

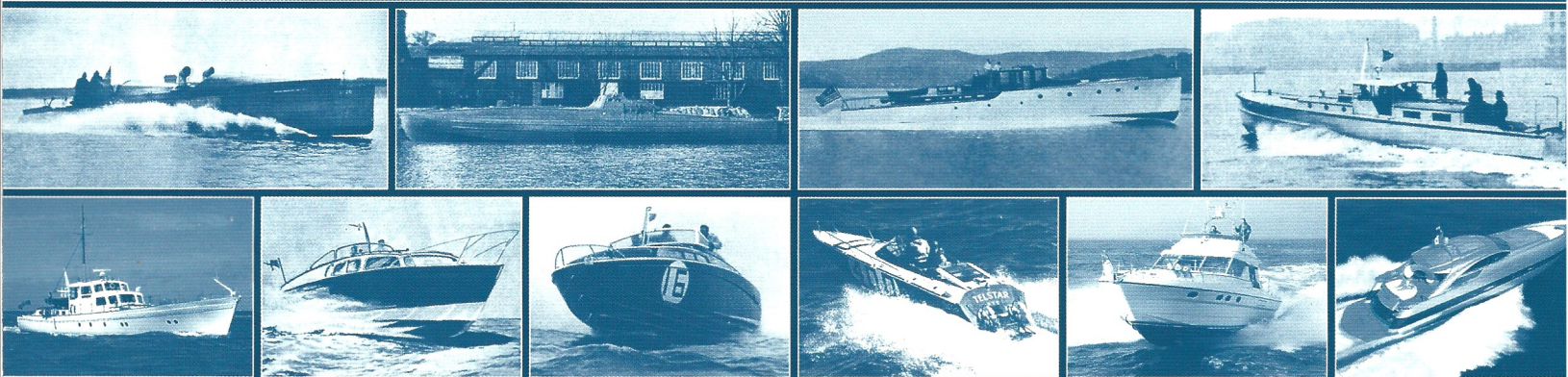
The Motor Boating Century

1904 - 2004

Seen through the pages of

MOTOR BOAT
& YACHTING

ALAN HARPER



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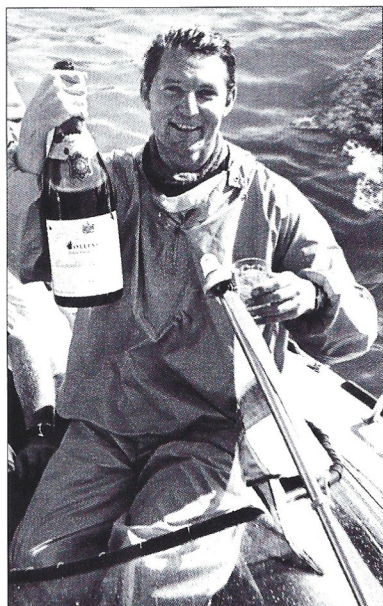
By Alan Harper



Whitstable Regatta, 1914.

Foreword

BY TOMMY SOPWITH



Having been a motor boater and yachtsman for about half a century, I was, of course, delighted to be asked to write a foreword to this book.

When Jeff Fanner and I won the first Cowes-Torquay Race in 1961, my father was surprised that 21 knots was fast enough, as he had won the Harmsworth Trophy in 1913 at 50 knots.

Although I had a brief and undistinguished career racing a Dragon, some of the time with ex-editor Dick Hewitt, my time afloat has principally been in motor boats of varying sizes and speeds. Ray Hunt designed the hull for *Thunderbolt* in 1961, but most of my subsequent boats, whether for racing or pleasure, have come from the board of my old friend Don Shead.

It is satisfying to look back at a list of our projects, starting with *Telstar* in 1968, and *Philante* in 1971, and realize that racing really does improve the breed. Perhaps the current range of Sunseekers, all with Don Shead hulls, proves the point.

Throughout this time *Motor Boat & Yachting* has been a monthly joy, one made all the better in recent years by reading Ray Bulman's column. I well remember the time when he was part of the racing scene, and now much enjoy being reminded of the "good old days".

Having said all that, I should hate to give the impression that I think that *MBY* is all about the past. Far from it. The boat tests and constant updates on the latest bits of kit are a great way to keep abreast of current products. May this excellent publication go on forever!

