

# Adrian Morgan



## One for the sea

*Adrian* mixes wine and water... just the once, mind you

Soft! I can hear the whump of angry mailbag on editor's desk. "Tread carefully Morgan," whispers a wee voice of warning deep in my ear, "for you venture on perilous waters." Here goes. The other day – a rare and blessed day of brilliant Hebridean sunshine on calm seas, when fluffy clouds barely smudged an otherwise clear blue sky, and a gentle southerly ruffled the surface of Annat Bay – you would have found me at the helm of my little wooden boat, humming along to a Mozart opera, glass in hand and, quite frankly, three sheets to the wind.

I'm not talking paralytic, just gently p\*\*\*ed. The kind of effect that half a bottle of red has on a hot, lazy, summer afternoon on a contented mind, in a small, classic, wooden boat, when all seems, fleetingly, right with the world.

It was, I realise, shocking behaviour, unseaman-like – on the Solent my contentment might have been shattered at any moment by the wail of sirens and the flash of blue lights; might even have been breathalised – and serve me right... supertankers, QE2, Cowes ferry, dozy yachtsman. Stupid.

But this was Annat Bay, with not another vessel of any description in sight. And, as it was a Sunday, the CalMac Ferry was safely tied up in Stornoway for the sabbath... and no sign of any fishing boats either; just me, on a 68-year-old boat I know like the back of my hand, listening to Mozart, arm draped lazily over tiller.

So, why is it that we can confess to every sin in the book – grounding on a falling tide, mucking up our pilotage, falling overboard, adding our declination rather than subtracting – and yet no one, but no one (and I've read a thousand yachting stories) has ever confessed to being gloriously, happily and, I would argue, innocuously and gently tipsy in charge of a small yacht on a sunny day?

Strange that. When one recalls that Britain's maritime greatness was based on the courage of her Jack tars, bolstered by liberal doses of rum. Or that solo sailors from Marin-Marie to Chichester and Knox-Johnston have enjoyed a sundowner. And that for many South Coast yachtsmen the primary reason for owning a boat is so they can nip across the Channel to Hoover up crates of cheap booze.

So what is the harm in drifting about on the fringes of the Minch, on a clear day with a glass in hand and a broad grin on one's face? Days like that Sunday are rare enough up here. It's mostly oilskins and thick-mitten weather, even in mid summer.

*"I'm not talking paralytic, just gently p\*\*\*ed..."*



CHARLOTTE WATERS

A day such as that is to be savoured – I was about to say like good wine, until I remembered that it was a drop of cheapish plonk that had provided the beatific grin.

But believe me, it happens so rarely. I learnt my lesson long ago sailing back up the Hamble, alone, when, tiller lashed, I so nearly piled *Sally* into a Sigma 33 lying to a fore-and-aft mooring near Mercury... only takes a small beer to cloud your judgement.

And honest, it probably won't happen again. Not, that is, until Hell freezes over or the next day dawns when I can sail in shirtsleeves on the Minch (whichever comes sooner). Just had to get it off my chest, for my sake and for all those who may, once or twice – not regularly, you understand – have

taken a wee dram while sailing a little boat they know well, in perfect contentment, under a clear blue sky on a glassy sea, and not another boat in sight. For that we should surely make no apologies.