



# KEEP TURNING LEFT

## Dylan Winter Interview

The English journalist's web-based video documentary of his small-boat trip 'round Britain has captured the imagination of sailors all over the world.

### So why the trip around?

I am a middle aged, middle class man from middle England. I have been a sailor since I was 8 years old yet I have never been right around the island I have lived on all my life.

I thought about waiting to save up enough money to buy the right boat (obviously a well found steel 35 footer) and wait until I had enough time to do the journey properly. Then I realized that I was over 50 and could drop dead any day now, so I decided to make a start before I got too old to tolerate a small boat. I bought the *Slug* on the Isle of Wight for £2,200 and made a start doing. She needed a lot of small jobs doing to her but I decided to do them as I went. This is one of the reasons why the roller reefing is held together with glass tape and epoxy resin and why the gear shift on the inboard is controlled by a red string and a blue one. The blue is for forwards and the red for reverse—or is that the other way around?

### The quality of both your footage and narration is spectacular, is this something you've done professionally?

Thirty years a broadcast journalist—and I have spent a lot of time standing beside some really, really good cameramen who really understand light and framing, I would be too ashamed to show my stuff to any of them. They used to say that a drummer was a bloke who hung around with musicians. Well I have hung around a few of the BBC's best cameramen.

### Has seeing so much of your country from the water changed your view of it, or for that matter, the world?

You know what amazes me most about the experience so far is that I feel sorry for all those poor bastards who have to try to do the journey in a single six week sabbatical, or even one year. This country has 20,000 miles of coastline. To sail past all those wonderful estuaries and rivers without going up them to experience the wildlife, understand the geography, and learn a bit of history is a criminal waste of

time and money. If you go around too fast all you do is learn everything there is to know about the bodily functions and personal habits of your fellow crew members.

### With the endless creeks, rivers, and tidal estuaries—is there better country for small-boat exploration?

Dunno. Crinkly coastlines are wonderful but from what I have seen the American and Canadian West Coast looks pretty good. Of course it was all ours you know. The Americans annexed most of it from us and the Canadians took the rest. But I forgive the Canadians because they took it nicely—the Yanks snatched it away. Sorry that wasn't what you were asking was it?

Man I love history. I can't wait to make a start on the perfidious Scots. Blimey they have a few sins to answer for. Then there are the Irish and the Welsh. You know there is an island where 10,000 saints are buried. Barking.

### Tell us a little about your boat and why you selected her for this adventure.

I certainly did not buy her for her excessive beauty or astonishing sailing performance. She is basically a motorboat hull with a stick on it—a short stick. She is a classic four-knot shit box. As for what attracted me to the *Slug*... price, separate heads, inboard, price, sits upright on the mud—made before the French invented osmosis. Did I mention price? And she's so ugly that she'd be the last boat the thieves would ever bother breaking into.

Apart from all these merits she was designed by a Dutchman for a competition run by a socialist newspaper. The aim was to design a yacht for the working man, so she has impeccable socialist credentials.

When I was a small child the politicians were telling us that in the future energy would be too cheap to measure and that the main problem facing the working man would be a surfeit of leisure time. Duh! I am also interested in the fact that the coastal areas were once dominated by working



men—shipbuilders, dockers, fishermen. Now all those jobs have gone and the coast is a place where rich people go for R and R.

**You've said she sails like a pig, but given your priorities do you think she represents an appropriate compromise?**

All boats are a compromise—but no regrets yet. On the other hand I have not done the frightening bit around the top of Britain.

I used to own and race small keel boats 22 footers—so I know how a boat should sail. Man she is a pig—although she feels fine as long as there are no other boats around to show how slowly she goes.

**Have you ever found yourself wishing you had an even smaller boat, or has it been mostly the other way around?**

Better to sail the boat you can afford now than to dream about the boat you think you want. The view from my cockpit is as good as that from any £50,000 yacht. Just a bit closer to the water is all. The boat is not too small for one person. A trailer would be nice for bringing her home in the winter time for repairs. But then the 1 litre Polo would not pull it—so forget that idea.

As for a larger boat I look with pity on the blokes with the big boats who have to hang around in the deep water at the entrance to our estuaries unable to go very far inland. On the other hand being able to stand up even when the hatch is closed would be quite nice. A two day rain shower when holed up in port can have you feeling pretty claustrophobic—but if the weather man is predicting bad weather then I am generally not on the boat.

And there is not a boatyard in the country that can't accommodate us. I did ask one yard owner what people like him think when they see me coming up the river. "I would assume you are bloody skint, mate." That is not a bad basis from which to start a conversation about the cost of a mooring though is it?

**Any modifications or strategies you've employed that have made your cruising significantly more comfortable?**

The boat is bog standard as built—right down to the single-burner gimbaled gas ring. I love my tillerpilot and the gps means that even an innumerate buffoon can navigate successfully. Naaa—old Van derStadt knew what he was doing. While we are on the subject of the Dutch—can we have our transom back please? De Ruyter nicked it. Man that guy gave the Royal Navy a right good kicking—and in their home port as well. He brought his whole fleet right up the Medway and utterly destroyed the Royal Navy. Got to hand it to the man.

