

Cruising log of *Sophia*
Rory Flannigan
Royal Ulster Yacht Club



Sophia, a Hunter Sonata, was stripped out by previous owners and has only bunks as an amenity onboard. The lack of a head or a kitchenette put me off cruising onboard her. This year, however, thanks to the arrival of my new crew mate (my partner Lewis whose lifelong dream was to go cruising on a boat), I decided to organise a one night cruise to Belfast Harbour Marina on the 16th August 2025.

On leaving our berth in, Bangor Marina, we made for the ILCA event being hosted by Ballyholme Yacht Club as several of our friends were onboard Royal Ulster Yacht Club's RIB providing marklaying services. We enjoyed watching the downward leg of the most westerly course before we were able to hoist our main sail, raise our

outboard engine and set a course for Grey Point. Lewis was determined that he wasn't just here for the journey and that he wanted to learn to helm Sophia. So, with that knowledge safely in hand I settled him into the stern of the boat with the tiller and set about preparing our picnic. By now the wind was in the north east and the maximum gusts we were getting were about 10 knots. Sea state was minimal and there was not a cloud in the sky! It was warm and we were both sweating with our buoyancy aids on.

We finished our picnic as we were rounding Grey Point and we set a course for Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club. We were on a run the whole way from the ILCA event. We were very lucky that it was high tide as we approached the RNIYC as we were able to sail within 60 metres of the club house and wave at our friends and family onshore whilst performing our first gybe of the passage as we had been on the same tack since raising our sails!

Now was the moment of truth! Could my crew mate hold Sophia head to wind as I lowered the mainsail before entering the Victoria Shipping Channel? Thankfully he proved his worth and held us perfectly head to wind. With our sails dropped and with



permission from Belfast VTS we entered the channel at marker 12 and headed towards Belfast Harbour Marina. Whilst transiting through Belfast Harbour we were able to see various Stena Line vessels as well as large cruise ships and various other tankers. We were even treated to the beautiful sight of Juniper alongside in the marina basin. Given the fact that it was our first time berthing Sophia in a new marina we set the lines and fenders up early. Lewis was standing poised, ready to jump ashore. He reminded me of a member of a ships company coming into some new and undiscovered land but alas our piece of land was as occupied by another



vessel. As with most plans ours did not survive first contact. Poor Lewis had to rearrange all of our lines and fenders in very quick fashion. Thankfully, Ken and Debbie Hunter were not on deck onboard Juniper as this all unfolded and the first they knew of their new neighbour was Lewis and I relaxing with a beer and enjoying the sun.

The next morning was a different matter. Whilst it was still very warm and sunny the wind had increased significantly! The wind had maximum gusts of 16 knots and as it was out of the east it was funnelling right down the Victoria Channel which meant that there was actually quite a bit of chop in the Harbour! Poor Sophia with her 3.3HP Mariner Outboard struggled significantly and it took us over an hour to motor from our berth to the channel markers off RNIYC!

Once we were out of the channel the waves seemed to dissipate and again Lewis settled in to the helm. Our passage from RNIYC proved long and difficult as the wind was still firmly in the east. However, on reaching Grey Point the wind seemed to drop and the sea state flattened and from there our voyage home was calm and relaxing. We even made it into Brompton for a look!

Sophia and her crew had a beautiful night away and for those who have not stayed in Belfast Harbour Marina we can highly recommend it! The amenities are well maintained and close at hand and the sail up and back is the right length!

Sophia

Rory Flannigan and Lewis Steven

