



ESSENTIAL NAVIGATION AND SEAMANSHIP

Both my course mates, Mark and Neil, had their day skipper qualifications and were fairly savvy with all the aspects of navigation and tide as discussed. But if you don't fancy doing the five-day course, then look to the online version of the RYA's Essential Navigation and Seamanship course. Taking around six hours, it's all done on your home computer and in your own time. I completed the course earlier this year and found it will sufficiently bring you up to the standard of knowledge required for the Intermediate. The online course can be taken through Powerboat Training UK and those wishing to try before you buy can do so on the RYA's special interactive website.

www.ryainteractive.org

LIFE AFTER LEVEL TWO

DOING THE INTERMEDIATE COURSE

Do you have your Level Two, a bit of experience and the desire to go further? Then the Powerboat Intermediate Course may be for you. Adrian Porter investigates.

The Level Two Powerboat course is without a doubt one of the most full on courses a powerboater will do. In just two days you are bestowed with all the basic skills to help you go from clueless land hermit to a vagabond of the sea, quite able to make short hops from one destination to another.

But the Level Two, however comprehensive, is still just the start of your education as a boater. As time stretches on, the novelty of new knowledge fades and is soon replaced by experience and confidence. It is about now, perhaps a season or more into your career as a recreational boater, that your complacency of familiar waters wears thin and you feel the niggles to go out further, explore new destinations and start making longer passages. It is time for you to build up your knowledge and develop as a boater. It is time to do your intermediate course.

A COURSE TO CRUISE THROUGH

On a surprisingly sunny morning in October, I walked into the familiar classrooms belonging to Powerboat Training UK, the same school I'd come to do both my Level Two and my VHF course. I was introduced to Terry McFall the instructor and two fellow students who were eyeing the camera around my neck with suspicion.

With the obligatory cup of warm caffeine in hand, Terry started by explaining that the Intermediate Course use to be known as the 'cruising course' as that is exactly what the two days are all about – to go cruising. Building on the skills learned during the Level Two, the Intermediate includes a bit more about navigation, how to use both traditional (paper chart) and modern (electric) means to plan a long journey, and a few more practical skills out on the water. He also explained as that with many courses, the best place to learn is in the fresh air, so we'd be spending as much time on the boat as possible.

PILOTAGE AND TIDES

But that doesn't mean all the time will be spent outside the classroom, and to kick off Terry spread out a few charts of the local area and told us to make a pilotage plan. The intended route should take us from the school's dock in Cobbs Quay Marina, out to Poole Harbour, around the three islands (Brownsea, Furzey and Green) and then back to the school. We set about the task as a group, channelling the skills we'd learned from previous courses.

Throughout the planning, instructor Terry asked us a number of questions and discussed our answers with us. From symbols on the chart, to understanding Latitude and Longitude and the principles of GPS, Terry was simply finding out what we knew so he could structure the rest of the course and give a much needed 'polishing' to the boating and navigational know-how that needed it the most.





Turns out it was our mooring skills that needed the most attention



Terry imparts more expert advice



GO WITH THE FLOW

Once the pilotage plan was drawn up, Terry took the opportunity to go through tides with us. Using tidal curves and information from the almanac, we went through working out the height of the water on a given day at a certain time (and vice-versa) and working out windows of opportunity - i.e. if your draught is one metre, between what times could you safely enter your chosen harbour.

About mid-morning, we emerged into the fresh air and went down to the pontoon. Handed our lifejackets we were told to check them if we knew how. If you're unsure on how to do this I very much recommend sending off for your FREE 'Serious Fun' DVD the RNLI has put together, just go to their website to order (www.rnli.org.uk). There is a whole section on lifejackets and it has all the information you need.

We were also asked to prepare the boat for use, check we had the right equipment, know where everything was, that the engine was ok and so on. We ticked off everything, perfect. Then we turned the key and got little response. Grinning, the instructor then opened the hatch and turned on the electronics. Oh well, almost perfect then.

MOOR PROBLEMS

We pootled out of Cobbs Quay and duly began our circumnavigation of the islands. Terry used this shorter passage, which serves as a warm up for the following day's larger excursion, to familiarise us with the chartplotter. Showing us how to register waypoints and tie them into courses.

Returning to port, it was time for us to moor the RIB and it was here that our skills were evidently a little 'rusty'. Whilst we managed to attach the boat to the jetty, it was certainly lacking in finesse and grace. This would be something we would be working on after lunch...

Post samies, and with a bit of instruction, we all shook the cobwebs from our mooring techniques and each put in a couple of good examples. It should be noted that rather than Terry just showing us how it should be done, he made us think about what we were doing and why we were doing it. He corrected the mistakes in our knowledge and then got us to then put it into practice, without demonstration (at first) - which is the big difference of the course from the Level Two. There is no hand holding, it's about being presented with real life situations and seeing how you deal with them, before being corrected.

