

Norna Biron's Delivery



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This travel story is a sequence of the on-board written and published episodes on my blog <https://framsblog.wordpress.com> and the redirection to [Zeilersforum.nl](https://zeilersforum.nl).

Henny van Oortmarsen (© 2023)

1. Norna Biron in Nidri

April 19, 2019

After an almost problem-free transition at Schiphol, only Joost had to convince the security guards that he really didn't want to leave his gas-filled soldering iron behind. After a flight of almost three hours, we landed at a nearly deserted airport in Preveza. For Transavia, it was again the first flight of the season, and that was noticeable at the airport. Once the still closed toilets were opened, the elders in our group could relieve themselves.



With 200kg of luggage in 12 travel bags and 4 not-so-small boys, the rented car is packed to the brim. The shock absorbers are on their last legs, making the many potholes in the road quite noticeable. Since the dinghy with the repaired outboard motor will only be available on Friday morning, we spend the first night in an Airbnb apartment. The address is only vaguely known, and the landlord has not yet responded to his phone. However, Jasper, acting like a true Sherlock Holmes, searches for similarities with the view photos of the apartment on the Internet and miraculously finds the location. The photos turn out to be very recent and an accurate representation of the surroundings. Vegetation, boats, bicycles, etc., are all in the same place, as if the photo was taken yesterday. It can't be wrong, then. Shortly afterward, the landlord arrives, resolving the uncertainty about our overnight stay. We have "a pint of lager" in the nearby English pub and then head to our last comfortable bed for the next 4 weeks.



The local bakery on the corner takes care of breakfast with delicious, warm croissants. We spot Norna Biron across the bay through binoculars. Next, we pick up the dinghy in Nidri, inflate some air into it, and give a stern talk to the outboard motor. Half of the crew then sails the boat back to the apartment, while the other half drives the car back.

A glorious moment follows. The four of us ride in the dinghy to Norna Biron, peacefully anchored. It's always a bit strange, approaching an unfamiliar boat —how does the interior look, the deck is impressive, a true expedition ship. Figuring out the electricity and lifting the heavy anchor require some work. While the outboard motor needed some coaxing, the diesel starts immediately on the first try. The anchor is up; the electric winch is working now, but navigating backward and forward takes a bit of figuring out.

We proceed cautiously, practicing maneuvering in both directions. Norna Biron has both a reversing gear and an adjustable propeller, offering multiple ways to steer her in a certain direction. She seems fine with it all, emitting a thick black plume from the exhaust, indicating her enthusiasm. Joost, the proud new owner, beams with confidence and is now convinced he can gently dock the ship alongside the sailboats at the Ionian Sea dock.

First, we transfer our luggage. The now empty rental car is once again filled to the brim with our bags, and I wonder how we managed to sit in it just last night. It's just a short distance to the dock where Norna is anchored, and I'm grateful for the rental car for transportation.



Meanwhile, the tanker has arrived to fill the diesel tanks. About 700 liters go in, so they weren't completely empty. In the meantime, I drive with Heiko to the Lidl supermarket, about 20 km back towards Levkas. In the car, we both observe that everything is going smoothly, and within 24 hours of departing from Lelystad, we're well on our way to being ready for sailing. Things are progressing nicely.

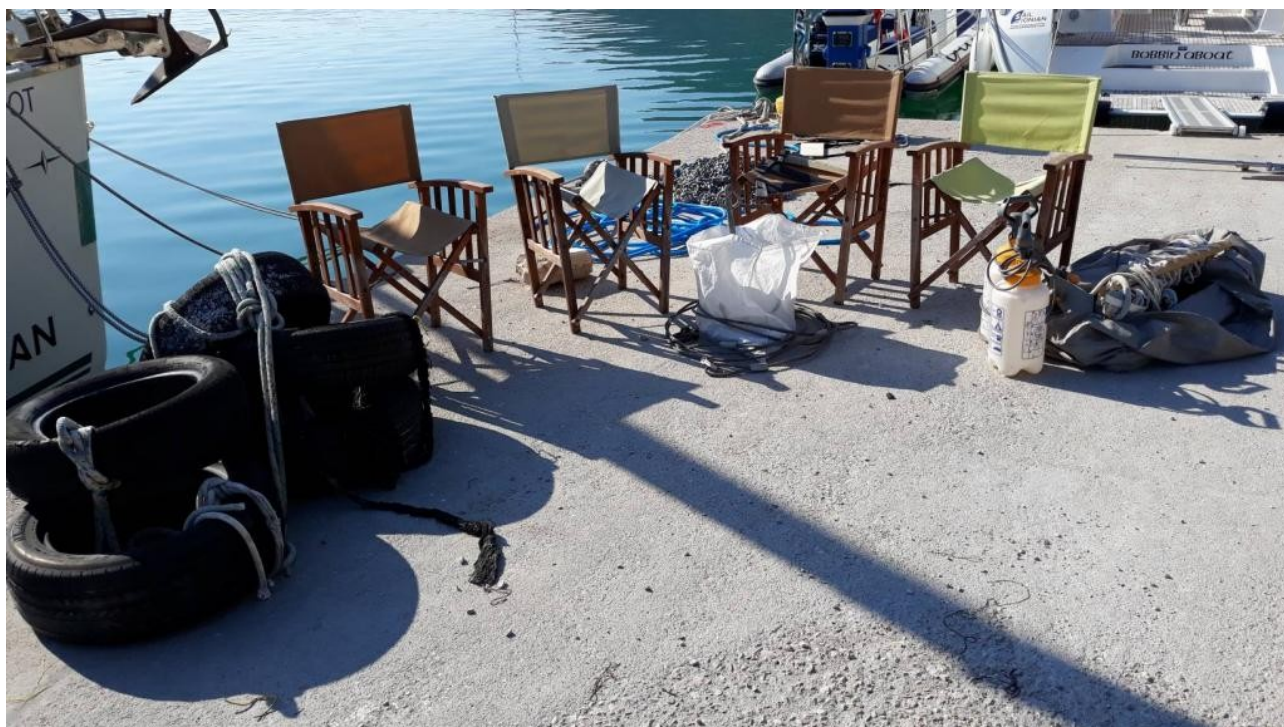
The car is now packed to the brim with provisions, and back on the boat, Jasper is busy setting up a network for communication and navigation.

2. Departure.

April 22, 2019

We pay another visit to the English pub, not just for a few pints but also for dinner. Fish & chips, albeit somewhat less voluminous than in the UK, are still quite enjoyable. We retire to bed early; it was indeed a busy day with a lot accomplished, giving us a satisfying feeling.

On Saturday morning, we have breakfast again at the familiar bakery with warm croissants and cappuccino. Meanwhile, we plan the day. Yesterday, we couldn't get everything at Lidl, so this time, Joost and Heiko head to the AB supermarket. Bread, flour, and yeast are still on the shopping list. In the meantime, Jasper and I clear the boat of unnecessary items, with Joost giving us carte blanche. It's easy to discard someone else's stuff. Naturally, I'm a collector, but Jasper is the opposite. Together, we make great progress. Anything that seems useful is laid out on the dock. Deck chairs, anchor chain, a grappling hook, heavy blocks, a collapsible table – these items quickly find new owners. Even the things destined for the container don't stay there for long.



The gray navy-like boat comes alongside, coast guard or police, it's not entirely clear to me. Thoughts about the new tax regulations cross my mind. We've let it go, after all, we'll be leaving here tomorrow and will be at sea immediately. "No worries," the uniform tries to convey as I take his line. They stay only briefly; they're just taking a coffee break, and one of the men goes ashore to buy something.

Shortly after, the boss of Sailing Ionian introduces himself. We are alongside one of his ships, and he wants to moor a few others here. Clearly, we are in the way. The agreement was that we could stay here until asked to leave. Apparently, that moment has come. I explain that half of the crew is still shopping, and once they return and everything is stowed away, we will cast off

to anchor further away. After all, a lot of stuff has been unloaded, and provisioning is nearly complete. It all goes very smoothly.

When Joost and Heiko return, we cast off and anchor in a different spot. I take Joost back to the shore with the dinghy. He is now returning the rental car to Preveza and will come back with a taxi. Meanwhile, Jasper has become the onboard engineer, busy connecting the new systems. We decide to wait for Joost before installing the VHF radio. A few spots are being considered, and what one person finds convenient might be different for another.

Joost calls again. We pick him up with the dinghy and then head to Nidri to find a nice restaurant for our last meal in Greece. Many of the eateries along the boulevard are still closed as it's early in the season. However, an Italian restaurant welcomes us warmly. After the usual exchanges about Ajax and Amsterdam, we enjoy delicious salads and pizza. In the dark, we search for Norna, peacefully waiting under her anchor light.

