

In the southern part of the delta region of the Netherlands, in the town of Vlissingen, stands a statue to the great Dutch naval hero Admiral de Ruyter. For many years he was just as famous in Britain too.

It was de Ruyter who brought tears to the eyes of Samuel Pepys when he captured Sheerness fort and subsequently burst through the chain barrier at Chatham to burn the British fleet at anchor in 1667. His victorious fleet actually sailed to Chatham from Zieriksee and although the burgers of Zieriksee did not raise a statue to de Ruyter, his spectre undoubtedly walks the wharves and scans the Oosterschelde for signs of any new invasion from across the Channel.

Imagine his surprise, then, to see a fleet of 32 Fishers sailing companionably across the Oosterschelde from the North Sea via the Roompot lock and romping up into the haven of Zieriksee at the start of the annual Fisher rally.

Such is the universal appeal of the Fisher family of robust motor sailers that to the sailing neophyte they represent a postcard stereotype of just exactly what a small sailing ship descended from a fishing vessel should look like, whilst to the dedicated sailor they induce a different sensation – the admirable strengths and handsome lines of the MFV pull subtly at even the hardest of hearts. Their owners, on the other hand, are like the proverbial dog with two tails: they dine in teak panelled saloons, or lounge comfortably in deep and spacious cockpits, and when the weather closes in or the east wind bites or the seas get up they duck into their pilot houses for protection.

Douglas Phillips-Birt, writing back in 1964 about MFV-type yachts, commented: "Two functions regulate the design of MFVs. They are firstly floating platforms from which the crew may catch fish; secondly the means of transporting the fishermen to the fishing grounds and the catch back to the market."

The integrity of the MFV is legendary and this classical shape has been well developed by Messrs Wyatt and Freeman into the Fisher line. The boats retain the best features of the MFV, but have managed to avoid the principal disadvantages of the marque such as the very heavy displacement, the full and snubbed ends and the very low freeboard.

Since 1970 nearly a thousand Fishers have been built and there is hardly a port in the world from Hull to Hong Kong where Fishers have not dropped anchor.

Fisher owners range from the absolute beginner to the knowledgeable sailor seeking a little less exposure to the elements.

For their 1992 hands-across-the-sea rally Ben van Haarsten of the Dutch Fisher Owners Association and David Ford of the British contingent devised a programme of three days and nights of short cruises in the Delta. The plan was that British participants would make their own way over to the Netherlands, meeting up with Dutch and Belgian Fishers at Roompot.

The rally started with the arrival of the fleet at Zieriksee, where there was an overnight stop. It then moved on to Numansdorp the following day and thence to a conclusion in Hellevoetsluis.

Zieriksee has been documented for more than eleven centuries as a fortified trading town and is the site of the Schouwen

*Few marques of
modern motor sailer
have as loyal a
following. Tim Ellis
joins the Fisher
Owner's Association
1992 Dutch rally*

Duineland Colossus. This tower, begun in 1454 and completed to a truncated design of a mere 190' (58m) tall in 1531, was intended to stand well over twice that height. It took twenty years for the foundations to be built! Not every Fisher owner was conversant with these facts but everyone could feel the ambience. Whenever a couple of Fisher owners get together they compare notes, so when 32 come together – and especially when you have 20-year-old 1970 examples berthed alongside the latest models – there are bound to be interesting comparisons to make.

What gives Fishers their cachet as a motor sailer in the MFV style? The fact is that they are a true 60/40 motor sailer and not a yacht with a deck or pilot house added. However, the glittering performance of modern sailing yachts obscures the fact that, given their sail area and the right conditions, Fishers perform very adequately under sail. We found that the Fisher 37 was capable of over seven knots with a breeze of about seventeen knots on the beam.

Although the Fisher range is characterised by fairly heavy displacement, their essential particulars are not too extreme. Many have accomplished lengthy ocean voyages, and one, the Fisher 37 *Balder IV*, recently took part in the ARC Rally.

Since the early Seventies the Fisher range has been built by Northshore of Itchenor. They build the Fishers very robustly indeed. But it would be wrong to think that because they appear so solidly constructed there is no finesse or subtlety. Quite the contrary. The range was designed by Messrs Wyatt and Freeman to give excellent seakeeping even in extreme conditions.

After the Fisher 30 and Fisher 37 had been put into production, the designers were asked to draw up a Fisher 34. This model started production in 1974. She has finer ends and better sailing characteristics than her siblings and, in the blustery winds of the first sailing day of the rally, the 37s were hard put to shake off Norman Overton's fine example, *Orton Lady*. One of the most sensible modifications on any of the boats was Norman's addition of a bimini top over the cockpit which incorporated side curtains and davits. The easy enclosure of the cockpit enlarges the living area considerably and provides a dry and pleasant environment in port.

Another 34, *Finlandia of Hamble*, owned by Derek and Jean Stevens since new in 1974, is full of inventive and useful ideas including a sliding combination toolbox and foot stand by the helm, so that when Jean is at the wheel she can step onto it to see over the bows.

