

Hayling Challenge 2024

Note: This joint entry is eligible for the Hayling Challenge Trophy. Individually, Justin is eligible for the Gunter Grail and Paul is eligible for the Allan Earl Trophy



Skipper names:	Justin Bennett, Mirror 'Red Dwarf' (Gunter Rig) Paul Pearson, Smacks Boat 'Marazan' (Balanced Lug)
Date of challenge:	Tuesday 27 August 2024
Time of HW Chi BST:	0600
LW Chi BST:	1130
Start time:	Departed from Cobnor: 0831 Arrived East Head: 0903 Departed East Head: 1050 Landed Langstone entrance (Ferry Inn): 1330 Departed Langstone entrance (Ferry Inn): 1410 Arrived Hayling Bridge: 1455 Departed Hayling Bridge: 1520 Finish Time: Cobnor Hard 1854
Finish time:	1854
Did you go Clockwise or ACW?	Clockwise
Wind strengths and directions:	Southerly or SSW F3-4
How did you pass Hayling Bridge?	Justin: Dropped gaff and rowed under Paul: Lowered mast and walked through
Was the current under Hayling Bridge with you or against?	With

Paul's report:

Completing the evergreen puzzle of the Hayling Challenge has been a long-held ambition and I was determined that 2024 was the year. After patiently waiting for suitable conditions, weighed against

commitments in the outside world, I settled on attempting the challenge on Tuesday 27th August. My neighbour in the Cobnor camping field Justin Bennett announced his wish to join me in his Mirror 'Red Dwarf'. I was delighted – this would now be a rare or possibly even unprecedented joint attempt!

We settled on a clockwise route. This enabled an easy sail to East Head and from there the chance to peruse conditions at Chichester Harbour entrance from the vantage of the dunes to decide how and when (or if) to continue. We were then rather rocked by alternate advice from seasoned Challenge campaigners proposing we go the opposite way! On the basis that there is no 'wrong way', rather the 'least worst' we pressed on with our plan.

After landing at East Head we climbed the dunes, shaded our eyes and gazed southwards. A number of yachts motor-sailing out were pitching wildly through the wind over tide above the bar. We wordlessly turned away and put the kettle on in 'Marazan's galley box. We would wait here in comfort with a brew and let the tide run itself out.

An hour and a half later we tacked through a now calm harbour entrance weaving between the two large charter boats drift fishing within the entrance. There was also an exodus of Laser dinghies heading out to race as well as yachts motor sailing out and others coming in. It made for a hectic environment as we tacked out towards the Bar Beacon marking the end of the Winner Sands. In amongst all the other vessels Chris Waite in 'Polly Wee' sailed swiftly past, on his anti-clockwise Challenge route; we grinned and waved in greeting.

'Red Dwarf's gunter rig points higher than 'Marazan's balanced lug and the Mirror's red sails remained ever ahead. Finally, I eased away westwards down Solent to find Justin hove to, calmly eating a sandwich which he coolly raised in greeting as I approached. We set of westwards together and I was grateful to him for waiting.



Outside, at sea, the water had changed colour to a dark green and we rode the long sinuous swell, thrilled by our newly extended horizons. I passed through a throng of feeding Common and Sandwich Terns, their raucous calls all around me.

At times in the swell, to each other, our dinghies appeared momentarily 'hull down'. Ashore, the waterside buildings on Hayling receded until their masses merged into a homogeneous strip above the beach reduced to a golden stripe.

I savoured the thrill of being 'outside' as I strained my eyes forward for a sign of the prominent brick tower marking the western edge of the Langstone harbour entrance. We cleared the East Winner and turned in towards the harbour entrance, before landing for coffees from the Ferryboat Inn. So surly was the service received that we vowed next time to use the Beach Café we had missed, obscured behind the bulk of the Inn. Warm sunshine sparkled on sea as we left the beach – we could have been in the Mediterranean.

Now with tide and wind on our quarter we cruised nonchalantly past the hulking concrete remains of the Mulberry Caisson and up the Langstone Channel towards the next challenge - the bridge - chatting amiably as we went.



The remains of the old railway bridge seemed to rush towards us and suddenly we were through. I gybed towards the slipway on the northern shore, startling two large Grey Mullet sufficiently to make both leap from the water in an explosion of water. One slammed, with a great thud, into the side of a nearby moored yacht - the other crashed into 'Marazan' just below the gunwale, resounding throughout the dinghy. Both disappeared below the surface again instantly.

On shore I quickly dropped the sail and then the mast. Whist I did so Justin expertly lowered his gaff and, turning, rowed backwards through the bridge with his mast clear with a couple of feet to spare. I walked 'Marazan' along the water's edge, alert for any concrete hazards, and was soon under and through the bridge, joining Justin to re-rig, relieved that this traditional impediment was behind us.

I set off again without realising I had not put the tiller back under the rope horse. Once corrected, we progressed together along the New Cut, and the wind fell away. I looked up and sniffed the air. Late afternoon would soon be upon us and the prospect of a dying wind and a foul tide was a gloomy one. It was now dead low tide and the channel was very narrow. A seal looked up from its haul out position as we went by.

As Swear Deep joined with the Emsworth Channel the wind picked up again but was now on the nose and the tide against. So started, apparently never-ending, short tacks down the Emsworth Channel. I hugged the eastern shore as closely as I dared to try and escape the worst of the tidal stream. The startling white plumage of foraging Little Egrets punctuated the nearby shoreline. Tacking for all I was worth between the withies and the shore I kept a close eye over the gunwale, looking for the bottom. I became accustomed to gauging the change in colour from blue-green to lighter beige as the sand below grew closer and shone through – a glimpse of a light coloured shell, then a clump of weed and – round we go! Again. And again. And again.

Ever in front of me, Justin was always ahead no matter how I tried. Eventually I rounded Pilsey Island after what seemed an age. Justin had rounded well before and would be, I assumed, long gone. Now the wind really was dying away, but it was a beautiful, gloriously sunny, evening and ‘Marazan’ drifted up the Chichester Channel, her drooping mainsheet dipping in the water occasionally.

But wait, what was that? A red hull and a lowered red sail came into view – Justin had waited again and I was delighted to see him. We would finish the Challenge, as we had started, together. “Fancy meeting you here!” he quipped as I joined him and we gently swept towards the Bosham Channel and the finish line, really ghosting now.

Our time was not fast by any means for we had enjoyed two generous stops en-route, true dinghy cruising style. After about ten hours exposed to the elements both of us were wind and sun blasted and exhausted; but in that good, physical, way. Our sense of combined achievement and satisfaction was palpable.

Back at the camping field Justin’s wife Karen had prepared a delicious green vegetable curry – nothing has ever tasted so good!



Report by Paul Pearson