

Why did we buy a ?

Like a lot of boaters my wife and I started boating by hiring, first a cruiser on the Norfolk Broads and then a canal narrowboat on which we cruised the Leicester Ring. From that point on we were hooked.

We bought our first narrowboat in the late 70's. Having just moved to West Yorkshire where we discovered those wonderful canals and couldn't wait to take advantage of them. It was a Springer, and before anyone starts to criticise Springers let me say that whilst they were 'cheap and cheerful' they did get an awful lot of people on to the canals who might not otherwise have been able to afford to do so, ourselves included.

By 1997 we were on our fifth boat, this time a twin engined Dutch cruiser, having progressed through two more narrowboats and a 60' Dutch barge all of which had two things in common. They were built from steel and they all rusted.

I am reminded of the poem 'The Pied Piper of Hamelyn' in which a plague of rats required magical intervention in order to be eradicated. Well we needed magical intervention to eradicate the rust. Sadly none was forthcoming and so we had to resort to the more traditional 'tried and tested' methods.

For those of you who have not had the pleasure, here is a brief list of the tasks required to keep rust in check.

When cruising, repaint any and all scratches immediately or as soon as possible.

Every two years take the boat out of the water, clean off all the crud paying particular attention to the waterline. Remove the old sacrificial anodes. Inspect the very bottom of the hull for rust spots as they can eat through 12mm of steel in a remarkably short space of time. Where there is rust, wire brush it off and kill it with phosphoric acid. Immediately cover the bare metal with a primer such as red oxide or similar. Re-black the hull including the base. Replace the sacrificial anodes.

We would take a week off from work and working as hard as possible, get the job done. I personally think that the very worst aspect of the job was lying under the boat, all 12 or more tons of her, angle grinder in hand, covered from head to foot in all sorts of mess, getting rid of the rust.

In short with a steel boat we were fighting a war, a war against rust. Certainly we did win some battles but overall we felt that we were losing and this has been borne out in recent years when we have seen on our travels, quite a few steel boats being re-plated.

And so one day in 1997, after nearly 20 years of boating I looked at my wife through my mud speckled safety goggles and said "I've had enough of this" to which she wholeheartedly agreed and we gave up the fight and sold the boat.

But we still had the boating bug, the urge to be on the water.

And this is where Sea Otter entered the picture.

It seems to me that owning a boat should be an enjoyable experience. Whether the boat is used solely as a weekend cottage, a place to live or as a mobile holiday home, the emphasis should be on enjoying it. I suppose that there are probably a few people who genuinely enjoy the maintenance aspect of boating but I suspect they are a small minority and I am certainly not one of them.

So the concept of a virtually maintenance free boat was very attractive, so attractive in fact that we bought one.

Now I suppose that most boaters have been to various boat shows where Sea Otter have been displaying their products and have spoken to the staff or indeed owners who have been manning the stand.

The main selling points, and they are stressed time and time again, are that Sea Otter boats being built from aluminium alloy, are low maintenance, cheap to run and will not depreciate in the way that steel boats do. Sure, they are expensive and sure, you could get a bigger boat for your money but think about whole life costs and it becomes clear that Sea Otter boats represent better value for money than the others.

Having been on both sides of the fence i.e. a buyer and a Sea Otter volunteer, I have believed absolutely in the product.

But we are human and in the wee small hours, humans tend to have doubts.

Are they really so resistant to corrosion?

Can I really leave the boat in the water indefinitely?

Will it depreciate at the low levels suggested?

Or is this really all just some great sales pitch and have we been fooled?

The problem is that it is impossible to know the answer to any of these questions until we have taken the boat out of the water and inspected, or sold it and of course have used the boat extensively and seen first hand just how well it has stood up to the rigours of canal life.

Well, we have done all of that!

We bought our original Sea Otter about 5½ years ago and have used it extensively. (1100 engine hours, approximately) and it has stood up to canal life magnificently. Being lighter than an equivalent steel boat she was fitted with a relatively small engine the fuel consumption of which at canal speeds, i.e. averaging 2.5 mph worked out at 5lts/8hrs. It has not been out of the water in all that time and we have just sold her (we lost approximately 10% of what we paid for her), and had a new Sea Otter delivered. It might be worth saying here that had she been a steel boat we would have had her out of the water at least twice during that time. She would have had to have had a larger engine which would have increased fuel consumption and being of greater displacement would have had much more impact on the canal environment.

Her new owners, who in fact sold their Sea Otter to buy ours, are lucky enough to have their own mooring at the bottom of their garden on the River Thames and since we had her moored near Northampton it was felt easier all round if she was transported down to the Thames by road. This meant of course having to have her craned out for the first time since her launching.

I cannot tell a lie, I was somewhat apprehensive as she was lifted out. What would she be like under the waterline? Would there be lots of corrosion etc?

Not a bit of it!

We managed to get up close and personal and as the pictures show she was dirty! Five years of crud had accumulated around the waterline and an extensive family of freshwater mussels had taken up residence underneath, but no sign of any problem whatsoever. Even the original hull blacking was there without a blemish.



So I say to all, keep the faith, the sales blurb really is true, if you are lucky enough to own a Sea Otter boat then you are owners of a truly great boat.

David & Eve Robson

Owners of a new 41' Semi Trad Sea Otter Narrowboat

