

Love Your Waterways!

February 2012 £3.50

# canals



## rivers + boats

**A spot of French leave**

Cruising in the Garonne

**Saving the Stover Canal**

The restoration in focus

**Sea Otter 36**

Lightweight narrow boat reviewed on the Broads

**Cheshire Choice**

Shroppie short break



*Traditional Trades*



*Cruising in France*



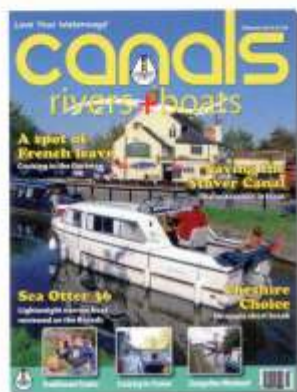
*Llangollen Weekend*





*Silver Moon negotiates a lift bridge on the Llangollen Canal near Wrenbury in our long weekend break feature on page 36 (Gerry Mulvaney)*

## February 2012



### On the cover

*Cruising near Shardlow on the Trent & Mersey.  
(Photography: Roger Baxter)*

### 16 FLOATING TRADERS

David Scowcroft meets Joe Hollingshead, one time boatman and now keeping the old trades alive as a rope fender maker

### 18 SAVING THE STOVER CANAL

Bill de Leie looks at the efforts of a team actively restoring a little known canal in deepest Devon

### 22 SOCIETY CLIPPINGS

Bob Clarke delves into the latest canal society and club magazines for juicy nuggets of gossip

### 25 EVELYN'S WAR Part 7

More exclusive extracts from the wartime diary of 'Idle Woman' Evelyn Hunt, working boats in 1943

### 36 PURRING IN CHESHIRE

Gerry Mulvaney takes a long weekend break on the Shropshire Union and Llangollen Canals

### 42 A SPOT OF FRENCH LEAVE

Jonathan Webster samples a luxury river cruiser holiday on the River Garonne in France

### 46 BOAT TEST: SEA OTTER 36

Richard Johnstone-Bryden reviews the latest lightweight narrow boat on the Norfolk Broads

### 52 SEA OTTER DIARY 7

As Brian Collings new narrow boat nears completion, this episode covers the boat's launch at Crick and dealing with some small setbacks

### REGULARS

5 Under The Bridge

6 The Bigger Picture

9 Aquarius

10 Diary Dates

12 Next Month in cr+b

13 Eating Out

14 Yesterday & Today

58 Classified

### EDITORIAL

Technical Editor: Peter Caplen  
Website Editor: Phil Pickin  
Secretary: Sue Ballard  
Publisher: Terence A Morgan

### EDITORIAL OFFICE

PO Box 618,  
Norwich, Norfolk NR7 0QT  
☎ 01603 708930  
✉ chris@themag.fsnet.co.uk  
🌐 canalsriversandboats.co.uk

### ADVERTISING

Advertisement Manager  
Doreen Reed  
☎ 01280 847038  
☎ 01280 847158  
✉ drnadvertising@gmail.com

### PRODUCTION

Production Manager  
Christine Blackmore  
☎ 01372 741411  
✉ christine@aemorgan.co.uk

### DESIGN

Blue Fox Media  
Chris Cunnill  
☎ 01603 708930  
✉ bluefox@themag.fsnet.co.uk

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscription Manager  
Valerie Atkins  
☎ 01372 741411  
✉ valerie@aemorgan.co.uk

Printed by Stephens & George Magazines, Goat Mill Road, Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil CF48 3TD. ☎ 01685 388888.

Distribution by Imagine Magazine Sales & Marketing Ltd., 4 Vaughan Avenue, London W6 0XS. ☎ 0845 612 0093/4  
🌐 www.imagemag.net

© A E Morgan Publications Ltd., 2012. ISSN 2045-1326

canals rivers + boats is published on the second Thursday of the month preceding cover date, by:  
A E Morgan Publications Ltd., 8A High St, Epsom, Surrey KT19 8AD. Tel: 01372 741411.

