

So where are we?

It has been a long and fascinating journey. The history of *Motor Boat & Yachting* is, to all intents and purposes, the history of motor boating. Like all histories, the one presented in the pages of the magazine is incomplete, biased and necessarily selective. And likewise, this history of the magazine suffers from all the same shortcomings. In 100 years there have been 2,820 editions, adding up to more than 100,000 pages of editorial. Not all of those pages have stood the test of time, but to do complete justice to the many which have would require a much heavier book than this one.

As with aviation, motor boating in 1904 was the preserve of a few pioneers who were a mix of visionaries, enthusiasts and nutcases. Some of them were picking out a careful path of development through experimentation, while others were blundering up blind alleys of trial and error. Great, progressive shipbuilders like Thornycrofts and Yarrows found themselves on equal footing with street-corner engineering workshops and private adventurers. At this embryonic stage, capital was not yet king. The only



Fairline's flagships, 35 years apart: a 19 from 1967 and a Squadron 74.

Sunseeker 105 Yacht.

thing that mattered was the quality of the ideas.

In 2004 the motor boating world is unrecognisably different from a century ago, but if anything it's just as lively and competitive. Capital is certainly king. Developing a new motor yacht is now a major undertaking, years in the planning – but the quality of ideas is still a crucial

factor. The pace of change and innovation may not be as rapid as it was during the Edwardian years or the 1960s, but it continues steadily. The market for boats has become sophisticated, and thrives on choice. The industry in both Europe and the US has matured, and in recent years consolidated, with fewer boatbuilders, served by





A trio of Sealine C39s.

fewer suppliers, producing more boats.

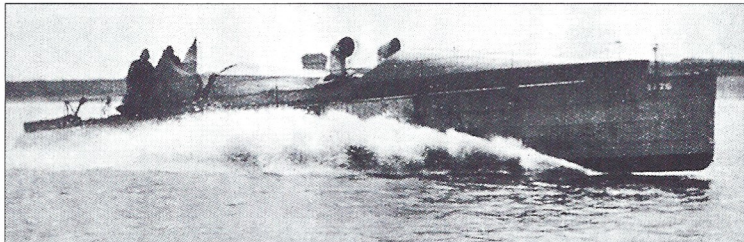
In Europe it is a time of change. The entrepreneurs behind the main surviving boatbuilding companies of the post-war years, all founded in the 1960s or 70s, have begun to retire – or at least think about it. Of the major British boatbuilders, only Sunseeker remains in the hands of its founders. Both Princess and Fairline are now owned by the same South African-based industrial group, and Sealine was recently bought by the American leisure and boatbuilding giant Brunswick. Meanwhile in Italy, modern economic realities have caught up with its inimitable boatbuilding industry, to the point where just two groups, Ferretti and Azimut-Benetti, now completely dominate the country's output.

There have been phenomenal improvements in high-speed diesels in the last couple of decades. Volvo Penta's 3.6 litre six-cylinder engine, for example, more than doubled in output from 130hp to 285hp between 1977 and 2002. Consequently, the size of the 'average' production motor cruiser has steadily risen, as has its performance: 20 knots was a respectable top speed in the 1970s, but now the market expects, and gets, 30. This engine revolution has allowed the British firms to extricate themselves from the cut-throat competition of the small-boat sector and leave it to high-volume producers in the US, France and, increasingly, eastern Europe. With the honourable exception of Sealine, no major British boatbuilder in 2004 is seriously addressing the sub-40ft (12.19m) market. In fact it is quite the opposite.

Indeed, the most arresting development of the

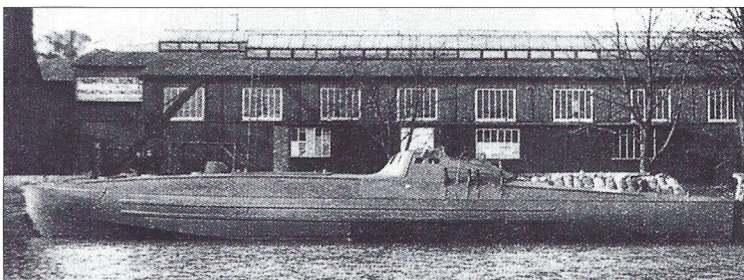
...and how did we get here?