There are a few tasks we postpone until tomorrow morning. We agree to wake up at 7:00 am so we can finish some chores and make the ship shipshape before setting sail. According to the weather forecast, the wind will pick up, and if all goes well, we'll already be near Sicily.

The cable chaos around the chart table gradually transforms into an orderly and functioning system. Eventually, on Sunday morning at 11:30, we set sail. Exciting, a new phase in the life of Norna Biron, and for Joost, who proudly sends Norna out into the world as a satisfied and happy man.

The autopilot isn't working. There's power and movement, but the compass isn't functioning. Joost produces another compass that breathes new life into the autopilot. Quite a relief; manually steering Norna is not easy, the wheel is still a bit heavy, and Norna responds slowly but decisively. Fortunately, the autopilot has no issues.

We can't set a direct course yet, but the expectation is that the wind will continue to shift, allowing us to possibly sail close-hauled. We'll see. For now, the polar seems accurate, keeping the routing on schedule.

Heiko conjures up a delicious meal, and we discuss the watch schedule. Joost ingeniously put it together, and even the engineers on board need to think twice to understand it. It's a rotating system with changing times and watch leaders. We'll see how it goes.

Norna is a big boat but a bit quirky. There aren't many sleeping spots, and I settle on the salon bench in the aft cabin. It's okay but not spacious; still getting used to it. The folded-down saloon table prevents me from falling off. In the now considerably built-up sea, Norna makes significant slides, despite her 30 tons.

The next morning, we're somewhere halfway to Italy. I have a cup of coffee with Joost. The jib needs to be rolled in a bit. Just as we decide to do that after coffee, the sheet breaks out of the sheet eye. After rolling in the jib, a substantial flapping flap remains, testing its own stability, the stay, and the attachments. Joost and Jasper manage the task by reversing the furl (as the furling line is stuck) and using the spinnaker halyard to create a loop around the broken sheet eye. Impressive work; the sheet eye is easily six meters above deck.

Meanwhile, it's noon on Monday. Wind estimated around 25 knots (wind meter still not working), and we sail with a broad reach behind the staysail. The sea has become quite rough, and occasionally a breaker tests our mood. But we're in good spirits, steering towards Italy with Eric Clapton playing from the speakers.



3. Messina.

April 24, 2019

Messina.

Gradually, the number of lights increases on the south side of the Italian boot. We are approaching inhabited areas again. When lights also appear to port (Sicily), it becomes clear that we are leaving the Ionian Sea in exchange for the Strait of Messina. Eighteen years earlier, I sailed in the same area with my Senta, also in the dark, approaching the Strait of Messina. Back then, we unsuccessfully tried to find a berth in Messina. According to the pilot, there should be a berth for yachts in the ferry port. I couldn't find it at the time, so we somewhat fled the busy ferry port and found a spot on the other side, in Reggio Calabria.

This time, we head directly to Reggio Calabria. On Google Maps, we see not only the city harbor but also several docks in the southern corner of the large harbor basin. As we enter the harbor basin, the city harbor immediately to port doesn't look very inviting. The wind howls through the harbor, and the maneuvering space in the city harbor is very limited. We don't dare to go in, afraid that we won't be able to get out, and head to the southern corner of the harbor basin. Unfortunately, no dock is in sight, only large uninviting quays with a few ferry terminals. We go back outside and now set course for Messina. Since my last visit 18 years ago, some things have changed. There's a new marina on the starboard side of the harbor entrance. That will be our next goal.

Meanwhile, the tide has turned, and it's against us. With a speed of barely 2 knots, we creep towards Messina in the strong wind. First, we do a round to explore the harbor entrance, courteously giving way to one of the many ferries that come and go, even in the middle of the night. There's a long floating dock with several inner docks. It looks rather rickety, and both docks and boats move out of sync with the incoming waves. A gesticulating and shouting guy in a rubber boat forbids us entry. It's too windy, and he seems afraid that Norna Biron will run off with the dock. However, there are some large yachts inside trying the same. There's plenty of space, but the guy is quite resolute, shouting "No Marina, No Marina."

We try the ferry port, and that does not go unnoticed (of course). Just like before with my Senta, we are not welcome here. "Noona Bierroon, Noona Bierroon, what are your intentions?" Jasper replies. We have engine problems and urgently need a berth but are not welcome in the marina. After some further back-and-forth conversations, we stand by for further instructions. Port Control was clearly "not amused" by the marina's attitude. Eventually, we are allowed into the marina. The guy in the boat seems to have been spoken to by his boss or Port Control. In any case, he helps, shouting incomprehensible cries, to dock Norna Biron. At half past three in the morning, we are secured, and after the usual rituals with mooring lines and springs, we have another arrival beer before heading to bed.

As mentioned, we make a stop for some maintenance and repairs. The "engine problems" focus on a clogged filter and the desire to perform engine maintenance. Checking and topping up oil, cleaning dirt from the diesel (day) tank, and replacing filters are on the list. There's also a new shopping list already.



The clew needs to be repaired. The stainless steel ring appears to be missing, indicating it's broken, but the rest of the clew is fine. We got lucky with that. Joost sews a Dyneema loop as a replacement for the stainless steel ring.

On the way, a nasty breaker wreaked havoc on Norna. Her watertightness was put to the test to see where additional to-do tasks are needed. In a corner of

the cockpit, there's something resembling a plunger, but because the water in the cockpit hardly drains away, the purpose of the thing becomes clear. There's all sorts of debris in the relatively large drains.



On the bulwark/gunwale/planking/decking, there is still some debate on the precise term aboard, it still says that Norna is "for sale" while she is on her first sailing trip with the new owner. She expressed her displeasure about this by not only removing the letters but also letting the underlying wood be taken away by the heavy breaker. The attempt fails, but the decking turns out to be broken and pushed about 1m inward. Apparently, there was a lot of tension. Pushing it back into its original shape is not possible without first cutting off a piece.

Finding a suitable piece of wood in Messina was unsuccessful, and even the harbor master doesn't think it's a good idea to use an old and worn piece of dock wood that I thought was in the trash. Even paying for it is not acceptable. Well, then, let's use a few slats that are still somewhere on board. Mistaan doesn't mind that either and can become permanent if the used threaded rods, for lack of a better option, are replaced by proper bolts. Put a new nameplate on it, and it looks like it belongs there. 😊



With these to-do tasks and further decluttering, the day quickly passes. The skipper gives the crew the day off to explore Messina. Well, explore, after a tip from Heiko's daughter, we visit a very nice restaurant, La Tonnara. Despite the beautiful table linen and the extensive menu, the dishes are very affordable and delicious. We venture out in Norna attire, which we were allowed to receive without the feared doping ceremony from the skipper.



Another point of concern is the electrical system on board. The value we should attach to the battery monitor remains unclear. The charge status shows peaks

and valleys that do not correspond to the feeling about electricity consumption. So, it goes back on the to-do list.

4. Tasks.

April 26, 2019

Dealing with a new boat that has been idle for a long time brings various surprises. It's quite a challenge to master the extensive onboard technology. The numerous tasks and chores take up a lot of time, and thus, another day at the dock in Messina flies by.

During breakfast, the drinks, and dinner, many matters are discussed or brainstormed. Topics range from sail repair, engine maintenance, day tank management, grocery shopping, task assignments, project management techniques, user cases—we cover everything, including delving into deeper personal psyches. Yes, it clicks; we've apparently become a good team.

However, one topic dominates: electrical energy management. The charging process, as well as energy consumption, seems fine, yet the battery monitor indicates that the battery charge is progressing extremely slowly, only to quickly discharge again. Has the device ever been calibrated, or are the batteries cooked?

Norna Biron has four 6V 420Ah Trojan service batteries to provide a nominal onboard voltage of 24V. In Preveza, we had already noticed that some demineralized water could be added. Actually, the 5-liter jerry can wasn't enough, but well, that's all we had. Here in Messina, we add another 10 liters on board. Using a battery acid hydrometer, I check all 12 cells. 11 of them have a specific gravity ranging from 1270 to 1285. Great. Unfortunately, one cell is not measurable; it's damaged. Okay, the voltage across the poles shows it too: 3 batteries provide 6.7V, and 1 provides 4.7V.

After some phone calls, it turns out a new battery has a minimum lead time of 5 days. What's the wisest course of action? None of us has enough know-how to foresee the consequences. I consult with the support back home in the Netherlands. They say a battery is only broken if the acid leaks out. Now, those are messages. It might even be possible that some self-healing could

occur with enough charge and sufficient acid. After all, they are sturdy Trojans, not off-the-shelf batteries from the marine jeweler. I add another 2.5 liters of water to the maximum level. We also connect to shore power, which is working hard at 30A. Conclusion: as long as we can charge, we have power, and the battery continues to work. It can't do much harm except for having less capacity. The decision moment regarding replacing one or all batteries can be postponed. Regarding wind, it seems that we'll be motoring a lot, including making a stop at Sardinia for refueling.

