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 DAILY STAR

GO FOR

Edited by VICKY LISSAMAN

Narrow



FLOW SHOW:
 Watch the world go by as you travel through stunning scenery

CRUISE DOWN THE 'SLOW LANE' WILL FLOAT YOUR BOAT

IMPACT was imminent. My narrowboat was on a collision course with the bridge ahead.

Images from war films, where sailors hurled themselves into the sea before a massive fireball, flashed before my eyes.

I fought to control the rising panic and the urge to spoil my new trousers as I tried to recall what Keith, the engineer, had told us at our morning briefing on how to steer the vessel.

My mind was blanker than Gordon Brown's expression.

And then, in a moment of unexpected calm, Keith's words returned to me: "Point the tiller at what you want to avoid."

Calm

As words of wisdom go, to me it's up there with: "Feel the force, Luke."

I pointed the tiller at the solid brick bridge and watched the bow gradually edge away from disaster and through the narrow span to safety.

With normality restored I returned to soak up my surroundings.

We were aboard Chanelle, a 50ft narrowboat, and had just set off along the Oxford Canal from Stretton-under-Fosse in Rugby, Warwickshire, for a long weekend.

Painted in her cheery red and green livery, she could have been mistaken for one of Thomas The Tank

ploughed fields, playful hares gambolled in the sunlight. They were heart-warming sights.

As we slowly headed south, we decided to take it nice and easy. The weather was perfect and the sun bounced off Chanelle's roof. We were fully aware that the unavoidable locks were magnets for mishaps and novice narrowboat crew.

Gates

Locks, I thought, are the 21st Century answer to ancient Rome's Coliseum. We were Christians at the mercy of the gaping maw of their unforgiving gates, while the onlookers overhead were the ghoulish crowd.

We had vowed that our first lock would make us look like polished veterans and not terrified of calamity, with an unintended appearance on You've Been Framed to follow.

Nerves got the better of us and we decided to stop overnight before our first

trio of locks. You can basically moor up wherever it is safe with no charge.

We rewarded ourselves with large gins and tonics at the Badsey Café Bistro in Hillmorton, Rugby. Its walls are steeped with narrowboat memorabilia that take you back to the days when canals were the 19th Century's motorways.

Feeling satisfied with our day's work, we headed back to the boat, returning each greeting we received from fellow narrowboaters. Another congratulatory sundowner in Chanelle's cosy cabin and we headed for our beds.

Up on deck next morning, I was met by two swans treading water at the boat's side. Their expressions told me they wanted feeding. The bread was gone but they were content with a cinnamon and raisin bagel each. We then watched some barges tackle the awaiting locks. We saw someone with a kind face and asked him for advice. He seemed delighted

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