Tommy Sopwith

**Dedicated to George Sharp,
who knew what he was about.**

Editor of *The Motor Boat* 1904-1906.

MOTOR BOAT
& YACHTING

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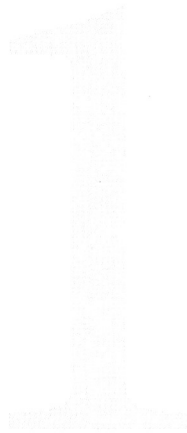
Published by IPC Media Ltd.

Kings Reach Tower, London SE1 9LS, United Kingdom.

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Written and edited by Alan Harper.

Design and layout by Jason Keens.

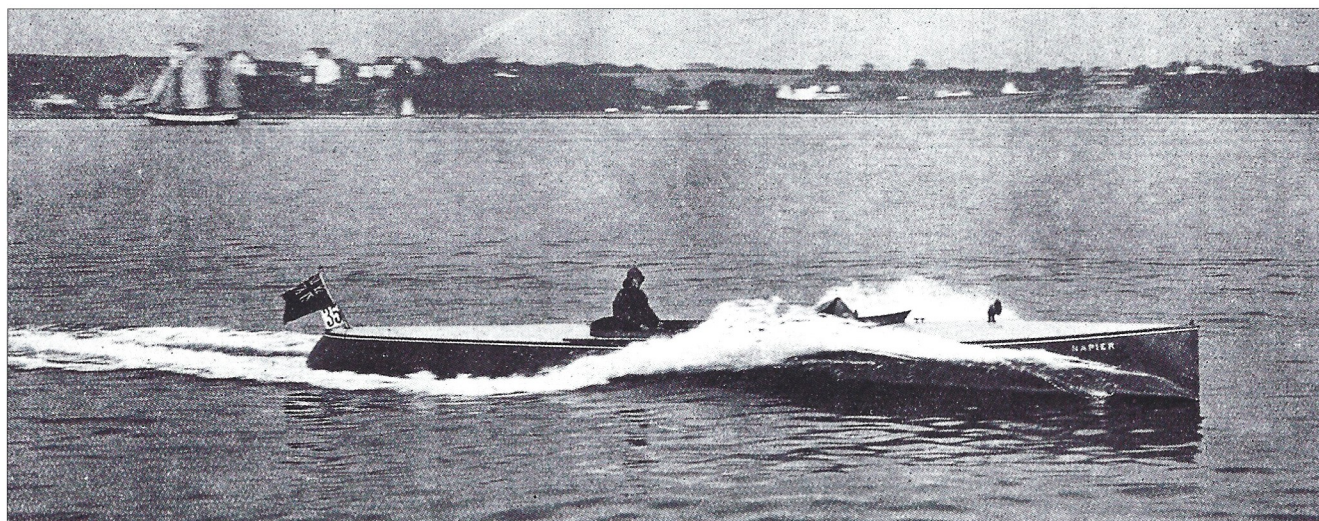


Power and passion

Most of us nowadays know, or fancy we do, how to make money. But our trouble, if successful, is that we do not always know how to quit trying to make it for a while – how to clear out, close down, and take a rest without actually retiring.”

George Sharp, the first editor, hit the nail on the head. From a cramped warren of offices near London’s Farringdon Road he was launching a magazine at the very start of a new nautical craze, and had identified at once as his target reader the wealthy, work-obsessed middle-class male. Boats had always been a popular plaything for the well-off. Now it was boats powered by the new internal combustion engines.

Gottlieb Daimler started it all, back in 1886. He and Wilhelm Maybach put a 1.1hp petrol engine in a boat on the River Neckar, having first festooned the craft with wires and porcelain knobs to seduce fearful onlookers into believing that it was a harmless electric vessel. The German inventor soon moved on to the cars for which we now remember him, but other pioneers,



Nippy Napier: the 40-footer won the 1903 Harmsworth Trophy.

particularly in France, Britain and the USA, were quick to follow his lead. Fear of petrol's combustible qualities in the early days led to the development of paraffin or kerosene engines, even though many of these needed petrol to get them going, but progress was extraordinarily rapid. In 1902 the 38ft (11.6m) *Abiel Abbot Low* crossed the Atlantic, taking 36 days to reach Falmouth. She was built as a demonstrator by the New York Kerosene Engine Co. The following year saw the inaugural British International (later known as the Harmsworth) Trophy meeting in Cork, won by the 40ft, 70hp *Napier* at 19 knots. And across the Atlantic the first of the famous Gold Cup competitions was run in June 1904.

