

**D**EAFNESS, distraction-proneness, poor typing, bad memory, narcolepsy and a general tendency to day-dream while others are talking, are some of the greatest boons to creativity that I have ever come across. Many of my finest and most original ideas were not, in fact, intended as innovation at all, but were the result of misremembering something else. When I come to check the facts later, I discover that my memory has distorted them so much that what I thought was mere repetition was, in fact, so far from the original that I can claim it as my own idea. Equally, mistypings, mishearings and nodding off while others are talking can be the source of great inspiration when one is trying to make sense of it all.

All of which is rather an elaborate way of explaining why I was having a great time whizzing down the Thames on a high-speed dinghy the other day, accompanied by my elder offspring, Junior.

I was in the middle of something when the chap rang to invite us, and my mind must have been elsewhere, because when I was jolted back into reality by him saying, "Well, how about it then? Would you like to come?", all I could remember of what he had been saying was the word 'rib'.

I could hardly say, "Er, sorry, what was that? I must have dozed off," so, assuming that he must be inviting me to a restaurant specialising in rib of beef, I said, "Er, yes, that'll be fine. Thank you," and he replied, "Excellent. London Eye, 10 to five then."

Funny time for a meal, I thought, but there are a number of good restaurants in that area, so I was probably right about the rib of beef. And that is how, a few minutes before five o'clock on the same evening, I found myself clambering aboard a RIB, or Rigid Inflatable Boat, for a guided tour of the Thames, and a hungry-looking Junior looking at me accusingly.

Messing about in boats does not, I must confess, come very high in my list of pleasurable things to do. In fact, I place yachting fourth, behind skiing, golf and ballet, in my list of the most pointless human activities. Unlike yachting, however, you do not have to do anything on the boats used by London RIB Voyages, other than sit down and listen to an entertaining commentary, then hang on for dear life when they open up the throttle. It all works rather well, as there is a strict speed limit on the Thames until you get past Tower Bridge, but that is where the best sights run out anyway, and any commentary would grow comparatively dull. So the guide stops talking, the pilot puts his foot down on the accelerator and the RIB (a sort of hard-bottomed dinghy) rears up in the water and vrooms off at speeds of over 30 knots, leaving other pleasure boats standing. It's all thoroughly exhilarating, perfectly safe and we did not even get soaked, as we seemed to be high enough above the water not to catch the spray.

It was only at the end of the 50-minute trip that I had my great idea.

"Do you have another of these boats?" I asked. "If so, could both make it from Mortlake to Putney and back?"

A smile came across my host's face when he said "yes" and clearly began to catch on. So I can hardly wait for next year's boat race between Oxford and Cambridge. A breathtaking turn at Putney, and both crews will be back at the start, where they left their shoes, in half the usual time.

London Rib Voyages: 020 7928 2350 or [www.londonribvoyages.com](http://www.londonribvoyages.com)