

PRIDE & JOY



No Worries



When fire swept through Mike Turner's Aquanaut 36 at her marina berth, the occupants were lucky to escape unhurt. The boat, however, was a complete write-off. Or was it?



Fire down below is every boatowner's nightmare. As Mike Turner and his friend Dougie Griffiths relaxed on board Mike's steel-hulled Aquanaut 1100, *No Worries*, neither knew that their cosy evening chat would suddenly turn into a scramble for survival.

"We were very lucky," Mike tells us. "The boat was alongside a pontoon at Windsor Marina on the Thames, and we were entertaining aboard. Dougie Griffiths from *Mystic Meg* had come aboard with his wife Annette and two young sons. At about half past ten in the evening, Annette and the boys went home, leaving Dougie and I chatting over a whisky night-cap.

"Suddenly I noticed there was smoke in the cabin. My immediate thought was that Dougie had lit a cigarette, which was odd as I have a strict no-smoking policy aboard. Then it seemed to be coming out of the television cupboard, so I dived over and ripped out the connections double quick. But it wasn't the television, so I pulled out the video as well. It wasn't that either.

"Finally we realised that the instrument console was acting like a vent, and that smoke was billowing up from the engine compartment. I opened an inspection hatch in the galley, and an explosion threw me back against the door. Dougie and I were both stunned, but managed to empty five fire extinguishers into the hatch before we both realised it was hopeless.



The companionway funnelled flames onto the flybridge.



Pitted and bucked steel is faired up with epoxy filler...



...before a new door, windows and a paint job.



All the windows on the saloon were blown out.



The steel is prepared for a topcoat of Awl Grip.



GYS colour-matched the original blue paint trim.

"We dragged each other out and staggered over to the marina car park. The alarm was raised, and a few minutes later there was another explosion, which blew out the windows. The flames were leaping higher than the tree-tops, and by now the whole marina had turned out to watch."

The first fire engine arrived within eleven minutes and its crew concentrated on stopping the fire from spreading. Hoses were played on all the surrounding boats to douse them down. If the flames had

touched any of the other craft, many of them with glassfibre hulls and petrol tanks, the damage could have been catastrophic.

The second engine on the scene tackled the fire aboard *No Worries* and, once it was extinguished, Mike and Dougie found refuge aboard *Mystic Meg*. Using the age-old remedy for shock, they tackled the drinks locker and sank an entire bottle of scotch. And who could blame them?

"If we had been asleep, we probably wouldn't be here today.

The smoke would have got us before the flames. Although the boat is a wreck, thank goodness nobody was injured. My advice to anyone facing a fire is to get out and get clear."

Post mortem

"The next day we covered-up *No Worries* as best we could, and tried to work out what to do next.

"Our insurance broker, Doug Houghton of Houghton & Marsh, was incredibly efficient. By 2pm the next day, their assessor, David



Above left opening this panel to trace the source of the smoke, fed the fire and caused an explosion. *Above right* the panel in the restored galley, minus the spice rack.



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The fire extinguisher near the start of the blaze was the only one not used.



Fully restored, the area opposite the galley also forms a double berth.



As smoke filled the saloon, Mike and Dougie dragged each other up these steps.



Mike's wife chose a new colour scheme for the upholstery and curtains.

Viner, had arrived. He asked us which option we preferred - the money for a total loss, or the cost of a rebuild.

"I was adamant that the boat was perfect for us and I wanted her rebuilt, which convinced David that it wasn't an "insurance job." Our insurers, Haven Knox-Johnston, were superb throughout, with no quibbles and no hold-ups. They asked for five separate quotes, so we contacted some yards on the Thames and on the South Coast. Goodacre Yacht Services (GYS) of Port Solent drove up to have a look at the sorry remains of the Aquanaut, and took the job on."

Mark Goodacre of GYS takes up the story:

"It was the worst case of fire damage I have ever seen," he says. "Fortunately, this was a steel-hulled boat, so the hull itself was intact, and the twin Lehman diesel engines had also survived with only superficial damage, but the rest of the hull was gutted.

"The interior helm position was charred almost beyond recognition, the galley totally destroyed, and the saloon windows were all gone. There was also a lot of damage to the bridge-deck immediately above the saloon. Although most of it was confined to the port side of the boat, the smell of burnt wood and fabric was overpowering."