This was the world into which *The Motor Boat* was launched on 14 July 1904. It was a pretty normal turn-of-the-century day. The British Army was setting about Tibet and making up borders in the Middle East, the Russians were on the back foot in the war with Japan, and the Germans were suppressing a Hottentot rebellion in Africa. There was even a small civil war going on in Kentucky. Anton Chekhov died, the Panama Canal was under construction, the World's Fair in St Louis was attracting 20 million people, Sigmund Freud had just published *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and Yorkshire had just beaten Hampshire by an innings and 18 runs at Portsmouth.

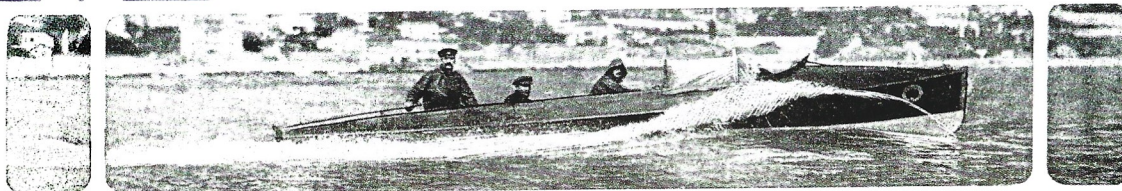
In the magazine's first issue it suggested that motor cruising was the best thing for the 'out-of-

doors' man to do on a Saturday. There was a report on a cruise of the Oxford and Grand Union Canals, with the advice that readers ought to make the trip early in the season, before weed clogged the watercourse. A correspondent in the Solent warned against going in too close to the beaches: "The trippers are not always of a very select type, and one of their favourite amusements consists in throwing stones at any floating object in range."

The first criminal trial of a motorboater took place in 1904. A Mr T. Desnos was fined £5 for swamping a punt on the Thames and for "navigating a motor launch without special care and caution". Our report questioned whether a 16ft boat fitted with a 1.5hp motor could do that much damage – although the boat was called *Look Out*.

Although Britain could no longer claim to be the 'workshop of the world' as she had been at the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851, her great smoky conurbations were still centres of industry, light and heavy, and London was no exception. Just yards from the magazine's Rosebery Avenue offices, the Motor Castings Company of 101 Gray's Inn Road were just one of thousands of small manufacturers contributing to the business, bustle and smog of Edwardian London, and were typical of the grassroots engineering industry that still underpinned the world's first industrial society. They made marine engines, and advertised their 'launch and punt motor' in the first issue of *The Motor Boat* for £17 5s 0d on two days' approval.

THE MOTOR BOAT



Vol. I.—No. I.

THURSDAY, JULY 14th, 1904.

One Penny.



High-Class MOTOR-BOATING CLOTHING.

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The "Popular"

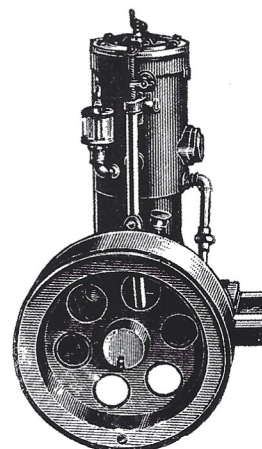
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is Better than the Best. It is the easiest to start, and requires the least attention afterwards. We can teach anyone how to run our Motor in less than an hour. Trial trips, by appointment, at Kew or Leigh-on-Sea.

Mr. G. M. Garrett sent the following to the "Autocar," July 18, 1903: "I can sincerely and heartily recommend the 'Popular' Motor as supplied by Messrs. Lister & Sons. I have driven one in a 25-ft. Launch for thousands of miles in all sorts of weather. I have never had the slightest trouble or worry, and the Motor has never, with the exception of one new Sparking Plug, cost me one single penny for repairs. Would that some enterprising manufacturer would come forward and put a similar Motor on the road."