Ten epoch-making boats that made *MBY's* heart beat faster, 1904-2004



Yarrow's 1176, 1905

Building *Napier II* in 1904 inspired Yarrows to use towed models to investigate flat-bottomed hull shapes. They then built 1176 as a trial horse, 60ft long by nine in the beam (18.29m x 2.74m), with a tight turn of bilge and a vertical transom – essentially a scaled-up version of the racer – and shoe-horned five engines into her, totalling 350hp. She managed an excellent 26 knots on trials, with *The Motor Boat* in attendance, and proved to be a true planing boat: "She rises bodily in the water... the wake leaves the floor of the boat in a straight line at the stern, without any curling eddies from the side."



Thornycroft Coastal Motor Boat, 1916

Government censorship kept this story under wraps during WW1, but the magazine made up for that as soon it could. Powered by a variety of motors including Thornycroft's own 250hp V12 and 375hp Y12 engines, the mahogany single-step 'skimmers' were built in three sizes, 40ft, 55ft and 70ft (12.19m, 16.76m and 21.34m), and speeds of up to 40 knots fully laden with torpedoes were achieved. In RN service several of the boats saw action and achieved results. The motor torpedo boat, long a fixation of the magazine's, had finally arrived.



Bennetti's Classic 115: the £8 million, production-line superyacht.

Princess moved from motor boat to motor yacht production with the 20M.



last few years has been the rise of the big – really big – production motor yacht. Since the late 1990s the boatbuilders of both Britain and Italy seem to have been gripped by a collective urge to scale up the motor cruiser concept to levels which could not have been imagined a generation ago. Some of the credit can be claimed by the engine manufacturers, spurred on to new technological heights by both competition and by environmental legislation. But the phenomenal demand that exists for such boats – the very existence of enough customers to make it worthwhile for so many boatyards to compete

for market share – continues to bemuse even industry insiders.

Fairline, who started with a 19-footer (5.79m) in 1967, brought out their Squadron 74 (22.55m) in 2002 and received an upbeat verdict from *Motor Boat & Yachting*. “It would be a magnificent achievement from any boatbuilder, but coming from one who’s never built in this size before, it’s stupendous,” it enthused. Princess, meanwhile, had quietly been consolidating their hold on this surprisingly active sector with three models between 71ft and 85ft (21m-25m). In 2004 neither company appeared to have any immediate plans to build anything larger in the foreseeable future, but Sunseeker, down in Poole, displayed no such inhibitions.

“The world has changed,” observed Sunseeker’s Robert Braithwaite. “Enormous amounts of money have been made in the last ten years. New buyers now come in at 64 feet (19.51m)” – and about £1 million – “then jump to an 82 (25.00m). They’re younger – they used to be around 55, and now they’re in their 40s. The real money is in business – not media or sport.” One exception to this rule among Braithwaite’s loyal customers has been the retired racing driver Nigel Mansell, a



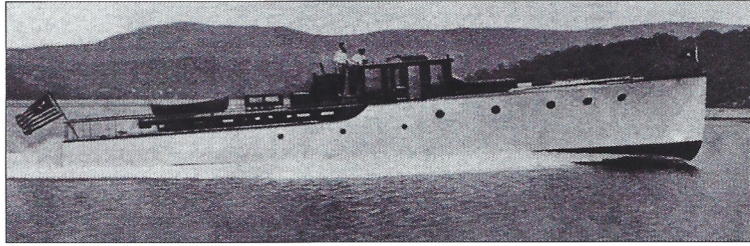
Bennetti Classic 115 interiors.



long-time Sunseeker fan, whose new 94-footer (28.65m) was due for delivery during *Motor Boat & Yachting's* centenary summer. Formula 1 team boss Eddie Jordan bought the first Sunseeker 105 (32.00m) four years ago.

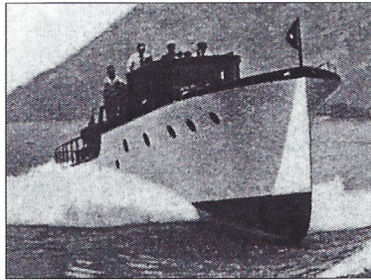
In Italy the story has been similar, although there the response of the boatbuilders, which are well used to building big motor yachts on a one-off basis, has been to rationalise themselves and set up more formal production processes. While this has involved a certain amount of frantic paddling below the surface, there was never really any doubt that the Italian industry would retain its position at the top – although some might say they were just in time. For the buyers are out there. Competition is extremely stiff, even for boats retailing at upwards of £5 million.