Annual subscription £36.95 inc. postage (UK). Overseas rates on application. Back copies (subject to availability) and single issues £4.35 each inc. postage in the UK. Cheques made payable to: A E Morgan Publications Ltd. Whilst every care is taken with submitted manuscripts, photographs, drawings and electronic media, no responsibility can be accepted for their loss or damage. Every care is taken to avoid errors in this magazine; however, no liability can be accepted for any which may occur. No material published in this magazine may be reproduced in any way without the consent of the publishers.

Love Your Waterways!  
**canals**  
rivers+boats

# Purring in Cheshire



Gerry Mulvaney samples a long weekend break aboard a luxury narrow boat and cruises down the Cheshire plain via the Shropshire Union and Llangollen Canals

With only four boats in the fleet a Cheshire Cat Narrowboats holiday is naturally going to be reserved for just a lucky few. We were part of that lucky number, as weekend guests of Linda Andrews and her team on *Silver Moon* at the end of October. The combination of the Cheshire Narrowboats approach to holiday hiring, with some unseasonally warm autumnal weather on the Shropshire Union and Llangollen canals made for an unforgettable few days of sunshine to tide us over the winter.

Linda has some strong views when it comes to hiring out narrow boats, formed from over ten years in the industry and experience with some of the larger hiring companies. She knew that she wanted her own business to put her theories into practice and so when Cheshire Cat Narrow boats came up for sale a couple of years ago, she was able to fulfil her ambition. Personal service and the personal touch is the key to Linda's approach and since this is a very much a hands-on method, the size of her fleet is unlikely to get too much bigger.

The personal touch was very much in evidence when we arrived, The Cheshire Cat base team were busy readying *Silver Moon* for us and it was clear that they take pride in the appearance of their fleet - I was surprised to see them place a tub of pansies on the roof, as well as the usual safety equipment. I don't think I have been entrusted with the proprietor's hor-

ticulture before on a hire boat. Inside the theme continued, with a bowl of fresh fruit, tea, coffee, sugar etc, large fluffy bath towels, a complete set of Nicholson waterway guides and a set of board games - perfect for the dark nights of October. There was even a jar of "doggie treats" for canine visitors. In fact *Silver Moon* was so well equipped and clearly personally furnished by Linda, that my wife remarked that it was more like borrowing a friend's boat, than hiring one from a company.

## Silver Moon

*Silver Moon* is the latest addition to their fleet, having started life with another hire company about ten years ago. Linda and her husband Mark had been searching for some time for another boat for their growing business when they spotted her. They wanted a six-berth boat and rather than having one built, felt it was more environmentally responsible to refurbish an existing one if possible. After a few months of looking, they found *Silver Moon* being retired from another hire fleet. She fulfilled the main criteria of having six berths, two bathrooms, a new and very quiet Beta marine engine, a high stern cruiser deck and most importantly of all, a beam of no more than 6ft 10in in order to be able to negotiate the narrow bottom lock at the entrance to the Llangollen canal. The refurbishment took place over the winter of 2010 and *Silver Moon* entered service at the start of the 2011 season.

Having seen the pictures of the former interior and experienced the new one, I have to say they have made a very good job of the fit out. The large cruiser stern has room for both helmsperson and several crew, with steps leading down into the fixed doubled bedroom. A nice touch here is

