

The Purchase and Transport of Toucan

by Tom and Jan Edge

To be honest this little article is not so much about the purchase of our replacement boat, but more about the vintage mode of transport used to move her from Foxes Marina, Ipswich to Dickies yard, Bangor, during mid-February 2020.

Let's get the boat buying bit out of the way first. We all know that at times boat ownership is a little like tearing up soggy £20 notes and throwing them into a hole, but while gainfully in employment the situation can be reasonably managed. Retirement though, tends to focus one's mind somewhat, so after much umming and ahring we decided to down size from 41feet, 8 berth, 2 heads and 10 tons plus acres of antifouling, to 29 feet, 3 berths 4.5 ton and copper coat. Luckily, we managed to sell our boat early in November 2019 and made all the usual promises to each other, of not rushing into buying a replacement and not from any far-flung locations.

With boats it's sometimes difficult to keep promises! So, December found us at the frosty and very frozen Crinan Canal, unfortunately the rose-tinted brokers details did not match what we found and after much grumpiness, my carer gently explained we would eventually find the correct boat and how beautiful she thought Scotland was at that time of year.

On the 27 December we found ourselves on our second mini break, this time to Ipswich, looking at a boat with an excellent specification, good condition and clearly well looked after; offer accepted, survey fine and final price agreed at the end of January 2020. My carer looking very pleased to have a wheelhouse and the biggest heads we have ever seen in a 29-foot boat.

The Next problem was how to get her back home. The hairy chested idea of sailing an unknown boat home from the east coast in winter, was met with stony silence and a sigh from my carer. However, she made the suggestion of talking to our mate Dave who has a canal boat transport wagon. What a good idea!

Dave was up for it providing we paid for the fuel, accommodation and an endless supply of bacon and egg buns!! Only one problem was that we needed to check the dimensions of the combined wagon and boat to see if we were a notifiable load. The initial gut feeling was that we would be struggling with the height 4.2m and width 2.9m, both legal maximums. The prospect of the eye watering cost of low loader loomed large!

Some meticulous measuring of wagon and boat was required. We used a Westerly Konsort Duo at Gallows Point to check height and beam and the overall distance between keels to see if they would fit on the wagon bed, which they just about did. We had an overall height of 3.85m so ok there, but a beam of 3.28m, too wide!!

We talked to the powers that be, and the result was that they would be happy if we modified the wing mirrors to increase rear vision, placed a wide load sign and a permanent flashing beacon on the back, that would suffice and we need not notify the load. The mast was to be taken down and placed between the keels.



The wagon is the successor to the Bedford models S and TK, first built in 1950 and 1960 respectively. Dave's is an H registered, 30-year-old Bedford model TL20-18, 20000 kg gross weight ,6000 CC, twin axel, articulated flat bed, which would look the part in any Miss Marple film. The only seat with suspension is the drivers, the mates' seat has all the suspension of a plank. The suggestion that we might have heating on such a cold morning was met with, "it's broken, use the rug!!"



Accommodation booked, we set off for Ipswich at silly o'clock in the morning with the aim being to arrive mid-afternoon, which we did. However, this was despite an unintentional foray from the A14 down the M11 for several miles due to misinterpretation of the road work signs around Huntington.

Apart from a dodgy heating system, Dave maintains the wagon to a very high standard and in an immaculate condition. We trundled eastward at a stately 60 mph and even unladen, judging by the numerous hoots and flashing lights from other artics, it soon became evident that the little wagon is something of a head turner.

Whenever we stopped at Services Stations, a group of generally grey haired, rotund, elderly lorry drivers would gather around admiring the wagon reminiscing about passing their driving tests in the same model, many moons ago.

During a wind and rainstorm of Biblical proportions, Toucan was loaded in the late afternoon and after a good night's kip we finished strapping her on and left for the west the following day. The reaction we got from the lorries on the A14 was incredible; for them to see such an elderly wagon working for a living with such a load was unbelievable.

On the way home we kept to a sedentary 50 mph, with several trucks overtaking us and then stopping further down the road in lay-bys, taking photographs as we strolled by. Service station stops now included drivers taking selfies with Dave next to the loaded truck.

The weather was not good for the journey home, high winds and heavy rain and by the time we reached Conwy it was blowing the mussels off the rocks and our speed had dropped to 30 mph. The last part of the journey to Bangor took forever, with Dave trying to avoid tacking along the A55 which required frequent white knuckles jobs on the steering wheel during the gusts.

We parked the wagon head to wind and abandoned her and Dickies unloaded the following day where she now stands in their shed, undergoing a major overhaul to be ready for 2021.

The conclusions to draw from our antics are, (a) never make promises concerning boats and (b) wagon drivers of elderly commercial vehicles appear to have hollow legs when it comes to bacon and egg buns and cups of tea!!

Dave also has an elderly single decker Crosville Bus - *but that is another story!*

