



# Bon VOYAGE

In just 18 months, Marcus Rowden and Freya Hart took their dream of building an ocean-going charter lugger from rough lines to reality. Meet the magnificent *Grayhound*

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS **NIGEL SHARP**

In May 2010, Marcus Rowden and Freya Hart met up, almost by chance, in the Azores. They had both sailed there – he, singlehanded, in his 32ft (9.8m) lugger *Veracity* and she in her 33ft (10m) steel double-ender. Although they had first met six years earlier when they both worked for the Trinity Sailing training foundation in Devon, it was during that Azores encounter that they fell for each other, much to their surprise, and within what seems like an incredibly short time decided to build a boat and have a baby.

During the course of subsequent discussions, they agreed that the boat would have to earn a living, and that they would take adventure sailors – “people who want to go on holiday but not lie on a beach” – on worldwide traditional sailing voyages. “It would basically be a week in the life of Marcus and Freya and we believe that our life at sea and our way of travelling is a good way, and we felt that people would enjoy that too,” explained Freya. “It would be completely pointless to build a boat without a purpose,” added Marcus.

About 10 years earlier, Paul Greenwood – organiser of the Looe Lugger Regatta and the “ultimate lugger man” according to Freya – had planted the idea of building a replica of a 1776 revenue lugger called *Grayhound* in Marcus’s mind. The original boat was built by John F Parkin on the beach at Cawsand, in Cornwall, and her role called for speed to give her the best chance to catch smugglers, whose own boats needed the same qualities. In fact Parkin’s reputation for producing fast boats allowed him to attract orders from both parties: poacher and gamekeeper, you might say.

As soon as Marcus and Freya got back to the UK, they met up with Chris Rees, who had built the lugger *Spirit of Mystery* for Pete Goss a few years earlier,





**Previous page:** *Grayhound* cuts a fine sight on the sea with her sails up. **Above:** the build process extended to the on-deck tender, which is clinker-built

and who now had Paul Greenwood's *Grayhound* drawings. Chris was keen to help Marcus and Freya build the boat, and there was a shed big enough at Southdown Quay in Millbrook, East Cornwall, close to Cawsand.

The original *Grayhound* had a hull length of 73ft (22.3m) but at an early stage of discussions it was decided that a boat of that size would be too ambitious, mainly from the point of view of the manpower to build and sail her, but also bearing in mind the potential difficulties of complying with MCA Category Zero regulations. This would be required to allow them to cross oceans with paying guests on board – an essential part of their plan not to be restricted by the time constraints of the British summer. So it was decided to build a 5/6th-scale version, but with about 18in (0.45m) more freeboard to give decent headroom below decks. So Chris redrew the lines accordingly.

Work began in earnest when, at the end of 2010, Marcus felled half a dozen oak trees in his mother's field in the Teign Valley. "Cutting those trees down was epic for us so it was a nice start to our journey," said Freya. All the other timber used came from various parts of the UK: around 30 other oak trees – mostly used for the frames – came from a forest near Launceston, in Cornwall; two 45ft (13.7m) lengths of greenheart, which had been part of a ferry slipway at the old Philip and Son

shipyard (now Noss Marina on the River Dart where Marcus used to work) were generously donated, and were used for the keel, deadwoods, rudder, rubbing strake and floors. More timber came from boatbuilder and CB friend Ashley Butler, who had acquired a hectare of larch from the Forest of Dean to replank the Brixham trawler *Pilgrim* but found that he had much more than he needed, and the excess proved to be just right for *Grayhound*; the opepe timber for the stem, pilot houses, decking, covering boards, bulwark stanchions and capping rail was transported down from Hull; Marcus went to Haldon Forest near Exeter to personally select the Douglas fir trees for the spars, and an additional 20 trees were used for the bulwarks, deck beams and bulkhead cladding.

While Marcus was casting the 10-ton lead keel, Freya was heavily pregnant, but by August 2011 when the wooden keel was laid – parallel to the ground, which meant the boat would be built at an angle of five degrees – she had given birth to their son Malachi.

