



SKIP NOVAK

IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MUCH OR HOW LITTLE YOU USE YOUR YACHT, IT'S A SYMBOL OF FREEDOM – AN ESCAPE POD FROM REALITY



How many times have you heard yourself or someone else say something like, “Look at all those yachts in the marina, and you seldom see them go out.” It is true. And it is a worldwide phenomenon. From the

marinas of Europe, the Americas, Australasia and everywhere in between, yachts of all sizes are probably the most visible of expensive recreational assets that can be considered grossly under utilised. Vintage cars might be another example, but they are normally out of sight locked up in garages. Horses might also qualify, although they do need to be fed and exercised daily at the minimum. Yet here there is another parallel for yachts. Anyone who leaves their yacht unattended for lengthy periods knows the possible outcome – a dead engine

ignition system and winches that won't turn. Like horses, boats with myriad moving parts need to have their ‘muscles’ flexed on a regular basis.

But what about the cost?

Boat ownership is often

described as like standing fully clothed under a cold shower tearing up 100 dollar bills, or the yacht in question becomes the floating black hole. Poor sod, bloody owner, Captain Bligh and the ‘cheque book captain’ are just some of the possible sobriquets that a boat owner might suffer at the hands of his crew whether in appreciative jest or otherwise.

Paying through the nose

No matter how you cut it, yachting can be a mug's game. Use any accounting system as creatively as you like, if you consider a cost benefit analysis – the benefit being time on the water after casting off from moorings – the numbers are embarrassing. I for one cannot envisage owning a yacht unless it is paying its way.

Granted, racing yachts are a particular genre as the season's racing schedule sets the scene and the boat does get used by this imperative. Most cruising boats though are not bound by an organised itinerary where you are

expected to show up (and having paid an entry fee) and this fleet represents the volume of what can be described as the ‘immovable feast.’ The ARC and similar rallies can be used as argument, but they represent a drop in the bucket of the ocean.

To really get your cruising bang for your buck, liveaboards make sense of it all, using the yacht as their permanent home. Also, possibly, those with a planned itinerary, such as an around the world cruise with the family. The proliferation of privately owned yachts used within the charter flotilla industry worldwide – such as The Moorings and Sunsail – points to an obvious alternative to boat ownership, although the fine print in the business model does mean you ultimately inherit the yacht at some point, with all its usual problems.

Another point of view

Nonetheless, the sheer number of yachts that lie apparently idle, tied up to the dock on standby, points to something more profound at work. In 1979 I raced with a young crew to victory on *Independent Endeavour*, winning the Parmelia Race from Plymouth to Fremantle with a stop in Cape Town – a one-off event to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Swan River Colony in Western Australia. Soon after the finish I signed on to deliver a Swan 65 up to the Mediterranean for a charter season. The elderly owner, a mining tycoon and newspaper owner from Perth, sailed with me as far as the Seychelles. One starry night as he and I were alone in the cockpit he admitted the only reason he bought the boat in the first place was to have an escape mechanism for his family when the Chinese invaded Australia. A novel idea – but he was dead serious.

The point to that story is that boat ownership, however under-utilised the boat becomes, if not simply a status symbol – and there are plenty of those examples – becomes an escape vehicle on standby, always ready to go, even if only for a day or a weekend from our everyday work a day world. Despite being seldom used it is always there in waiting for you, anxiously tugging at the mooring lines – ties that can easily be cast off with a few flicks of the wrist. Freedom.