

Questions, questions

It's amazing how many people are curious about narrow boats and the prospect of living and travelling on them. People we see on the tow path seem to fall into two categories; those who show absolutely no interest whatsoever and don't even want to make eye contact and the larger majority who, given the tiniest hint of invitation will hungrily embark on a detailed interrogation about our lifestyle. The same comments and questions come up again and again so for those of you who have never

had the opportunity to ask, here are the answers.

“Do you live on the boat?”

This is an interesting one because when we say yes we do we invariably get the same response which is something along the lines of; “Ooh, how lovely. I would love to do that. What a wonderful life you must have.” The reason it’s interesting is because they probably have almost no concept of what living on a narrow boat entails but they are confident that they would be ideally suited to the experience. It’s often

followed by a second question that somewhat undoes their declared desire to abandon everything and move on board immediately and that is:

“Have you got a house as well?”

The question isn't quite what it appears to be because what they really mean is: “Have you got somewhere proper to live like normal people?” Technically we have because we own a property that is rented out but as we have no intention of ever going back to live in it we don't feel that it counts as the safety net that the

questioner is hinting at. It's usually at this point that I can sense them beginning to re-evaluate their initial rose tinted idealism and it leads to questions such as:

“Have you got a telly?”

The answer to that is yes we have but for some reason we stopped watching it back in July and haven't missed it at all. I suppose we will watch it in the winter on the marina but while we have been travelling it just hasn't appealed. Variations on this question are:

“Can you cook on the boat?”

No we just eat bread and drink cold water.



The Golden Girl doing 'real'
cooking

“Is it cold in the winter?”

No because we have a solid fuel stove and diesel fuelled central heating. I can't really imagine why anyone would choose to live somewhere that is cold in the winter. I'm sometimes tempted to reply with, “No, is your house cold in the winter?” But maybe I am being unkind now.

“How do you get on for shopping?”

Well we moor the boat up somewhere close to some shops and go and buy

stuff actually. I guess for most people shopping starts and ends with a car in a car park and they have never considered it can take place any other way. We have been known to walk a mile or more each way to the shops but that doesn't bother us and you would be surprised at how much shopping two people with a rucksack each and four shopping bags can carry. The only serious issue is when you see your favourite beer or wine on offer and you have to ration how much you buy.

“Can you just stop anywhere you

like?"

I like this question because it's sensible and the answer could have a massive impact on the joys of boating. That answer is, more or less anywhere, yes. There are designated mooring spots that have time limits of one or two days or maybe a week but generally so long as you moor on the tow path side and you are not obstructing a bridge hole or a winding hole then you can just pull up and stay for up to two weeks in one spot. In the earlier part of our trip we almost moored in some beautiful

places. I say almost because before I was confident at reversing the boat we would usually just end up looking back longingly at some idyllic setting that we hadn't noticed in time to stop. It's better now as although I'm still no expert I can bring the boat to a halt and at least try to back into a nice location. It doesn't always work and can lead to a little, shall we say, friction between the crew and the captain but we're getting better.



I think I did actually reverse into
this spot.

There are other practical and sensible questions about mail, doctors, dentists etc. and then there are the really ridiculous ones. Often they are heard as observations rather than outright questions. Things like:

“Look, they can stand up inside it”. Or, “They are eating a proper meal” and “That one’s got a washing machine in it”. These things are normally heard as people pass by and blatantly stare into our home without any thought for our privacy. It doesn’t actually bother me really and can be quite entertaining.

The one question that people rarely ask, though I suspect many would like to is; “What do you do about your toilet?” Well it’s quite simple, we use a porta potti just like caravaners do. I’m sure

you don't need any more information than that but one couple I met got a bit more. They were walking the tow path and stopped me to ask for directions as I made my way to the elsan disposal point carrying a heavy waste cassette. I apologised and explained that I couldn't help them as I wasn't local to the area at which point the man took in the situation and said; "Is that full of what I think it is?" I replied, bluntly but honestly, "yes, it's full of poo". The lady he was with went visibly pale and made a sort of squeaking sound before they

hurried off. Probably in the wrong direction. Well, what did he expect me to say!

And finally, the most common question by far:

“Are you the Golden Girl?”

I hasten to point out that this one is always addressed to Gill. She smiles shyly and confesses that yes she is indeed that creature, whilst I usually stand behind her making gestures to indicate that actually she only *thinks* she is. I'm always tempted to say that I get my turn at

weekends and on Bank Holidays but I don't want to shock people.

I enjoy these exchanges with the people we meet and if the initial flicker of curiosity grows into a full blown desire to own a boat one day then good luck to them. Perhaps I just like being the object of intrigue but really it's more about sharing something that I enjoy and enthusing about it.

Any more questions at the back there?