All in all, it's a good reason to investigate why the generator isn't working. A task that Jasper takes on and successfully gets the thing running. Initially, by hand starting, but later on its own start battery.

While Heiko goes shopping for the well-being of the crew, Joost and I focus on the rig. The repaired headsail needs to be hoisted and furled, and the lazy jacks on the mainsail need to be re-reefed. A beautiful new line from the inventory in the forepeak works perfectly for the third reef's lazy jack, making it permanently rigged. At least there are enough sheaves in the boom for this. In case a third reef is needed, we'll only have to move the tack of the first reef to the third reef at the mast.



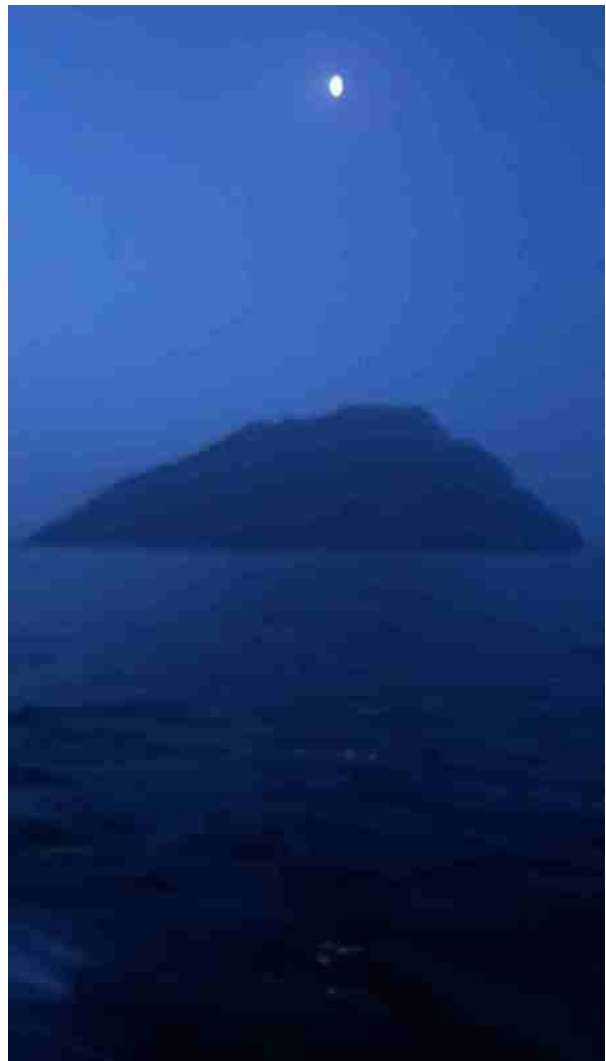


At the beginning of the evening, we set sail again from Messina. How delightful it is to be back at sea. There's something glorious about leaving the Strait of Messina and entering the Tyrrhenian Sea. The sun is replaced by the moon, and we've simplified the watch system to three hours on and six hours off, resulting in solo watches instead of the previous two-person system with a free-flying keeper. A system that has always suited me well.



We sail close to the last volcano north of Sicily: Isola di Alicudi. A perfect cone, 2000m high from the seabed, rising 675m above the surface.

During the night, we pass by the volcanoes Vulcano and Isola di Alicudi; I manage to take a photo of the latter.



5. The greengrocer's battery

April 26, 2019

The repair of the generator deserves some further explanation. The device is not functioning. Andy, the previous owner of Norna Biron, informed Joost that the starter battery of the diesel generator is dead. Since Jasper wanted to explore the city of Messina, he takes along the handcart with a shopping bag for this purpose. A similar cart you might see older people using for shopping, just in a slightly larger size. Handy for not carrying an awkward battery too far.

The Pirelli tire shop a few streets away might also sell batteries. At least, in the Netherlands, such shops often combine services like that. Unfortunately, the shop is closed. Across the street is a greengrocer who explains that today (Thursday) is Liberation Day in Italy.

Liberation Day? What could they be liberated from? We all agree that it must have been their inhibitions. Unless it was Mussolini, whom they may have lynched somewhere. In any case, the greengrocer turns out to be very helpful. He has an old battery in the back of the shop that should still work for starting a car.

Well, if you don't speak Italian and want to convey that you need a battery using hand gestures, the man can't be blamed for immediately thinking of a car. Explaining that it's for the boat's generator is quite a challenge with hand gestures. Jasper thanks the man kindly and goes in search of a place where he could get a battery.

However, except for basic necessities, businesses are closed on this day. Jasper is back at the greengrocer and asks if he can buy the battery. That's possible, but this honest greengrocer doesn't want to sell Jasper a pig in a poke and insists on testing the battery first. A friend of his who lives a bit further away has a battery tester. He asks Jasper to watch his shop for a moment and goes to his friend to have the battery checked.

And then, one after another, three customers enter the store. Using Google Translate on his phone, Jasper tries to explain to the clientele that the boss is

momentarily away to have a battery tested for him but will be back soon. English is not yet a common language in Messina.

The oldest of the group is accompanied by a much younger and stunningly beautiful lady. She speaks a little English but with an unmistakable Russian accent. The conversation might have been easier if the greengrocer hadn't appeared in the doorway again. The battery is fine, and after some bargaining, it changes ownership for €30.

Back on Norna Biron, Jasper takes care of the generator. The battery poles are so corroded that any contact with the wiring is almost impossible. After a thorough cleaning and some maintenance, the generator starts using the pull cord and, later on, with the old starter battery. A new one was not necessary at all.

Well, for €30, we've got ourselves a good story and a spare battery.

6. Pipi Langkous and the Miracle of the Clogged Drain(s)

April 28, 2019

Sailing on the port side, the bathtub suddenly fills spontaneously, not with fresh clean water but with black water and filth from the holding tank. The sink is clogged, and the toilet doesn't receive flushing water. Norna Biron has a sophisticated plumbing system with numerous valves, three-way taps, and pumps, professionally installed and accompanied by one meter of documentation and drawings. Following the pipes to see where they lead seems like the easier option. Easier said than done because "along the way," we encounter T-junctions, valves, and pumps whose functions aren't immediately clear. There's probably a certain logic to it, but it's challenging to decipher.

Taking inspiration from Pippi's motto "I have never tried that before, so I think I should definitely be able to do that," everyone is assigned a task to solve one of the problems. On my boat, the person who caused the blockage is responsible for cleaning it. In this case, it's an inheritance from the previous users and prolonged inactivity, allowing the unpleasantness to solidify.

The satisfaction is immense as Norna reveals her secrets one by one. The final accomplishment is clearing the sink. Not only is the trap completely clogged, but further down the hose is blocked too. Complicating matters is the presence of a pump in the drainpipe. A call to the previous owner reveals that the pump is intended to clear a possible blockage, a conclusion we had already drawn ourselves given the pipe layout. However, you shouldn't let it solidify for a few years because then it won't work anymore.

After everything flows smoothly again, markings are added to the three-way tap to indicate what goes directly outside and what goes to the holding tank. The tap is not very intuitive in that regard and does exactly the opposite of what you would expect. Typically English.

Jasper and Joost have familiarized themselves with the fuel system around the engine. Of course, it's not straightforward but a system of main tanks with a day tank, once again many valves, filters, and pumps—all redundantly executed. Before departure, water and dirt were removed from the diesel as much as possible. The engine runs beautifully, and the fact that it's air-cooled instead of water-cooled is also one less worry. We can motor for about 9 hours on a day tank before it needs to be refilled.

During my shift at the end of the night and just before we want to enter the port of Cagliari in the south of Sardinia, I find it necessary to fill the day tank, which is practically empty. With such a large port and a traffic separation system ending within the harbor piers, you don't want to suddenly run out of diesel. So, I wake up Joost to take care of that task. He had to wake up anyway for entering this port.

After filling, the engine starts sputtering and then stops. The wind is offshore, and we have plenty of space. Nothing to worry about in that regard. We do, however, prepare the anchor gear and can immediately roll out a sail if necessary. I still assume it will start again soon; we've experienced this once before, also after filling the day tank. (I don't believe in coincidence, but the evaluation is not complete, and we'll save that for dinner.)

It starts after pumping some diesel, but the engine stops again shortly afterward. Something else is going on. The hand pump offers little resistance, and we think the fuel pump is not working correctly. Jasper takes it apart and cleans it. Meanwhile, we drift back into the bay. It's still early on this Sunday

morning, and the only traffic is a cruise ship in the distance, passing well behind us. I can't get Norna with her stern into the wind; she prefers to lie sideways—well, that's fine too; there's nothing to steer anyway.