It was probably Azimut-Benetti boss Paolo Vitelli who first detected the arrival of this new tidal wave of money into the market. With Azimut he was already well used to building boats of up to 100ft (30.48m), and in Benetti he had a shipyard that built truly enormous craft nearly three times that size – although hitherto on a one-off basis. Vitelli's breakthrough was to put into production a 115ft (35.05m) 'mini-superyacht'

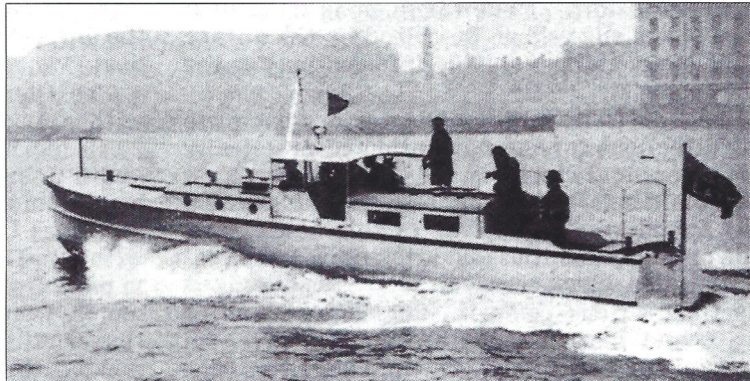


Cigarette, 1923

Seventy feet long on 12ft of beam (21.34m x 3.66m), two ensuite cabins, four crew berths, five 450hp Liberty aero engines, 50mph – this is the sort of extraordinary thing Gar Wood got up to when he wasn't winning the

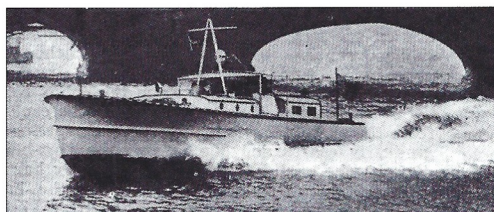


Harmsworth Trophy. "All records appear to have been broken," observed *The Motor Boat*, lamenting that "we do not think there is much likelihood of any corresponding development in this country" – while tactfully neglecting to point out that in this country there was no Prohibition, and therefore no need.



Despujols 41, 1929

Like Gar Wood, French raceboat campaigner Victor Despujols built leisure boats for a living, and the magazine tested this one on the Thames at Westminster. She was well ahead of her time. "The hull is of the semi-displacement type with a moderate round bilge flattening out aft," the magazine reported, 30 years before the first Nelsons emerged from Bembridge. "She rode on an even keel with very little wash," and featured two twin-berth cabins. Two horizontal



'spray deflectors' were fitted at the bow: "these answer their purpose very well." A pair of 150hp petrol engines gave her a top speed of 30 knots.



*A 100ft (30.48m) Navetta
from Custom Line in Italy.*



The interior of Norberto Ferretti's own example.

called the Classic, which looked like a Benetti, but was built like an Azimut – in a mould, with fixed layout, power and fit-out options. It was a runaway success, and by the summer of 2004 some 20 of them had been completed in five years, with a further six on order. They retail at more than £8 million each.

The rest of the European industry took note. Many boatbuilders knew there were good times ahead, but no-one had suspected they could be this good. The 115 was followed by a larger 'Mk 2' at 120ft (36.58m), and in 2003 by a smaller model built on the same principles called the 100 Tradition – for which Vitelli himself was the first customer.

Meanwhile Vitelli's rival Norberto Ferretti, founder and chairman of the Ferretti Group, which owns some of the best-known brands in

the business – including Riva and Bertram – was commissioning his own new boat, a 100ft (30.48m) 'Navetta' from Ferretti's Custom Line shipyard. He claimed some insight into who these wealthy new buyers actually were.

"After you have the €20 million house, the vintage cars, the paintings, then you might come to these boats," he says. "And then you might want a Ferretti, or if business is good, a Custom Line. The philosophy of these brands is the same: family boating, cruising, some business entertaining – sometimes," he adds laconically, "it can be useful to take your bank manager out on the boat." A Pershing buyer, on the other hand, would be younger. "A Porsche or Ferrari driver, rather than Rolls-Royce or Bentley."

Pershing boss Attilio "Tilli" Antonelli, whose company was bought by Ferretti in 1998, agrees. "The typical age is 40-something. One customer with an 88 is 32. They are industrialists, mainly self-made, family people who like to show off a little to their friends. In the US the age is 50-plus; retired internet, new-tech people. You get different profiles in different places."