Work on the boat then continued at an extraordinary pace, but it needed to as they had already decided she would be launched just a year later. By September the frames were up and the shipwrights began to fasten the planks to them with oak trenails. Marcus was keen to use this traditional process to "keep the skill alive"

## “Marcus felled half a dozen oak trees in his mother’s field”

and because it “fitted with our ethos and our whole way of thinking”. He expects they will have a longer life expectancy than metal fastenings, which can so easily cause “nail sickness” in the surrounding timber. By February the planking was complete.

Marcus managed the whole project along with Chris who was also the lead shipwright in a growing team, which included 12 others in the latter stages, plus three students from the Douarnenez boatbuilding school in France who did work placements on the project for a couple of months. Marcus also did a great deal of the engineering and metalwork himself, including fabricating the chainplates, for instance.

The project was financed in a variety of ways. For instance, Freya sold her great-grandfather’s house, which had been passed down to her; 2,000 people paid £5 to sponsor a trenail and write their name or a message on them; money started coming in at a surprisingly early stage from voyage bookings, which are being handled by Classic Sailing – including one from a family of eight who, in May 2012, signed up for a trip to the Scillies 15 months later; and on three separate occasions – two open days and on the evening of the launch – hundreds of people, many of them locals who were clearly captivated by the project, enjoyed bands and licensed bars specially laid on for the events.

In fact, an astonishing 2,500 people attended *Grayhound’s* launch, which took place, as planned, on Saturday, 4 August 2012. For a time it seemed as though

the tide might not make enough to float her, but the strenuous efforts of Marcus and others persuaded her that it was her time, and at last she was gently towed into the middle of the river in the evening sunshine. Although a great many people will remember that day as the “Super Saturday” when British Olympians excelled, those of us who were in Millbrook that evening had something extra to savour.

But the boat still had to be finished and in many ways Marcus and Freya found those last few winter months the most difficult of the whole project, not least because they were living on board while completing the fit-out of the interior of the boat. Furthermore, although *Grayhound’s* MCA compliance had been planned right from the start – her theoretical stability (now proved in practice) was established before any timber was cut, for instance, and she has four separate compartments with watertight doors and bulkheads between them – towards the end the attention to the detail that was needed to get the certificate proved particularly time consuming.

However, Marcus, Freya and Malachi eventually welcomed their first guests aboard, on schedule, on 3 May 2013. Rather poignantly, 237 years after the original revenue lugger was launched there, they chose Cawsand as the starting point for this maiden voyage.

### TIME TO TEST HER ON THE WATER

Later that month, I had the opportunity to sail on *Grayhound* myself. I joined her at Plymouth’s Mayflower

Clockwise from right: Marcus, Malachi and Freya; enjoying a sailing trip; the generously appointed galley; the beautifully finished oak table dressed for dinner



“It would be pointless to build a boat without a purpose”

Marina where she presented a sharp contrast to the rows of bright white and newly launched Princess motor yachts undergoing basin trials.

Marcus, Freya and mate Matthew made the six guests (two of whom were small children who would provide good company for Malachi throughout our day’s sail) and myself feel welcome with coffee, biscuits and a friendly briefing, in which Marcus made it clear that we could all join in with the sailing processes “as much or as little as we wanted to”. As it turned out we all did so enthusiastically, although it would probably be unusual for anyone to sign up to sail on such a boat if they didn’t want to play an active part.

When I had previously met Marcus during the course of *Grayhound’s* build, I asked him about the boat’s likely handling characteristics with her long keel and offset propeller. “She’ll do what she does and I’ll work that out and make that my advantage every time,” he told me.

He also talked about his passion for traditional boat handling, and that he preferred not to use an engine whenever possible. “I use sails to manoeuvre, I use warps to manoeuvre, I use anchors to manoeuvre,” said Marcus. “The engine is for a flat calm, for getting into a harbour instead of sitting outside looking at it. I very much like traditional stuff. If there is a quay that needs warping out of, then that’s what we’ll do.”