**Tell us about those cockpit stowage boxes.**

Bosum boxes. In the days of sail men were rowed ashore in port for a night of carousing. The Bosun and his crew (effectively the naval police) were charged with manning the boat and also making sure the drunken ratings got back to the ship. Sometimes this required some strong-arm tactics in getting them out of bars and brothels or even extracting them from prison or fights. Each boat had a watertight box on board containing the necessary paperwork, some cordage for restraining drunken sailors, a few knives and a pistol—mainly for summoning assistance. The box was only opened in an emergency, but if it was opened then the captain had to be informed and the Bosun had to do a lot of paperwork. I have no idea why it was called a Bosum box as opposed to a Bosun box. But that was what I was told. I can't find any mention of it on the Internet so all this may well be complete and utter nonsense—but it sounds true and that's the main thing.

The Bosum box made a handy seat and a step. My boxes make excellent containers for cockpit detritus such as binocs, beer cans and bungees. They also make wonderful seats so that I can see over the top of the cabin roof. The starboard one is the anchorage point for the tiller pilot. Basically they are a wonderful idea; I commend them to you.

**Do you think small boats are or can be more seaworthy than generally accepted?**

You know some people have been around the world in some pretty small boats. I think that as long as the helm shuts himself down below and has enough sea room to sit out the storm then small, well-built boats can survive almost anything. There is a power in the shape of an egg.

The leaflet for the Mirror offshore—which is on the website—shows a shot of them dropping the boat from a crane. No idea why that is a good idea, but I assume the modern 40-foot French Tupperware lozenge would not survive such treatment.

But generally if the wind is strong then I like to be in harbour or at home safely in bed with Mrs. Winter.

**What boat or boats you've encountered have been most interesting?**

There are some great local boats around our coasts—I love Thames barges. Its amazing that the darned things can sail at all. East Coast smacks—wonderful as well. Hilyards, Folkboats—blimey I love them all as long as they are not a 40-foot mobo with twin 500-hp Cat diesels—or whatever those crass buggers put in their ungodly gin palaces.

Why does a bloke think he should be allowed to dash around at 30 knots in a planning 40 footer—arrgh!. Most of the owners have gone prematurely bald anyway.

**Your proceeding slowly seems to be part of the magic of the videos. How much would you have missed if your trip was a race or on a set schedule?**

Absolutely everything. Not sure where the pleasure is in a long offshore passage, although I do fancy having a go at the Atlantic by myself, just to see what such an experience would do to my head. Blow it to smithereens I suspect.

**Do you have any tips for amateurs with regard to getting good footage while under sail?**

Film lots and throw 98-percent of it away; even better if you can manage to throw the last remaining 2 percent away as well.

**And we're sure a few of our readers will want to know about your gear. Can you tell us briefly?**

I started out with a £120 Canon 205, the cheapest dv camera I could find that had a microphone-in socket. That died after the first year.

Then I risked taking my proper pro Sony cameras; the big one is a Sony Z1e—cost about £3,000. But it struggles with the damp and the cold. I have also started using a small Xacti waterproof camera, which is brilliant for what it is.;

The small SD card cameras are brilliant—no moving parts. All I would say is that a big lens captures more light. If you want to get good pictures from a pin hole then go off and film pins.

**Any plans to offer a full length feature DVD of your trip? Sailing is a minority sport. Watching an ugly old man sailing**

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**Watching an ugly old man sailing an ugly old boat up a muddy river in Essex will only ever appeal to the more crazed members of society—such as your dear readers.**

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I earn my living by making and selling DVDs about trucks and farming. One of my YouTube films about trucks has had 8 million hits – YouTube pay me about \$1 per thousand—so that is worth having

The sailing films get around 5,000 hits. My wife says that to put so much effort into so much for so few means that I am the sort of fool who stands on a street corner shouting at passing traffic. You don't have to have the mathematical skills of an astro-navigator to work out that there is not much money to be made from sailing films.

Making a proper DVD that will work in the four formats currently in use around the world is really tough. In addition, I would then have to get the masters pressed—in four formats—make the artwork—print the address labels—put everything into jiffy bags—put the stamps on—say hello to the people in the post office on a daily basis—then deal with all the people in Austin Texas who send me angry e-mails saying that the dvd I sent them was the wrong format or gave them epilepsy or was the reason why their TV blew up. Its almost worth doing it for millions of truckers; not for a few hundred sailors.

**How about a book?**

I have written two already. My brother told me that they were the sort of books that once you have put them down are almost impossible to pick up again. Although I will probably write one—not least because as a journalist it then makes all my sailing into a literary endeavour and it therefore it becomes tax deductible. I hope. If any chartered accountants or people from the IRS would like to e-mail me and tell me if this is true I would love to know now rather than in five years time when I finish the journey.

One other thing: Small-boat sailors, please feel free to e-mail me, I love receiving sailing e-mails with both good and bad advice in them; I take pleasure in both sorts. Even a bad sailing e-mail is better than one from a redneck trucker or farmer who has had all his brains scrambled by too much pesticide.

Also if any of the viewers or readers want to send me pix of their boats, I am running a gallery of ktl viewers boats on the Web site—they are amazing! Dylan.winter@virgin.net

*Dylan's website: [www.keptturningleft.co.uk](http://www.keptturningleft.co.uk)*