

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 blue serif font. At the bottom, the word "LONDON" is written in a smaller, blue, all-caps sans-serif font.

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GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008

PART 2 – The River Main and the Main-Donau Canal

16 June – 1 July 2008

After the fast moving Rhine, with between 3 and 6 knots of adverse current, it was a relief to turn off at Mainz into the gentle River Main with less than one knot of opposing flow. Just because there is little current does not mean that we travelled any further in a day, because of the many locks. There are 34 locks on the 384 km River Main all of which are 300m long by 12m wide and vary in height from 3m to 8m, none with any rising bollards. Small craft were not taken into consideration in the design of these locks which were built to service commercial traffic – huge barges – so the inset bollards are up to 30m apart. We devised a system of using one bollard for centre, fore and aft ropes moving them up the lock wall in sequence as the boat rose. Rather tiring when doing 6 in some days!

Our first stop was at Frankfurt-am-Main where we spent two nights in the central Westhafen marina, surrounded by luxury apartments with their own moorings. We had our first encounter with officialdom when two very pleasant River Police Officers moored their speedboat alongside to inspect our papers and advise us on local restaurants!

Frankfurt is the very cosmopolitan financial capital of Germany with skyscrapers towering above the old city centre. Many central streets are pedestrianised with cafes spilling out onto the pavements. We stopped for lunch in one of these establishments, to find it was an Indian-Italian restaurant where we enjoyed Pinot Grigio and pappadums followed by tandoori chicken pizza and salad. Bizarre but delicious.

Our next stop was in the marina at Asschaffenburg which is in a protected side water in a long bend in the river. The pretty town is overlooked by Schloss Johannesburg, one of the most magnificent castles we have seen in Germany.

We were grateful to find our next night's mooring in a tiny inlet at Stadtprozelten where we took up the whole guest pontoon. It was after 6pm when we arrived as we were too large to get into any of the earlier marinas we tried that afternoon. We had even considered anchoring in a gravel pit but ran aground in the entrance, so changed our minds about venturing into any more. Luckily maximum engine power in reverse pulled us off but bunged up our speed log which Roger had to free up the following morning.

Another long day saw us arrive at a small marina at Lohr where we were charged twice as much as usual as we took up all their available space along the entrance wall.

The Main is a delightful river, very similar in characteristics to the River Marne in north-east France, with forests and vineyards. However the main challenges are finding moorings for boats of our size, getting white diesel, and waiting for long periods outside locks. Most marinas are just for small sports boats up to 9 metres long. Bunker boats only sell red diesel for commercials, and the lock keepers won't empty a 300m long lock just for a pleasure boat which hasn't had to pay any fees.

We were advised that the marina at Eibelstadt is one of the few places to buy white diesel so we phoned and reserved a mooring for a couple of nights. Although the pontoon was rather short for our boat and it was very bouncy near the entrance way, it was a delightful spot in a pretty village on the wine route. It was a short taxi ride to Würzburg, a picturesque Bavarian town with the magnificent 18th century Residenz built for Prince-Bishop Schonborn, which is one of the most flamboyant baroque palaces in Germany. We walked across the Altebrücke over the Main where the day before we had been prevented from entering the lock for over an hour while thousands of yellow plastic ducks, patrolled by six river police boats, floated slowing down stream – part of the national midsummer day festivals.

Our next night was spent at a tiny marina in the weir stream above Wipfeld lock, a lovely quiet place with an honesty box in which to place the mooring fee. We took up both guest pontoons and had only just enough water under our hull to float but we were grateful for it as it had taken us until 7pm taht night to find somewhere suitable.

Our final night on the Main was spent on a free mooring. Again we had difficulty finding anywhere to stop and had been refused permission to tie up at Eltman yacht hafen as we were too heavy for their pontoon. Luckily, opposite was an old concrete landing stage where our boat fitted nicely, and a couple of locals came to chat to us.

The following day we entered the Main-Donau canal and almost immediately found a tranquil mooring in the mouth of the Regnitz river that runs through Bamberg. This historic town was unscathed by WWII and is now a World Heritage Site. A half hour stroll up the little river towpath took us past some beautiful old fishermen's cottages and into the centre of Bamberg with its magnificent cathedral, cobbled narrow streets, ancient timber-framed houses and stone bridges.

After two peaceful nights in Bamberg we continued up the canal which was conceived as long ago as the 8th century by Charlemagne to link the Rhine and the Donau (Danube). A canal was in operation by 1850 with horse-drawn barges. The present super canal was finally opened in 1992, linking the North Sea to the Black Sea, to carry barges up to 3300 tons. We entered the first of a series of 16 locks over the canal's 174km length. While these locks are only 190m long, they are very deep with 3 of them up to 25m high. According to our reference book, locks 8 to 16 have floating bollards, so we were rather taken aback when at lock No 8 with its 19.5m rise, the floating bollard system was out of commission and there were no fixed bollards on the usual left hand side either! As the lock had already started to fill we had to hastily move across to the other side to grab a fixed bollard, and then move our ropes steadily upwards. Nothing to panic about!

Boats are not allowed to stop along the banks of the canal, nor drop anchor, so our journey planning was governed by finding places to spend the night. The second night we stopped at Forchheim sports boat marina which was far too small, but luckily there was a disused passenger boat landing stage nearby where we moored up for the night. It was a bit bouncy but quiet.

