



**Peter
Nicholls**
Yachtbuilders
Limited

Why have One!

*The FCN SEAGOING BARGE
Designed for Open Sea and Inland
Waterways*



Seagoing "Dutch barges" What you should buy and what you should avoid.

A lot of people ask us for a barge to take to sea and then cruise the European waterways and wide beam canals and rivers in the U.K.

Unfortunately most "Dutch barges" are not up to the job of going to sea. They may have the paperwork to say that they are category C for the E.C Recreational Craft Directive but they are definitely not sea boats. How so? Well for a start a Dutch Barge in Holland is referred to as a *Binnenschip*. *Binnen* is Dutch for inland or inside, *Schip* is, as you might expect, is Dutch for ship. So the Dutch have them down as inland ships which is news to some people!

If you look at the hull design of a "Dutch barge", you can soon see that the design is not meant for sea. The main drawback, among others, is that the bow section involves a plumb stem. This means that, seen from the side, the stem bar is vertical or near vertical; "plumb" in other words. Furthermore, seen in plan view (ie: from above) the bow section of the boat has pretty well the same area of cross section from the fore deck shape down to the shape at the bottom of the hull.

Both these factors make for a hull that is unsuited to sea work. Fine on inland waters and easy to build, but no use at sea.

Why is this? Well, this sort of bow section will tend to pitch (ie: the boat will try to bury it's nose) in any but the calmest seas. The Peter Nicholls FCN class of barge has a different type of bow altogether. It has a flared bow, a bow that points forward from base plate to deck when seen from the side and a bow that flares out to the side when seen from above. This is harder to build, involves pressing a cone shape to the very bow and is beyond the wit and capabilities of most other builders. These two factors in an FCN mean that the buoyancy at the bow, as the bow is flaring out to the side and to the front, is increasing tremendously as the boat tries to pitch forward and downwards when a sea is running. The result is that the pitching motion is greatly reduced. This is what you want in a seaway.



In fact, the bow of a Peter Nicholls FCN is the shape that you would expect to see on a sea boat, very much like what you would see on a coaster or a proper commercial seagoing barge. That is one reason why you must have it if you want to go to sea.

To be sure, Peter Nicholls Limited build a plumb stem barge called the Belle Etoile. We have just completed one now (March 2006) but it is for inland use only. It will have a D category RCD and will look very much the regular "Dutch Barge" But sea boat it is not. Neither are any of the other "Dutch barges" that you will, be offered elsewhere. That is not to say that in D category conditions and with a good forecast it cannot make a dash to France to avoid transport costs. Peter has in fact offered to take the boat for the customer in the future, if a sea trip to France was required. At this stage however the boat will be based in U.K. for the foreseeable future.

How will my boat handle?

Some of these barges steer reasonably in deep water, but do not do so well at slow speeds in confined situations. A Peter Nicholls FCN, which has good underwater lines, is different. Many other boats have too short a swim to the aft end, the centre of lateral resistance is in the wrong place and they continually try to crab up and need constant attention to the helm.

A Peter Nicholls FCN is a joy to handle, even for the inexperienced.

Most people have a bow thruster fitted in a barge. Very nice we are sure, and they do help to nudge the bow over when you get into a lock. **But on a Peter Nicholls FCN a bow thruster is not essential and we can prove it.**

Firstly a Peter Nicholls FCN 54 has just gone to London on the Grand Union and then onto the Thames. She has an electric bow thruster which gave out after a couple of days. The manufacturers discovered (eventually) that they had supplied the wrong fuses!. Larger fuses have been supplied and all is O.K. However in the meantime the boat



was bow thrusters-less for 3 weeks and we and, later, the Customer, had to use the boat without the bow thruster. Handling was still superb, both on the constricted Grand Union and later on the Thames. The steerer could back and fill, slow to a stop without crabbing up to let an oncoming boat through. This all without a bow thruster!!

This was repeated a couple of weeks later when another customer took his new FCN 65 sailaway down to London. The boat has the bow thruster tube fitted in case one is wanted in the future, but no bow thruster as yet. However, the boat handled superbly without one, the customer had finger tip control of this 65ft x 13ft x 30 tonne boat all the way down the canal, backing and filling with no problem at all. Then down on the Thames, with deep water under her and she got along at 8.5 knots with no deviation or wandering. Then down to the boat's permanent mooring at Poplar Dock which is not easy to get into. Lots of backing and filling as he threaded his way through tight spaces to get into the furthest part of the mooring; lots of onlookers waiting for the tell tale sign of the bowthruster grunting away. Many people were most impressed with how such a big boat got into a small space (without a bowthruster!)