At the end of the rally, the Stevens planned to cruise north for six weeks. It must be a measure of their confidence in *Finlandia* that their advancing years are no deterrent to such voyaging (see CB 15 for a report on the Fisher 34).

Fisher owners tend to be great individualists, so each vessel reflects the owner's input – not always in the way that one expects. At least two of the British boats have substantially customised interiors, mostly involving the storage, presentation

The Dutch

Thirty-two Fishers supported the rally – sixteen boats sailed over from Britain to meet an equal number from the Netherlands and Belgium. Here the fleet lies alongside at Zieriksee. Photo courtesy of Northshore.



Connection



Top left: Norman Overton in Orton Lady, an F35, leading P Jump's F37 Optimist and Roel Bainma's F37 Dundee through the Volkerak in a fresh breeze.

Middle: Sentanna, an F37 owned by John Gibbs, en route to Numansdorp. This photo and the previous one by Tim Ellis, rest courtesy of Northshore.

Top right: Northshore, an F37 owned by Albert Goswell of South Africa, enters Numansdorp crewed by Northshore's Bryan Moffat and Mrs Goswell.

Bottom left: J Sonmema's Kingfisher, an F30, entering Zieriksee after sailing from Roompot.

Bottom right: Janboel, J Zirksee's early Freeward 25.

and consumption of a range of liquors and beers that would hardly be out of place stocking the shelves of a major hostelry. One rally participant declared that almost the whole of the starboard side of their saloon was devoted to 'refreshments'. The hostess then explained rather wistfully that although she could lay her hands instantly on any specified tippie on the starboard side, the port side was unknown territory: sure enough, a veritable jungle of sprouting potatoes and misplaced onions greeted the casual searcher who lifted a settee cushion.

Refreshments are not the only subject of modifications, or even the most interesting: as well as tool boxes beneath the wheel, a variety of shapes and materials of cockpit tables adorn every cockpit, and *Sentanna*, a new 37 owned by John Gibbs, even has a bumpkin. Stowage was addressed on some of the Dutch vessels, as were parrot perches and geranium pot baskets.

Other noteworthy modifications and additions were glass storage lockers in *Quintade* and *Finlandia* of Hamble. Extra portlights were fitted in several vessels to increase light and ventilation. Several boats also carried a veritable treasure trove of glistening brass and chrome artefacts, all lovingly polished and cared for.

As a measure of the kind of service Northshore still provide for their owners, Mr Iperen, Chairman of the Dutch Fisher Owners Club, had ordered a cockpit locker for *Brigantijn*, similar to one that he had seen on a later model. The locker in question, complete with trim door, catches and moulded in the correct colours, was duly carried over in a rally yacht and passed across for installation. Not bad for a boat that left the factory in the late Seventies.

The Fisher 37 *Quintade* boasts a French-polished interior of exceptional lustre and depth. This finish would be quite impractical on most sailing yachts but owner Paul Whitfield of Grimsby confirmed that it had caused him no problems whatsoever. Crewed by five Hull-based pilots, each and every one a Master Mariner, *Quintade* was neat as a pin despite having motor-sailed all the way down the North Sea the night before. In fact, although the temperature during the rally was around 27°C every day, *Quintade's* wood and coal burning stove seemed to be a focal point. No doubt winter in Grimsby calls for a stove of this type to ensure a satisfactory supply of hot toddies for personal central heating.

The first evening found nearly 70 of the participants dining in Zieriksee's Mon-

dragon restaurant, housed in a 17th century building alongside an arm of the canal in the city centre. Dutch people take their food seriously and this was a feast of many dishes – some sea food, and others of vegetables, fruits, meats, with a finale of sorbet, chocolate and candied fruits. Needless to say Genever (*oude* and *jonge*) was available, together with excellent wines and local beers, the consumption of which encouraged boisterous exchanges at maximum volume.

The party drew to a close fairly early, several of the British vessels having arrived earlier that day, although some others had already rendezvoused at Veere, a most attractive and prosperous medieval merchant port famous for its trade in Scottish wool, and for providing a barracks and hospital to Napoleon and the British respectively during the Napoleonic wars.

The more energetic crews remained into the wee small hours to exchange yachting sagas, preparing themselves, maybe, for the 27-mile sail to Numansdorp the following day.

To reach Numansdorp from Zieriksee involves some tight scheduling to pass beneath the Zeeland and St Philips bridges before passing through the Krammer and

the Volkerak locks, and thence into Hollands Diep for the final short passage into the narrow entrance of Numansdorp.

Quite a few of these locks and bridges open only at hourly intervals and locking through the Krammersluizen, where pleasure craft have their own lock, often involves delays of two to three hours. The rally had been arranged to pass through the commercial lock and, after a brief period of boisterous milling around, the fleet settled down for the flushing process to take place and to exit into the Volkerak. Not once during the rally did anyone have problems in the locks, although one of the 34s just tipped her VHF antenna whilst passing under a bridge – a reminder always to have the air-draught of your boat written down near the chart table!