It was wonderful to find a marina with large berthing for visitors on the outskirts of Nürnberg where the members were very helpful and there was again an honesty box for the mooring fee. The following day we went to visit Nürnberg, faithfully rebuilt after it was flattened in the war, and returned to find the marina deserted as everyone was watching the European football final. When Germany had won their previous

matches we knew by the cheering, hooting, whistles, etc into the small hours, so we guessed they had lost to Spain as there was total silence all round.

Our last night on the canal was spent at a delightful small marina at Berching near the summit of the canal at 406m above sea level. Three members rushed onto the pontoon to assist us in tying up and gave us lots of local information. This part of Bavaria is very picturesque with wooded hills and open landscapes, all the more apparent when the canal is often higher than the surrounding countryside.

At the last lock on the Canal we were congratulating ourselves on our achievement in reaching the Danube and looking forward to cracking a celebratory bottle of champagne that evening. The Kelheim lock gates opened but we were going nowhere as there was total silence from our engine. It was 6.30pm and we were stuck at the bottom of the 12m high lock, explaining on the VHF radio our predicament in fractured German to the very perturbed lock keeper. We, and he, envisaged us bunging up the whole lock system until we could be towed out. We ran round looking for warning lights, trip switches or other clues for engine failure. Finally, Roger noticed minute print in one of the dials on the instrument panel telling him that the boat was in gear. It was hard to tell who was more relieved when we finally motored out of the lock!

While some of the friendly locals we have met along the way have spoken English, few lock keepers do, so our German has been improving daily. Despite language constraints we have coped well and are really enjoying our slow meander through Germany. We have been struck by the displays of wild flowers, the many amazing castles and the numerous ornate churches in every town and village, many with distinctive onion domes.

Gemini Duo is very comfortable, and several people have admired her and enquired about our travels. So far, so good.

Since leaving the Rhine our fuel consumption has dropped dramatically leaving us more to spend on wine and wurst! And, even better, it's all downhill now to the Black Sea as we have the current of the Danube flowing with us.

One month after leaving home and 1025km later, we entered the Danube River. Only another 2410km to the Black Sea – more travel news to follow ...

Auf wiedersehen

Diane and Roger



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GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008

PART 3 – The River Danube, Kelheim to Vienna

1 to 14 July 2008

The Danube is broken up into 3 sections, Upper, Middle and Lower. We have completed the first 500km from Kelheim in Germany to Vienna in Austria.

We found the river very civilised being fully buoyed with every kilometre marked along the bank and numerous navigation signs and warnings. What was new to us was the blessing of having a 2 to 5 knot current flowing with us which has done wonders for our engine's fuel consumption. We were able to cruise at an average of 20 km per hour and the only delays were the locks.

There might not be many locks on the Upper Danube – 16 in 600 km – but they make up for it in size. The barges are huge here being not only very long but super wide too, and the locks, which come in pairs, are up to 264m long by 24m wide with falls of between 10 and 20m. Fortunately the deeper ones have floating bollards so once tied on you can relax while the boat descends effortlessly.

Private boats that turn up at locks are made to wait until a commercial ship comes along. The best way to make speedy progress is to follow a moderate sized barge which ensures, in most cases, that the lock gates are prepared for an immediate entry. On some occasions we have followed one barge for a whole day, becoming quite friendly with the captain and crew in the process.

Having spent the first night on the Danube in an expensive marina at Kelheim, the next day we arrived at the historic small city of Regensburg where our mooring at the sports boat haven was back up the fast flowing weir stream through the centre of town. The tricky part was negotiating the 12th century Stone Bridge. The current was very strong against us and we opted for the central arch which although narrower than the others looked like it had the deepest water. We needed full power to get under the bridge and we moored at a very nice pontoon alongside a pleasant park with great views of the old city.

Regensburg, originally the Roman's frontier on the Danube, is the largest city in Germany to be unscathed by WWII and is utterly charming. After two pleasant days of seeing the ancient sights and being visited by the boat club president (in his Jaguar XJ8) we departed with his advice of taking the wider arch on the left. We shot under the bridge into a large whirlpool and crunched the boat into the rocky river bottom and came to a dead stop at a slanting angle! After much swearing about the president's advice we realised that the front of the boat was still afloat. A man in a rubber dinghy with a small outboard motor helped to pull us off the rocks and we proceeded on our way with great relief that there seemed to be no damage to the rudder or propeller. We shall see what it has done to the hull when we lift *Gemini Duo* out of the water at the end of the year!

Finding nowhere to moor up that evening we dropped anchor behind an island where there seemed to be enough depth. Inching in slowly the depth went from 4 metres to nothing in 20 seconds and we ran aground again! Sand this time, so full power astern remedied the situation and the anchor held very satisfactorily until the morning.

We had hoped to stop in Passau, another historic town, but the quays were jam packed with huge passenger boats and there was nowhere for us to tie-up. Instead we continued on, crossing from Germany into Austria where the scenery became very alpine with hills covered in pine trees and little “Heidi” houses everywhere. The Austrians love the outdoors, especially walking, canoeing and cycling. There is a dedicated cycle path along the Danube with small ferries to transport cyclists and pedestrians from one side to the other.

We were also unable to stop in Linz having tried two sports boat havens that were both full and were pleased to find a quiet marina further down the river that was virtually empty. No locals or visitors meant we had a choice of pontoons and we never did find out why it was almost deserted.