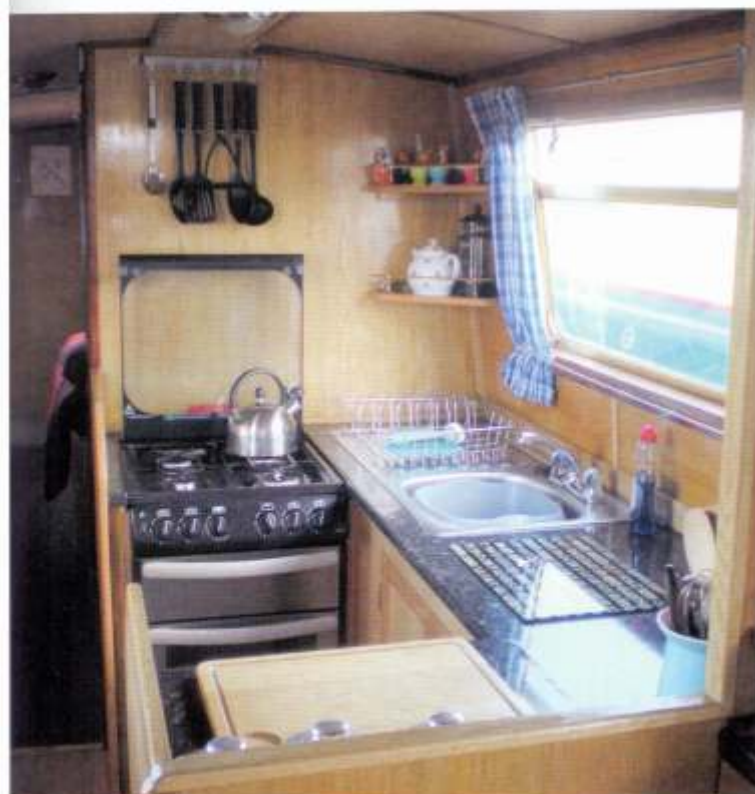


the memory foam mattress on the large double bed, whose sleep inducing comfort I can personally vouch for. Next up is a modern bathroom and toilet. Again the personal touch of a nice selection of chrome bathroom fittings, including soap dish, toothbrush holder and mug, was evident. A small passage leads into the next double bedroom which has been configured as either a double or two singles to give versatility to hiring groups. A large wardrobe completes bedroom two and a second bathroom, equipped to the same high standard is sited between the bedroom and kitchen.

It is in the kitchen where a lot of the refurbishment took place, opening it up into the lounge area and bringing the two rooms together. A black marble work top sits above new cupboards, with a modern sink, a new gas cooker and a large fridge, which my wife noted was one of the first boat fridges she had come across that would hold three vertical bottles of white wine in the door and enough ice in the freezer box for the weekend's G & Ts. The kitchen opens into a large sitting room with a couch and folding dining table and chairs. A digital TV with DVD player is fitted and I can vouch for its reception, having to endure Strictly Come Dancing in the wilds of the Llangollen canal. Diesel powered central heating warms the boat up quickly and an inverter ensures phone chargers and other paraphernalia of modern life are provided for.

### Audlem base

Cheshire Cat Narrowboats are based in the new Overwater Marina near Audlem. This is a lovely spot, guaranteed to make a good impression on arrival and ideally suited to a variety of cruising options. We decided to



### CLOCKWISE FROM

**OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP:** *Silver Moon* negotiates the lifting bridge at Wrenbury Church on the Llangollen Canal; Overwater Marina is the base for Cheshire Cat Narrowboats; The main bedroom on *Silver Moon*; Cheshire Cat (left-right) owners, Mark and Linda Andrews with the team; the well appointed galley aboard *Silver Moon*.



head up the Shropshire Union to Hurlston Locks and explore the first part of the Llangollen Canal down to Wrenbury. It was good to hear that the personal touch extends to a comprehensive handover of the boat and instruction for first timers from Linda, who in addition to running the company, is a qualified RYA helmsman instructor, so your holiday will get off to a safe and enjoyable start.