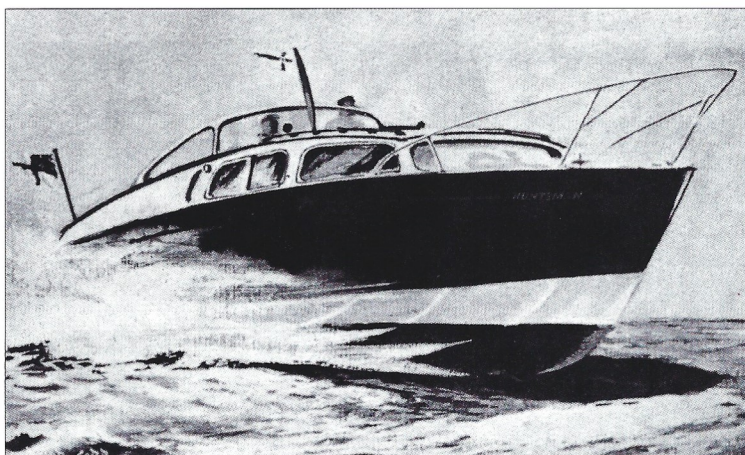
Antonelli staked his claim to this new motor yacht market with a dramatic silver 88-footer (26.82m) in 2001, and almost immediately set his designers to work on a larger successor, aimed at 88 owners who wanted to move on. The Pershing 115 was launched in 2004, with Antonelli claiming to have sold three off the drawing board. "Then we will introduce a 130 or 140 in 2007," he said. "A 115 buyer has already asked for one." He also had plans to fill in the gap in the product range with a new 92 or 95-footer. Slightly superfluously, he explained with a smile: "You can't stand still – you have to follow the customers, follow the market."

Owners, Norberto Ferretti contends, are also using their boats more than they used to – perhaps because the boats themselves are better than they used to be. Engines, electronics and other vital systems are after all much more reliable than they were a generation ago. "A boat like this is better than the best hotel," he says. "You can go to places that are only accessible by boat. You can have dinner in your underwear if you want. It's like your house – but less formal, because boats are more fun."



Woodpecker of Poole, 1948

Seventy feet (21.34m) of sheer elegance, the epitome of Laurent Giles's motor yacht style, *Woodpecker* graced the MBY Festival of Power with her presence when nearly 50 years old and carried off a special 'Editor's Award'. Later she was featured over several pages. "If Giles had only ever drawn one motor boat, he would still have earned himself a place in history." Her original two 100hp Dorman diesel engines gave her a top speed of about 13 knots, but she looks just as pretty standing still. "The launch of *Woodpecker* resulted in a spate of orders for sophisticated and elegant motor yachts."



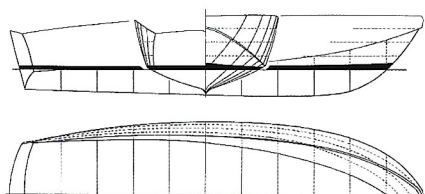
Fairey Huntsman 28, 1960

Inspired by Ray Hunt but designed by Fairey's own Alan Burnard, the 28ft 10in (8.79m) Huntsman seemed to epitomise resolute British pluck. Like the famous Mini, they performed with distinction in competition – all the early Cowes-Torquays, as well as the marathon Round-Britain Race of 1968 and 1972's London-Monte Carlo. Their classic looks also helped to define the style of the 1960s, and while the Mini starred alongside Michael Caine in *The Italian Job*, two Huntsmen and several lesser Faireys appeared with Sean Connery in *From Russia With Love*.

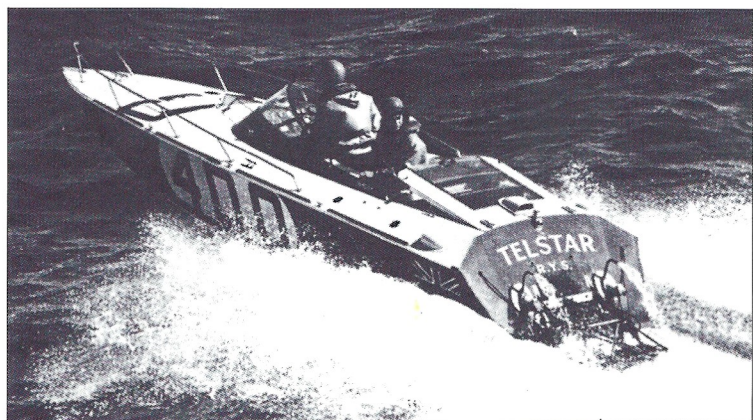


'A Speranziella, 1961

Europe's answer to the Hunt deep-vees and Britain's first glimpse of the work of Italian maestro Sonny Levi, she was not only bright red, but also the best-looking boat in the early Cowes-Torquay races. Campaigned for three seasons and re-engined twice – ending up with two 400hp Ford Interceptors – the 30ft (9.14m), 43-knot 'A Speranziella' taught her designer more than any



