



Film crew 'cut' on the Cut

WE ALL know the feeling well. Once the self-appointed 'Captain' has his or her hand on the tiller, nothing and no-one can separate the two. That was the theme in the recently screened episode in the BBC comedy series; *Next of Kin*, starring William Gaunt and Penelope Keith.

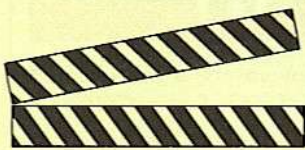
The episode The canal boat mutiny was filmed on the Shropshire Union Canal between Norbury Junction and Audlem in early October last year. The 29 minute episode took two weeks to film with over 40 staff on location on the Shroppie.

Executive producer Gareth Gwenlan explains the choice of location: 'We needed to find a canal that was scenically interesting that was away from the towns. Knowing the way that the water shortage also affected canals, it always had to be a canal that was going to have enough water in it. I sent my location manager off to look in the general direction of north of Birmingham. 'Gareth already had a good knowledge of canals. Thirty years ago he spent two years living aboard a narrow boat and had worked two boats up and down from Manchester docks to Brentford for a brief pe-

riod between jobs. In the 1970's he worked on the second series of *The fall and rise of Reginald Perrin*, where Jimmy, the brother-in-law had a canal boat company. These experiences left Gareth with an insight into some of the difficulties they might encounter. 'I also knew what could and couldn't be done,' he says. The writers, Jan Ethrington and Gavin Petri had written the script from their knowledge of the Thames. 'The river is very different,' says Gareth, 'but those alterations were made before we went on location.'

The crew hired three boats from Shropshire Union Cruises, part of Dartline, at Norbury Junction. Two day-boats were used, one for the electricians and generator, the other for costume and make-up, while the 62ft narrow boat *Abel Tasman* was the filmed boat used by the characters Andrew, Maggie and their grandchildren Georgia, Philip and Jake. The entire episode was filmed using *Abel Tasman*, including the interior shots. 'It became very intimate inside at times,' laughed Gareth, 'Once you had the camera, lights and actors in position, it was almost impossible for people from wardrobe and make-up to get in.'

Richard Hill went on location on the Shropshire Union Canal with the cast and crew for an episode of the popular BBC TV comedy series, *Next of Kin*.



OPPOSITE, RIGHT: The cast of *Next of Kin* aboard Dartline's *Abel Tasman* (left to right) William Gaunt (Andrew), Penelope Keith (Maggie), Ann Gosling (Georgia), Matthew Clarke (Philip) and Jamie Lucraft (Luke).

TOP: Shooting the final scene. The camera crane hangs precariously over the canal.

LEFT: With Andrew and Maggie safely locked in the cabin, Jake, Georgia and Philip take charge of *Abel Tasman*.

Photographs: BBC Publicity.

Technical advice and an intimate knowledge of the canal came from Dartline's Roger Savage. He was responsible for making sure that the narrow boat was in the right place at the right time. He took charge of the boat when the actors were not being filmed at the tiller. On occasions, as the director yelled 'cut', Roger had to rescue the tiller from the actor and steer *Abel Tasman* off her collision course with the bank. 'Steering isn't an easy thing for an actor to do,' Gareth points out, 'when you have to act, talk and remember lines.' Roger also had to find a suitable place for a deliberate collision. It was called for when Philip (played by Matthew Clarke) ran the narrowboat into overhanging trees while watching and trying to impress a girl walking her dog along the towpath. According to Gareth, the deliberate collision; '...was quite a difficult thing to do.'

The Shropshire Union provided the crew with the locations they needed. There was the scene where the family set off from the base. This was filmed at Norbury Junction because it was considered to be photographically interesting. Similarly at High Offley. The script called for a pub which had to be concealed from the canal, yet

could be seen from high up. Andrew (William Gaunt) made a 'safe' offer to buy some fishermen a drink, believing that they were miles from the nearest pub. The gantry camera raised above the trees to reveal the *Anchor* pub just yards away, a fact of which the anglers were aware, but not the hapless Andrew. At *The Shropshire Fly* in Audlem, landlady Vicky Goodwin played her part as an extra as her canalside pub was taken over for the filming for a couple of days.

The storyline was a familiar one. Andrew refused to hand over the tiller to anyone else. Eventually, Maggie locked him in the cabin and took to the tiller herself but she turned into exactly the same sort of skipper as Andrew. The grandchildren; Georgia (Ann Gosling), Philip (Matthew Clarke) and young Jake (Jamie Lucraft) decided that enough was enough. They ended up locking both grandparents in the cabin leaving them to take charge and cruise happily off in the Shropshire sunshine.

The author would like to thank Pam Groom of Shropshire Union Cruises for her assistance with this article. ↓