

GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008

PART 1 – The Rhine

We spent three days at the Elling boatyard at Aalst on the river Maas in Holland, where *Gemini Duo* was built. The Elling staff could not have been more helpful with our final preparations and even showed us again how some things work that we had forgotten about!

On 5th June we bade farewell to Elling and set off up the Maas, joining the Waal (Rhine) at Nijmegen the next day and entering into Germany a couple of hours later. The Rhine is the third longest but by far the busiest river in Europe. Up to a kilometre wide and flowing never less than 3 knots of current against us, and with commercial ships 250 metres long, the Rhine can be a daunting experience for a 14 metre boat. You cannot just stop where you want on the Rhine and hammer in mooring stakes like you can on the upper Thames! Your boat would be swept away immediately! Therefore it is necessary to find a proper “sportsboot haven” to spend the night.

Our first stop in Germany was at Emmerich in a smart yacht club in a gravel pit where other boaters were keen to chat, but only in German, of course. This proved to be the same at subsequent moorings as the Germans are very friendly and helpful. Somehow we seem to be coping in a language we speak very little of! Just as well, as all our river guides are in German and without them it would be almost impossible to find marinas as there are no signs for them.

The following day we arrived at Duisberg in the Ruhr valley, the most industrial part of Germany surrounded by steel works and power stations – very picturesque! We were made very welcome by the harbourmaster in what looked to be a nice quiet little backwater. At 10pm, the local youths with their girlfriends and beers turned up for a swim (it was a hot night), some dressed, others not. Fortunately the wind blew up later and it got too chilly so they got out of the water and peace descended.

Next morning after putting 300 litres of diesel in our tank, we set off for Dusseldorf and found a mooring in a wonderful marina in the regenerated “Mediahafen”. The buildings surrounding the harbour were designed by Frank Gehry, he of Bilbao Guggenheim fame, and are a real challenge to the eye as they are all at different angles but very impressive. This is all overlooked by the “Rhineturm”, from where we viewed the city from the 180 metre high revolving platform. We spent two enjoyable nights here, exploring the Altstadt and enjoying a typical German meal at the nearby Spanish tapas bar!

We moved on to Cologne which was quite a different story. The harbour is surrounded on three sides by at least ten construction sites and the marina has not been updated since it was built. The central pontoon is so rickety they have covered it in royal blue carpet so you can't see the holes in the slats and the missing bolts! This did not stop our lovely new white fenders being covered in rust and bitumen which we still can't scrub off. We enjoyed visiting the Cathedral and the Chocolate Museum (and sampling of wares) but we much prefer Dusseldorf to Cologne.

On our way up river to Oberwinter, the weather changed and the rain and wind hit us and the current picked up to 5 knots in places – using up far too much fuel. Oberwinter haven was very quiet and although in the middle of nowhere we found a

terrific local supermarket where we stocked up on supplies including local Wurst which we subsequently carried – a German delicacy!

The morning of Friday 13th June found us filling up again with another 200+ litres of diesel, paid for in cash. Few German retailers seem to take credit cards, including supermarkets, shops, most restaurants and most riverside fuel posts. We have had to hunt for ATMs which are not that easy to find in Germany.

Arriving in Koblenz we found a mooring opposite the city centre which although quiet was rather bouncy from the wash of passing commercial ships. With no sign of a harbour master, and us having to replenish our cash, we needed to get in and out of the marina's electric gate. We worked out that the boathook could be deployed from outside to reach through the bars of the gate and press the release button that was 2 metres inside. Armed with our boathook we walked through the city centre to find an ATM.

The next night was spent at St Goar at the start of the dramatic Rhine Gorge. The quiet marina is overlooked by a famous castle, the Burg Rheinfels, and the village is totally devoted to tourism. Being a Saturday afternoon we could buy as many cuckoo clocks and beer steins as we wanted, but no milk!

Another 310 litres of fuel was purchased which was needed as we battled up to 6 knot currents through the Rhine gorge where the river narrowed to just 100 metres wide. The gorge is overlooked by many castles and the passing villages with their vineyards gripping steep slopes are very pretty, but much concentration is needed to avoid rocks and huge barges and tourist boats hurtling down river round sharp bends. Once we got above the gorge, the river widened out and the current fell to the lowest we had experienced and we arrived unscathed in Mainz. The little marina near the city centre operates an honesty box for the mooring fee at a reasonable 1€ per metre per night including electricity.

We have completed 390 km of the Rhine, using around 900+ litres of diesel at an average cost of 1,57€ per litre, but we have actually travelled 702 km through the water because of the opposing current. *Gemini Duo* has coped very well with the Rhine and the Volvo Penta 435 hp engine has not been at more than half speed. We are really enjoying the spacious and comfortable living accommodation and the large galley with full size appliances just like being at home.

Apart from in Dusseldorf, we have not encountered any other foreign pleasure boats, this we were told by marina staff is due to the high cost and the amount of fuel needed to battle up the Rhine.

We have seen very many interesting sights along the way, with the sandy beaches along the Rhine providing particular diversions. "Spot the naked German" has been our eye-spy game. At the first sign of sunshine they (usually men) can be seen, often standing facing the river, sometimes even in groups! What has been more helpful along the river bank is always knowing where you are as every kilometre is marked with large boards. These facilities cost us nothing in Germany, unlike in France and England. However for boats over 15 metres long then all sort of regulations and costs befall upon you on the Rhine!

Next we are setting off up the River Main which we believe has very little current but many locks. We have had no locks on the Rhine so have some hard work ahead of us on the Main and the canal that joins it to the Danube. More later

Regards, Roger and Diane

The logo for Gemini Duo London features the word "GEMINI" in a large, bold, blue serif font. Two gold stars are positioned above the letters "I" and "N". Below "GEMINI" is the word "DUO" in a similar bold, blue serif font. At the bottom, the word "LONDON" is written in a smaller, blue, all-caps sans-serif font.

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