

# EMOTIONAL JOURNEY



A happy new owner. But what about maintenance?

As a sailor of a plastic Bavaria yacht Thomas Board wanted to upgrade to a classic. With the buying uncertainties behind him he reflects on his first season as owner of the yawl *Frenesi of Clynder*



Anisa at the helm under the watchful eye of RYA instructor Martin Northey

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS BOARD AND ANISA

Six months ago Anisa and I bought our first classic boat *Frenesi of Clynder*. Jumping straight into the deep end, we had swapped a 34ft (10.4m) Bavaria for a powerful 43ft (13.1m) classic yawl. After an 18-month break from sailing we were returning rusty with a two-year-old son in tow, and had to learn how to care for a wooden boat. We were looking forward to our first season, but knew that we had our work cut out.

As we live in Spain, the whole purchase was managed from a distance, with only two UK visits. Even *Frenesi's* delivery trip to her new base in Portugal was planned and monitored remotely. Our broker, Barney Sandeman, had seen to anything that needed a physical presence. So it was only when the call from the delivery skipper confirmed *Frenesi's* safe arrival that the penny dropped. Our stabiliser wheels were gone, and we were on our own.

Buy any boat and the initial learning curve is steep. With an older classic, however, there is more to worry about. I'd asked some pretty stupid questions of my surveyor, Adrian Overbury, but I had plenty more. How much longer can 60-year-old fastenings hold? Could the survey have missed any rot? How will I know which jobs to leave and which to tend to? How on earth am I going to calm myself down enough to trust in the buying decision and enjoy this?

It took time to build trust in *Frenesi's* build quality and condition. Before *Frenesi* left the UK for Portugal, I discussed the survey with Adrian, and identified what was important. It wasn't all necessary, but I had decided to enact most of his recommendations. The work was completed by craftsmen and engineers who I knew could be trusted, thanks to advice from Barney and *Frenesi's* previous owner David Hart. This gave me an instant network to plug into for advice.

When I first set eyes on *Frenesi* I'd been bowled over by all her sparkling natural hardwood. Looking at her as owner, all that varnish was unsettling. As the hot Portugal sun set to work on her, the unprotected toerail varnish started peeling in protest (the rest of the brightwork is protected with cream covers). The deck caulking began to part in places from the teak (I'm

not sure why) causing drips on the starboard chart table when close hauled. I began to agonise over *Frenesi's* condition (p53).

Timely advice from our shipwright Paul Kendall struck a chord with me. He said we had to decide what type of owners we would be. "Some spend 80 per cent of their time maintaining their boats," he said, "while others just sail them." Wise words, but when self-appointed experts tutt-tutt at the tatty toerail varnish and comment, "she could do with some TLC though", it hits a nerve. Pride of ownership is a double-edged sword!

#### Programme of maintenance

Thus, the next thing was to arrange an ongoing programme of maintenance and renovations. I've learned that the amount of renovation work and gear replacement needed for a classic depends on her sailing plans, how fussy you are, and how good a boat you have to start with. We're still figuring this out, but refitting floor bolts and an engine overhaul will be the next major jobs.

So I'm gradually sorting my head out; starting to relax into ownership. I expect the pleasure will continue growing as routine familiarity replaces stressful learning, allowing me to enjoy her more. So you are probably wondering if the emotional burden is repaid in an amazing sailing and ownership experience.