The fuel pump is back together, and we try again. Unfortunately, luck is short-lived. Cagliari is dead to windward, but on the chart, I see an alternative harbor downwind, much easier to approach—the marina of Capitana. And equipped with a fuel station, which is why we originally intended to visit Sardinia.

Using a hand vacuum pump that Macgyver connects to the fuel return line, the diesel is finally drawn in. Heiko is promoted to pump master, and we try to sail a bit with this. It works. The staysail is unfurled, and I get to sail Norna into the harbor of Capitana. Just before the harbor, the engine starts, we roll away the sail, and after a beauty round, we moor alongside the fuel dock.

It's Sunday, a beautiful day for chores. The pump master got another day off and first provides a tasty breakfast and later lunch. The unclogger has everything running again, the sailmaker does some preventive repair work, and the diesel mechanic dissects the fuel pump.

Such a delivery with an unfamiliar boat is truly enjoyable. It's challenging to unravel all of Norna's secrets, noticing that she's starting to listen better to her new owner, who, by the way, is in for quite a task with this capricious yet robust lady. It's as if we've rudely awakened her from her winter slumber.

The journey from Sicily to Sardinia was one of extremes, from no wind on an oil-smooth sea to thick foam, high waves, and a headwind. From deck sunbathing in a bikini to wearing thick



oilskins under the sprayhood. But always accompanied by cheerful leaping dolphins and lazy turtles, interspersed with a large seaweed field that turns out to be not seaweed but thousands of tiny jellyfish. Despite her 30 tons, Norna Biron happily bounces along. And so do we. 😊

Note: Norna Biron is an alcohol-free boat, except for a daily happy hour, but you wouldn't guess that from her satellite track. This is not due to an intoxicated helmsman but because our satellite box has an external antenna for satellite communication but not for GPS positioning. The device has an internal GPS antenna, and it works poorly inside a steel boat. So Joost tested the GPS reception at different locations where the device is both inside but can also look outside. Hence the somewhat peculiar track over a certain stretch.

Given that this message is not only sent to my blog but also to the Zeilersforum, we have made bets among ourselves about who will post which criticism on the forum. It's amusing; we had a lot of fun with it, and it turns out to be quite accurate.



7. Marina di Capimana.

May 1, 2019

Marina di Capimana is a pleasant interlude. The extremely hospitable and helpful harbor master allows us to moor at the fuel dock, a nice and convenient spot just behind the harbor entrance. The harbor master also provides us with

a car to go to Cagliari. Capitana seems to be a kind of resort with a few houses around, but there's not much else.

For dinner, we drive to Cagliari with the help of good dining addresses given by the harbor master. Unfortunately, it doesn't work out. Everything is closed on this Sunday evening. However, we end up in the higher old town with its narrow streets and, of course, an imposing basilica. As the only Catholic in the group, I have to take a look inside to admire the architecture, not like most others who do it by making a pious cross. I left that belief behind a long time ago.

On the way back to Capitana, we find a pizza place along the beach. The restaurant is packed with Italian families, so it must be good. Pizzas as large as cartwheels disappear into our now quite hungry stomachs. Delicious, and all for only €8 each.

On the shopping list for Monday is a new fuel pump, new battens for the 1st and 2nd reefs, MacLube or something similar to lubricate the mast groove, light bulbs, and a CO2 cartridge for Heiko's life jacket. The vest spontaneously inflated a few days ago in the forward cabin. The second time this trip.

Before Jasper and I go to Cagliari, he calls the Deutz importer to ask if there is a company in Cagliari that has Deutz parts. Well, there is, a machine workshop for agricultural vehicles. The first call to the company ends abruptly after the first words in English. Oops, not a good start. A second attempt, this time with an Italian greeting. That helps. The conversation quickly switches to French; Jasper correctly guesses that the man on the phone is of North African Italian origin. He turns out to be very helpful and quickly relieves us of our worries. Yes, the fuel pump for this type of Deutz engine is readily available. What a delightful relief. The box even shows a date of March 2019. So, there seems to be a certain turnover. Great, such a Deutz.

Google Maps takes us to a marine chandler, a large comprehensive shop where we score only moderately. The second shop we visit is manned by two proper ladies, looking neat, both probably not under 70. They sell us the dyneema battens at a discount. The only thing that doesn't work out is the CO2 cartridge. A 275N vest seems to be something typically Dutch.

Back on the boat, Joost is reinforcing the head of the mainsail. The sewn bands are way too short, and Joost is sewing in new ones, at the expense of the safety line on deck, which serves as a donor. Such a job would be beyond me, but Joost doesn't seem to have any trouble with it and has a lot of experience. From sailing clothing to sleeping bags, from zippers to vagina (after childbirth, as a doctor). It's delightful to watch, what calmness, dedication, and patience.

Meanwhile, Jasper is replacing the fuel pump. A drop-in replacement it seems, but the reality is more challenging. It's a tricky place to reach; the thing needs to be pushed into place against its own resilience, and a few bolts must be tightened in invisible places. Also, making sure that screws, washers, gaskets, and tools don't end up in the deep bilge forever.

I climb the mast, secured by Heiko, to make the mast groove more accessible with a kind of silicone. It's blowing 25 knots hard in the harbor. Above, it's a bit more, but the silicone finds its way into the mast groove. Phew, that was quite a climb, and I'm glad to be back down. I'm not as brave as Joost and Jasper, who seem to do it with the greatest ease.

Heiko fills the tanks with water and diesel. While filling the diesel tank, some confusion arises. Much more diesel goes in than the tanks can hold. Joost thinks the diesel is very cheap, but Jasper has the idea that we are being cheated; so much diesel doesn't fit in. The Italian diesel man looks bewildered and points to the meters. Euros and liters, not the other way around. Okay, problem solved.

The too-short reinforcements in the head of the sail are also at the reef eye of the first reef, resulting in a substantial tear. The head was a whole day's work, and repairing this reef eye is just as much work. Considering the forecasts with light weather and a broad reach, Joost thinks he can take care of this job on the way, so we depart on Tuesday morning with a mainsail hoisted up to the second reef.



Marina di Capitanà: Grande porto con tariffe molto ragionevoli, noleggio auto, diesel, servizi igienici carini e un padrone del porto estremamente ospitale e disponibile. Consigliato a chiunque venga qui.

Just a note of praise for Marina di Capitanà. A great harbor with reasonable rates and a very hospitable and helpful harbor master.

We're on the move again. Nice wind at the moment. Looks favorable for the coming week. Enjoying the moment!

Next stop, Spain, England, or Portugal.



It's now Wednesday, and we're cruising on the motor over a smooth Mediterranean Sea with barely any wind under a pleasant sun. Today is a special day, although he doesn't want to acknowledge it himself. More about that later today.

8. Happy Birthday.

May 1, 2019

Happy hour today is Happy Birthday! Joost is celebrating his birthday, and instead of the usual ship's grog, there was champagne on the foredeck. I had bought two bottles in Nidri, but due to all the shaking, they were under considerable pressure. Therefore, half of each bottle rightfully belonged to Norna Biron.

A delightful moment to enjoy under the radiant sun and calm sea.



What a surprise!
Engraved
champagne glasses
to make this special
birthday
unforgettable. For
me, it's one less
problem; for Joost,
it's one more
problem 😊 How to
keep them intact?



9. Brown shower.

May 2, 2019

Today promises to be a beautiful sailing day. With a brisk wind, we sail behind the reefed jib. The mainsail has been taken down to be able to sail deeper. Regularly, a cargo ship passes by, both oncoming and following. It's clearly busier with major shipping in this part of the Med.

After being rested from my night watch, I flush my last nugget through the toilet. There's shouting from the cockpit. STOP STOP! The poop appears to be coming out halfway up the mast. Downwind, thankfully; the cockpit sitters are spared the worst.

The exact workings of the black water tank are not entirely known yet. The function of the electric pumps for both black and gray water, combined with various switches that seem to give the pumps different functions depending on their position, remains a mystery for now. The fact that one pump seems to be stuck doesn't make it any clearer.

Until that system is unraveled, we'll just pump our needs outside. That's allowed, in the middle of the sea, and the fish seem to like it.

Midway up the mast is the vent for the black water tank. Nice and far away, so you don't smell anything. Apparently, it's not supposed to let anything out, it should provide ventilation, so there must be something wrong. We conclude that there's a blockage somewhere, causing the black water tank to fill up despite the three-way valve being set directly outside. The path apparently runs through the drain into the black water tank.

We have a Helmsman moment 😊 (for the ZF insiders). Work for the plumbers on board. When it comes to poop and pee, the jokes are plentiful. I'll spare you the details.