One morning we woke to the sound of running water coming from the engine compartment of our boat! Very worrying! The needle on the water tank gauge was dropping fast. Roger quickly tracked down the source – after pulling out the washing machine, which is not easy in a narrow galley, he managed to turn off the faulty supply tap. We spent the next hour baling out nearly 100 litres of water under the engine. No bilge pump here as this area should not get wet!

Emmersdorf was the first marina we stayed in Austria that was near a town or even any shops. The harbour master called a taxi for us to cross the river to the pretty old town of Melk where we visited the hill-top golden abbey, Stift Melk, home to monks since the 11th century. The picture-postcard town has much to offer, including a supermarket where we were able to stock up on supplies for the first time in a week.

The next day on our way to Vienna we passed a square-rigged hand-built wooden sailing boat, some 6m long by 1.5m wide, with a “hen coop” for accommodation sporting the message on its sail “Regensburg to Odessa”, nearly 4000km. This seemed a rather ambitious project for a boat that only has one small sail and a 5hp outboard motor. The three Ukrainians were fine going along with the wind behind their sail but stopping proved to be a big problem as we saw when they caught up with us at the next lock. Without Roger catching their rope and quickly putting a turn round a bollard they could have careered into the closed lock gates.

In Vienna Marina we berthed alongside one of the four barges in the Dutch Barge Association trip down the Danube. We had met the members in London last year so it was nice to meet up with some of them again. We also were reunited with a Dutch couple in their Linssen Sturdy who we had met in two previous marinas. Vienna turned out to be a very social stop indeed including dinner at a local restaurant where an Austrian wedding party was being entertained by a Spanish band and a Turkish belly dancer!

There is much to see and do in Vienna with striking architecture round every corner. Apart from visiting the magnificent Hofburg imperial palace, the Stephansdom Cathedral and other historic places, our main objective was to arrange to have the engine oil and filters changed. The marina service centre was very efficient, although somewhat more expensive than anticipated – their engine oil turned out to be 58€ for a 4 litre can and we needed five of them. Liquid gold! It was in Vienna where our Vodafone broadband plug-in packed up and an expensive local IT expert could not get it going. It was only when phoning Vodafone to arrange for a replacement to be sent to us in Budapest, we discovered we had been disconnected for running up a

£70 bill! They said they had sent an email which we couldn't access as they had cut us off! Catch 22! We are back online again but unimpressed with Vodafone UK.

After 5 enjoyable days in Vienna we filled up with diesel before we departed the marina – the cheapest fuel we had come across on the trip, as the Austrian tax is lower. Whereas going up the Rhine we were using nearly 3 litres for every kilometre travelled, now going down river are using only 1 litre for nearly 2 km travelled. A 600% improvement in fuel consumption, and in our bank balance!

Germany and Austria have been delightful to cruise through with everyone being very helpful and friendly. The scenery has been varied, and spectacular in parts, with vast forests and lots of wild flowers. There are thousands of castles, cathedrals and churches, with every village and town have several places of worship. We are now entering Eastern Europe – next stop Slovakia. More to follow ...

Auf wiedersehen

Roger and Diane

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GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008

PART 4 – The River Danube, Vienna to Belgrade

14 - 29 July 2008

The first 1500 km of our journey were in Western Europe where we had managed to communicate in our limited German, spend Euros and not worry about any border controls. After Vienna we entered what was Eastern Europe and which felt very different indeed.

There are now border and customs controls, and each country has a different language, often different script too, and different currency. It made for interesting shopping when we sometimes couldn't understand the labels and often became confused with currency conversions.

A few hours cruising from Vienna we were into Slovakia, and stopped near the capital Bratislava. Here we found great hospitality and kindness. We had phoned to reserve a place in a small marina and when we turned into the backwater, the owner and his wife came out to take our ropes, tied us up and connected us to electricity without us lifting a finger. They gave us welcome drinks, set up an account, organised a taxi to go to the old city, and even lent us 1000 Slovak Koruna (c. £30) as we had no local money yet. We dined on both nights in their floating restaurant, having some of the best food and wine we have had on this trip, and they even made reservations for us in boat havens further down the river. Best of all, they wanted no money until we left. Two nights mooring, dinners and wine came to less than £100! We can highly recommend Dodo's marina in Bratislava.

The taxi ride past the old docks and ugly blocks of flats was not inspiring, but central Bratislava was a very pleasant surprise. It is very cosmopolitan cafe society where the old city centre is pedestrianised with shops and restaurants. The hill top castle is stunning but is currently closed for reconstruction, but there is much else to see and do. We visited several museums, one of which had an extensive dungeon full of medieval torture equipment and graphic pictures of how to use it. We never knew you could be sawn in half long ways from the crutch!

100km further into Slovakia Miro greeted us at his marina in Komarno opposite a ship building yard. It turned out to be a quiet spot within a 10 minute walk of an excellent supermarket where we spent the remainder of our Slovakian Koruna. We were now intent on stocking our larder and freezer at every opportunity as we had no idea what to expect further down river.

Hungary was the next country we visited, apparently with many Tesco superstores, but we never found any within walking distance of our moorings. In the historic town of Esztergom we moored up the old Danube arm which was only 30m wide with a stiff current. As Dodo from Bratislava had made a booking for us we were welcomed and tied up in the only space available. It was a great mooring because it was directly under the hill on which stood the magnificent Esztergom Basilica. We walked up the hill and admired the neo-classical interior of Hungary's largest church, and then climbed up 430 steps to reach the rickety wooden walkway on the outside of the cupula. The views of the Danube and the city are amazing as long as you don't suffer from vertigo.

