

Sometimes you find a company that would seem to have got the balance just right. Doesn't happen too often, but in the case of Chas Hardern Boats of Beeston Castle Wharf we might just have found it!



# When old and new merge

If you expect to find a hire fleet's offices made up of chrome and smoked glass when you visit Beeston Wharf in Cheshire, the base for the Chas Hardern Boats fleet, then you are going to be disappointed. It just isn't their style. Chas and his team have been at this location since the 1970's, but Chas himself has been involved in the inland waterways since growing up on the family farm through which the Llangollen Canal ran. As a youngster he had always been fascinated in the canals, far more than in the dairy herd they milked. At the age of 13 he took control of a trip boat (this was in the days before too many rules and

regulations). Ironically, that same boat now provides the family with a home.

Some time later, and before foot and mouth decimated the family herd and business, Chas had begun to offer camping boats for hire from the farm but when the herd was wiped out, and after the council objected to him running a hire fleet from the farm, he looked for a new location from which to work. As luck



The Chas Hardern team and, right a page from an early brochure.

**THE HARDERN LINE  
INLAND WATER HIRE FLEET**

**KEHAAR**  
4 BERTH STEEL CRUISER  
Length 23ft, Beam 6ft 11ins, Draft 1ft, 5hp. 100hp. Diesel, Vanner 6, electric start. Electric light. Color gas cooking. Fresh water. Cold storage cabinet.  
In the fore cabin are two full length berths, which by day provide comfortable seats with excellent views, and which by night can be separated by heavy curtains from the main cabin. Convenient for both cabins is a separate toilet compartment.  
In the main cabin is a dinette converting to a double berth. Opposite this is the galley, comprising a stainless steel sink with cold water tap on, a draining and working area, a color gas cooker with two rings and a grill, and good cupboard space. There is full standing room in the main cabin. All berths have generous locker space under, and are fitted with foam, vinyl-covered seats. Blankets are provided, also cushions which become pillows by shuffling their outer covers. Crochets, cutlery and cooking utensils are in the galley (see inventory). There is a good-sized rear cockpit, with seats and canvas cover.

**ETRURIA**  
4 BERTH  
Length 23ft, Beam 6ft 11ins, Draft 1ft, 5hp. 100hp. Diesel, Vanner 6, electric start. Electric light. Color gas cooking. Cold gas heating. Cold storage cabinet.  
The main cabin is fitted with two single berths with storage space under, wardrobes, drawers, and a folding table. The galley has a sink with water storage cabinet. There is also a good-sized window, so that one can still enjoy the scenery when gally-sleeping. Opposite is the toilet compartment, with chemical toilet and washbasin. The centre cockpit has seats on each side and a canvas cover. All of this is a double berth cabin with wardrobes, cupboards and drawers. All berths are fitted with DuPontite mattresses, and cushions which convert into pillows by removal of outer covers.

Both boats carry chemical toilets since flush toilets are now banned upon all pollution grounds and may cause the pollution. We provide toilet fuel and a key to the sanitary facilities for emptying toilet which the British Waterways Board have set up.

**GOLDBERRY (alias Julie Goye)**

4 - 5 berth steel narrow boat  
Length 20ft, Beam 6ft 11 inches  
Engine 100hp diesel  
Color gas cooking, electric light  
Cold fire for early or late season (Coal coal)  
Choice of water or toilet flushing  
Fridge  
At the front end is a small fore deck, covering the water tank. This, and the compass, which runs all round, and the roof, are covered with rough, non-slip material. There is a grab rail along each side to hold on to. At the back is a good sized cockpit, with choice of wheel or tiller steering. The color gas cooker has hot and, and warming spares and hammer, windscreen and the fuel for refilling the water tank are stored in various outboards. The engine is under the floor.  
Inside, the cabin is open plan to give space to sleep. But can be divided by night. There is a window giving a good view forward, and below this, a double berth which makes a good window seat by day, and by night is divided from the main cabin by the two wardrobes and a heavy curtain.  
On each side of the main cabin is a canvas which becomes a single bed by night. A camp bedding is provided for a fifth person between these. There are two lights above the double berth, and one above each corner. All beds have thick foam mattresses, and are supplied one pillow and cover and three blankets for each single berth, including the camp bed, and two pillows with cases and four blankets for the double, four doors.  
There is a fridge, a folding table, and a small coal stove.  
The galley contains a stainless steel sink with cold water and on and a draining board and hot surface. A color gas stove with two rings, grill and oven, and top of food-saver. Also crochets, cutlery and cooking utensils. We supply 2 crochets, 1 thermos, 1 crochets, 1 cover cloth.  
By the door is the toilet compartment, with chemical toilet, a toilet roll, and small washbasin.