This is not an isolated testimonial. We have scores of satisfied Purchasers. We supply on Easy Terms.

The "POPULAR" Motor Boats and Motor Launches are built at our own Works, Bangor Road, Kew Bridge, where Standard Boats and Launches can always be seen, both finished and in course of construction. We are fine Boatbuilders, and we give FINE QUALITY, FINE WORKMANSHIP and FINE FINISH. We can design and build any type of Launch desired, including Shallow Draught Motor Launches, with draught as low as 8 inches. We give THE BEST MOTOR AND THE FINEST BUILT LAUNCHES, COMPLETELY FITTED, at a fixed price. Gentlemen will appreciate there being NO EXTRAS.

Claims.

We claim the "POPULAR" to be the simplest, most compact, and most easily operated Motor on the market.

We claim that no Motor will run with less attention than ours.

We claim that no Motors are as good as ours at the same price.

We claim that no Motor will run better than ours at any price.

The life of a first-class steam engine is a quarter of a century. The "POPULAR" Motor is built on the basis of a similar long life. Mechanically, the "POPULAR" Motors are as fine as it is possible to make them.

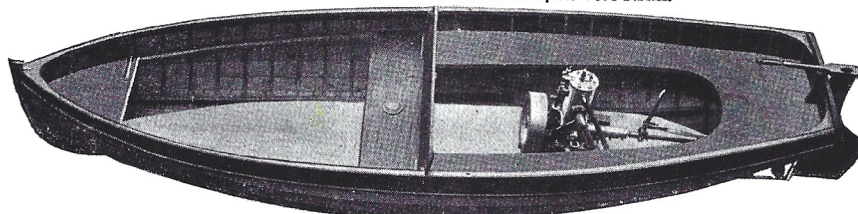
"POPULAR" Superior to Six other Kinds.

"Have used Motor for three months, day and night. I use my boat to take out pleasure parties, and am going constantly. For reliability, simplicity, and smooth running qualities, your engine is superior to any I have seen. Have had six different kinds in different boats in the last ten years, and have had more comfort with the 'Popular' Motor than any other. Your sparking device is perfect, as that is the trouble with many of the engines I have seen. Am perfectly satisfied with your Motor, and will recommend it to others."

4 h.p. Beats alleged 6½ h.p.

"As we are about taking our boat out of the water for the winter, we write to express our satisfaction and appreciation of your Motor. At the time we purchased the boat, we had absolutely no experience with any kind of engine, either gas or steam. We have run your engine something over 2,500 miles, and our experience of same has been much pleasanter than some of our friends who row back about half the time. Our engine is only 4 h.p., but we have been able to keep up with some engines which were alleged 6½ h.p."

There are two kinds of Marine Motors—The POPULAR and others. The POPULAR spells SATISFACTION. Most others spell TROUBLE.

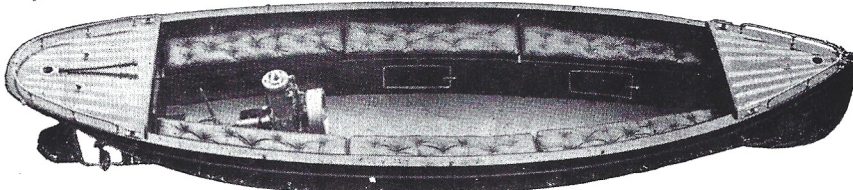


A Roomy Boat, with
over 18 ft. of Seating,
complete and ready
for running. Price :
£64 ; or £16 with order,
£16 when ready for
delivery, and £2 16s.
per month for 12
months.

Reliability.

This Testimonial refers to a 17ft. Launch, fitted with a 2½ h.p. "POPULAR" Petrol Motor: "I have great pleasure in informing you that the Launch which I have named Mona-Beg (the Manx for Little Mona) is a perfect gem in every way, as a sea boat and for speed. I have got 8 miles out of her in exactly one hour. I have been out in half a gale—in fact, when fishing boats of 70 tons dare not venture. Old sea captains have told me she is the finest sea boat for her length and size ever seen in the Bay of Douglas. Several gentlemen are greatly interested in the Motor and its perfect working and simplicity. I have been round the Isle of Man in the Motor Launch. I started in a gale from Douglas and weathered it. In going round the Island I did 50 miles in 1½ hours without a single stop, the last 20 miles in a fog, steering by compass."