other boat about high-speed offshore. When she finally won the race on the third attempt, *Motor Boat & Yachting* led the applause. "The success was a popular and well-merited one."



Telstar, 1968

Don Shead's big break, and the first of many boats he designed for Tommy Sopwith. She endeared herself to the magazine for all time by snatching the rough, 228-mile Cowes-Torquay-Cowes race from the much larger *Surfury* – the 25ft (7.62m) *Telstar* was only a Class 2 boat, with half *Surfury's* horsepower – when Tommy Sopwith took the longer, but flatter route around Lyme Bay. Her race average was 33 knots. The blue-hulled look would later reappear in Shead's *Sunseekers* – but it took the Poole boatyard a while to adopt the expensive curved screen.

No-one could have foreseen a few years ago that these new, extremely wealthy buyers would be content to spend upwards of £60,000 per foot (£228,000 per metre) on boats that, outwardly at least, looked exactly the same as all the others on the production line. In the past, owners with this kind of money would have demanded something unique and distinctive. What has changed?

"Well, they're happy to buy a Rolls-Royce," says David King of Princess, thoughtfully. "And in the circles they move in they'd probably be quite happy to find it parked next to another one. And of course you can have your own ideas on livery and interiors."

"There are advantages to buying a production boat," adds Norberto Ferretti. "You can test one beforehand, assess it for speed, noise, vibration – even the size of the bathrooms. With a custom boat you have to trust the builder on all this – and it may not be quite as you expected." And as for those ideas on livery and interiors: "We might offer 20 different colours of leather, 30 colours of carpet," says Ferretti, "but 80 per cent of customers go for the scheme in the brochure." This is usually a conservative mix of creams and beiges – the least risky option. The new rich are, perhaps, a little nervous about re-sale values.

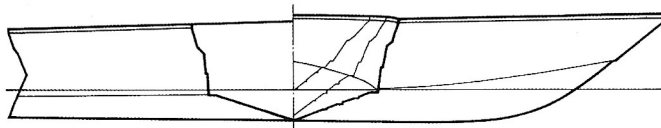
Perhaps they are right to be. It is always difficult to see what the future holds. Writing in the 50th anniversary issue of the magazine in 1954, Temple Press managing director Roland Dangerfield, the son of the founder, displayed a different kind of foresight from that exercised by his father in launching the magazine, when he predicted that the next 50 years would see the development of nuclear-powered boats. It seems laughable now – a perfect example of the risks inherent in using occasions like this to make grand predictions – but forgivable. Nuclear power was, after all, the latest thing. And who knows? Maybe the world's oil reserves won't run out after all. Perhaps some way will be found to produce enough combustible fuel from plants without having to cultivate every acre of the earth's surface. It could be that hydrogen fuel cells will indeed come to the rescue of our energy-hungry civilisation.

Or, just maybe, another 50 or 100 years will see that young Dangerfield fellow proved right.



Princess 45, 1982

A star is born. Granted the rare privilege of a rough-weather test in a boat that could handle it, the magazine's technical staff were knocked out by the Princess 45's effortless seakeeping. Thanks in no small measure to her designer we now take such capabilities almost for granted, but in those days flybridge cruisers just weren't supposed to handle this well downwind. It must, the magazine felt, be something to do with that strange transom 'bustle' below the waterline. She was also remarkably quick for her horsepower. And in the same year, Bernard Olesinski drew the Turbo 36 for Fairline as well.



Pershing 88, 2001

It was clear by the turn of the millenium that something unusual was afoot in the big motor yacht market. Boats were getting bigger and faster, designs were becoming ever more radical, and the Mediterranean seemed to be awash with money. But no boat turned more heads at the 2001 boat shows than Pershing's astounding 88. "Even tied to the quay it radiates an authority that's positively Wagnerian," the magazine felt. "Pretty? Not really. But impossible to ignore." And it delivered on its looks, with a 39-knot top speed and excellent handling.