That evening a rock band started playing at the open air bar opposite. It was extraordinarily loud and not very good and we feared being kept awake until the wee hours but at 9pm a huge thunderstorm brought an abrupt end to the free concert and peace descended.

Next morning the sun was shining again and we had a choice of how to leave our mooring – we could have gone a further 3 km up the narrow stream and rejoin the Danube but were concerned about depth. Instead we reversed round the end of the pontoon and swung on a stern rope secured by the harbour master, our bow narrowly missing the railings of the steps on the opposite bank. It was a manoeuvre we are unlikely to want to repeat again!

Budapest was our next stop in the large and busy Wiking Marina which is situated in an old ship yard about 5km north of the city centre. An English friend who works in Budapest came to lunch and gave us good advice on the best sights to see. It is fair to say that Budapest rivals Vienna for magnificent palaces, castles and cathedrals but has the advantage of actually being on the Danube. Old Buda and modern Pest are linked by 9 bridges, one of which is closed to traffic on summer weekends for craft and food stalls and musicians. While Budapest is exciting and safe, it suffers from a widespread graffiti problem which defaces so many buildings.

Before leaving Budapest we filled up with diesel as we had been told it would be difficult to find fuel further down the Danube. As we had travelled only 276km since our last fill-up in Vienna we knew we would not need a lot but were surprised to only take on 118 litres. This means that on the Danube we were now doing 2.3km per litre so a full 1500 litre tank will allow us to complete the rest of the river to the Black Sea.

We had planned to stop at Paks but the marina was tiny so we had a peaceful night at anchor in a nearby bay. Our final night in Hungary was at a very quiet marina up a long canal at Baja where the harbour master spoke a bit of English and was very helpful indeed. He told us about the weekly farmers market the next morning where we stocked up on fresh fruit and veg but resisted buying any of the tiny puppies or kittens on sale.

We left Hungary the next morning in pouring rain and crossed into Serbia on the left bank and Croatia on the right. We had received conflicting information about whether or not we had to exit customs at the Hungarian border of Mohacs and stop for entry formalities at the Serbian port of Bezdan. We had heard stories of people being delayed at border controls for several hours and were rather concerned about what to expect. In the event, both looked closed, there was no-where sensible to moor and it was still raining, so we proceeded on and anchored for the night on the Croatian side of the river.

It was still raining hard the next day when we motored down to Vukovar in Croatia. The town is very industrial and still has bullet riddled ruins which give it a derelict air and we didn't fancy stopping as the small marina was in the midst of it. We went on for a total of 140 km and were very tired by the time we reached the biggest marina in Serbia, at Novi Sad. A kind boater helped us squeeze between two boats and moor stern-to the pontoon where we picked up a bow rope to hold us tight, the Mediterranean way.

We were concerned about the language barrier as we had phoned the day before to book a space and could not communicate in any of the four languages we know. We had no Serbian dinars and as we didn't know where an ATM was we didn't know how we'd pay for our mooring if asked. However, we ate on board that night and slept very well.

The following morning we set off with some trepidation and were greeted at the marina gate by a man who spoke excellent English and who introduced us to the owner of the marina and restaurant. 1000 dinar (£10) a night is all he wanted for our berth including electricity and water. We wondered what the annual rate might be!

We were told that we needed to register with the local police who were 10 minutes down the road alongside the Danube. After 3 km we were in the city centre but had not found the police station. So we got some local currency from an ATM in the old town and later crossed the river on the bridge that was rebuilt following the Nato forces bombing in 1999. Our aim was to visit the Petrovaradin Fortress perched high on an enormous rocky ridge overlooking the river. It's been a fortification since pre Roman times but the present colossal stone structure was completed in the 18th century and is the best preserved baroque fortress in Europe covering 280 acres. Whilst walking up the steep and winding path, the heavens opened again and our one small umbrella did nothing to prevent us being soaked from head to foot. We even had to empty our shoes when we reached the castle, but it was well worth the effort.

What did take a lot of effort was the Serbian border procedures which we faced when we left Novi Sad the next day. We moored up on the Police pontoon and were greeted by five officers who studied our passports and ship's papers. They kept our passports and told us in very limited English that we would have to wait on our boat for the "Kapitane" who would arrive in two hours. A plain clothed man who spoke no English finally managed to explain to us that we would have to pay €30 for every hour we parked at the pontoon! We were not happy.

In the marina the previous day we had met an English-educated Serbian boater who had luckily given us his number to call in the event of any problem. After more than two hours had elapsed and we were still waiting, we phoned him and he came down to the Police pontoon and talked to the various officials. By the time he arrived the Kapitane's assistant had also turned up and taken us across the road to the cigarette smoke filled River Authority office where a Robbie Coltrane lookalike charged us €80 for a permit to travel on the Serbian part of the Danube. None of the other nine countries through which the Danube flows make a charge. Finally after much form filling and rubber stamping we emerged from the office with two pieces of paper and returned to collect our passports from the police. This had all taken four hours and thankfully our Serbian friend had negotiated the pontoon parking charge down to just €30. What a money grabbing scam!

