

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Belted Gremlin

First part of the trip south to Key West had been just on the overside of difficult. Cold, with intermittent good days of running. Then high winds and a doubleback low front had kept us weathered in Onset, south of Cape Cod Canal for twelve days. We'd had a one day window allowing time to get south of the front, but a bad alternator had closed that shut with a vengeance. By the time we cast loose, folks in the Onset Coffee Shop were on a first name basis.

AJ and I figured once we got into Chesapeake Bay the old "Helen J" would have a smoother time of it and we could click off some miles. Made the entrance without a hitch. A memory day. Left Cape May at first light, rode the incoming tide up Delaware Bay on an absolutely gorgeous day, hung a left on the C&C Canal and by late afternoon were tied up at Handy Point Marina on Worton Creek enjoying the company of Alice and Pepper Gilbert. Good friends, great meal of Chesapeake Crab Cakes and then upsetting the entire household taking their two young boys on a raucous hunt for ghosts by flashlight. Thought was enticing to linger perhaps through the weekend and in Pepper's company, with Alice heading off to visit her parents, attend Bob Stine's famous fall get-together at Black Dog Marina in Denton, MD. True to form the weather Gods said no. We could have just one day and that marginal at best. We left early morn. By afternoon as we passed under the Bay Bridge rain was driving in sheets. We felt our way into Knapps Narrows and Severn Marina on the eastern shore in black dusk with tide running out and a beam wind making for an interesting landing. Tie up lines resembled spaghetti before we'd sorted out. Thankfully owner Carl Grebe was still there to lend a hand.

That was it. Back to the same schedule. Look out for the good days and make the best of others. Gas canisters for the heater continued to disappear. By the time we were through the gloom of Dismal Swamp, more electrical problems in Elizabeth City, high winds of Neuse River, we finally slipped into the canals of South Carolina and the low country. Felt good. Sun was warm and we could finally pilot from the bridge. A real intracoastal waterway day. Put my feet up on the bridge console, took pen and pad in hand and started a new article for the revered 'Fishermen's Voice'. AJ was below finishing a few chores and chatting with a friend by cell phone.

"Lee," she said standing on bridge ladder with head just poking over the pilothouse roof wearing a look of questioning concern, "there's a funny odor in the salon. Perhaps you should come down."

"Okay," I replied, "Let me just finish this paragraph and I'll be down, be just a minute."

Sure felt really good. Seconds later there's a scream. Her head appears again and this time with more than concern. "Get down here quick, the engine's on fire!"

She had my attention. Bill Crowe would have to wait. Feet back on roof I pulled the throttle down, simultaneously hit neutral and kill switch, leaped for the ladder and a thought came through as I tripped down the rungs with heart banging and adrenalin in high charge. "Stay cool." AJ passed me the big fire extinguisher from cockpit locker as I took in the billows of white mist suffusing the air, closing visibility to negative one. Air was laden with the sweet odor of antifreeze. Slowly with as much calm as could be mustered I raised the main engine hatch and tried to see what was going on. Engine heat exchanger overflow was blowing green antifreeze. We were okay. No fire. AJ nervously climbed around the hatch to lower console and dropped the hook. Crossed myself for the quick set of an all chain rode and started opening windows and hatches. Took an anxious five minutes for the steam to clear. As I'd already guessed, our nemesis companion, alternator/water pump belt. Looked okay at engine check that morning but a slight out of kilter sheave that had haunted us the entire trip had worn the belt just enough to let it roll up and over then snap. Belts had been lasting three days. This one decided he'd go just two and that was the last of the "best fits".

Nothing to do but let the "beemer" cool down, refill the cooling tank and find a tie up. Finally, with turn of key, anchor up, and lazy current we idled to an absent someone's dock where with attendant bad words I rigged a new belt. "Beemer" lived. He was ready to do battle again.

Still, we eased on the next few miles to Swanboro Marina and fuel stop to find the nearest auto parts store was fifteen miles away and out of bicycle range. Luckily a local guy offered a ride. So AJ hung back, neatified the mess and I bought a half dozen new belts. With a long engine tuneup stop at Whitticar Marina in Stuart, Florida we managed to dampen the spirits of the belt gremlin. However, doggone the tenacious devil he managed to hang with us all the way back to Maine two years later. And now, with an engine overhaul completed at Pirie Marine in Ellsworth, I'm fervently hoping for his final demise.

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Other Notes:

1. I urge you one and all to go see Michael Moore's documentary movie "Sicko". See for yourself what the newspaper and magazine columnists have been saying for way too long. Understand why we are 27th in the world for health care (just above Slovenia wherever that is). Watch as he takes ill 9/11 "Heroes" to Cuba where they received 'Free to All' health care after being abandoned by our so-called system and the illustrious Giuliani.
2. Blue Cross/Anthem after an inane, loaded deck, second appeal denied my coverage for the Cyberknife prostate cancer procedure as still too experimental. Score is now 208 happy campers with no side effects and almost nonexistent PSA readings. LSW still on herbs.

3. AJ applied for a new health insurance policy. Denied. Reasons: she had had a broken ankle years ago with a metal plate installed on the repair, "Might possibly need to be removed at some time." "Possibility of acid reflux" (she'd cured it with natural baking soda and orange bitters). Ain't it great and one of the Health Ins. CEOs gets 2 mil a year salary.

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There's kind of a sneaky enjoyment trying to bring a recipe you really like to perfection and blueberry pie is one. With a few more dozen I might possibly be satisfied.

1 qt. blueberries (raked are okay)
Shy 1/2 cup water
Shy 2/3 cup natural cane sugar
2 1/2 T. flour or cornstarch

1/4 t. cinnamon
1 large T. butter
Deep dish cooked and cooled pie shell

Mix together in a saucepan 2 cups blueberries and first four ingredients. Cook until thickened. Add butter. Let cool a bit. Pour into cooked pie shell. Pour remaining berries over top, smooth out. Allow to cool. Serve with whipped cream (optional). Wicked, wicked good!

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