Having arrived at Numansdorp, the fleet found that it had to skirt around a keen fisherman dangling his line from the tip of a pole which must have extended at least 20' across the narrow entrance channel. Once into the channel, the rally emerged through the former lock structure (the lock gates no longer necessary since the Deltaplan holds the North Sea at bay) into a grass-banked cutting leading to the centre of the town. Protected from wind and tide, the fleet could tie up five deep with only the inner and outermost vessels warped to the quay.

As usual in the Netherlands, the organisation of these town dock areas is low-key but efficient and clean. Mooring is also relatively inexpensive.

Many of the rally participants sailed between the locks and bridges in up to 25 knots of wind; essentially a close reach with the winds from the north and east. *Eccentric Lady*, a 37 owned by David Jordan, recorded an impressive 7.6 knots under main, mizzen and cruising chute.

There was plenty to talk about over a beer on the hospitality ship berthed alongside at Numansdorp and ready to provide a surprise party for the participants. Once again a remarkable spread was laid before us. Speeches followed with addresses by Marcel Kouwenberg, retired chairman of the Dutch Fisher Owners Association and owner of the Fisher 30 *Saudade*, followed by the present incumbent, John Iperen, owner of *Brigantijn*, and by Ben van Haasteren, the club secretary and owner of *Goudvis*. Bryan Moffat, Chairman of Northshore, answered on behalf of the builders, and David Ford on behalf of the UK Fisher Club.

The Fisher 37 is the most popular model currently being built by Northshore, followed, in order, by the 34, 25, 31 and lastly the flagship, the Fisher 46. Seven 37s attended, followed by nine 34s, ten 30s (now replaced by the 31), four 25s but only one 46. The Fisher 46 has almost twice the displacement of the 37 and has really spacious accommodation. With 20 people in *Hootact's* saloon there was still room to ferry refreshments and snacks around from the U-shaped galley, while the sumptuous owners' quarters really deserves the term 'stateroom'.

On Friday the fleet set off for Hellevoetsluis, some 25 kilometres distant and a former naval port. The only impediment along the way was the bridge spanning the Haringvliet, although a 37 did manage to tickle the putty while negotiating the inside passage around the island of Tiengmeten after straying beyond the markers. After a few minutes of fanning the bows with the bow thruster and occasionally gunning the engine astern, she slipped off and rejoined the fleet.

Hellevoetsluis itself is a major yacht harbour and effectively marks the northern limits of the Delta. Packed with shops,

restaurants and plenty of entertainment, Hellevoetsluis is crowded with visitors both from the Delta and from Rotterdam, only 10 miles away. But aboard one's yacht the crowds hardly seem to exist.

All good things come to an end, and it seemed no time at all before the visiting Fishers were straggling out through Harlingvliet lock and turning their stems towards the UK. The Dutch hosts, having made their farewells, began to disperse towards their home ports.

Looking at the particulars of the Fisher range in some detail, there are several features which commend them to owners interested in serious cruising. The displacement/length ratio, used to indicate the fullness of a hull, show that Fishers are all above 387, while the current trend in sailing cruisers, including some motor sailers, is around the 175-280 mark. What this means is that Fishers are very well endowed with space to build-in the tankage, stowage and accommodation that are the hallmark of comfortable cruising.

The sail area/displacement ratio helps to show how much power a yacht has compared with its mass. Modern vessels typically register from 16 to over 20: the Fishers all have ratios ranging from 10 to 14. So they are conservatively canvassed. The boats are able to hang on to full sail even in a fresh breeze, but their ability in light airs must suffer. Given the motor-sailing character of the marque, however, this is an acceptable trade-off. ⚓

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THE FISHER RANGE Specifications

TYPE	46	37	34	31	25
LOA	51' 6" (15.69m)	42' 6" (12.96m)	34' 1" (10.39m)	31' 3" (9.53m)	25' 25" (7.69m)
LOD	45' 7" (14.00m)	37' 2" (11.33m)	34' 1" (10.39m)	31' 3" (9.53m)	25' 25" (7.69m)
LWL	40' 0" (12.19m)	32' 5" (9.91m)	29' 7" (9.07m)	26' 25" (8.00m)	21' 0" (6.40m)
BEAM	15' 0" (4.57m)	12' 0" (3.66m)	11' 0" (3.35m)	10' 3" (3.15m)	9' 3" (2.85m)
DISPLACEMENT	25 tons	14 tons	11.5 tons	7 tons	4.5 tons
BALLAST	10 tons	6 tons	4.8 tons	3 tons	2.1 tons
DRAUGHT	6' 6" (1.98m)	5' 3" (1.60m)	4' 11" (1.49m)	4' 3" (1.30m)	3' 9" (1.14m)
SAIL AREA	1575 sq ft (146 sq m)	996 sq ft (95 sq m)	633 sq ft (55.5 sq m)	544 sq ft (50 sq m)	296 sq ft (27.5 sq m)
ENGINE	135hp	90hp	60hp	34hp	27hp
SAIL AREA/DISPLACEMENT	14.7	13.98	11.60	13.90	10.15
DISPLACEMENT/LENGTH	390	407	436	387	485
BALLAST/DISPLACEMENT	40%	43%	41%	43%	47%
PRICE EX VAT	£355,555	£143,335	£96,945	£79,445	£51,390