Rebuilding a launching trolley

By Jon Davies, Shrimper 19 *Merriwinds* (847) (October 2024)

Our Snipe combi trailer is about 12 years old, and although properly maintained, has had a lot of use with the launching trolley going into the water several times a year. It has always been carefully rinsed off with fresh water after every immersion, and until recently seemed to be in very good condition. However, after its latest dip I was dismayed to discover that, although everything else was fine, the galvanising on the spine was quickly deteriorating and it was becoming very rusty. It looked as if the original galvanising had not been very well done. There is also no way of examining the interior where the corrosion could be far worse. If the metal was on a garden gate, you could probably rub it back to bare metal, treat it and it would be good for several more years. On a trolley that carries the full weight of a Shrimper over long distances, knowing the main part of it is badly rusting (and which would get worse every time it is put in the water) is a big problem.

Those trailers are not made any more, and finding an exactly compatible trolley in good condition (and at a sensible price not too far away) didn't seem likely. However, eventually I realised that, apart from some holes and a simple plate welded on, the spine is just a long piece of 90mmx 90mm x 3mm galvanised box section. Everything can be unbolted from it, so making a new one is possible.

I ordered the steel from Brundle metals of Southampton on a Sunday evening and they delivered it, cut to the correct size of 5356 mm the following Tuesday morning! I then had to measure the original tube and carefully mark the position of everything on the new metal. It was then on to drilling lots of holes which was best done using a pillar drill outside. The hardest job was cutting the large 52mm holes for the jockey wheel. That was just accomplished by using the drill's slowest speed, a new tank cutter and lots of patience. I then cut off the jockey wheel bracket (just a piece of steel plate) from the old trailer and, after cleaning it up, welded it into place.

The next problem was getting the large piece of metal galvanised. Wessex galvanisers of Eastleigh are one of the few places that can do that sort of work. They said they couldn't collect and deliver to a residential address, so I had to carry the 65kg tube strapped to the road trailer to Eastleigh; not a pleasant journey with the empty road trailer ramps rattling behind. The galvanisers were also very efficient, and four days later after another noisy drive to Eastleigh, I had my brand-new shiny trolley spine. Reassembly was easy, everything fitted and I now have a trolley that should last at least another 12 years as all the other fittings are easy to replace if the main spine is OK.

Was it worth it? The bare metal cost about £115 delivered. The galvanising cost £150 plus two journeys Poole to Eastleigh. About £290 altogether. So, not cheap and quite a lot of work, but very reassuring to have a solid trailer again.

Photos 1 and 2: The galvanising was flaking off. (The hubs on the axle look rusty but are solid steel blocks).

Photo 3: Drilling the holes needed the precision of the pillar drill. The jockey wheel plate has been clamped into position to make sure everything fits before welding.
Picture 4: Everything reassembled and looking solid again, the shiny metal will soon go dull and match everything else.