As for the cause of the fire, that still remains a mystery, mainly because of a lack of clues. Suspicion has fallen on the battery charger, as shore-power was connected at the time. But there is no obvious reason why it should have shorted out. It had worked perfectly for years.

No Worries was craned onto a low-loader and transported to the large Goodacre workshops at Port Solent in Hampshire, where the full extent of the damage could be assessed. Passers-by were intrigued, none more so than the

marina's lockmaster Tony Sheaf. "You'll never fix that," he said. Fifteen months later, he would have to eat his words.

Gutting the gutted

Managing director Barry Goodacre was shocked at the extent of the destruction. No part of the interior had been left unaffected, either by the fire itself, or the thick black smoke that had swirled through the accommodation.

The first job was to gut the internals, taking detailed plans of everything as it came out to enable copies to be made. Some pieces of bulkhead and furniture were retained, as their shapes could be used as templates to speed up the refit process. This is a golden rule when stripping out a boat. Keep as many patterns as you can, and make a note of the order in which they are removed. This will all be invaluable later.

One big advantage of restoring a written-off boat is that it can be put back together better than it was before. After all, how many changes would you like to make to your own boat, but are reluctant to cut into a perfectly good interior?

Mike had always wanted to improve the galley as he was unhappy with its design and this was an excellent opportunity to make some changes. The galley units were moved to give more space, the fridge was relocated, and the seating in the saloon area extended. Because these changes were asked for early in the refit, GYS were able to incorporate them at no extra cost.

There were a few additions as well - Mike paid for a holding tank monitoring system to be installed, along with an electric toilet aft. As for the rest of the refit, wherever possible fixtures and fittings were replaced like-for-like, although some items for this 1991 boat were no longer available,

'The flames were leaping higher than the tree-tops, and by now the whole marina had turned out to watch'



The original joinery has been faithfully recreated.



There is nothing to suggest that the aft cabin was once full of smoke.

The refit was a long process, as it was done extremely carefully. The entire electrical system had to be replaced, along with new windows, furniture and headlinings.

Mike's wife Kathy had some clear ideas about how she wanted the interior furnishings to look. She chose a new colour scheme for the fabrics, curtains and carpets, and insisted that an existing shelf in the saloon was replaced exactly as it had been previously. The dimensions were perfect to house her beloved Lladro collection of Spanish pottery.

As for the interior teak-veneer woodwork, what couldn't be cleaned up was replaced. As nearly all the wood had been destroyed, matching teak veneers were obtained to keep a consistent colour throughout the main cabin space. As the inside of the hull was

exposed before the panels went up, it was sprayed with a fire-resistant and soundproof foam.

The final touch was to varnish all the woodwork to the original specification. "How Bruce the shipwright achieved what he did with the teak joinery, I do not know," Mike says.

"Just by studying the charred remains of the cupboard doors in the aft cabin, he managed to recreate perfectly all the other doors throughout the boat as originally installed. In my opinion, he performed a miracle."

Exterior treatment

The heat and smoke had also made a mess of the outside of the hull, and to keep that 'just-built' look, GYS had a lot of work to do.

"The worst job was clearing the decks," Mark recalls. "The plastic

non-slip Treadmaster pads had melted to the steel, and were almost immovable.

"Getting it all off was a hell of a job, and passers-by may have heard a few choice words in the struggle, but once done we were able to prepare properly the metal for new deck materials."

Mike chose a light speckled blue colour for the pads, which nicely offsets the darker blues on the hull.

"As for the hull itself, we realised it would have to be resprayed, and the lines of colour carefully re-instated. We rubbed all the damaged areas back to bare metal, carefully prepared them with 545 primer, and then re-sprayed the boat using a top coat of Awl Grip.

The waterline had some rust patches around the plastic rubbing strake. The rust was ground away,

pits or dents were filled in with an epoxy filler and faired-up before the final respray. The blue paint for the decorative hull lines was no longer obtainable, but we were able to make up our own to match."

Mike also took the opportunity to have the blue boot topping repainted. He had new anodes fitted, along with a new exhaust for the Webasto heater.

Once all the painting was completed, a brand new rubbing band was fixed around the gunwale.

Relaunching

Rebuilt, slightly modified, and looking ready for a boat show, the last job was to polish *No Worries* thoroughly to remove the evidence of all the labour, and then take her for sea trials.