We had booked a mooring in Belgrade for that evening but it was now 2pm and we had 90km to travel. We were so cheesed off that we were determined to reach the nice floating restaurant mooring that had been recommended to us by Dodo back in Bratislava. We finally reached the Vedonica Restaurant mooring in Belgrade at 7.30pm and were warmly welcomed by George, the owner's son, who spoke excellent English. Our stressful and frustrating day finished with a delicious fish dinner in the Vedonica with fine local wine. The meal was so good we ate in the

Vedonica again the next evening, this time dining on succulent local rump steak. George's dad treated us to a bottle of Serbian red from his village which was excellent.

The next morning George took us in his car to the fruit and veg market, the butcher, the baker and the supermarket so we could stock up. George, his father Neja and all their staff were delightful, as was everyone else we met in Belgrade and Novi Sad, but the officials are a total nightmare.

The Vedonica floating restaurant is in the Sava River where it joins the Danube and is situated directly below the Petrovaradin Fortress and within an easy stroll of the main city centre. While the outskirts of Belgrade are ugly and industrial, the city centre has many fine buildings and all the shops and conveniences you could want.

We left Belgrade refreshed and stocked with food and water, but had the further difficult prospect of the Serbian exit procedures to face. At Veliki Gradiste some 100km down river we moored up at the Police pontoon and were directed to the police station across the road where we took all our papers. Again our passports were held while we had to visit the River Kapitane in another building. He kept all our ships papers and gave us a piece of paper for the police and the customs officer to sign. Back we went to be told by the police to wait on the boat for inspection. When we returned to the boat a man appeared who demanded €50 for parking! Roger blew his top and we moved to the next mooring for commercial boats. We had only been there 10 minutes when another man appeared who wanted €25. When we refused to pay this amount he became willing to accept €10 if we didn't want a receipt. More Serbian money-grabbing scams. Twice we had to trudge back to the police station before they came to inspect the boat which they just looked at from the pontoon and then hang around for another half an hour in the police station trying to get our passports and ships papers back. Only two hours this time!

By now the Danube is a very major river indeed averaging 1 km wide with 20m of depth and travelling 2 knots and more of current. However, we have now encountered three new hazards – duck weed that clogs the engine water filter, all sorts of floating domestic rubbish, literally thousands of plastic and glass bottles, but the most serious danger to boating is fishermen's nets. Because the river is not very busy in this stretch, fishermen take the liberty of stretching their nets out well into the navigation channel. To avoid a net round your propeller, you need keen eyes and a good pair of binoculars to spot their buoys which consist of 3 plastic bottles tied together.

It was with great relief that we checked out of Serbia, but what about border controls in Romania and Bulgaria – more to follow...

Diane and Roger



GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008

PART 5 – The Lower Danube - Romania and Bulgaria

29 July to 7 August 2008

After the lengthy and costly Serbian border control bureaucracy it was with great trepidation that we entered Romania at the border post of Moldova Veche.

We moored up at a very fine pontoon alongside the police premises, and were greeted by an English speaking border police lady with magenta hair, dressed in a tight uniform with mini skirt and sporting stiletto sandals and a small automatic pistol - a "Cheeky Girl" lookalike! She escorted us to her office where our passports and ship's papers were examined and forms filled in. From there we were escorted to the River Authority and then the Customs department. Every official treated us with great courtesy and efficiency and the whole exercise took less than an hour and cost us nothing, not even to moor at the smart pontoon. The lady officer and two of her colleagues escorted us back to our boat, apparently to make an inspection but in fact they wanted to look round and see the inside of our fancy new boat. They all seemed quite overcome by Gemini Duo and the lady officer even asked if she could join us for the rest of our trip down the Danube. Roger seemed keen but Diane thought it would be a bit crowded! However, we were very impressed with the Romanian warm welcome.

The scenery along the Danube now became very dramatic with steep narrow gorges with up to 63 metres of water below us! Carved into the rock face on the Romanian side is a 40m high face of King Decebalus, an early ruler of the country. On a more modern note we were struck with the number of big houses, many still in construction, around a huge bay just after the gorges, possibly with new EU money.

One of the downsides of the lower Danube is there are very few places to moor up as marinas are virtually non-existent. As a result we spent more than a week anchored each night in quiet bays or behind islands off the main navigation channel. It is easy to find somewhere remote as this part of the Danube is very rural with densely wooded banks and only the odd small fishing community. It was good after a hot day's cruising to chuck ourselves into the river, but first ensuring we had hold of the secured rope and fender trailing behind the boat. With a 3 knot current you'd be swept away from the boat in seconds!

On three occasions while at anchor we were inspected by Frontier Police in their speed boats, once in the middle of the night when they beamed their powerful searchlight on us giving us a bit of a fright, but we were in their computers so they drove off. What did wake us on several occasions was the tremendous wash from the huge cruise ships that travel at great speed through the night causing us to nearly fall out of our bed. We learnt quickly to put anything breakable away in its place before retiring.

On 30th July we faced the first of the two "Iron Gates". These are the final two and most massive locks – 310m long by 34m wide - on the Danube which has created the enormous width of the river and the hydro-electric station which provides one third of Romanian and Serbian power. Each country has a lock which they operate in turn on a weekly basis. You need to know which side of the river to be on at least 4km away

from the locks, as they are 1.3km apart, and you must also fly the right country's courtesy flag. After four attempts on two different VHF channels we received a reply in broken English from the Serbian side which was operational that week – another dose of Serbian authority!