After making our goodbyes, we set off up to Nantwich for our first night. This part of the Shropshire Union is very pretty, with wide views across the Cheshire plain to the Welsh hills. The canal is well maintained, with lots of towpath mooring as well as some new picnic and barbeque areas recently constructed by the local Canal Society. Passing large signs for The Secret Bunker, an oxymoron on a par with Scottish Amicable, we arrived at Hack Green Locks. These are single locks so with no queue in October we were quickly through and on our way. If you are new to boating, Linda makes a point of meeting you at Hack Green and taking you through the locks, to give you confidence. Incidentally the Secret Bunker is a cold war relic, now a museum showing how government would have lived and functioned while the rest of us were being frazzled. This is perhaps worth an hour of your time if you are interested in subterranean structures.

### Nantwich

Nantwich is somewhere I have been on business, but never by boat. It is always a different experience arriving by water and with the canal on an embankment above the town, the mixture of old buildings and a very pretty market square are very much in evidence. We stopped on the visitor moorings just before the Nantwich basin, formerly the terminus of



*Approaching Bennett's Bridge on the Shropshire Union Canal.*



the Chester canal. It is a good spot, since steps lead down onto Welsh Row, one of the early routes into the town, with fine old Georgian and some Elizabethan timber buildings and many local shops, rather than the big national chains. This is a prosperous Cheshire town, so boat people, with boat hair and clothes do stand out, so be warned and smarten up!

After a very restful night spent on the memory foam mattress, the next day we headed up to the Hurleston Lock flight, which marks the entrance to the Llangollen canal. The four locks raise you up 34ft alongside the Hurleston reservoir which provides a feed for the Shropshire Union as well as water for the inhabitants of Nantwich. There are good views at the top of the locks across the Cheshire countryside and the big white dish of Jodrell Bank is visible in the distance. We had been tipped off by Linda to stop at Hurleston Bridge and pay a visit to Snugburys Ice Cream at Park farm. I am an ice cream aficionado, so was easily persuaded. As well as a range of delicious flavours of Jersey Ice cream, Snugburys have also been making straw sculptures to entice in the customers. In 2011, a giant 38 feet tall polar bear towered over visitors and in past years, Meerkats, Big Ben and a replica Jodrell bank have been on display. The ice cream was excellent too!

**Popular canal**

The Llangollen canal is one of the most popular canals in the country and I can imagine that it can be quite busy in summer holidays but at the end of October we virtually had it to ourselves as we cruised towards Wrenbury. Most visitors will be heading to the Pontcysyllte Aquaduct, but you would need more than the long weekend we had available to complete that trip. Once out in the countryside, the Llangollen also affords spectacular views of the Cheshire countryside and in the autumn the colours on the trees were a sight to behold. We had to navigate both the Swanley pair of locks and the trio of Baddiley as we made our

*Llangollen lift bridges - all part of the fun!*



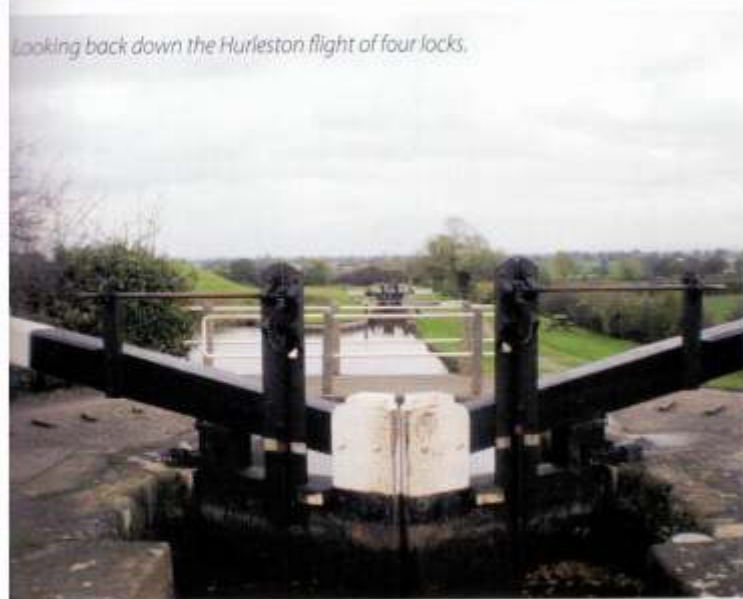
*Silver Moon moored below Hack Green Locks.*



Waiting for the locks at Hurlleston Junction.