Call me Ismail: ship's alarm-clock in his bunk

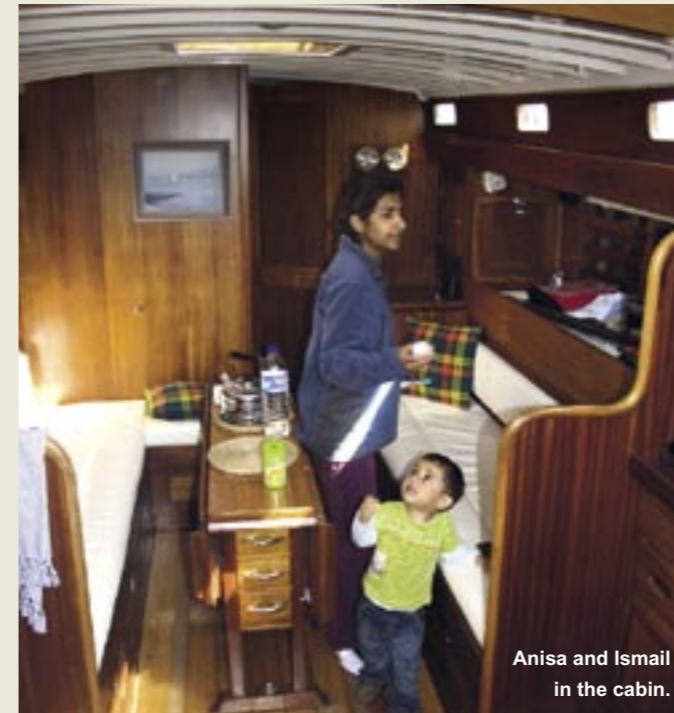




At anchor, with child nets



Under a bright Portuguese sun; not so good for swept decks



Anisa and Ismail in the cabin.



Fine sailing off the Algarve but don't look at the varnish!

*Frenesi* was designed by James McGruer, who at the time also drew many of the emerging fast international 8M cruiser/racer class, with very similar LOAs and LBPs. She was designed as a fast family cruiser, but in recent years has been upgraded for use in classic racing. So she's a fast boat, fully kitted out and rewarding to sail.

When we bought *Frenesi*, we were looking for a comfortable and safe family cruising yacht, with also a good turn of speed. We would be sailing mostly as a husband and wife team with our young son Ismail, so we wanted a boat that could be sailed single-handed.

Climbing aboard *Frenesi* for the first time with Anisa, I pondered the long and heavy main boom and tall, powerful rig. But as I pulled on ropes, learning my way around, I quickly realised that the gear was up to the job of taming all those forces.

The mainsheet has huge purchase, and hauls the boom taut with easy efficiency. The cockpit layout and position of winches, the mainsheet and mizzen control lines, all make it easy for one person to steer and control sheets. With halyard and reefing lines at the mast, the cockpit wouldn't become a rope bin. The impression was of a boat designed to go to sea.

Coming from a GRP boat, the difference in stability is significant. The wooden hull and heavy displacement (17 metric tons) give her a well-dampened, steady motion as she drives through the water. She is powerful but inspires confidence. With our old Bavaria I would shout wash warnings after passing speedboats. Now we both still dive for handholds, before laughing at the comedy of it as we hardly notice their effect. Her progress through the water is much quieter above and below decks.

On Portugal's Algarve the winds regularly strengthen on summer afternoons to around 20 knots. With two cautious reefs in the main, and the genoa furled, we can be beating to windward nudging 7 knots in the gusts. As the wind gusts, *Frenesi* just leans a touch and goes faster. No fuss or drama, no weather helm. In the Bavaria, these conditions would have been a handful short-handed.

**Short-handed**

*Frenesi* does require a little more physical effort to sail than our last boat, with her larger sail area, but paradoxically she's easier to sail short-handed. If you need to go forward, or tend to sheets, you can just let go of the wheel and she will sail herself. Her steady motion makes going forward to the mast feel much safer than on the Bavaria. Most of the time one of us is happy to single-hand her, as the other tends to Ismail. We are conscious of the danger of the heavy main boom and powerful rig, and sail her conservatively. Downwind, we always rig a boom preventer.

Her good sea-keeping qualities instil a lot of confidence, which ultimately makes her a safer boat. There's a fine line between excitement and fear, and that line has been moved a long way for us. For me, the real bonus is that Anisa now enjoys the sailing more, as she feels relaxed and more confident. The penalty in lighter winds performance is a small price to pay, though with a full crew aboard her spinnaker gear would certainly liven things up.

