



Charging across the IJsselmeer on a 13-tonne boat with a tiller was an absolute joy. See our Dutch cruising guide on p64

'I'd much rather steer from here'

I do like a yacht with a tiller. It just feels better. With a tiller in my hand, I instinctively know how well the sails are balanced and when to trim or reef them. I struggle to feel the same direct connection with the boat, the rig and the sea when I'm using a wheel.

Most sailors prefer a wheel, but I'd rather be tucked up snug under the sprayhood clutching a tiller extension than stuck behind a binnacle, exposed to wind and spray. I'd rather not have an obstacle to jump around when I'm trimming sheets or tending lines. And after driving down to the coast, I'd rather steer with something other than a wheel when I get there.

You rarely see a tiller on a modern cruiser so I was surprised, after driving 450 miles to a photo shoot at Makkum in The Netherlands, to find one on the new Bestevaer 45. I'd assumed that a tiller would be hard to handle on a 13-tonne boat, but it wasn't. Charging across the IJsselmeer at eight knots in a strong, squally wind was an absolute joy.

This vast freshwater lake and the shallow, sheltered sea outside its mighty

dike are a great destination for a summer cruise (p64). The old Dutch East India Company towns are a delight and the well-marked channels of the Waddenzee, snaking out to the Frisian Islands, are fun to navigate in good weather. These are among the best-surveyed waters in the world, but you must get the latest tidal heights over the watersheds from a local harbourmaster, as even this year's chart will be out of date.

These shallow seas can get unpleasantly rough – even the enclosed IJsselmeer, as I discovered last summer. But if it blows a hooley you can still sail in the backwaters of Friesland, where many free swinging moorings have been laid in recent years.

If you foul your prop on a lobster pot this season, you can blame Theresa May. The Cruising Association's petition to improve fishing pot markers was shut down, alas, when she called a 'snap' general election. They'll have to start again from scratch with a new petition after the election. Watch this space.



PHOTO: GRAHAM SNOOK

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