

Boat owner Briar Jensen gives a humorous, if painful, account of sending good money after a bad motor

# Diesel

**A**NOTHER long awaited family sailing holiday and we are tied up to the service pontoon, in the pouring rain, with a broken engine. Words cannot describe my emotions — at least not printable ones. There are enough obscenities flying about the cabin anyway.

Those emanating from the engine compartment are not coming from the skipper this time, but from an irate mechanic cursing a seized bolt on an engine with extremely limited access, even for a midget, and this chap is six foot tall.

The skipper is slumped despairingly nearby anguishing over how much this latest breakdown is going to cost, in monetary terms as well as aggravation.

We had been so elated when we bought a larger yacht and progressed from an outboard motor to a diesel. That was before we struck our first engine problem ... almost immediately we took possession.

The skipper took one look at the malfunctioning diesel and realised he didn't have a clue how it worked, let alone how to fix it.

My suggestion that he do a diesel maintenance course was met with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. In fact, I could describe his reaction as blatantly hostile.

Yes, I was aware it was a weekend and that we were out on the water, so it wouldn't help our immediate predicament. I was just planning ahead, in case a similar problem should arise in the future (women's intuition).

Instead our staunchly DIY skipper thought a couple of expensive diesel maintenance books would be sufficient.



That was until he found their glossy pictures of immaculately clean engines didn't resemble the dirty, oily, obsolete model we'd inherited.

Not a weekend cruise passed without some diesel dilemma.

First it was the engine cutting out — invariably at the worst possible moment, like trying to navigate the narrow marina berths (designed for motor boats endowed with twin diesels and bow thrusters), under the scornful gaze of the wine-quaffing patrons on the balcony of the quayside restaurant.

The problem turned out to be lack of fuel to the engine. Repairs involved removal and reinstallation of the fuel tank, at great expense, but did not include the removal of diesel spilt in the

— and without it the engine would seize (in retrospect, I wish it had).

This was duly repaired following the outlay of yet more money from our rapidly dwindling account.

If it's not a drought it's a flood and sure enough next trip, due to a hole in the exhaust pipe, we pumped cooling water inside the boat instead of out. The skipper spent the 40<sup>th</sup> afternoon siphoning diesel tainted water between spitting out profanities.

My job was to keep our hot, cranky minimariners out of the skipper's way, and the scorching sun, between emptying buckets of dirty water over the side. In return the minimariners taunted us by mercilessly repeating the words the skipper had just added to their vocabulary.

In the middle of his endeavour the skipper's handheld pump broke, taking his anger to a height previously unattained (and hopefully never again reached). Altogether, it was an afternoon we would rather forget.

By this stage we felt that we'd had more than our share of problems which had all been repaired at substantial cost. We were due for a break, figuratively speaking and set off on our next long weekend cruise full of optimism.

This was short lived. On arrival at our destination we discovered we had no power. This meant no water pressure, no fridge, no lights, no radio, no Lectra/San loo.

Thanks to the mobile phone we were able to contact the emergency breakdown mechanic (whom by now we knew more intimately than we would have liked) who arrived with a boat full of batteries. Having become accustomed to our engine he rightly assumed the problem with the alternator would not be easily fixed on the water.

process. The skipper scored this thankless task.