The Cotton Arms at Wrenbury.



Looking back down the Hurlleston flight of four locks.



Wrenbury electric lift bridge.



Autumnal cruising on the Llangollen near Wrenbury.

An eclectic collection near Wrenbury Heath Bridge!



approach to Wrenbury. All of these are single locks which Mrs M took in her stride as the sole crew member. She also had to cope with the delightful Wrenbury church lift bridge, which works with a windlass and then the Wrenbury lift bridge, electrically operated with a British Waterways key, which sets off flashing lights and a manual barrier, while the school run traffic backs up into the village. Great fun on a boat, but I imagine local Mums have a few choice words to say about the stream of boaters in the summer. I suppose at least the kids are off school at the height of the season.

## Wrenbury

Wrenbury was to be the end of our exploration of the Llangollen canal and we turned at the winding hole by Thomassons bridge, just west of the village, before returning through the lift bridge disrupting the traffic once more, to find a quiet mooring just outside the village. Linda had been enthusiastic about the Cotton Arms, a real ale local pub by the canal and close to the electric lift bridge, so we agreed to meet her and Mark, her husband who looks after the technical bits of the business like engines, electrics and toilets, for dinner. The place was packed on a Monday night, with a real log fire blazing away. The Cotton Arms is a proper local pub. There were domino sessions going on, a darts match and assorted local "characters" who could tell you their life stories for the price of a pint. We used the opportunity to hear about Linda and Mark's experiences of running the business over the last two years. They had tales about teenage guests leaving it late to get up as mum and dad handed the boat back and having to get into the car in their pyjamas, other guests turning up thinking their boat would be fully catered and even six gentlemen from Dubai, who had mistakenly booked what they thought was an apartment, not a boat, something apparently lost in the translation. They didn't have to stay on the boat, as Linda managed to find a local hotel to take them. The funniest story concerned an elderly gentleman, who after a full week on the boat without mishap, was disembarking for the last time when, missing his customary belt his trousers unexpectedly fell down, he tripped and ended up in the Marina. No photos exist apparently, but the image is imprinted in their minds!

## Personal touch

Our short break was all too quickly coming to an end and we headed back down the Hurlston flight the next day on our way back to Cheshire Cat Narrowboats base at Overwater marina. Linda and Mark Andrews are certainly adept at providing their guests with something different – that very personal touch naturally missing from the larger operators. If you are wanting to experience the same, you had better get in quick, because I am sure that 2012 will see very few empty weeks in their season's calendar. 🐾

## RESOURCES

Cheshire Cat Narrowboat Holidays runs a small fleet of four characterful narrowboats ranging in length from 50ft to 62ft, accommodating up to eight people. The company is owned and managed by Mark Edwards and Linda Andrews, waterways enthusiasts with many years narrowboating experience between them.

Mark looks after the spanners and technical side, while Linda takes care of the administration and housekeeping. They share the work of turnaround days, with assistance from their cleaning team, Nikki, Mick, Joe and David.

The fleet operates from OverWater Marina, a beautiful new marina situated near the bottom of Audlem locks, on the Shropshire Union Canal. 2012 Prices range from £455 for a short break on the smallest boat, to £1470 for a high season week on the eight berth. Fuel, bedlinen and towels are included, and pets are welcome at no extra charge.

Contact Linda on 07867 790195, E-mail [info@cheshirecatnarrowboats.co.uk](mailto:info@cheshirecatnarrowboats.co.uk) Website [www.cheshirecatnarrowboats.co.uk](http://www.cheshirecatnarrowboats.co.uk)