We had read that delays of up to 4 hours were the norm, but as it happened we went into the lock straight away behind the most enormous vessel we had seen to date – a tug pushing 9 x 1700 ton barges, all full of aggregate. In addition there were two other normal 1000 ton barges which looked quite small by comparison. We were at the back (we know our place) and tied up to a floating bollard and down we went by 15 metres. We knew the lock was 30 metres deep so were surprised when the gates opened and the push-tug moved out followed by the two other barges. We didn't hurry as the huge barges take forever to get going, but were puzzled when they all came to a halt ahead. We thought there was a problem, but then we realised they had moved forward into the next chamber for the second stage of the drop. We rushed in and tied up on the last available floating bollard, only to be shouted at by the push-tug captain. It transpired that the floating bollard we were fixed to didn't work and our boat would be left hanging in mid air unless we moved quickly. We manoeuvred sideways and tied up to the corner of one of his nine aggregate barges and had a comfortable descent for the remaining 15m. The whole locking procedure took 3 hours.

80km down river is the second Iron Gate which we tackled the following day. We had seen no other boat traffic on the river that morning so we thought we would have a long wait at the lock. 5km from the lock we radioed in English and received a reply in German. No problem as we now understand German lock talk. It was the Serbian side again and we thought we had misunderstood when he told us to enter straight into the lock. But no, the green light was on, we motored into an empty lock (same massive size as the other one), the gates closed and down we went. This only took three-quarters of an hour! Mustn't slag off Serbian lock-keepers!

Serbia was now behind us, but we gained Bulgaria on the right bank and still had Romania on the left. We had been told that the protocol is not to fly any courtesy flag until mooring up on one side or the other. We approached the first port in Bulgaria, Vidin, and tried to find a place to moor so we could register. All six pontoons were full of large commercial barges and huge passenger liners. However, the Frontier Police came out in a launch to direct us to tie up alongside a barge where a very smart English speaking policeman met and escorted us to his office. He took our passport details, directed us to the River Authority and we were done and out in the town doing our shopping within half an hour. Like Romania, the Bulgarian officials were all very pleasant and helpful and did not charge us anything.

Here the Danube varies tremendously in width from 100m wide up to 3km because the river keeps splitting around islands. Without both our paper maps and electronic chart plotter it would have been impossible to know where the navigation channels lay. Buoys are often missing or dragged out of position by strong currents and there are many hazards including giant sandbanks, shipwrecks, rocks and floating tree trunks. Birds often give clues – if they are standing in the water you know it is shallow!

Birdlife is abundant, although during this latter part of the river there are few ducks, geese or swans, but thousands of sea birds – gulls, terns, cormorants and even a colony of white European pelicans.

After a week of nightly anchorage, our fresh water tank was getting low. We stopped at places that had a big tap sign, but found that these were huge outlets with large locking valves designed for barges. No nice little tap for our garden hose! We were therefore very grateful to find a tiny, scruffy marina in a commercial harbour at Ruse, the largest Bulgarian town on the Danube. The marina owner made us very welcome, spoke good English, and showed us his visitors' book with the entry of the authors of the German Danube river guide we are using. Ruse sports numerous factory chimneys which belch smoke of various colours, including white, orange through to black, and our boat was covered in sooty smuts next morning. We didn't mind too much as we had filled up with water, done a load of washing in our machine, and had replenished our food supplies in the local market.

In Ruse we "checked out" of Bulgaria, which was a speedy and painless exercise, although with signage in Cyrillic script it took a while to find the border police office, stumbling instead into the optician's clinic where they appear to use Roman lettering on their eye test charts. We were charged just 10 Leva (€5) departure tax by a girl who was a spitting image of Janet Street-Porter and were sent on our way with a friendly bon voyage.

Now we had Romania on both banks and after another 200km+ and two more nights at anchor we reached Cernavoda at the junction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal. Construction of the canal started in 1949 and was completed in 1984. It has been estimated that up to two hundred thousand workers died during construction when more soil and rock was excavated than either the Suez or Panama canals. We had the option of continuing the remaining 300km down to the Danube Delta and entering the Black Sea at Sulina or taking the 65km shortcut along the canal to Constanta 100km further south on the Black Sea coast. Although the canal charge for a boat of our size is 420 Romanian Lei (€120), we reckoned we would save that amount on fuel costs and 4 or 5 days more travelling. Having been on rivers for over two months, we were now yearning for the sea.

Not having any information about how to book and pay for our boat passage on the canal, we were welcomed to tie up to the Harbourmaster's tugboat where the captain spoke to us in German. He radioed the lockkeeper and arranged for us to join the next morning's 6am convoy, and then drove us in his car to the town centre to find an ATM. He allowed us to stay alongside his tug for the night. Having had our dinner and a few glasses of wine, we were about to turn in when the tug captain roused us to say he had been called out on a job and we would have to go. However, he had fixed for us to move to an cruise liner pontoon half a kilometre upstream. It was very dark, and Roger had never driven the boat at night and didn't know how to turn on the back lighting on his instruments. We managed to tie up without mishap and were greeted by the resident pontoon manager and his wife who gave us some of their dinner – two river fish fried in garlic with "mamaliga", a sort of polenta. Romanians do seem to be very kind and hospitable people.

