



**Haines Bure 28'6" 'Holly Blue'**

## **Wheelchair Boating on the Norfolk Broads**

I have, for many years, loved boating on the Broads, but it's always been a challenge for me (and my companions!) as I have the neuromuscular condition Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 3, causing muscle weakness, and I'm now a wheelchair user.

In the past, my husband Jon and I hired boats, favouring the forward drive, single level design, because steps are a problem for me. We hired the same boat for many years but getting on and off it was becoming more difficult. It had long been our dream to have our own boat, ideally adapted to make life easier for both of us. In late 2006, we became the proud owners of an 18 year old Sheerline 24 forward drive motor cruiser – chosen for its relatively easy access and single level layout. Moorhen suited us very well but, as my condition deteriorated, we realised we would eventually have to look around for a boat with a wheelchair lift, or give up boating (NOT an option!)

We were attracted to the Aquafibre 28'6" hull and drew a basic interior design based on Moorhen's. We consulted many people in the trade, and took our design to several boat builders for a quote. We looked at boats fitted with wheelchair lifts. We debated whether to go for the build straight away or defer it for 6 months or longer. Then, in June 2008, the decision was made for us – I broke my leg, restricting my mobility even more, so we decided to go ahead straight away.

We chose Haines Marine to build our boat, firstly because they had previous experience of fitting a wheelchair lift to this type of hull, secondly because of the very competitive price they quoted, and thirdly because of their good reputation, both as boat builders and for customer service. They gave us endless help and advice and fine-tuned the design in order to fit a lot into a relatively small space. We visited the factory once a month during the build and Haines kept us informed and consulted us throughout.

In late November 2008, overcome with excitement, we took delivery of Holly Blue. The build quality is excellent. The layout incorporates port forward driving position, in a large open-plan saloon with raised seating and galley, separate toilet/shower compartment, and aft cabin with double berth. The wheelchair lift at the port stern gives access when moored stern on as well as side on. Equipment includes a mudweight winch, bowthruuster, navigation lights and 240v shore power. There is a forward well for enjoying those balmy summer evenings we hope to experience. The wheelchair lift has made our lives so much easier, and the open plan design means that my wheelchair can go from the quayside into the saloon without encountering any steps or turns. Fantastic!

Sally Millo

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