Fine Motor Launch
with £20 value in Fit-
tings. Price : £100 ; or
£25 with order, £25,
when ready for de-
livery, and £4 7s. 6d.
per month for 12
months.



It's a good plan to mention "The
Motor Boat" in your enquiry



Then as now, no amount of enthusiasm was enough to guarantee a magazine's success. Edmund Dangerfield's Temple Press had been set up on sound commercial principles in 1891, and was already well established in the cycling and automobile markets when he decided that the



A lady journalist with Mercedes IV's driver.

time had come to dip a toe into marine motoring. The first issue was a well-rounded 40 pages, with 20 pages of closely-set editorial and 20 pages of advertising, including the front cover. We don't know how much seed money Dangerfield ploughed into his new title to see it through into profit, but by all accounts it was hardly necessary, for the magazine was an immediate success.

In an example of the entrepreneurial genius that was only rarely to characterise the magazine's promotional efforts in later years, that August *The Motor Boat* chartered the fastest cross-Channel steamer of the day, the South Eastern & Chatham Railway's *Queen*, for 600 readers and special guests to watch the first (and, for nearly 60 years, the last) cross-Channel race, from Calais to Dover. There were 20 starters, a prize pot of £1,500, and the winner in just over 60 minutes was *Mercedes IV*, closely followed by *Napier Minor*.

Coverage of early races was detailed and often passionate. When a French journalist criticised a British racing boat as a mistake, *The Motor Boat* took up the cudgels: "We all make mistakes. *Parisienne II*, which had three motors and three

Gathering powers: boats preparing for the first day of the MYC Reliability Trials in No.4 dock, Southampton, in 1905.



***The American way:
Br'er Fox II made it
from Cincinnati to
New Orleans at an
average of 25.2 knots.***

propellers, none of which could be made to run in unison ten minutes consecutively, and was burnt like a rocket soon after the start of the race, was a mistake."

Like many of his successors in the editor's chair in the years that followed, Sharp was often at pains to point out that wealth was not a prerequisite to motor boat ownership. But at a time when a well-off civil servant might take home £3 a week, it was slightly disingenuous to suggest that the only thing between the reader and boat-owning felicity was "a few shillings' worth of petrol and less than a hundred pounds' worth of hull and motor." Yet the starter boat of

the day was indeed remarkably simple and cheap, perhaps something along the lines of an 18ft open clinker launch with a 2.75hp engine mounted amidships, like those turned out by Lister & Sons at Kew Bridge and advertised in the first issue.

Of course more substantial cruising boats could also be had for those who had the funds. Royals and dignitaries graced the early pages of the magazine, either as competitors in races or as boat owners. King Alfonso of Spain owned two 28ft Thornycroft launches, while the King of Siam owned a Saunders river launch and a Thornycroft racer. Czar Nicholas ordered two launches from J.S. White of Cowes as tenders for the Russian imperial yacht, and the King of Wurtemberg ran a 61ft motor yacht. But few royals were as hands-on as Grand Duke Friedrich August of Oldenburg, who was wont to experiment with his propellers. The magazine commented in an editorial: "There may be some reader of a socialistic turn of mind who thinks that many a monarch would make a better mechanic than a ruler."