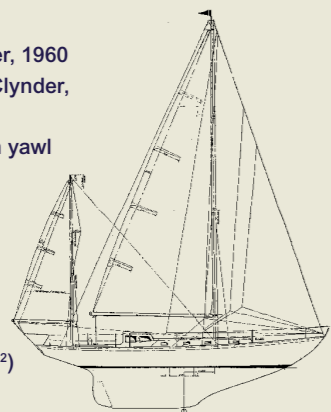
After a day's sailing, *Frenesi* never fails to create a stir as we come into port. Like most classics, her lines and appearance give her real presence. She exerts a magnetic pull on hearts and imaginations. Strangers smile and wave from the shore or water, from yachts and motor boats alike. One fellow classic owner even came searching for us at night, in his dinghy, after we passed him at anchor.

My feelings about owning *Frenesi* are easy to sum up. Whatever my mood, my spirit is lifted every time I look at her.

*"Whatever my mood my spirit is lifted everytime"*

**Frenesi of Clynder**

Designer: James McGruer, 1960  
 Builder: McGruer & Co, Clynder, Scotland, 1961  
 Rig: Masthead bermudan yawl  
 LOA: 43ft 6in (13.27m)  
 LWL: 30ft (9.15m)  
 Beam: 11ft 6in (3.5m)  
 Draught: 6ft (1.83m)  
 Displacement: 10.4 tons  
 Ballast: 4.24 tons  
 Sail Area: 880sqft (81.8m<sup>2</sup>)  
 Sail Number: GBR 1744



**Some early conclusions about my classic worries**

**Are classics a nightmare to handle at close quarters?**

No doubt about it, long keels and heavy displacement mean less manoeuvrability. So you re-learn traditional techniques, and allow more time. A swinging mooring is the best solution.

**Are they physically more demanding to sail?**

We avoided traditional working-boat style yachts for this reason, though we love gaff rig. Wooden spars are heavier, but with the right gear this shouldn't be a problem. We reef early.

**How easy will it be to sail short-handed?**

We've had no problems so far, but you need to choose a boat with the right set up. Compared to modern boats, heavy wooden yachts are more seakindly and this makes a big difference.

**How big a boat can a cruising husband and wife team manage?**

We received a lot of conflicting advice about this. *Frenesi* is as large as we would want to go for handling reasons, but we would ideally like more space. We need a boat we can sail single-handed, to avoid restricting our use of her.

**Do they need more maintenance than modern GRP yachts?**

I'm not an expert, but it seems to me that an old wooden classic is bound to need renovation work periodically that newer GRP boats clearly don't. But an older GRP boat could also have osmosis problems, or need just as much renovating of systems, teak decks, rig, etc. Whatever hull material, buying a good boat should be the focus.

**Are they fragile and do they need a lot of TLC?**

I haven't enough experience yet to really say. From what I've read, it's true that wooden boats will suffer cosmetic deterioration quickly if neglected for long.

To minimise maintenance, the wood finish can make a difference; we are experimenting with new wood coatings like Coelan.

**They're better to dream about than own, is that true?**

No way. They're much better to own, providing you are willing to take care of them.

**Will it need a lot of my time to look after?**

Yes. Even if you have work done professionally, if you're like me you'll spend hours researching things and learning about these boats. If you don't foresee enjoying this, you'll probably resent it. At times even I do.

**Will the interior be too small?**

It will be smaller for sure, for any given boat length, than on an equivalent GRP boat. Post-Second World War wooden yachts, or pilot cutter style boats with wide beam, seem to have the most

interior volume.

**Will I have to sacrifice mod cons for traditional simplicity?**

Not necessarily. We have hot water. The electronics are modernised. We don't have a shower, but it could be fitted (we are contemplating it, but we also want to keep things simple).

**I love the classics, but will my wife be able to live with one?**

My wife prefers wipe-clean GRP surfaces to wood, and likes modern comforts when sailing. We were lucky to find a sympathetically updated and renovated boat, with hot water and cosy interior. She loves sailing *Frenesi*.

**Will it be too slow in light airs?**

We don't have much experience yet. We have spinnaker gear, but short-handed we will not be using it.



Anisa finds *Frenesi* to be easy on the helm

Questions and answers by Thomas Board