

ME AND MY BOAT

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FREE

Tessa Tennant and Lou de Marco wanted a boat that allowed them to break out of the prisonhouse of the Solent. The Selene 43 has proved to be just the job

Text: Tessa Tennant and Rob Peake Photos: Tessa Tennant

A mbling home along the towpath from The Ship pub in Wandsworth one afternoon, Tessa Tennant mused: “Why don’t we buy a boat!”

“At the time I was only thinking of a small dinghy that I could conveniently store in the garage of my London flat,” she recalls. “I planned to spend a couple of thousand pounds to satisfy a desire to potter up and down the river.”

As many *MBY* readers will know to their cost, once you start looking at boats on the market, your dream craft can rapidly alter in size and price. But even so, to go from a dinghy on the river to a 43ft trawler yacht is quite a leap by anyone’s standards. They didn’t do it in one jump, but just a few years after that Thames afternoon, Tessa and partner Lou de Marco are the proud owners of a Selene 43, with many thousands of cruising miles under their belt and a season in the northern Adriatic ahead of them.

So what ever happened to the dream of pottering up and down the river in a 14-footer? “Never quite works out like that, does it?” laughs Tessa.

The couple did, in fact, enjoy some time on the Thames, not in a dinghy, exactly, but a Fairline Targa 29 – replaced a year later by a second-hand Broom 38.

“We needed the extra space for mates, for our regular river trips, but also as an unusual and very popular spare room for my Chelsea Harbour flat,” says Tessa, who at the time was running a highly successful hot-air-balloon advertising and aerial filming company.

After two years on the river, she and Lou, a former airline pilot who also flew search and rescue missions for the RAF, headed for coastal waters, where from Southampton’s Shamrock Quay they enjoyed a sociable couple of years cruising around the Solent, France, the Channel Islands and West Country.

However, Tessa says: “We began to get bored visiting the same old places, the familiar home port, and the weekend Solent traffic jams. We didn’t plan to buy a new boat so soon, but dreamed of one day owning a Nordhavn, a Grand Banks or a Fleming – the sort of boat you could comfortably live on, with seaworthy looks and a sturdy feel to it.”

Lou, then working in Wichita, Kansas, began scouring the internet for the perfect craft. It wasn’t long before a Selene 43 for sale in Nice caught his eye, and when the price was reduced he and Tessa pounced. Tessa immediately checked it out first hand and three months later they had tried, tested and bought it.



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The Selene range, which *MBY* scholars will already know is named after the goddess of the moon, is made up of 12 models from 41ft to 78ft, all trawler-style passagemakers. They are designed in Taiwan and made in China.

“The 43 was just under the 15m benchmark in marinas, making a big difference in mooring charges,” Lou says. “The two of us can easily manage her, and with a 2,000-mile range and a quiet cruising speed of eight knots, the world’s our oyster.”

Berthed in Baie des Anges, Nice, the boat was three years old but virtually unused with just 50 hours on the clock and showing some signs of neglect.

Tessa says: “To begin with it was a nightmare. A boat doesn’t like to be unused for three years and initially, everything went wrong. We replaced batteries, had problems with the stabilisers, the electrics, the loos. Just about everything threw up glitches during our first two weeks.”

It was then the couple invited their first guests for a night on board, with less-than-spectacular consequences. After a trip ashore to check out the marina shops, Tessa slipped on the boat’s steep gangplank. Lou did his best to catch her and they both crashed into the marina in front of a crowd of astonished Italian and French onlookers.

“Apart from feeling complete idiots, our pride and bodies were well bruised. We lost glasses and mobiles, and narrowly missed the concrete pontoon,” recalls Tessa. “As we were changing into dry clothes, dripping like drowned rats, Lou

Below: *High Flyer* is at home on these calm, sparkling coastal waters off Italy, but has happily dealt with Force 8s.





Left: the trawler-style Selene 43 has seaworthy looks and a sturdy feel – a great boat for liveaboards who like to follow their cruising nose. **Below:** it is also a leisure boat – Tessa and Lou enjoy having romantic dinners on board and relaxing in the Mediterranean sun.



shouted: ‘Why did we buy this ***** boat!’ I burst into tears and secretly thought the same. Not a good day.” Yet the incident did give their guests a chance to thank Tessa and Lou for going overboard to entertain them.

Once the couple had given up their jobs and the reality of their new freedom sunk in, things began to look up.

“We couldn’t quite believe what we’d done,” says Tessa. “We rechristened her *High Flyer*, a reference to both our careers, and have never looked back. She’s our floating cottage, every day is an adventure, and our lives have taken on a new dimension.”

In that first year they spent just under four months on the boat, travelling more than 2,000 glorious miles around northern Italy, Elba, Corsica (their favourite) and Sardinia.