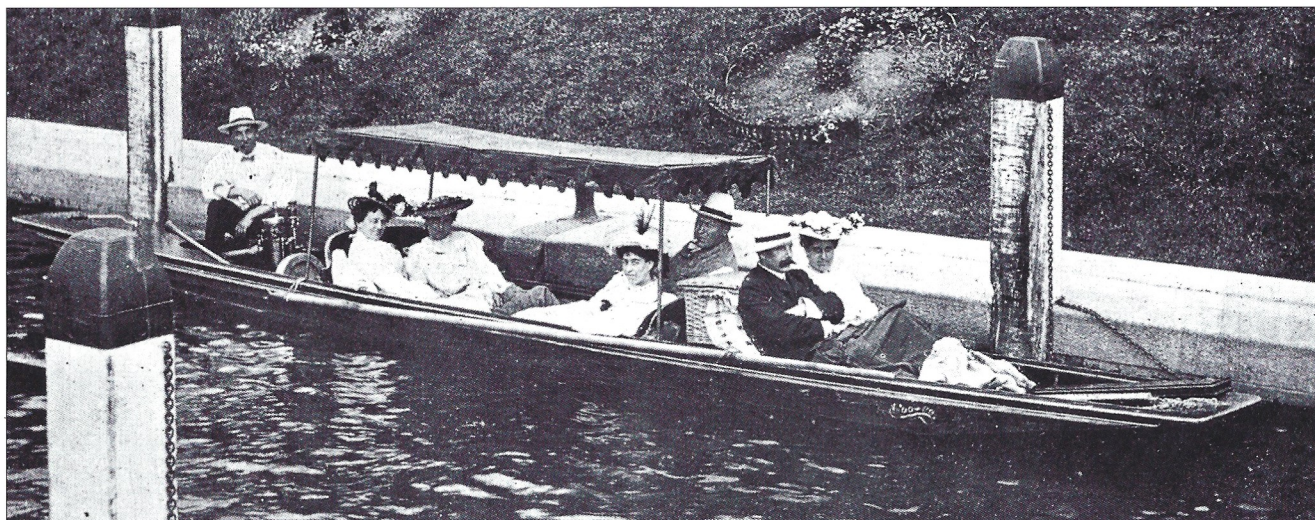
In these earliest days of motor boating one thing united almost all who went afloat under power – a love of competition. In a short feature on the nine British motor boat clubs in a 1912 issue, the writer remarks that of the 500 or so boats belonging to members, most were raced. The British Motor Boat Club's Cowes meeting that year featured events for everything from 1.5hp motor dinghies to out-and-out racers packing 800hp, while cruising boats and motor

Editors

1904 - 1906	George Sharp
1906 - 1908	R.G.L. Markham
1908 - 1912	T.D. Wynn Weston
1912 - 1955	A. P. Chalkley
1956 - 1962	Frank Snoxell
1962 - 1967	Erroll Bruce
1967 - 1972	John Liley
1972 - 1979	Dick Hewitt
1979 - 1986	Alex McMullen
1986 - 1991	Tom Willis
1991 - 2003	Alan Harper
2003 -	Tom Isitt

Magazine titles

1904 - 1911	<i>The Motor Boat</i>
1911 - 1912	<i>The Motor Boat and Marine Gas Oil Engine</i>
1912 - 1920	<i>The Motor Ship & Motor Boat</i>
1920 - 1937	<i>The Motor Boat</i>
1937 - 1938	<i>The Motor Boat – Yachting and Commercial Craft</i>
1938 - 1963	<i>The Motor Boat and Yachting</i>
1963 -	<i>Motor Boat and Yachting</i>



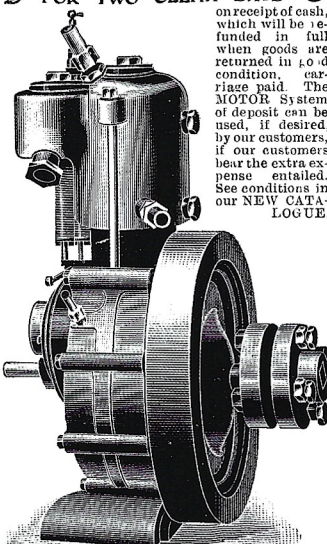
yachts took part in handicap events.

By then a new editor had taken the helm, A. P. Chalkley, who was to steer the magazine through boom, depression and two world wars for the next 44 years. He was a known engine expert with at least one book to his credit before he joined the title, and he brought with him a healthy distrust of hype that his modern counterpart would recognise and respect. "Long distance races and endurance runs are now becoming so numerous in the United States that the majority call for but little comment," reads an item from one of Chalkley's first issues. "The notable 1,554 miles run of the *Br'er Fox II* at 25.2 knots in 1909 is well within memory. Although the boat covered the distance in 53 hours 26 minutes net," it records drily, "the actual time taken was ten days, the longest non-stop run being 150.5 miles in 5.75 hours." But credit where credit is due – Chalkley goes on: "A new record was set up last month by the launch *Charmalee*, which made a non-stop run of 208 miles at 24.9 knots on the Columbia River on Sunday, 13th October." And of course he provides the technical details of this groundbreaking craft: 36ft by 6ft, with an eight-cylinder, four-stroke, 100hp Van Blerck motor and a fuel capacity of 100 gallons – of which it used 97, plus one gallon of lubricating oil, during its record run.