After a disturbed night we were up very early and radioed the lockkeeper at 6am to be told to report straightaway to the lock entrance where we were to travel behind two Romanian navy frigates and a huge cruise ship. We were very unimpressed with

the awful standard of steerage of the navy ships which took forever to get in and tie up even with 20 men on deck. What they need is one good woman!

Once into the canal the 12kmph speed limit was ignored and we had to race to keep up with the others. What should be a 5 ½ hour journey took just 3 ½ . When we arrived at Agigea lock at Constanta we were instructed to tie up and wait alongside the wall where the harbour master arrived in his car to collect the fee and check our details were in the computer.

By 12.30 we were out of the lock and into Constanta harbour. This is a huge port with the naval base and container and freight shipping of every description. We motored slowly round and finally found our way to the buoyed entrance and at last were out into the Black Sea.

After 3200km of rivers and canals our European inland waterway voyage is over, and we have the Black Sea to navigate to Turkey. More to follow



GEMINI
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GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008

Part 6 – The Black Sea – Constanta to Istanbul

7 - 14 August 2008

After more than two months on European inland waterways, we popped out of the busy Port of Constanta into the Black Sea and met the new experience of “waves and swell”!

We had originally planned to stay at the marina of Port Tomis, north of Constanta, but while searching on the internet we found a new marina at Eforie Nord which had all the facilities including fuel and is in the right direction for Istanbul. Ana Marina is only 8nms south and en-route a pod of dolphins welcomed us into the bay. The chart reference given on the internet was incorrect but we knew the marina belonged to the Europa Hotel. It wasn't too difficult to spot as the hotel is a huge 20 storey block overlooking the beach which, being August, was packed with holidaymakers.

By 2pm we were berthed up stern-to and for the first time used our electric gangplank to reach the quay. While we were washing the boat two Romanian Frontier Police arrived to inspect our passports and papers. The officers were charming and the formalities were completed in 10 minutes. Before leaving they made an appointment for colleagues to visit the boat an hour before our departure for the exit formalities – again a quick and easy procedure.

We had decided on a three night stop as we needed a bit of R & R and had to do passage planning, boat stocking and sitting in the sun not doing a lot. The marina has its own convenient little beach and the crystal clear and current-free sea was a joy after hanging onto a line for dear life of the back of the boat in the river Danube!

While Ana Marina is very smart with many expensive boats, and even a landing pad where we watched some rich Romanian boat owners arrive by helicopter, the town of Eforie Nord is something else. We went out to explore and were greeted by thousands of tourists in various states of undress many sporting tattoos and beer bellies. It was hard to find any food shops but there were hundreds of souvenir stalls selling blue china dolphins and stuffed toys. The beach discos seemed to thump out their music 24 hours a day but we were fortunately anaesthetised enough by the local wine to sleep through it all.

Constanta, the largest Romanian city on the Black Sea, was a taxi ride away and we felt we should take a look. However, the road traffic was terrible and the journey took longer than expected so we returned to the boat after visiting the Orthodox Cathedral and the waterfront for lunch. Like Bulgaria, it seems that the national dish of Romania is pizza!

The local weather over the past two weeks had been very changeable and we had experienced some big storms with high winds. We abandoned our plan to refuel the boat on the second day as the high winds would have made re-berthing difficult. The following morning the wind was lighter and we took on 700litres of diesel. Not bad considering we had travelled 1430km since we previously filled up in Budapest in Hungary. There was the added bonus of the price which worked out at around £1 per litre.

Our plan to depart the next day looked in jeopardy as the high winds returned during the afternoon and night, but we set our alarm for 6am to find a calm morning. Shortly after the Romanian immigration officers had visited, we set off for Varna in Bulgaria, a passage of 81nm (143km). The wind was moderate but the sea was still very

choppy. The prevailing wind on this part of the Black Sea during the summer is from the north but it was blowing from the east on our port beam, causing us to roll. However by lunchtime the wind dropped away and we were able to enjoy the spectacle of several pods of dolphins around us. In the afternoon the wind started to blow from the south, reaching Force 5, and within 20 miles of Varna waves were breaking over the front and we shut all windows and the windscreen wipers were going continuously.

Shortly after entering Bulgarian waters when we were 2 ½ miles off shore, the VHF sprung to life asking us to identify ourselves! The border Police had spotted us from their lookout on the cliffs.. Before entering Varna port we radioed the Harbour Master who directed us to the Passenger Ship terminal where we tied up and were visited by Bulgarian Immigration Officers. By this time the wind was howling, it was pouring with rain and a storm was over us. It made for interesting stern to mooring in the very tight space available in the nearby marina. Although the space was for a much smaller boat, we really had to have it and were very relieved when we were safely berthed with the help of other boaters before the thunder and lightning hit.

The storm passed over and the next day dawned sunny and calm and we made our way to the chandlery for some local charts. They were very helpful and even arranged for one of their staff to drive us to the big supermarket in town where we stocked up with more excellent Bulgarian wine and food.

We made all our preparations to set off early the next morning having booked the Immigration Police for 7.15am. They were a bit late and were accompanied by a greasy little man with wrap-round sunglasses and slicked back hair who said he worked for the Port Authority. The Police finished quickly and departed but the grease-ball stayed behind to demand €93 for “administration services” and mooring charge. We had already paid the mooring charge the day before and were at a loss to know what the other charges were for. It turned out he was an agent who was trying it on. When we produced the business card of the man who owned the marina, the charges fell to zero and he said we could leave straightaway! We had read that Varna was a good place for comen!