10. Cleared up.

May 3, 2019

It was still quite busy last night. Oncoming, following, and cross traffic. One of the latter had to adjust its course slightly to pass Norna at a pleasant distance. My shift begins again at 9:00 a.m. The entire crew is in the cockpit, Pink Floyd's "Time" blasts from the speakers, and we're still sailing behind the headsail. Now, all we need is some sunshine; it's still hiding behind a gray cloud cover. Not a bad start to Friday.

Even better, the blockage in the black water discharge has popped out, and that without dismantling anything. Because that was the original plan for today. Jasper scrubbed the last bits of poop from the deck hatches.

There are plans for a new VHF cable in the mast...



11. New VHF cable.

May 4, 2019

A quiet day today. We glide almost silently along the south coast of Spain. Watery sunshine, a bit of wind, both the Kluiver and the Jib are out, and the sailmaker has resumed the task of repairing the torn reefing eye. My shift ended this morning at 6:00 am, then I slept for a long time until my alarm went off again for the 12:00 pm shift. Finally had a good night's sleep. My bunk on the salon bench is actually too wide, and with a moving ship, you don't stay secure enough. But not this morning, little swell and sailing calmly. The toilet is clogged again, which is less pleasant.

Yesterday, Joost spent at least 5 hours in the mast to install a new VHF radio cable. A significant achievement on a rocking ship—I wouldn't do it, but Joost loves it and enjoys the challenge. The new VHF antenna had already been installed by Jasper. The world suddenly seems much bigger. While we used to see other ships in the dark based on sight and then on AIS, with a range of at most 5 to 6 miles, we now see them at a distance of at least 30 miles. A huge improvement.

In the course of the afternoon, we will probably be back under 4G coverage, but this email is still going through the satellite.



12. Sometimes, we are truly happy.

May 5, 2019

We're approaching Gibraltar; another 11 hours of sailing. We'll probably refuel and do some shopping there. Here's a portrait of two of the four heroes:



And our fourth crew member who provides delicious breakfast, lunch, and dinner under all circumstances:

He is also good with toilet pumps! Yesterday, he dismantled the thing and equipped it with a series of spare parts, making it work well again.



13. Boat refugees

May 7, 2019

My very esteemed Vietnamese colleague never talked about it. How he, as a 14-year-old boy in the late seventies, set out with others in a rickety boat on the South China Sea.

After the war and the arrival of the communist regime, it became clear to many that there was no future for them in the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The communist regime taught the South Vietnamese population the principles of Marxism-Leninism and labeled 'state-threatening persons' were imprisoned in reeducation camps or deported to 'new economic zones' to cultivate agricultural land in primitive conditions.

Thousands of Vietnamese drowned, died of hunger and diseases, or were murdered by Thai pirates. My colleague never talks about it and is also not very talkative about that period. The frustration and trauma run deep, and questions are dismissed with brief words. That he has built a better life here and has become an appreciated Dutch citizen is beyond doubt.

The radio on board Norna Biron regularly broadcasts PAN PAN messages about boats with 16 and 54 refugees on board, asking for a good lookout and to report if you encounter them. How they can know the exact numbers escapes me.

About 20 years ago, I sailed with my Senta in these regions as well. A day after Gibraltar, I also discovered a boat. Gliding eastward at 2 knots under spinnaker. The Navtex mentioned military exercises with a submarine, and the first thing that came to my mind was that these were apparently marines, and at any moment such a submarine could emerge. Boat refugees did not initially come to mind.

Very gradually they came closer and closer. With binoculars, I saw dark figures and they were waving. Only then did it dawn on me. Could they have weapons? I woke up my crew member and decided at the same time to lower the spinnaker and start the engine. The distance became larger again. This was a harsh and unpleasant reality in my so carefree existence. I did nothing. In this heavily trafficked part of the Mediterranean, there are others who are

better equipped. In hindsight, perhaps I should have stayed nearby, reported it, and waited until they were safe. But that's hindsight; it haunted me for a long time.

On Norna Biron, we have made agreements about how to act in case we find ourselves in a similar situation. Reasonably, hosting people on a yacht is not desirable. Report it, but what to do if people drown? Or intentionally sink their boat. It remains a difficult dilemma; we have gone through a number of scenarios, and ultimately, the skipper decides.

The radio announces another PAN PAN message. There is a boat with refugees sinking nearby. What a harsh reality on our pleasure trip.

14. Gibraltar.

May 7, 2019

After the long crossing from Sardinia, we regain 4G coverage along the Spanish coast. How addictive is that? For a few hours, it is very quiet on board because first, the internet needs must be satisfied. But by staying close to the coast, we also experience less swell and less adverse current.

The downside is that there are many lobster/crab pots anchored in the coastal area, sometimes even entire floating structures that you can navigate around during the day but cannot see at night. It's better to keep some distance then.

Jasper messages the bridge or calls on the VHF radio to ask if they can lower the volume. He is about 1 meter away from it.

The approach to Gibraltar from the northeast is magical. "The Rock" appears as a light in the distance that keeps getting bigger. The mountain is beautifully lit on that side, and I wake up the other men to not miss this spectacle. I took dozens of photos with my phone, of which only one is more or less successful. In any case, it is the least blurry one.



Around 3 in the morning, we are at the fuel dock at the back of the harbor and right next to the runway of the airport. While approaching, the extended area of the runway is marked as a restricted zone by red flashing buoys. The rum that was originally intended for Joost's birthday (but was replaced by champagne) is now on the table. With ice that Heiko managed to create in the recently discovered freezer compartment of the refrigerator.



The shopping list for Gibraltar is ready. After careful consideration, we abandon the original idea of leaving late in the evening due to the tide. There is a lot to do, and why rush when we can depart 12 hours later in the next morning. The weather forecast for the coming week looks favorable for making our way north on the Atlantic Ocean. After one or two more glasses, we retire to our bunks early in the morning. The alarm clock will go off relentlessly three hours later, and if not, the diesel dock attendant will wake us.

The diesel dock is popular this morning. Norna looks like a dinghy compared to the enormous motor yacht that also needs refueling. The distinctive aluminum motor yacht of Dashew also appears. We move Norna to another part of the dock to avoid waiting for the lengthy refueling session of the superyacht.



Unfortunately, we cannot stay here, so we move to the Queensway Quay marina, about halfway into the harbor. Along one of the docks, the Dutch cargo ship "Diamantgracht" is unloading its deck load consisting of motor and sailing yachts. Another way to get your boat into the Mediterranean.

I have been here with my own boat in the past, but I only recognize the colonial-looking buildings on the land side. Much has changed, and additional buildings have been constructed. Nevertheless, it's a great harbor, and the harbor master gives us a nice spot just below his office. It will be another busy day taking care of Norna with fresh oil, water, filters, stern light, steam light, sheets, and more.

The Morrison supermarket is within walking distance, and just as I realize that we don't have pounds to release a shopping cart from its fellow carts, I see one in the wild. That's convenient, no coin needed.

Our handcart with bags is almost stolen. In an unguarded moment, it's gone. I sprint outside but see nothing. With Heiko, I go through the supermarket three more times, but the cart is nowhere to be found. We resign ourselves to the thought that it's gone. In another moment of frustration, I take another look, this time next to the exit at a bar. Lo and behold, there it is, with the bag open (which had nothing in it). Phew, that's a relief.

We have happy hour on a terrace in the harbor. Two rounds of pints, and we are ready to find a restaurant. Jasper wants a thick steak, and I'm up for it too. We order a Sirloin steak and a T-bone steak of considerable size in a Spanish restaurant in Ocean Village. We were there last night too, as the fuel dock is nearby. Joost and Heiko opt for a Burger and Calamares, more modest choices. The restaurant is replaced by an Irish pub, where we discuss the political and social currents in the Netherlands while enjoying pints of Guinness and Lager. Because we can, with four such different men.

It's already early morning in the salon of Norna Biron with requested songs playing from the speakers before we retire to our bunks.

We departed at 10:30 this morning, hoping for another long stretch. Tomorrow evening, I'll seek out 4G for the Champions League showdown Ajax - Tottenham. Life aboard Norna through my Ziggo App (I hope).

15. Champions Leage.

May 9, 2019

Thursday morning, still recovering from last night's Champions League disappointment. Following the 4G signal along the coast of the Algarve, we can watch the Ajax - Tottenham match live on board. The Ziggo app on my iPad only works with Wi-Fi, provided through the hotspot of my Android phone. The crew is divided. Joost and I have been looking forward to an enjoyable football evening all day. The watches almost align perfectly. I spend only the last hour of my 18:00-21:00 shift with Heiko for the pregame analysis and anticipation. At 00:00, it's Joost's turn again, and at 03:00, my watch begins once more.