At the end of a spectacular first season, their spirits were high as they motored into Ostia, Rome, where they’d secured a berth for the winter. Unable to raise anyone on the VHF, they found an empty pontoon and searched for the harbourmaster. Returning an hour later, they were met with a torrent of abuse and an irate Italian throwing their bowline into the water. The stern line had already been cast adrift.

“I never knew I could run so fast!” says Tessa. “We just managed to jump onto the boat and Lou started the engines, before we hit the rocks on the other side. We were on his mooring and he wasn’t happy.”

Shaken, they recounted the story to the marina office, where the staff shrugged. “‘He’s a bit crazy, but he’s Italian,’ is all they said. It would have made an interesting insurance claim,” comments Tessa.

Listening to them recounting their Med adventures is a perfect advert for the liveboard life and the usability of the Selene

So how have they taken to the cruising life?

“The highs have exceeded the lows a hundredfold, and our second year has been much easier. We’ve had no problems finding space in marinas. We’ve only been turned away once – from Santa Margarita in Italy – and that turned out to be a great result, since we ended up in the stunning Portofino Marina instead.

“It was April and there was plenty of room. We felt like millionaires eating our meal by candlelight on the bow, watching the lights come up along the famous Portofino promenade. A perfect evening.”

Other highlights have included their first night passage, when they were accompanied by dolphins in flat calm conditions, the fish soup in Gallipoli, the lobsters in Saint Florent, the Sicilian fish market in Riposto and a full moon over Ay Stephanos in Corfu. Listening to them recount their Med adventures is a perfect advert for the liveboard life, and indeed the usability of the Selene.

“She means business,” Lou says. “She handles very well and is reliable, now I have the bugs sorted out. She’s economical too – we normally cruise at a comfortable seven to eight knots on one engine. We believe that getting there should be part of the fun. Stabilisers are essential in rough conditions, which makes the Selene surprisingly comfortable in the short, steep seas of the Mediterranean.

“You get the feeling she can cope with anything. She took unexpected and unforecast Force 8 winds in the Bay of Squillace in her stride, and hardly noticed the bounce in the Strait of Bonifacio.”

Left: the 43 is just the right length overall for visiting Med marinas. **Below and middle:** *High Flyer* found some beautiful Italian ports-of-call and anchorages. **Bottom:** Tessa keeps in touch with friends via email.



Lou has rigged the mast so it can lift the tender on and off. The watermaker they installed has also paid dividends where drinking water is less abundant and has to be paid for. It can replenish the daily usage of four people in four hours' cruising, Lou says. A bimini hood, larger teak table on the boat deck and new passerelle have all made life aboard easier.

"She's easy for the two of us to handle, although having the extra help from visiting friends is always a pleasure. Her plough anchor gives us great confidence, particularly after a month of hook dropping in the Ionian. Stern-to berthing with the cockpit engine controls is generally a doddle, even in windy conditions," he says.

"One of my favourite areas is the bench seat forward of the wheelhouse, a sun trap with the Portuguese bridge to keep you dry. Sunbathing on the deck, reading on the roomy flybridge and boat deck, or snuggling down in the saloon during rough weather – she has it all," Tessa adds.

Born and bred a hardy sailor, Tessa admits: "I love being so comfortable in *High Flyer*. We even have a dishwasher and washing machine. Ice on board is a luxury I still relish. These things, plus constant hot water, an electric loo, aircon and a dry wheelhouse, make this a different boating experience."

Despite the ease of two engines, Lou says in the future they would consider a single installation with a wing engine, with a hydraulic drive to the bow and stern thrusters from the wing engine or generator. This would give them the potential for joystick handling at close quarters, together with even better economy, but retaining the safety of two independent engines and drive-trains.

We're wintering in Corfu, then heading off to Montenegro, Dubrovnik, Croatia, Venice, Greece and Turkey. And then who knows. Another six years at least!

So what now? Tessa's eyes light up: "We're wintering in Corfu's Gouvia Marina and heading off to Montenegro, then Dubrovnik in June, Croatia for the rest of the season, then Venice and back down to Greece and Turkey. And then who knows. Another six years at least!" **MBY**

GET IN TOUCH! We're always on the look out for owners with interesting boats and a story or two to tell. If you fit the bill, let us know by dropping us a line at Hugo_Andreae@ipcmedia.com

High Flyer's vital stats

Model Selene 43 Ocean Trawler
LOA 47ft 7in (14.50m)
Beam 15ft 8in (4.78m)
Displacement 25 tonnes
Engines Twin 210hp Cummins 6BT
Top speed 12 knots
Cruising speed 9 knots @ 1,800rpm
Fuel capacity 700 imp gal (3,115 litres)
Berths Two ensuite double cabins; plus pilot berth & convertible double berth in saloon
Range 2,000 miles at 7.5 knots @ 1,300rpm
Price second-hand around £305,000
Price as new from \$654,000 (with single 230hp) (approx £387,000 inc UK VAT)
Price full-spec \$800,000 (£473,300 inc UK VAT)