A rare shot of the Editor actually doing some work

“THERE IS NO HAND HOLDING, IT'S ABOUT BEING PRESENTED WITH REAL LIFE SITUATIONS AND SEEING HOW YOU DEAL WITH THEM”

END OF DAY ONE

Once back in the classroom we started to draw up the big passage plan – that is we were going to plot a journey from our destination in Poole to the Needles and into the Solent, to stop off at both Lymington and Yarmouth. A long passage that, done successfully, is the goal of the course.

Armed with more hot beverages and the day's boating under our belts, we set about the task. Terry broke up the afternoon at strategic points to educate us about tidal streams, tidal diamonds and considerations about the Solent being a tidal gate, having a double high tide and what implications that had. We also made sure to factor in what effect the tidal flow will have and were taught how to compensate for it.

DAY TRIPPERS

The next morning found us amassed at 9:00(ish – us journalists are notoriously bad at mornings) and trussed head-to-toe in wet weather gear. Having navigated the RIB to the entrance of Poole Harbour, we knew that from our starting point we would be heading for the fairway buoy (safe water mark) near the needles, before navigating the (relatively) narrow channel leading into the Solent. Our bearing from here to the buoy was 110° but we knew to steer 115° to compensate for the effect of the tide.

Before we got going we put in a number of waypoints on the plotter, planning out our journey. Happily, the bearing as shown electronically correlated with what we had put down on paper. This was great as it certified our workings out and if either the paper plan went over the side accidentally, or the chartplotter fizzled out somehow, we had a backup. Pointing the boat in the right direction, and glad it was my turn to play skipper, I took the RIB to 25 knots and started ploughing the waters of the English Channel to get to our destination.

THREE'S NOT A CROWD

Working as a team, there was always a skipper, a navigator and, well, a backup navigator. Entering the Solent (bit earlier than predicted, must have had the wind with us...) it was Neil's turn to drive and he successfully took us into Yarmouth where we drove around a bit and left again. The point of entering was that we had had to make a plan for entering an unfamiliar port, as decreed on the syllabus. This meant working out the tides, our point and time of entry, and so on – rather than relying on local knowledge and guessing whether you can cross that sandbar or not.

Leaving Yarmouth we went over to Lymington and after a bit of manoeuvring and mooring, settled on a pontoon for a late lunch. As planned for on the previous day, we were to take a different route back, this time sticking close to Hurst Point and going through 'The Trap' overfall. From there we'd skirt the coast, picking our way through shallower water – on a route we knew would be safe at that time, before cutting a line straight to the entrance of Poole Harbour. Rather than set waypoints this time, we put in a proper route on the plotter, compared it to our paper workings out and got underway.



Neil takes the helm to bring us into Yarmouth



At this point, the conversation had largely turned to fishing



Everyone pretended not to look after 'someone' managed to punch a hole in another boat...



SHALLOW WATERS

The journey again was without fault, with the exception of our entry to the channel taking you into Poole Harbour. Having 'accidentally' cut a corner at the last minute, we saw from our chartplotter that we were about to pass over a submerged ridge. Working out there should be just enough water underneath the hull, we cautiously crept over... and thanks to a dedicated lookout and a pair of eyes glued to the depth readings and sounding off the values to the skipper, the three of us negotiated the waters without incident, phew. This is a typical scenario that boaters find themselves in and our instructor seemed very pleased at how we handled it.

BACK HOME

Once we tied up and put the boat 'to bed', we stumbled into the classroom for the final debrief. The Intermediate course is all about cruising in confidence. And to make longer hops and enter unfamiliar ports, you're going to need more knowledge than what you were endowed with on your Level Two – and this course teaches exactly that by way of planning and executing a decent excursion, peppered with some dedicated classroom time and revealing more about the arts of electronic navigation. The entire course has a very straightforward feel to it: you up your knowledge of tide and navigation, and put it to real use straightaway. You're not just 'in a lesson', you're doing the boating you want to do whilst under supervision. This means that this is not a case of 'see then do', but instead you're given a situation to deal with and must think it through yourself, but under the eye of an instructor. Think of it as real boating... but with a safety harness.

I highly recommend this course to anyone who has passed their Level Two and wants the skill and confidence to go that little bit further.

More info:

This course was undertaken at Powerboat Training UK, who are based in Cobbs Quay Marina in Poole. The principal is the respected Paul Glatzel, the man who wrote the RYA Powerboat handbook. Having completed several courses at this school, I can personally vouch for the staff as being incredibly knowledgeable and passionate instructors. Information on the courses they run can be found on their website.

Phone: 01202 686666

Email: office@powerboattraininguk.co.uk

Website: www.powerboat-training-uk.co.uk

“YOU INCREASE YOUR KNOWLEDGE... AND PUT IT TO REAL USE STRAIGHTAWAY”