The next leg to Igneada in Turkey was again virtually due south and the winds were very light, the sea was calm and it was a very good but long day at sea, taking 9 hours to do 92nm (162km). We could go much faster but it would use too much fuel! At one stage we were 40 miles from the coast crossing Burgas Bay and we saw hardly any shipping all day.

We knew that Igneada is not an official Port of Entry into Turkey, but there was no alternative unless we drove on through the night. We entered this fishing harbour and were waved at by several uniformed Coast Guards to tie up to their quay behind their gun boat. We were a bit non-plussed when these young men who spoke no English signed to us that we couldn't stay the night. While we were wondering what to do a charming English-speaking officer arrived and told us that officially we couldn't stay. After looking at our passports he said that as long as we didn't step onto Turkish soil, we could stay the night. We had a very secure berth next to the armed coast guards!

The next morning we left early on the final leg of the Black Sea to the entrance of the Bosphorus. After an hour the wind got up to Force 5, again with wind and waves on our port beam and we had an uncomfortable 70nm (123km) journey. We had seen no ships en route so were surprised when 10nms from the Bosphorus the Black Sea turned into a giant shipping parking lot! There must have been over 100 vast ships at anchor waiting to take their turn to travel south down the Bosphorus. Entry to the

Bosphorus is managed by the Turkeli Control tower on VHF Channel 11 who had many irate conversations in fractured English with ship's captains from all over the world who were trying to jump the queue or enter from the wrong direction or too fast. We were amused by the English in a wide variety of foreign accents. How they understood one another is a mystery.

Our boat, being tiny and insignificant, was completely ignored by the controller and we crept round the parked vessels and the rocky corner and went into the harbour of Turkeli Feneri. It was packed with fishing boats, none of which Diane fancied mooring to, but Roger had noticed an old scruffy private 50ft motor boat to which we tied up for the night. It wasn't the most scenic place to stop in front of the abandoned Shellfish plant, and the harbour was noisy and oily, but in the event we had a very quiet undisturbed night.

The next morning, sunny and calm, we just had the final 20nm (32km) to do southwards down the Bosphorus. As soon as we set off we realised that all the big ships were coming up towards us, and we assume they operate a one-way system as nothing big was going in the same direction as us. At its narrowest point the channel is only ½ mile wide but up to 85m deep with vast ships appearing around some pretty tight bends. It was a real pleasure to pass under the two huge suspension bridges which span the Bosphorus and to see the many famous sights of Topkapi, Aya Sophia and the Blue Mosque from our own boat. Istanbul certainly ranks alongside Paris and London for dramatic views from the water. The two main hazards to watch out for are the numerous high powered catamaran ferries whizzing past creating big wash and the width restriction at the southern end of the Bosphorus where vast floating cranes are moored. A tunnel is being built for the Metro line.

This final leg only took 2 ½ hours and by 11am we were berthed at Atakoy Marina on the European side of Istanbul 6 miles west of the entrance to the Bosphorus. The marina, which is very large and accommodates boats up to 40m, has all facilities. You are met by staff in an inflatable and led to a berth where they tie you up. Excellent welcome and service, but then this is an expensive place as we found when we paid for our year-long berth.

We cracked open a bottle of champagne for lunch and went out in the evening for dinner to celebrate the successful completion of our long voyage from Holland to Turkey. We toasted *Gemini Duo* who had done amazingly well for her maiden voyage. She is a very comfortable live-aboard being spacious and well-equipped. The engine had not missed a beat, had used just a cup-full of oil and had been very frugal on fuel. The navigation system had proved invaluable and everything on the boat had worked with the exception of the air conditioning. This we hope to get sorted before next year as Turkey is very hot in the summer.

After 10 weeks, travelling more than 3500 km through ten countries, we have reached the end of our journey in Istanbul. *Gemini Duo* will be left at Atakoy Marina for the winter and we will continue our cruise round the Sea of Marmara and out into the Aegean next year.

SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

Gemini Duo

Built by Neptune Marine in Aalst in Holland. Launched in November 2007.

Dimensions: 13.8m long, 4.25m wide, draught 1.2m, airdraft 3.5m. Weight 16 tons gross.

Capacities: Fuel tank 1500 litres, fresh water tank 800 litres, black water tank 150 litres.

Fuel used on voyage – over 3300 litres of diesel, a quarter of which was used in the first 470 km going against the strong current on the Rhine!

Cozens' Voyage

Departed UK on 1st June 2008 (by car). Left Aalst in *Gemini Duo* on 5th June. Arrived in Istanbul on 14th August.

Travelled 3673 km on rivers Maas, Rhine, Main, the Main-Danube Canal, the Danube River, the Danube-Black Sea Canal, the Black Sea, the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara, through Holland, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria to Turkey. In the process went through 72 locks, the biggest being the Danube's Iron Gates at 310mx34m by 30m drop.

Highlights: travelling in our boat through some of the great cities of the world, as well as gorges, ravines, wide open spaces and seeing the stars at night. Meeting interesting people and receiving amazing kindness, hospitality and help from strangers.

Lowlights: Serbian border controls (although the Serbs are really nice people) and running aground on rocks in Regensburg.

We've said enough, so over and out!

Diane and Roger

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 blue serif font. At the bottom, the word "LONDON" is written in a smaller, blue, all-caps sans-serif font.

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