broker to negotiate in a luxurious hotel beside the marina where the Shannon was berthed. I think he may have had shares in the place because a wave of the hand and coffee was served.

After listening to my prepared speech about what needed to be done to sail her across the Atlantic, the owner turned to the broker and asked what he should do! It was suggested a further price reduction would be in order and to his credit he offered a good discount which I accepted with one caveat, namely that he should pay for a rebuilt rudder. He even offered to let me leave the yacht on his mooring until I came to sail her home 6 months later. Another wave of the



Naming Ceremony Snead Island Florida



Snead Island Boat Yard

\$660,000 so I felt I had done pretty well.

Now the challenges began. First, there was the little matter of the hurricane season which was about to begin. My luck held and the broker took me to the best yard on the West coast of Florida, where the staff shook their collective heads and told me they were over subscribed. Fortunately, the owner of the yard happened by, slapped Tom the broker on the back and agreed instantly for the Shannon to be stored. Furthermore, he agreed to do work on her and for me to come out at the end of the hurricane season to prepare her for the crossing. The Snead Island Boat Yard is South of Tampa Bay at the entrance to the Manatee River and I was very lucky to have found it as you will learn later, not just as a place to lift out.

There remained the small matter of the mechanics of paying for the yacht. A sterling cheque was out of the question and the price was a bit beyond my credit card limit. I simply walked into a Bank of America branch and opened an account and it took just 20 minutes and \$100 deposit to complete. Back in the UK I bought dollars at a very advantageous rate, which made the tourist rates look like an almost fraudulent transaction. This is only possible if you part with shed loads of money and sending it to my new account in the US was simplicity itself. Paying Tom the broker was just a matter of asking him to call by the bank where a cashier's bank cheque awaited him.

When your new pride and joy is uninsured and on the hard about 3 feet above sea level in the hurricane belt for the season, you quickly learn how to track hurricanes on the internet. 2004 was the worst season in Florida for a very long time. Four hurricanes passed with in 50 miles of the yard which miraculously escaped any real damage. As part of my rehabilitation, I sent a donation to the nearby Chapter of the American Red Cross to help the victims and pondered whether there may after all be a God who listens to my entreaties.

I returned to Florida with a plan to prepare the yacht now British registered and renamed Plane Song in deference to my former and current employment and the musical career of my wife. Her first owner had named her Summer Salt, he being in the salt mining business and the previous owner had had a rush of blood to the head and renamed her Tarpon Turtle after the lake Tarpon

where he built his house. Given a tradition of each owner naming the yacht and the second owner's choice, I felt I did the right thing.

The plan to sail Plane Song home allowed me 6 weeks to prepare her before the first of my crew arrived in the shape of my eldest son. I needed all of that time and more but on the appointed day the 2 of us set off for Miami via the Florida Keys where my second son would join us for the leg to Bermuda. A change of crew and wind generator under guarantee and off to the Azores trying hard to get there before the ARC UK. Having decided to pay VAT, the Azores was a good choice of where to settle this unpopular tax, the rate being the smallest in the EU after Greece. They are getting used to people turning up to pay this tax in Horta and wisely as it turned out, I took the advice of the customs man and engaged an agent. I met one stubborn couple who were trying to do it themselves and they were still trying as we prepared to leave two weeks later.

The agent wanted a fee akin to the cost of a survey and it was with some reluctance that I agreed. When we discussed the value of the yacht I had a bit of a rant about the things I had discovered sailing her across the Atlantic, which had I known about earlier, would have reduced the price paid. To my great surprise he suggested a valuation at least 30% less than her real value. The very next day the agent arranged a visit by no less than the Chief of Customs. After glancing at the yacht's name on the transom, with a wave of the hand in the style you might expect of Royalty, he was gone. Apparently this indicated that the valuation was accepted and now all that remained was to pay the VAT, in cash preferably. The next day I sat outside the very impressive panelled door labelled in gold letters Chief of Customs, and handed over to the agent a brown envelope stuffed with Euros. After a flurry of rubber stamping in the outer office, the agent reappeared and handed me a not very impressive document recording that VAT had been paid on Plane Song. He had earned his fee.

The voyage home via Bayona in NW Spain would need another article to do it justice. Some testing conditions, such as a Force 9 the forecasters somehow failed to mention and several days of almost no wind, added to my confidence that I probably had made the right choice for my new pride and joy.



Caught mid Atlantic