



An Ownashare boat

The right formula

Wessex Chemicals boss Michael Borowski, maker of Blue Bio toilet fluids that are familiar to many boaters, explains the surprising science behind a product most of us take for granted

Michael Borowski loves a challenge and is a bit of an alchemist, and as managing director of Wessex Chemicals confesses he's happiest in the lab creating things.

"I'm probably the worst person to talk about marketing. Other people are doing that via

the internet, Facebook, etc. I run the technical side. My job is to solve problems for people's products," he said.

That's how the company came to produce Blue Bio, which uses microbes rather than chemicals and was originally developed for giant cruise ships.

"The client was a company who worked with American cruise operators, supplying and maintaining (sewage removing) conveyor systems in the bowels of the ships. The bacteria based product was used to reduce smells coming up to the passenger areas," said Borowski, who then went into technical details that the average *Tillergraph* reader might find a bit baffling, involving marine biomass reactors with filtration membranes. These get blocked with sugary residues, when they were being flushed out with harsh chemicals to kill off unpleasant odours.

"The destruction of bacteria releases a range of molecules, some of which are approximately the size of the pores in the membrane, which they subsequently block. When

the system efficiency reduces to less than 40 per cent, the vessel has severe problems, which the use of our product returns to 90/95 per cent; with the sugars reduced to carbon dioxide and water," said Borowski.

With some of these boats docking at Southampton, it seemed logical for Wessex Chemicals to manufacture the product so that it could be taken on board in the UK, and to also look for other markets.

Blue Bio is actually made in Daventry, which isn't too far from Crick, so the company took stand space at the Crick Show and made a tentative foray into the inland waterways market.

Michael concedes that this represents a small part of the business, but he is quietly evangelical about weaning river and canal boat owners from



Specialist equipment

chemical-based toilet cleaners. Blue Bio was already being sold to motor caravan owners, and initially was marketed to boat owners with the same dosage levels, "but the dose wasn't enough," said Borowski.

There were letters and phone calls, many suggesting appropriate mixing ratios. "Customers find out how to use these things, and it's very helpful. None of us own boats."

Problems that have seen the mixing ratios tweaked included issues with steel holding tanks with rusty interiors creating an oxygen-free water/Blue Bio mix that put the enzymes off their work "so the bugs made smells rather than got rid of them". Borowski and his colleagues also found that water adulterated with traces of heart medication sometimes inhibited the product.

Borowski has been involved in the world of chemicals for over 40 years, having fallen into the industry more or less by accident when a friend suggested setting up Wessex Chemicals as a joint venture. The friend changed his mind and backed out, but Borowski, convinced that it was a good idea, stuck with it.

"I'm a practical chemist. I didn't do any deep research and

development theoretical stuff, but we're not in that business."

That doesn't mean the business itself hasn't changed. It was originally a general supply company selling water based products, oils and greases, which it bought in and sold on behalf of other companies, but when one supplier went bust with an unfulfilled order destined for Borowski's company, he concluded that making his own materials would free him from the vagaries of other businesses; so that's what he's done for the past decade and a half.

Ironically, the latest member of the Blue Bio family is actually clear, thanks to shared narrowboat operator Ownashare pointing out that the dye damaged interior fittings. "We talk to them all the time," said Ownashare's manager Linda French.

Like everything Wessex Chemicals makes, Blue Bio is produced in a factory that creates zero waste, something that delights Michael.

"It's not hugely difficult," he said, "you just have to do a bit of thinking."

Blue Bio is sold over the counter at many chandlers and is available online from supplier such as Amazon.



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