Only deluded loons, new advertisers and editors of unsuccessful titles imagine that magazines shape their markets. Successful magazines reflect them. *Motor Boat & Yachting's*

On Appro

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Price with Flywheel, Couplings to form Universal Joint, and Silencer. **£17 5s.**
Cradles supplied, rough or finished. Motor can be seen running in boat.

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Supplied with Stern Tube and Levers complete.

	Castings.	Finished.	
8 in. ..	£2 5 0	£3 5 0	steel shaft
10 ..	2 5 0	3 7 6	"
12 ..	2 5 0	4 10 0	brass "
14 ..	2 10 0	5 0 0	" "
16 ..	3 5 0	5 10 0	" "
18 ..	3 5 0	6 5 0	" "
20 ..	5 10 0	7 15 0	steel "
22 ..	5 15 0	8 2 6	" "
24 ..	6 0 0	9 5 0	" "

MOTOR CASTINGS CO.,
101, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.
Telephone No. 8697, Central.

*Motors and boaters:
this powered punt
cruised with seven
people at 6mph.*



*Transport of delight:
the motor boat stands
at a Paris show in
1904.*

target market has always been the well-off middle class males that George Sharp so presciently identified 100 years ago. The 'aims and intentions' he set out in the first issue were admirably simple and still hold true today:

- to interest the motor boat maker and user
- to watch the interests of motor boat users
- to foster the industry of motor boat building by publishing details of all new inventions

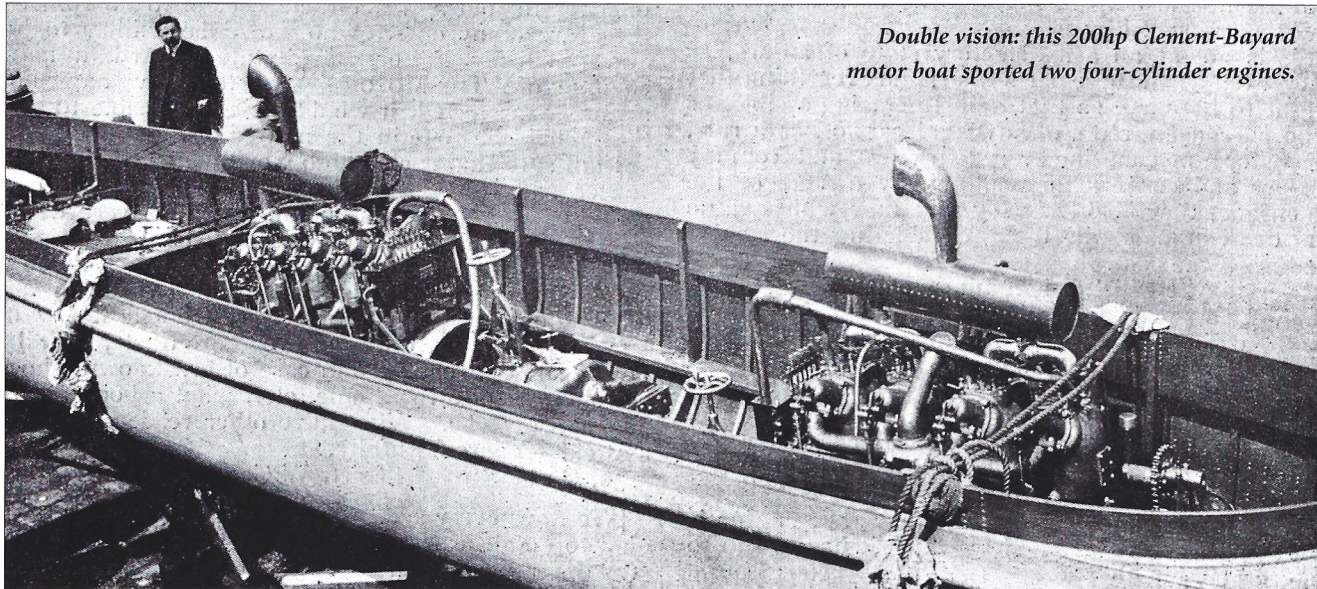
Of course any editor who is human will inevitably inflict his own passions, prejudices and enthusiasms on the magazine in his care, whether