Jasper doesn't care much and steers the boat from 21:00 to 24:00 through the dark evening. What a pleasure to be disconnected from the world for 2 hours using a small iPad screen. Well, I'll refrain from further commentary. Within 5 minutes after the end of the match, I'm already in my sleeping bag. Such a shame.

At the beginning of my 03:00-hour shift, we have just rounded Cabo San Vicente. Rounding this cape is majestic during the day, in my opinion. Now, there's little to see except for the lighthouse casting its beam rhythmically over Norna. To port, there's the TSS (Traffic Separation Scheme), which we stay well clear of. Finally, the wind is cooperating, not directly against us but with a gentle breeze filling the sails.

My turn is coming up soon (12:00). Outside, a long swell creates a beautiful hilly landscape. We are halfway to the next 4G buoy.

16. Bay of Biscaye.

May 12, 2019

Bay of Biscay, Sunday evening, May 12th, 22 PM

The northern route along the Portuguese coast has been a constant point of concern on this journey. Often, there is a consistently strong northern wind along that route, known as the Portuguese North. This phenomenon is a result of the Azores High, around which the wind circulates clockwise, and a Spanish low where the wind circulates counterclockwise. These forces converge along the Portuguese coast, reinforcing each other.

The conditions depend on the position of the Azores High. It is very challenging to beat against this wind. In essence, there are two options: venturing far into the ocean to catch western winds or staying along the coast and utilizing coastal effects, often with intermittent stops.



But now, none of that. Luck is on our side. With a beam to broad reach, we experience a few beautiful sailing days with stunning nights. Dolphins leave a green trail in the water, resembling torpedoes. Absolutely magnificent. We sail from 4G buoy to 4G buoy, or that's what we call the prominent capes where we briefly enjoy internet connectivity. Not only to satisfy our social media needs but also to download extensive weather GRIB files. It's faster than using the satellite.

We round Cabo Finisterre within sight, in calm weather, and a sea that, apart from the swell, is otherwise flat. This corner of Europe can be quite turbulent, but not now. Biscay welcomes us with a large school of dolphins displaying their skills all around Norna Biron. They seem to be enjoying themselves.

Biscay promises us easterly winds, making it a favorable run to the north. We sail more or less parallel to the shipping route, so there are always ships around us. Remarkable is the range of our IAS, reaching up to 165 miles. That is probably due to atmospheric conditions. The sky is clear as well.

It is significantly colder. For the first time on this journey, I am wearing my thermal underwear and sailing boots. There isn't much else to tell. The days string together, Norna holds up well, and so does her crew.

My most beautiful sailing days were often with an easterly wind, but well, that's from a Dutch perspective. For now, this wind will persist, giving us pleasure, but later, during the approach to the Channel, it will become a significant challenge as it will be headwind. But that's a few days away. We will see.



17. English Channel.

May 15, 2019

Wednesday evening, somewhere halfway between Selsey Bill and Beachy Head.

Well, that was a smooth crossing from Biscay. Unfortunately, the set whale alarm did not go off. (*see note) However, we are regularly accompanied by dolphins, sometimes a few, sometimes a whole school.

()Note: After a confrontation with orcas off the coast of Finisterre in the fall of 2020, I think differently about that now. (Fortunately, it ended without damage at that time.)*

Two days sailing on port tack, and the Biscay crossing is a fact. After Ile D'Ouessant, we continue that for another two days through the approach of the channel until below the English coast.

Ile D'Ouessant we round at night, quite spectacular I find. Especially the many red and white lights, and knowing what impressive structures are underneath them, is impressive.

From the Chenal le Four on starboard, I see a 24ft. French sailboat approaching on the AIS. Judging by its name, it seems to be a solo sailor, perhaps one of those Mini Transat racers. A completely different world than aboard Norna, and for some reason, I don't envy him or her.

Norna glides majestically over the waves with her 30 tons. Picking up poles is unfamiliar to her, just like letting a wave stop her. She just keeps going, breaking through the waves with clouds of foam, quite different from an AWB (Average White Boat). Only a protesting anchor in the bow occasionally disrupts her grace. And when the wind decreases to 20 knots, a bit of headsail works wonders to give her a boost again.

The 4G buoy (as we call "Land in sight") is at Start Point. We sail a bit further into Lyme Bay before heading north. Then the engine starts again, and we continue motor-sailing against the wind.

At three o'clock in the morning, I take over the watch from Joost. Not even fifteen minutes later, the autopilot stops working. It happens quite often. A complete reset, some messing with the wiring, or an educational slap on the compass has always helped to get it working again. Joost has even put it on a different circuit because there were frequent "power failures." Now it seems to be refusing to cooperate. The reset doesn't help. The compass works, and it's willing to work, but it seems like the clutch in the system is no longer functioning. Sometimes I feel a little jolt, but there's clearly something wrong.

Norna Biron's rudder bearings are in dire need of replacement. We knew that when we left Greece. Steering requires muscle power. In every position, the rudder stubbornly stays in place. Similarly, getting the boat to follow a course is a patient process or an oversteering with muscle power. In short, it takes some practice and getting used to. The art is actually to steer as little as possible and let Norna continue her own way, albeit with small corrections, and

that's where the art is hidden. It's not too difficult in calm waters, but in high waves, it's quite a challenge.

The autopilot, on the other hand, seems to have no problem at all. Despite the slowest setting in terms of reaction speed, it's still busy. Unnecessarily busy, but many autopilots have that issue. Knowing how hard the rudder works, we are concerned about whether this will continue to go well. New rudder bearings are only planned in the Netherlands.

In sight of Portland Bill, I realize that the moment has come when the autopilot has really broken down somewhere mechanically. There's no time now to further test or think about it. A fisherman on starboard, an oncoming vessel heading straight for us, and rounding Portland Bill now demand my full attention. Like a drunk man, I try to keep Norna on course in the high, hollow sea. Swings to both sides of at least 40 degrees are not exceptional. What will they think of Norna on the AIS? It's unpredictable, just like that fisherman, who also goes in all directions and keeps me busy for at least an hour and a half. The only steady factors are the oncoming vessel and Portland Bill.

I can only see the direction in which the fisherman is sailing on the AIS. The boat itself is one bright white light, and navigation lights or anything else can't be seen. When the fisherman changes course to 180 degrees and sails away from me, inner peace returns, and I can focus on rounding the cape. We are still in safe waters. Actually, the iPad is not allowed in the cockpit, but necessity breaks the rule. There's also a chart plotter in the cockpit, but its map stopped at South Portugal, and what remains are the contours of the land. Enough for AIS but not enough to round this infamous cape. And since steering requires my full attention, I can't go inside to look at the chart.

At 6:00, Jasper comes upstairs, and I tell him the bad news. Since I didn't want to go on the aft deck alone to give the compass an educational knock, Jasper does it now. As I suspected, it doesn't help. Jasper also agrees with me that something must be mechanically broken. The clutch is no longer working, or maybe the drive shaft is broken, the gear is off, or something like that. The prospect of having to steer by hand is not pleasant, and after a short discussion, we decide to wake up Joost. Jasper and Joost take over, and I dive into my bunk, not even cold.

A few hours later, I wake up not entirely voluntarily, and I find out that I share my bunk with all kinds of tools and wooden parts from the crockery cabinet. Because above the crockery cabinet is the drive of the autopilot. Jasper is dismantling it.



What follows is a careful dissection of the drive by our Bush Mechanic. The resources are limited. Soon, the conclusion is reached that the clutch is in perfect condition. We try to get the gear off the shaft by wriggling and tapping, but it doesn't work. With a McGyver pulley puller consisting of the two bolts that held the drive in place and a cable tie, we eventually succeed. When the aluminum housing is also removed, the issue becomes visible. Also, with immediate relief. The shaft is intact, but the gear ring is loose. It should be secured with 4 bolts, but 2 of them are broken, and the other 2 have had to twist in all kinds of ways to keep things somewhat in place. Ultimately, they had to give up.

The remnants of the broken bolts are still in the aluminum housing. Drilling them out is not successful. Besides, we don't have these bolt sizes on board. We do have a size larger. Further examination leads to the conclusion that drilling new holes and tapping them between the existing screw holes is the best solution. The slightly longer bolts we have found also bring the idea of drilling the new holes all the way through and securing the new bolts with a nut on the outside of the aluminum housing. It may look less fancy but is a lot more solid than the original construction. The thus-revised drive is now better than it ever was.

Just before happy hour, everything is fixed, and the autopilot can be reinstalled. In the meantime, I have been able to hand-steer Norna in the right direction all day, and we have passed the Isle of Wight, among other places. Practice makes perfect, and fortunately, the sea state has also become a lot calmer during the day. The weather has turned beautiful again, the craftsmen below have missed quite a bit, but they have experienced their own highlight. A clever piece of work again.