## Hiring on the Shropshire Union Canal

would have it the wharf at Beeston became available so in the early 1970's he moved in and set up the business. The business included boat repairs as well as the small hire fleet and a gift shop, which was run by his mother and father. Some years later Chas got married and the rest, as they say, is history. Children, dogs, horses and goats followed, with the human element living on the restored boat, mentioned earlier and which was moored at the Beeston base.

### Not much change

Apart from these additions things haven't changed much since that time, and this is not a negative point. The kids have grown up, with one at university and one helping on the hire fleet. The goats have apparently gone, but other than that the biggest change is to the size of the hire fleet. The camping boats went early on but since that time they have built the business - initially - by buying, refurbishing and then selling some boats. Then they began to buy in hulls which Chas fitted out himself. In fact, this is a point they are very proud of and all of the boats are built in house. They don't build for others but do still carry out repairs and refit work but the biggest part of their business is the hire fleet. It's not the biggest fleet by any standards, but that is by choice as they feel that the seven boats they operate are enough for them to handle.

### Service is paramount

Unsurprising for such a small business, but rare in all too many businesses today, customer service is important to them and they allow enough time for each handover to be conducted thoroughly. They even allow an hour between each pair of boats as they leave. This is to avoid the "M25 on



a Friday" effect, as they put it. This is just one thing they've noticed and allowed for over the years they've been in business. They've built and equipped the boats to not only keep costs down but to also incorporate the many changes that have come about over the years. At one time TV's were looked upon as additions but now they are almost essential for most families. The result of all this effort and attention to detail is an excellent reputation ensuring that the business already had, in mid July 2009, many weeks bookings for 2010.

The latest addition to the fleet is *Strider*, a 65ft, 6 berth, semi-trad boat fitted out in house using a Price Fallows of Shrewsbury hull. Equipped with everything you'd expect from a boat of this type and age, *Strider* looks like it will provide a comfortable and spacious holiday for its occupants. The colour TV/DVD and radio are now standard and if it drops cold, diesel fired central heating has been fitted. The boat has been designated a four star boat and



The new fleet boat, *Strider* reverses into its mooring at the wharf.



The hire base is a familiar sight to regular cruisers of the Shroppe!

Very much in keeping with the spirit of the waterways this hire fleet, from its equally traditional base, is keeping things just as they are without trying to over-stretch themselves...



Strider's smart new galley.

at 65ft is the longest in the fleet. Despite all this room they have found that they get good numbers of couples booking boats that can accommodate far larger crews. They provide that bit more room will be the thinking behind it.

### Pets welcome

Although they get couples, as well as families, they also get plenty of pets as well. Being a family of animal lovers

### RESOURCES

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they are only too happy for clients to bring pets and over the years have welcomed a veritable menagerie of species. Dogs and cats are standard but a tortoise, ferret and a number of birds have also been sailing with them. The holiday-makers also come from far and wide with many coming from Norway and Scandinavia for some reason. All, however, are made very welcome.

With bookings doing OK you might expect the business to be looking to bigger things but that would risk changing what is a very traditional outlook. Very much in keeping with the spirit of the waterways this hire fleet, from its equally traditional base, is keeping things just as they are without trying to over-stretch themselves. They've done fine over the years doing what they do so why change? A philosophy we can applaud and support. In difficult and impersonal times it's good to find a bunch of people who've obviously put a lot of themselves into both their business and their boats. Long may it continue.