Mike went down for the official



Above left charred almost beyond recognition, the helm station took the brunt of the blaze. Above right the rebuilt saloon, slightly modified by extending the seating.

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hand-over, and was absolutely delighted with his 'new' boat. As she was craned onto a low-loader for transport back to Windsor Marina.

It has been a happy ending to a heart-breaking disaster. For Mike, a keen boater who virtually lives aboard his boat, he has had his pride and joy restored to a

condition better than new. For the insurers, their pay-out for the rebuild was actually considerably less than a claim for total loss. For GYS, it was another job well done, with some impressive photographs for the album.

Suffering 'boat withdrawal symptoms' during the restoration, Mike had bought a Broom 37

to use for his boat club activities during the summer. However, good though the Broom was, she was sold the moment *No Worries* was craned back into the Thames.

Thanks to a quick acting insurance company and a dedicated team of craftsmen, this is one boat that has lived up to its name. □



Above when a lift-out went wrong, the crane toppled over and impaled this Carver. The damage was extensive, but was 'invisibly mended' by GYS.

Goodacre Yacht Services

Goodacre Yacht Services, set up in 1989, boasts clients from all over the world. "We have a team of 10 craftsmen," says director Mark Goodacre, "and a delivery crew if boats need moving."

Looking around their large premises, behind Marine Superstore at Port Solent in Hampshire, we were impressed by the variety of the projects being undertaken. Everything, from another scorched motorboat to a beautifully restored wooden

yacht, was in various stages of completion. This diversity is something GYS are proud of. "We can handle almost anything," Mark tells us.

Looking at the work going on in the sheds and the horror stories in the GYS photo album, we were also impressed with both the general quality of the fit-outs (of which *No Worries* is a prime example) and the attention to detail. This is particularly true when it comes to GRP repairs.

Anything from a minor scratch to a hole you can walk through can be repaired so well that it will appear as though nothing was ever there.

"The trick is in the colour matching," Mark explains. "There are thousands of colour shades for gelcoat, with just about every colour of the spectrum available. Even white has dozens of combinations - slightly yellow, slightly blue, and so on. We have three craftsmen who have a gift for matching up replacement gelcoat with the original colour. You need to look deep into the pigment, and have an almost artistic diagnosis for what you're seeing. It's quite a skill."

Mike has nothing but praise for GYS, and we have to say the team are friendly and approachable. Better still, they are stealing Bob the Builders catchphrase.

"Can we fix it? Yes we can..."

Enquiries for a quote for any repairs or modification work, you can contact GYS at 13 The Slipway, Port Solent, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO6 4TR. Tel: 023 92 210220. E-mail: info@gys.co.uk Website: www.gys.co.uk

No Worries

Designed by Dick Boon of Vripack Yachting in Holland, the Aquanaut 1100 offers six, occasionally seven, berths within its 36ft (11m) steel hull. Displacing 14.5 tonnes and with two long bilge keels, this is a comfortable sea or river boat, with two helm positions and a collapsible radar arch.

Accommodation consists of two berths forward, with another two on a fold-away dinette opposite the galley. An occasional berth can be made up on the saloon seat, with another double aft. There are two heads, and the one in the aft cabin has a shower.

Power comes from twin 135hp Lehman Sabre diesels, giving a cruising speed of around 12 knots. She is equally happy at sea as on the inland waterways, and her wide decks, solid guardrails and deck hardware make her perfect for extended river work.

Model

Aquanaut Unico 1100

Builders

Aquanaut Yachting, Holland

Designer

Dick Boon.

Year built

1991

Loa

36ft 3in (11m)

Beam

11ft 9in (3.6m)

Draught

2ft 9in (0.9m)

Displacement

14.5 tonnes

Berths

6/7

Cruising speed

12 knots

Fuel capacity

135 gal (600lt)

Water capacity

2 x 45 gal (2 x 200lt)

Contacts

The following companies assisted in *No Worries*' restoration.

Insurance

Haven Knox-Johnston. Tel: 01732 223600.

Surveyors

David Viner, Bateman Chapman. Tel: 020 7623 1819.

Upholsterers

Mastercovers. Tel: 02392 374 739.

Carpeters

Rowdan Flooring. Tel: 01735 865676.

Windows

Marine Window Fabrication. Tel: 01621 786413.

Spray Foam Insulation

Isotech. Tel: 02392 816291.

MOTOR BOATS MONTHLY