Pool of London, 1904.



they are for sailing, canals or motor torpedo boats. And so the particular flavour of *Motor Boat & Yachting* has constantly changed over the years, sometimes dramatically and sometimes subtly, but few editors have ever lost sight of George Sharp's primary aims for very long.

He only held the chair a couple of years before moving on to pastures unknown, but he had set the magazine on the right course. His remarks addressing the busy businessman reader, the man who couldn't seem to get away from work long enough to enjoy any leisure time – this man for whom motor boating was the perfect pursuit – come from a long and rather wonderful essay in the first issue entitled, 'Why the Motor Boat Should Become Popular'. He takes us, "the tired business man", on a journey down the Thames in a simple motor launch – perhaps one from Listers at Kew Bridge. "She is no flyer, it is true," he says. "Six or seven miles – or perhaps knots – an hour being no doubt the limit at which her little three-horsepower engine can drive her. But even running at this speed, the breeze pours past our faces and into our lungs in one steady stream, health in every breath of it. There is no smoke-stack to hide the view ahead; no furnace to attend



Double vision: this 200hp Clement-Bayard motor boat sported two four-cylinder engines.

to, nor anything else that reminds us of work.”

Past hazel-dotted eyot, willow-hung bank, grey bridge and clear clean meadow the little boat sweeps us, through the factories and smokestacks silhouetted against “the opal of a London sky; while the whole northern bank, from Chelsea to the Tower lies folded in a golden haze. If this be London in reality, it is one we never knew.”

Further down with the stream as “the little motor thrums and throbs on”, under the bridges to the ships in the capital’s thriving port, “the only real things in the whole voyage of enchantment, with the stain and sweat of travel still upon them, and ragged as befits those who shoulder the pack of the world”. He edges over to read their names and ports of registry: Stockholm, Hamburg, Palermo, Halifax. On again, through Limehouse Reach, where “upper and lower topsails half-hauled up, and courses tripped ready to sheet home, is another brig hauling out into midstream to drop down with the ebb, leisurely as a swan.

“Our little motor boat,” says Sharp, “gliding in and out among these, has admitted us to the freedom of forty ports, to the salt and scend of the long seas. But if we like we may go further; past the long green Essex flats, down through the Gore, and on to Burnham River before nightfall, as certainly as if we owned a hundred-ton steam yacht...”

There was no stopping him. *The Motor Boat* was on its way.

Magazine offices

1904-1921	7-15 Rosebery Avenue, London EC1
1921-1934	Imperial Buildings, 56 Kingsway, London WC2
1934-1939	5-15 Rosebery Avenue, London EC1
1939-1970	40 Bowling Green Lane, London EC1
1970-1980	Dorset House, Stamford Street, London SE1
1980-1991	Quadrant House, Sutton, Surrey
1991-	Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1

Apart from a decade or so in the leafy Surrey suburbs, *Motor Boat & Yachting* has always been a denizen of the Smoke, never straying more than a mile or two from its original editorial offices in Rosebery Avenue, where Edmund Dangerfield established the Temple Press in 1891 with magazines devoted to cycling and motor cars. *The Motor Boat* was originally an offshoot of *The Motor*.

All the buildings have survived the decades, the wars and the planners. The Rosebery Avenue premises were until recently an architects’ studio, and the upper floor rooms look little changed from the days when the small staff bashed out those early issues above the din of passing tram cars. The Kingsway bank whose upstairs offices the magazine occupied in the 1920s and 30s is now a bar, but the grim square block in Bowling Green Lane looks unchanged. Dorset House is now a branch of HM Customs & Excise, but Quadrant House is still home to Reed Business, which owned the magazine in the Eighties.

The magazine currently overlooks the Thames, and its old haunts on the fringes of the City and West End, from 23rd-floor offices in Kings Reach Tower, headquarters of IPC Media Ltd.