In my job, you do tinkering in your own time. Apparently, aboard Norna, it also happens in the boss's time. Overtime is not compensated, so I'll be on duty in the regular watch schedule soon (9:00 PM) 😊

With love and joy! What a delight to be packed together with these guys for 4 weeks.

Joking aside, Jasper turns out to be a true diesel doctor and has spent many hours in the engine room. The diesel tank is dirty, and in addition to sucking

out as much dirt as possible, filters must also be replaced regularly. I secretly think he may have become a bit infatuated with that Deutz.

We expect a lot of headwinds on the North Sea, and to stick to the schedule, we'll make one more fuel stop tomorrow.

Photos Isle of Wight, St. Catherine's Point





Now between Beachy Head and Dungeness. Going well. This afternoon, refueling with diesel in Dover or preferably Ramsgate, then heading to Amsterdam to have some wild nightlife. The crew gets a passenger pass until 10:00 PM!

And the sun is up again! Just to the left of the sun, Dungeness is visible.





In the morning sun near Dungeness.



18. Ramsgate.

May 17, 2019

We choose Ramsgate as a port for a refueling stop. It's a bit out of the way, but it's also the original home port of Norna Biron, and there's a planned meeting with the previous owner, Andy. Personally, I've been dreaming of a nice pint with fish and chips for a few days now.



Spotted on the webcam.

There are also various tasks to be done, such as pumping out the forward compartment, replacing filters, and securing the dinghy firmly in its davits. The dinghy has softened a bit and managed to work itself loose in heavy seas. The outer davit supports are at an unhealthy angle but, upon closer inspection, they are not broken, as we feared. Just a bit twisted.

The crew is eager to tackle the tasks again, but by now, I know exactly how that goes. It results in less time for other pleasures, with fish and chips ranking number one on my list. Half of the crew is in favor, and then the skipper realizes that we've earned it. Mutiny is thus avoided, and just as we

are about to step onto the jetty, four impeccably uniformed Border Control gentlemen appear on the dock for clearance and inspection.

A nice task for the skipper.

Meanwhile, we gather the hardly liftable garbage bags to take them to the waste container later and enjoy ourselves in the sunshine on the jetty. The customs officials keep the skipper busy ticking off items on their checklist while casually inspecting a few cabinets and under Norna's skirts. Apparently, we are trustworthy enough for them to step off the boat after half an hour onto their own coast guard frigate, which happens to be docked right opposite Norna.

The gathered garbage bags on the jetty are not given a second glance. So, for next time, we now know how to smuggle contraband into Europe.



Now time for fish and chips. On the quay, we run into Andy, who points out to us THE fish and chips place in Ramsgate. Indeed, my dream is more than fulfilled, with the surprise of not having soggy fries this time. The place doesn't have an alcohol license, but that is more than compensated by the nearby pub, from which we are served a deliciously fruity Jack Brand Ale Pine.

In the current lovely sunshine, I find myself overdressed and shed my jacket, two sweaters, and the thermal underwear (well, only the top part to keep it decent). One of the three shuffling, excessively overweight, and shabby elderly ladies comes over to taste Joost's fries and, after an approving cough, orders a portion for herself.

Still a bit wobbly on our legs from that one pint, we walk back to the boat. The Border Control men wave friendly greetings from their ship. Such nice guys; they already knew a lot more about us and our journey before we met them. Andy and his wife come aboard and bring a box of Belgian beer. First, finish the job, then time to socialize.

The plan was just a short stop in Ramsgate. From 22:30, the tide is favorable to leave the harbor. However, it's windy, we are on the lee side at the head of a "hammerhead" pier with limited maneuvering space. After dinner, we discuss the strategy to leave this place. A jump forward, swing the stern to starboard, reverse away with the question of whether we can still get Norna's stern further into the wind. The propeller effect is precisely the other way. That's possible, but there's less maneuvering space there. Or sinking backward, which will undoubtedly result in a creaking moment at the tip of the pier. An ill-fated plan emerges to practice first. Hello, you might as well set sail immediately because if "the exercise" succeeds, it's better to put words into action and leave. Out there at sea, a strong headwind awaits in a choppy sea. Not very enticing either, and I realize that I'm a bit worn out. Probably not the only one because there is quickly agreement. The skipper's red eyes also tell a story.

Yes, it's better to get some sleep first and leave tomorrow morning. Alarm set for 6:00 AM.

This afternoon at 12:00 PM, I hand over command of Norna to Jasper. I am cold, and it has rained, the first time this trip. Inside, I am sitting with clothes and a hat on under the sleeping bag, warming my hands to devote myself to this email shortly. From the à la carte galley menu, I choose a thick hotdog in a freshly baked roll. The others are still in the smoking room on the bridge, opting for a filled omelet that the chef later serves in the salon.

Amsterdam, here we come!





19. The End.

May 19, 2019

We want to pass by the Blighbank Windfarm and then take the passage between this wind farm and the Northwind Windfarm, turning northward. However, our right of way is taken away by a Guard Vessel. Led by a Pole, this ship acts as a watchdog, guarding its windmills. "Entry prohibited," the Pole cannot be persuaded. Instead of rightfully protesting, our skipper is wise and changes Norna's course above the first wind farm.

So much has changed in this part of the North Sea in a short time. Seemingly, this area has been overwhelmed by the quest for green energy, leaving little space for anything other than slalom. Well, almost.

My afternoon nap is interrupted by the smell of salami and peanuts. Since my bunk occupies about half of Norna's salon, happy hour takes place in the other half, right next to my sleeping bag. I'm handed a beer, a nice way to wake up. Once again, I manage to almost double my happy hour ration by sharing a portion of the can with Norna. Well, they say beer doesn't stain.

The anchorage area is busy, but the anchored vessels have kept a nice lane open for us to pass through under motor-sailing. There isn't much wind, and to maintain some progress, the motor is gently running.

A small boat approaches from the port side. I check the CPA (Closest Point of Approach) to see if it will pose any danger, but the boat is not visible on AIS. However, it slows down to let us pass. With binoculars, I spot some reflective paintwork and recognize the vessel as the Coast Guard, later confirmed to be the Zeearend. I keep an eye on the VHF radio, but it remains silent. A little later, it sails behind us, showing no apparent interest in us. When Heiko comes outside, I tell him that the Coast Guard has no interest in us. Looking back, Heiko responds with, "In that small rubber boat?"





Darn, they're coming after us again. Ha, this will be fun. What a sturdy rib with helmeted guys on board. They first, less skillfully, attempt to come aboard on the windward side, but it doesn't work. So, they try on the leeward side, where Norna, with her thick stern, provides a bit more shelter to the helmeted men.

By now, we've awakened Joost, and he comes out with his camera. After some acrobatics, we welcome two uniformed gentlemen, one customs and one police officer. Oddly, I was expecting Military Police, but it seems the police officer is granted the privilege of visiting Norna. He turns out to be extremely well-informed about our activities and casually mentions the internet and our travel adventures. He doesn't reveal much about himself, but he's undoubtedly a fellow enthusiast. He already has our entire trip from Greece mapped out. Our skipper is praised for his watertight administration. Everything adds up, which they have experienced differently with newly purchased yachts and their deliveries. It's nice to receive such a compliment.

Joost truthfully mentions that we fueled up with white diesel in Ramsgate to avoid any trouble with the tax-free red variant, and after saying that, the customs officer decides to skip the inspection. We share stories about their colleagues in Ramsgate, where we demonstrated how to smuggle contraband ashore using the garbage. To assert some authority, the police officer points out the absence of the inverted cone, a mandatory signal when both sails and the engine are running. I mutter something about Belgium and being on more forgiving Dutch territory now.

The customs officer wants to come inside for a quick check. It may not be easy with all those secret hiding places on Norna, but he doesn't seem to mind. "In case of any suspicion, we'll just take you to the port and send our drug-sniffing dog Dolly inside." It doesn't come to that. Despite Heiko's assurance that pea soup will never be on board, my favorite soup but a dish he detests, the sneak is now secretly cooking pea soup. What a fun and tasty surprise on the last night at sea. The smell of the rich, thick green mush also appeals to the customs officer. But that's as far as it goes. The man cave gets his approval, especially now that our masculine aromas are dominated by the smell of pea soup.

It was a delightful interlude. The men want to leave on the leeward side, but now the skipper of the rib asks us to sail directly downwind for a bit. With all

sails taut, he only gets 30 degrees from Joost, but that's what they have to work with. The men are now also assisted by the rib to get back on board, the police officer more smoothly than the customs officer.

