

# FULL STEAM AHEAD



**There are people who thought that the steam launch Orion was a figment of Niall Galway's imagination, so closely guarded a secret was she. Here, he lets us in on the reality of the unearthing, restoration and launching of his gentleman's boat**

I have a habit of rummaging about, which has landed me in trouble in the past, but thankfully led me to discover the SL Orion under some trees on the Grand Canal near Tullamore. Ever since I was a young child, I had wanted to own a steam launch, so discovering she was for sale, Derek Whelan and myself bought her. We came to a deal on the grounds that I wanted to restore the boat, but did not have all the money, and Derek wanted the boat, but did not have the time to restore her.

Orion was brought back to Dublin, together with an estate car full of assorted bits, which no-one knew anything about. The first thing we did was examine all the parts. We decided that the boiler had reached the end of its life, the engine was seized, and the reverse gear not working. We needed a new boiler and an engine rebuild, and lot of cosmetic work.

The first thing was the boiler, the internet is a great tool, because a quick search located a boiler maker in Wales. He turned out to be Glyn Lancaster Jones, a well known and respected boiler builder, who has become a good friend, and has visited several times. I visited Glyn and decided to order the boiler from him. Then I started on the engine rebuild, so out came my father's steam engineers' books, which proved to be very helpful. Even though our engine is much smaller, the principal is the same. With the engine running on compressed air (which is not good, as there is no lubrication) and going into reverse, it was time to start on the hull.

There is a brass handrail that goes around the stern of Orion, which was so

badly tarnished I thought it was made from copper pipe, so all the brass work was stripped. I am lucky enough to have a job with a bit of time on my hands, so I took the liberty and brought bits of brass with me to work. There, I was able to clean them, much to the amusement of my work colleagues, and some Dublin Bus passengers.



**We had no hand feed pump for the boiler, so we had to fill it with a watering can**

The woodwork was stripped, repaired and re-varnished. The fibreglass hull got some attention, but was in good shape and required minimal work.

Eventually, the boiler arrived from Wales, and I remember standing looking at it, wondering, what have I

## TECHNICAL JARGON

Orion is an 18ftx4ft 6in Frolic class fibreglass replica steam launch, with Aframosia woodwork. Straight stem. Counter stern. She is powered by a v-compound 1½ + 3x2" engine, giving about five knots, the boiler is a Lune Valley water tube boiler fired by propane gas, and last but not least she has a three blade 12x 18" propeller. The working pressure of the boiler is 150psi.

done? There is a lot to be said for a small diesel engine, which probably costs the same, but is easier to work with. It's not as much fun though. After deciphering all the pipe work on the boiler, engine and boat, and after a visit from our boiler builder, we eventually got it fitted and covered. There were lots of late, late nights.

Then, the day of reckoning had come, it was time for Orion to be launched for the first time in over 10 years, and light a fire in her boiler. But something else was happening, the IWAI Dublin Rally 2004 was on, and the Dublin Branch chairman was hounding me to get Orion in to the rally. I thank him now, because she could be still in the shed, so nearly finished. We also had no hand-feed pump, so we had to fill the boiler using a watering can.

The hand-feed pump has since been fitted, and for those of you that are interested in the technical bit, the pump is a hand pump from the landing gear of a 747 aeroplane.

The day before the Dublin Rally went out onto the Liffey, Orion was put in the Royal Canal, and steamed for the first time. There were a few leaks, but they were cured, and Orion steamed up the Royal Canal. She was then taken out of the water and put back in the shed, ready for the Dublin Rally. Some 12 hours later and just over an hour after the last coat of varnish was put on Orion, she was steaming across Ringsend Basin. ■

*Niall Galway is a member of the IWAI Council, the IWAI Kildare Branch and the Royal Canal Amenity Group.*



**The hand-feed pump is a hand pump from the landing gear of a 747 aeroplane**

PHOTOS: NIALL GALWAY



**Orion, with Niall Galway as skipper, was the 50th boat on the 50/50 rally**

PHOTO: MICK KINAHAN



**And the next project is....**