However, on this occasion, with a new crew on board, he chose to motor off so we could get going quickly, and we didn’t waste any time hoisting the sails,

doing so in the best order to encourage the boat to stay head to wind: mizzen, main and then the fore-lug. Six of us worked together to hoist the main and the fore-lug – three on each of the halyards. Whereas all lugsails have a halyard attached to the yard at its nearest point to the mast (known as the tackle, but pronounced ‘take all’), on a rig of this size a peak halyard is also needed to support the outboard end of the yard, whereas on a smaller boat the tension in the luff is enough to do this.

We broad-reached in the northerly wind towards Drake’s Island and got ready for our first manoeuvre – a gybe around the eastern end of it. There wasn’t really much to it: although the two aft sails needed their sheets pulled in a bit, just as boomed sails would, the mizzen is mostly aft of the transom and so out of harm’s way, and besides, there wasn’t any great danger from the loose foot of the main. There was quite a bit more to do with the fore-lug, however, because the mainmast forestay is in its way. But by pulling on the brailing line, which is attached to the clew and goes to the top of the foremast and down again, the sail can easily pass forward of the stay, and then the sheet tackle can be connected and tensioned on the new leeward side while the old one is released.

We sailed past the breakwater and headed towards Rame Head before coming onto a beam reach in the direction of Fowey. We then hoisted a jib and found ourselves easily reaching speeds of over eight knots in the building breeze. Marcus offered me the tiller, which has



*Clockwise from top left: cabins and companionway stairs take shape; the view forward along the port sidedeck; chainplates for the mainmast; as the build process nears fruition, the true scale of the project comes to the fore*



a four-to-one tackle connecting it to an eye on the windward side of the deck, but for most of the time her directional stability was so true and predictable that the fall of the tackle lay slack in my hand. Marcus is delighted with how well balanced she is, but thinks that the fact that no real tuning was needed to attain this is probably mostly down to luck.

*Grayhound's* rig is essentially a standing lug: that is to say that each sail's yard, luff and tack are always on one side of its mast: it so happens that her mizzen and main are on the starboard side and the fore is to port. However, while we were sailing on the starboard tack, we took the opportunity to convert the fore-lug to give some of the characteristics of a dipping lug by unstowing a section of sailcloth in the luff to reveal a new tack, which we connected to a scud hook forward of the stem. We had to revert to the normal tack position just forward of the mast when we tacked on to port to sail back past Plymouth Sound towards the Yealm. However, the whole sail and yard can be moved to the starboard side immediately before any future voyage, which is expected to provide predominantly port tack sailing. *Grayhound* also has two topsails – we could have put them up that day but, as Marcus explained, we didn't need to in that breeze – three other jibs and a staysail, and there is a mizzen staysail on order.

During the sail I chatted to Paul and Emma, the parents of the children being entertained by Malachi, who had recently bought *Spirit of Mystery* from Pete Goss. They have extensive sailing experience having worked on superyachts for many years but, by their own admission, they have done very little lugger sailing, and they were there to learn. They were in the process of refitting *Spirit's* interior to suit their family needs before setting off on worldwide voyages of their own.

At lunchtime Freya served up an excellent lasagne, salad and garlic bread, which we all enjoyed while sheltering from the cool wind in the light and airy pilot house that's accessible from the deck through a wide companionway. At the forward end of the pilot house, steps lead down to the large, well-equipped galley and the rest of the accommodation. Opposite the galley is a pilot berth that Marcus uses at sea and also a settee, close to a wood-burning stove, which came from Freya's uncle's farmyard. Aft of here and either side of the engine room, Marcus and Freya's small cabin is to starboard and Malachi's is to port.

