# Sundowner Review

This document was written by Paul Naylor and is published here for FMES online viewing, and was written during 2025.

**Sundowner project – my conclusions**

I don't normally write about 'how it was for me' and a self-criticism, but I thought on this occasion I would try to summarise the project and some reflections. This is not for any personal motive, although *thinking* about what could have been better, or lessons learnt from any project is a good learning routine even if you are not conscious of doing it deliberately (putting things right that went wrong is the best training course you could possibly do!). Here are some thoughts under the two headings:

**How it was for me**

This is a very personal view as 'how it was for me' is dependent on my personal approach, what I found interesting because it was new and what I found tedious because it wasn't!

- This was my first boat for 50 years and I was able to use my ability gained in that time making other models to improve what I did.
- Following the process I adopt for all my projects, I regard each part or assembly as a project on its own: this means that you get satisfaction from the completion of parts as you go rather than see the whole thing as one long journey. It certainly helps me 'manage' my natural impatience.
- The hull was one such part and all of it was new, so this newness kept me focussed on what could have been a boring plank by plank task. It does not mean that I am ready to build another one using the methods here!
- The planning of the order of things to do was interesting, and there was much problem solving 'en route' which I find stimulating.
- Since I was trying to make a model of a real boat, I was always conscious about whether I had scaled something right. I am NOT a perfectionist, and I was able to ratify my concerns about some aspects (see criticism, below) by saying 'the finished result looks OK to my eyes' rather than worry about it and end up dissatisfied.
- The small bits of the boat do not have to work (eg the anchor winch) and I need not focus on 'will it work', 'will it be reliable', 'how will I maintain it' and other considerations necessary when making a working steam locomotive for example. I enjoyed using metal fabrication methods in the same way but knowing that it just has to look representative.
- For me, the project was just the right length (around 11 months, drawing to champagne bottle breaking) and cost (difficult to say owing to scrap bins etc: certainly, *far* less than a working steam locomotive) to keep the pressure down to 'get on with it' and reduce worry about spending money on expensive bits.

- I spent quite a lot of time proportionately on fiddly and trivial little bits. The epitome of this is the wheelhouse insides: you can't see it as it is dark, so I had to add lights! I think that this sort of detail adds to the character and interest of the model, and making them rather than buying them gave me more satisfaction (and was the only way to get many done).
- I know that my main interest is making something rather than running it. I want my projects to work, but once proven I take some persuading to get it out again to show it off, so I like to get on with the next project rather than run an old one…

**Critique**

Here are some 'in hindsight' critical thoughts, as well as some admissions that I accepted at the time. None of these causes me to lose sleep or detracts from my enjoyment, they are just things I know are wrong but I am happy to accept them:

- The wheelhouse is too 'chunky', the wood frame should be more slender to allow the windows to be bigger.
- The anchors are too large.
- The hatches are too slightly too high off the deck.
- The rubbing strake all round is too deep, especially at the stern.
- The anchor winch needs more 'innards', but what they are is anyone's guess.
- Some of the dashboard instruments are a little 'chunky' and there is one plaque missing.
- The rear steps are too chunky (there is a theme here!).
- The diagonal hull planks are the wrong way round.
- The rudder should stick up out of the water more (ie enough to have a waterline painted on it).
- The rudder 'cylinder' is too large (yes, it is 'chunky'!).
- In fact, rather than list more things that are 'too chunky', I will simply say that this arises because I am less likely to waste something I make if it starts off too large, and I would prefer to go up a size not down to match available screw threads for instance. And so, *everything* is likely to be overscale … too 'chunky'.
- I am still not totally convinced that Sundowner now is 52 feet long! I have read relatively recent newspaper articles that say '58 feet'. It *could* be that my model is 6" too short, although I would have thought I would have seen this when trying to get deck fixtures etc in the right place as I measured and scaled photos from both ends! The proportions seem OK for 52 feet though, and it is dangerous to rely on newspaper articles.
- The paint and varnish finishes could be better with more time and more coats and more rubbing down, with more hull filler and so on. This is a facet of my levels of patience…that I know about and accept!
- The rear mast stays are the wrong style for the iteration of the boat that I am modelling (for good reason however: easy access to the insides).
- The rail upright flanges are 'all over the place' in terms of size and pin hole location for various reasons: I could not face remaking and resoldering them all, another facet of my impatience, especially towards the end of a project. Fortunately, they are small (and the errors are small too) and not conspicuous.
- In operation, the hull tends to go 'bow down' under higher speeds, rather than 'bow up' as it tries to climb its bow wave. Having thought more about this, I suspect that the reason is because the hull shape generates suction at the bow end pulling it down, and this increases

with speed. If so, this is 'unfixable' given the finished boat, and is presumably the reason why naval architects spend a lot of time on small scale trials (or computerised hydrodynamic modelling these days) before they make a hull. It is more critical for displacement hulls: planing hulls are more forgiving in this respect, at least for longitudinal attitude.

- The height of the masts presents some difficulties in transport (they only just go into my car for example). I know I could collapse the masts as designed, but it is a bit of palaver involving unhooking the stays: not impossible, but too much tension on the stays over time will slacken them: at present, the spring-loaded tensioners I made are OK at keeping the stays apparently tight and under tension as installed.
- I want to keep charged batteries inside the hull so I can show off the interior of the cabin when required, and this means periodically charging them, something for me to remember to do.

**Overall comment**

When I make a model, it is a balance between my natural impatience and the need for care to 'do things properly'. Whilst I am confident about the ability of the boat to work and continue working, and it is robust enough to do this with minimal maintenance and sensible levels of care, without doubt it could have been improved at the expense of more time. There are some wonderful absolutely scale models out there that are a testament to the care others can apply (and a measure of the time taken to achieve this), but I know that I cannot do this. My experience over years making this and other models allows me to get many things right, but whether I can make a truly scale model is dubious.

The simple fact that it is possible to make a representative model that works well without spending huge amounts of time means that no one should look at a museum quality model and be put off trying – so why not 'have a go'!