

# LURKING IN THE DEPTHS!

Mac Brandrick

Things that go BOOM

Photo: Mac Brandrick



I suppose it was around Christmas time that I noticed things were amiss. Nothing serious mind you. It was just that when I was in the galley with the strip light on, opening the tap and causing the water pump to operate caused a severe dimming of the lights. OK I thought, I need a new domestic battery. No rush, just get it before the season starts, what I have is good enough to see me through the overnight stays on the boat during the winter, usually every 2/3 weeks.

*Marion of Wimborne* was staying in the marina for the duration. I like her in the water. We can take advantage of any fine days and I still reckon it's the safest place for her to be. My winterizing procedure has seen us through the recent two bad winters.

So, we plod on through the wind (remember February 12th?) and the rain (a lot of the time), and about a week before Easter I go down to the boat to de-winterize and to measure up the battery box ready to purchase the biggest battery that fits the

space.

To get to the domestic battery box, I suspect like a lot of boats, requires dismantling stuff, removing carpets etc. I had to take away the step by the port side door, remove the vacuum cleaner, and four or five pairs of shoes (owned by her indoors!), and disconnect an inverter. This allowed me to roll back the carpet to reveal a floor panel. This was put aside and then I saw it! What an unholy mess!!! No need for torches or tape measures here! The two piece box lid was out of position and unclipped at one end, and the top of the battery was in at least 10 pieces and scattered over the area!

The remains of the battery below all this carnage beggars belief and it is best if you look at the photograph. That shows it better than I could ever describe it. The side had split in two places allowing a couple of cells drain almost empty. Marks on the biggest piece of the top suggested that a cell had exploded!

I clearly needed a new battery and very fast. Luckily for me, I phoned Pat McMahon, a Killaloe based boatman and all round good mechanic, who pointed me in the direction of 'Auto Diesel', Dock Road, Limerick. This place was like an Aladdin's Cave for diesel heads! I was looked after by the manager, Danny Russell. The outcome was that my new 185Ah, deep cycle battery would be available the following morning and I left the shop with a pair of nitrile gloves and a small rubber bulb pump to extract the electrolyte before attempting to move the corpse!

And so it was. The next day, twenty minutes each way on the M7 around Limerick and I was back on board ready for battle. I disconnected the leads, donned the gloves, removed the debris and pumped out as much electrolyte as I could reach. I made a stout rope sling and hauled the battery up to the wheelhouse floor. Another good heave and it was on the doorstep, then down to the pontoon, where it became a local attraction for a couple of days.

I suppose the new battery, due to its 185Ah, was a bit pricey, but I reckon it will be worth it. It should last a while and appears to be doing a good job. Even with the water pump on, shower drain pump working, and other items running, I don't see any lights dimming thank goodness!

So what caused it? Electrolyte levels were ok in October because I checked them. Even in its bad state, there was still a circuit through it, and it still delivered 2.43 volts! Auto electricians have told me that it happens more often than we would like to know. A short circuit in a cell causes a spark and the volatile gas above the electrolyte explodes! One guy said that one exploded when he was standing next to it and it cost him a pair of overalls which were splattered with acid and duly rotted!

Could I have lost the boat? With the right (or wrong!) circumstances I guess it could happen!

So Guys and Galls, get those floorboards up, lift up the hatches. Get the torches out. Peer, poke, prod, pull. Assume nothing. Suspect everything. Check it out then check it out again. You never know what's lurking in the depths!

**Sleep easy!**

## USEFUL CONTACTS

Pat McMahon, Mechanic, and all things diesel: 061 376516, 087 2377039

Danny Russell, Auto Diesel Services Limited: 061 229222, 087 2392288

**Mac Brandrick is a member of Lough Derg Branch**

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