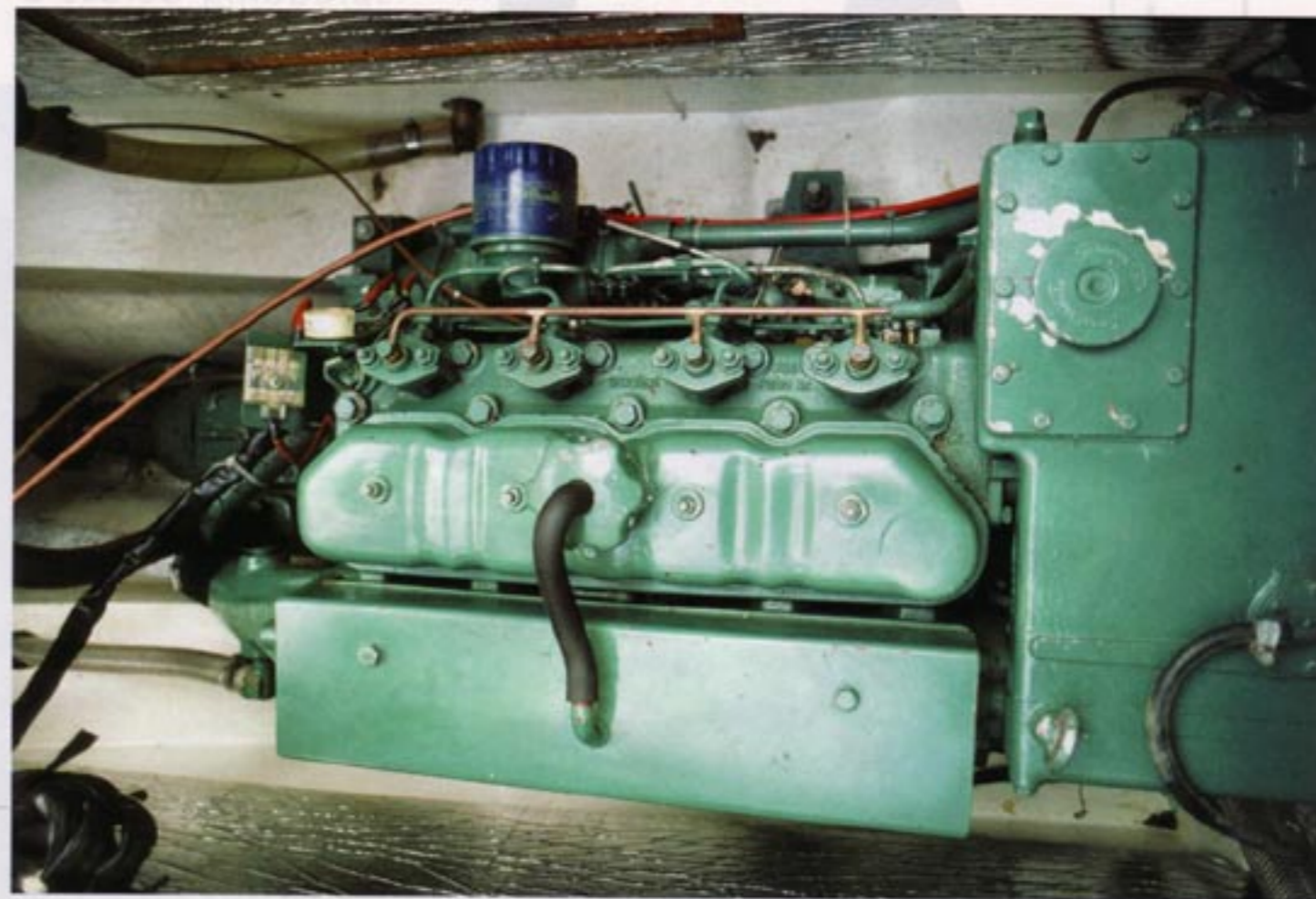
Following this lack of fuel we next found ourselves awash in fuel. Due to a hose clamp that hadn't been tightened after the fuel tank repair, diesel flowed into the engine compartment and bilge.

It was not a happy skipper who had to siphon spilt diesel yet again. (Remember we are talking about a yacht here — access to our engine compartment is for hands only, via a tiny sliding panel, while prostrate in the cramped, airless quarter berth).

Water was the cause of our next problem, or more precisely, the lack of it. The engine was not pumping cooling water



# Dilemma



Instead he brought a bank of batteries which we could use free of charge for the weekend (did I hear that right?).

Not being able to waste power moving about, we were thankful we had chosen a pleasant anchorage next to the beach, especially with the kids on board. Our only form of transport was the dinghy and — you guessed it — the outboard motor chose that precise moment to break down. But that's another story.

After spending enormous amounts of money getting the diesel engine going the #&@&#\* thing wouldn't stop! I didn't even know such a problem could occur, apparently caused by a burntout stop solenoid. We had to face the fact the whole damn diesel was burnt out.

Every time we used the motor it serenaded us with its sensor alarms; we had become so accustomed to them, we

began to worry when they didn't go off.

So, following 10 months cruising disrupted by visits from the emergency breakdown boat and being towed into marinas, we decided this continuous drain on our finances, strain on our relationship and ruined holidays, had to stop.

We decided to invest a substantial amount of money on the purchase of a brand new motor (after much anguished discussion along the lines of boat needs versus kids education).

Consequently, we unwillingly parted with a large sum of money in exchange for a new diesel engine, in the belief it would buy us uninterrupted, troublefree motoring for the next few years.

And here we are on our first cruise since its installation, having to be towed into the marina twice.

So why are we back at the service

pontoon at the mercy of this distraught mechanic? We have been asking ourselves that all morning. After cursing the engine manufacturers and blaming the person who installed it, it turns out it's not the engine after all.

It's an archaic fuel filter that has the accumulated muck of countless years. It needs replacing, but of course that model doesn't exist any more. We can have a beautiful new (expensive) model instead. Just not today. It has to be ordered in and may be here tomorrow.

That will give us plenty of time to contemplate the old saying that a boat is a bottomless money pit, while our daughter continues to tape 'Help!' messages to the windows.

It looks like the service pontoon is our home for tonight. Perhaps we should just take a permanent berth here ...