Goodbye, it was fun, and with a wave, they return to their mothership, the Zeearend.

At 3:00 in the morning, I begin my last watch of this journey. Joost has crossed the Maasmond a bit earlier, having to slow down a bit to let two large sea vessels pass. Now it's completely windless and empty, except for a few anchorers. The sea is completely calm, flat, no swell, but a bright full moon above our wake and the lights of Scheveningen to starboard. Still, it's a magical moment, but shortly after, I take advantage of the now ample 4G. I realize it's almost over. The white flash in the distance announces the approach of IJmuiden. Greece, Messina, it seems like ages ago. With a Personal Message from the Sailors Forum, country life suddenly feels very close.

Just before six in the morning, we enter IJmuiden's piers with a provisional farewell to the salty water. The lock passage goes smoothly, and before we know it, we're already in Amsterdam, mooring in the new Marina in Amsterdam Noord. It's too early for breakfast at Loetje. Our last shower was in Gibraltar; I don't even remember how many days ago. So, some refreshment and shaving the sea beard are welcome. But, as I've said before, without that genuine merino thermos underwear, it would have been much worse. What fantastic odor-absorbing stuff it is.

However, after my extensive week of laundry in the luxurious sanitary facilities of the Amsterdam Marina, with the carefully preserved fresh and dry clothes on, Norna's belly now smells different. Fortunately, the use of deodorant on board Norna has not been noticeable (I never use it). I always experience it as if there is a continuous air freshener somewhere. Well, then baby wipes are much more pleasant to use. An excellent recommendation for such journeys. Nevertheless, it's time to open all of Norna's hatches wide and let her get some fresh air.

Meanwhile, we have an extensive brunch on the terrace of Loetje. It's too late for breakfast. Between the last Dop beer and the next aperitif, there are only a few hours, which we spend on the marina's pontoons. Our appealing boats, both sail and motor, are carefully dissected, and while one immerses himself in

the classic lines of some yachts, the other examines the various details of a variety of rigging. For the golden years, we check out some motorboats that we consider suitable for the French canals. The wish for a patio set with an umbrella in the cockpit narrows down the choices quite a bit, and part of our group concludes that you can already be done for a few thousand euros.

During the aperitif on the terrace of Loetje, Philip comes by. A friend of Joost from previous harbor encounters and a friend of mine through the Sailors Forum. He is working on his Koopmans 34 a bit further down. It's always nice to add faces to digital connections. Although you meet for the first time, it's as if you've known each other for years. The digital discussions and questions seamlessly continue in personal contact.

Suddenly, our stories start flowing. We don't need to tell each other, but now there's someone else present. Poor Philip, but I think he finds it fun too. Of course, we come for the thick steaks in margarine from Loetje, and very immodestly, I devour the XL version with white bread dipped in the black gravy. So delicious. The brothers make a different choice but enjoy it no less.



Very wisely, we decide to go to sleep early. Joost has made an appointment with his daughter the next morning, who will accompany us for the final stretch to Lelystad. We pick her up just next to Central Station where the municipal harbor used to be. Now, it's a quay no longer intended for yachts. Although no one obstructs us, this illegal action does not go unnoticed by the omnipresent Sailors Forum members. Quite amusing, actually.

Meanwhile, the deep blue of the ocean has transitioned through the somewhat grayish North Sea water into the brown soup of the Markermeer. We're almost home. It was a beautiful journey and a fantastic experience. Just two days ago, we said to each other that we might as well continue for another 12 days to the Lofoten. The mood has been excellent all these weeks, no irritations, harsh words, or anything else, and in a particularly pleasant and harmonious collaboration.

Before the Oranjesluizen, Joost leans back relaxed against the railing of the waiting jetty. Undertaking such an adventure with an unfamiliar boat and crew selected based on hearsay is no small feat. Relaxing with such responsibility was challenging, although Joost has rarely let that show. Now, he visibly lets it slide off his shoulders.



Today, Jasper is handling the maneuvering of Norna. Jasper, who was often found in the engine room of Norna, performing the most challenging technical tasks in sometimes impossible positions to keep the reliable Deutz running. Occasionally, a great deal of improvisation talent was required, such as the time near Sardinia when he used suction on the return diesel line to assist the damaged fuel pump, creating just enough engine time to dock properly.

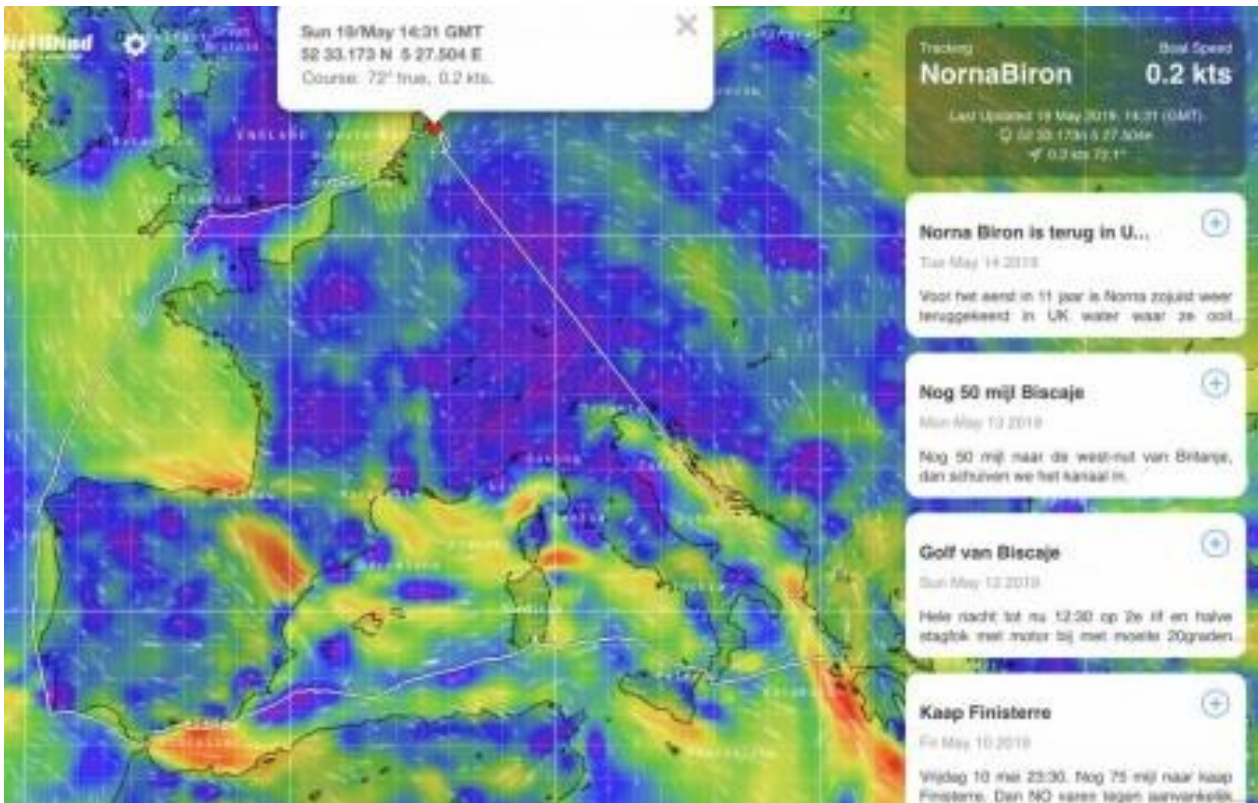


The galley is Heiko's domain. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, coffee, warm rolls, pasta in all possible combinations, conjuring with canned preserves, grilled sandwiches, and omelets, warm buns with shrimp. Or there was Lapskous, the ingredients of which are a secret, and although recognizable, some may have a dubious origin. But always delicious. The improvised oven with aluminum disposable trays was just as good as the defective original.

We knew in advance that we were taking a boat to sea that had been idle for a long time, that we didn't know, where things didn't work, where undoubtedly some tinkering would be needed along the way, and certainly not to expect a problem-free and well-prepared ship. We have expressed that to each other beforehand. For some land-based captains, this may be hard to understand, but the confidence in one's own self-reliance is liberating and personally gives me a freedom that, for me, is the essence and joy of traveling by sailboat.



The last Happy Hour, this time at Norna's new berth in Flevo Marina in Lelystad, where we arrived this afternoon.



We zijn rond, Lelystad, Amsterdam, Preveza, Nidri, Messina, Sardinie, Gibraltar, Ramsgate, Amsterdam, Lelystad.

I enjoyed it, heartfelt thanks to Joost, Heiko, and Jasper, and also thanks to everyone who followed us in my blog and on the Zeilersforum, for the comments and amusing personal interpretations.

Henny

