

50M - Venus - GCC Canal Boat - Dublin 1928

06 May 2008

Last Updated 03 December 2010

Technical Details

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Reg Number:

50M

Built By:

Vickers (Ireland) Ltd.

Year:

1928

Construction:

Riveted Steel

Length:

61' 6"

Beam:

13' 2"

Payload:

62 tons

Draft:

4' 6"

Weighed:

Killaloe 1928

Engine:

Bolinder E Type, 15 HP

Steering:

Tiller

Home Base:

Church Bay, Lough Derg

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The barge numbered 50M (formerly Grand Canal Company and CIE) was bought at the CIE auction on 8 June 1960 by Charles Tottenham, on behalf of himself and his brothers Robert, Geoffrey and Richard. The price was Â£89.5s.0d. She was christened The Venus. They enlisted the help of Jimmy Dean, a former bargee, and brought her from St James Harbour to Williamstown, Co Clare, between the 14th and 15th of June and then to Scarriff Dock. Dinny Weir, another former bargee, looked after her in Scarriff.

Conversion started with 18 tons of hand-mixed concrete poured into the hull for ballast. Over the next two years, the living accommodation was completed, often on the move. When it was complete, the Venus could sleep nine people and could take two cars on the roof. In 1971, Geoffrey, his wife Ann Louise and his son John lived on the Venus while they were waiting for their house in Whitegate, Co Clare, to be renovated. During this time, the familiar marble busts were placed on the marks at Benjamin Rock and Horse Rock. The busts were of the owners's ancestors ("Lofty" and "Charlie") and were surplus to family requirements. They were put in place on a dark and foggy night departing from and returning to Scarriff.

In 1966, the Venus was probably the last boat to be hauled onto the slip at Killaloe, and almost didn't survive the experience. It took four people "from breakfast to lunch" to winch her onto dry land. While she was there, a fire broke out in the galley. By an odd stroke of luck, Davy Columbey, the head of the Killaloe fire service, was drinking tea on board at the time. He summoned his crew, led by J Kennedy, who quickly quelled the flames.

Visitors to the Venus are always struck by the collection of Guinness advertisements from the 1960s. Many feature the old animal prints with the slogans "Guinness for Strength" and "My Goodness, My Guinness". Most are still in place, though many have faded over time. During a regatta in the 1960s, it is said that four barrels of Guinness were consumed on board the Venus. Without the proper taps, the Guinness was inclined to be "heady". This problem was overcome at the suggestion of Ken Simmons, who found that it settled nicely in a kettle or teapot before dispensing.

The Venus is one of the very few barges to have retained the old 15 HP Bolinder engine. This makes any journey quite a performance. To start the engine requires a blowlamp to be lit, and to start a large flywheel manually. The engine gives a very distinctive noise when moving, moves slowly and is very difficult to put into reverse. Since the Venus was bought a log has been dutifully kept by the owners of all family holidays and fishing expeditions. Events in the log include lifting out Dave Fogarty's tractor when it was driven by accident into the Shannon at Kilgarvan in 1961. In 1975 she assisted in the lifting of the 45M at Parkers Point.

She is still very much part of the Tottenham family but unfortunately, less time has been spent on her in recent years, so that she is in need of serious renovation. It is hoped that this will be completed in the next 1-2 years.

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[Note: serious renovation is currently taking place and we all look forward to seeing Venus once again on the water, in the not too distant future]

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