Moving forward, there are berths for 10 people in various configurations in the saloon and forward cabin, although there are no plans to take any more than eight guests on overnight voyages. The forward cabin also has a heads and a separate shower, while the saloon has a

**Above: *Grayhound* in build: once fully framed up in oak, she was planked in larch and fastened with oak trenails**



*Clockwise from top left: top of the rudder stock with embossed heart motif - a design theme throughout the boat; launch day celebrations; stove chimney with heart-shaped mounting bracket; Grayhound feels the water beneath her keel for the first time*

magnificent centrepiece in the shape of an oak table around which 17 people – the most they can take to sea on day trips – can all sit and dine together.

The 90hp Beta diesel engine is, by Marcus's admission, small for a boat of this size but he emphasises that *Grayhound* is first and foremost a sailing boat, and the engine is primarily needed to ensure that guests are picked up and dropped off as scheduled. There is no gas on board as the decision was made early on – for safety reasons and because of the difficulty of carrying enough of it for long ocean voyages – to have a mains electric cooker powered by a generator. There are two 800-litre, custom-made fuel tanks, one dedicated to the engine and the other to the generator. There is also a Penguin keel-cooled fridge and freezer in the galley.

After we got back to the marina, Marcus and Freya told us about their future plans in more detail. Throughout the summer they will be sailing in the West Country and Brittany, with a combination of day sails, weekend trips and week-long voyages. In September they plan to go farther afield and will set off for the Cape Verde Islands via Spain, Portugal, Madeira and the Canary Islands; New Year's Day will see them in the middle of the Atlantic on their way to Barbados, and from there they will explore other parts of the Caribbean; and at the end of April they will set off back to the UK via the Azores. "That itinerary will continue for a few years," said Freya, "until we get our feet

grounded in the industry and get a reputation for being a great boat to come sailing on." In the long term they hope to go to the west coast of Canada, probably via the Panama Canal or through the Northwest Passage.

Freya is a passionate cook and is really keen to get the best out of whatever food is available wherever *Grayhound* goes. "We will eat culturally wherever we are," she told me. "My kind of passion is cooking the local food, making the most out of every country's produce and stocking the boat up so we have lots of nice things all around. That's what I love about travelling and about sailing, that you can really live in these places."

Two more crew members are due to join *Grayhound* soon: a helper to assist Freya with domestic issues and looking after Malachi, and a trainee deckhand.

From a very early stage of this project, Marcus was keen to use it to pass on his skills and knowledge in sailing traditional boats. He is now putting this into effect with plans to have one or two trainees on board at all times, each of them for around a year. This will give them the opportunity to sail around 15,000 miles, learn a variety of skills such as sailing in and out of anchorages and astronavigation, and gain a meaningful Yachtmaster qualification, rather than the "zero to hero in six weeks" method practised elsewhere".

Marcus was also keen to try to introduce some sort of specialist formal qualification as part of the training, which he felt was particularly relevant considering the recent growth in traditional boat sailing, and he found welcome support for this from Tom Cunliffe who unexpectedly called into the shed during the course of *Grayhound's* build. However, for the moment it would seem that Marcus's initial enthusiasm for this has met with too many difficulties but he may well revisit the issue at a later date.

Marcus and Freya's enthusiasm for *Grayhound's* future remains undimmed though, and there seems no doubt that this will be shared with many future voyage guests. "As a business venture we are trying to offer something different and fresh," said Freya. "And we know what it's like to finish a voyage where you've had fresh fish, sunshine, starry nights, sunsets, sunrises, good food, homemade bread, and a fresh, saltwater cold shower every day, and you get to the end and you feel like a million dollars." We know the feeling. 



## GRAYHOUND

LOD  
63ft 6in (19.4m)

LOS  
108ft (32.9m)

BEAM  
19ft 5in (5.9m)

DRAUGHT  
10ft 9in (3.3m)

DISPLACEMENT  
49.5tons

SAIL AREA  
3,500qft (325m<sup>2</sup>)

[www.grayhoundluggersailing.com/](http://www.grayhoundluggersailing.com/)  
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