The point of these two examples is not to show that with an Peter Nicholls FCN you can save money by not having a bowthruster, but to show that the FCN does not need one and handles supremely well without. This is really what you should be looking for in a heavy barge.

Where is the money spent?

Most people looking at a barge concentrate on the interior fitting out. How well that fit out will last, how well it is designed is another matter but the "Oohs" and "Aahs" that come from a nice bit of fitting out go a long way to clinch the deal. There are plenty of "Oohs" and "Aahs" on the go when a Peter Nicholls FCN is viewed and we are not saying



that is wrong. However, the real quality in the boat resides in what you cannot see. For a start, with a Peter Nicholls boat you can be confident in the features mentioned above (good handling, sea keeping etc). then in the choice of steel, the quality of the steel, the attention to detail in the grit blasting, the paint and paint plan, the neatness of the engine installation (most FCN's have an engine room you can access down a ladder and can walk round), the amount of fixed ventilation to keep the boat sweet (no pressing need for air conditioning even in France), the quality of the fitting of the services and access to same. These are just a few items to consider (there are more, sorry) before you even start looking at the joinery etc, the joinery being only just one of the features to be considered.

What about aluminium rather than steel for barge construction?

Definitely not in our opinion. The reasons against aluminium for a barge are several:

- (1) If it is corrosion you are worried about then aluminium corrodes in salt and fresh water, albeit in a different way to steel. But there is no problem with steel corrosion if the right grade of steel is used and the right build, blasting and painting techniques are used on steel. We have proved it over 33 years of steel boatbuilding.
- (2) Furthermore, aluminium can rip and tear under stress, unlike steel. Not something you want in a barge environment.

(3) Aluminium has little flexural memory. In other words dent it and it tends to stay dented, whereas steel will often flex back out to its original shape.

(4) Aluminium construction is more expensive than steel construction. If there are no advantages for a barge then why spend the money?

(5) Where aluminium comes into its own is in saving weight in the construction. For example this is important if you are building a fast planing cruiser where a considerable weight saving will allow the boat to plane and increase its speed. But hull weight is not a problem for a barge (draft is but that is a different matter) so the comparative lightness of construction is not an advantage.

Is it worth buying a sailaway?

Certainly it is if you are willing to complete the fitting out yourself or farm the work out under your supervision. But please remember that the price of a sailaway, properly built, must reflect the amount of work and materials and effort that has already gone into the boat to bring it to sailaway stage. The fitting out is actually the "easy bit"

There are savings in buying a Peter Nicholls sailaway. Best choice for a sailaway is, in our opinion, a boat that is lined and floored and ballasted with tanks, undercoat, doors, windows and hatches, engine (of course). A 65 foot FCN has just been supplied (June 2005) without wheelhouse for £165,000 plus VAT. To supply this fully fitted we would need some £230,000 to £270,000 so there is a fair bit to save. The same, but without the interior cladding and insulation would cost around £125,000 ex VAT. Materials and equipment to complete a lined sailaway would cost in the region of £20,000

A popular size is 54 ft which will still give you two double cabins and two bathrooms. A recent 54 was built for £220,000 plus VAT complete while the lined sailaway would cost around £140,000 plus VAT.

Finally let us quote from an article on buying a barge which appeared in the July 2006 edition of Blue Flag the journal of the Barge Association and written by Mr Kees Cornelissen and entitled "The Hidden Cost of Naivety". In the article Mr Cornelissen writes:

"It is a common tale of past new-build barge owners who have commissioned complete new builds where the build-time continually escalates and so do their costs-all because their chosen inexperienced builder is learning how to build their barge as he goes along. They pay for his education. The other life truth: the next build can always be constructed better... Only buy from an experienced and seasoned barge builder, it can be a lot cheaper in the end"

Well said Mr Cornelissen. At Peter Nicholls we have been building wide beam barges since 1979, have our own Peter Nicholls barge in France where we cruise her regularly. We first cruised our own Peter Nicholls barge in France in 1988. This track record and hands-on experience is vital for us as builders in meeting your practical requirements as a customer.

Ignore our experience and you may come unstuck, it is as simple as that.

October 2006

*Peter Nicholls
Yachtbuilders*



Before you buy!

If you have any queries or need any advice (whether buying a Peter Nicholls boat or not) do not hesitate to contact me before committing yourself.

For further information please contact :

Peter Nicholls Yachtbuilders Limited

BRAUNSTON MARINA TRADE CENTRE
DAVENTRY ROAD, BRAUNSTON, NORTHANTS NN11 7JH

Tel: 01788 891823 Fax: 01788 899109

www.steelboats.com

E-mail: peter@steelboats.com

