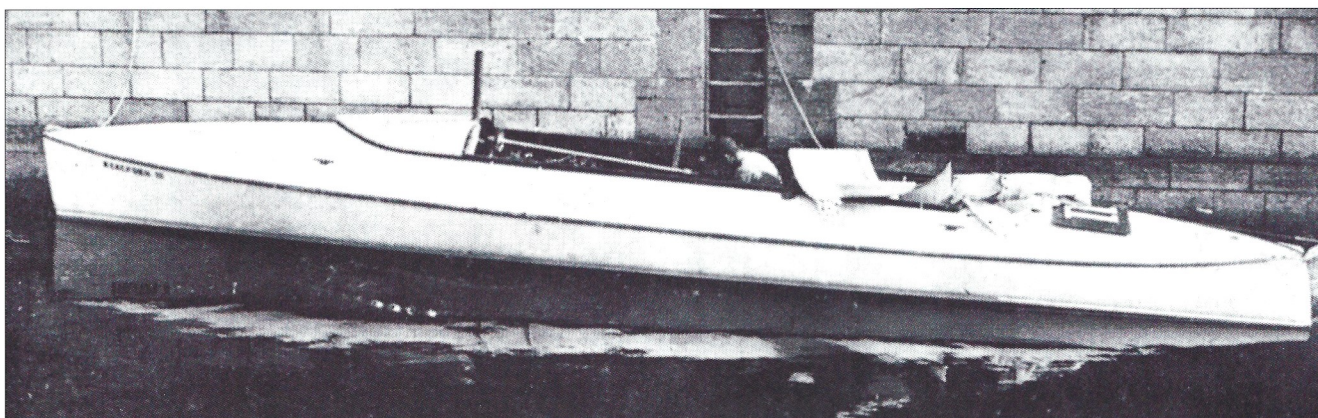


This sporting life

Racing – particularly offshore racing – always did have the power to capture the imagination of *Motor Boat & Yachting*. Whether it was 1904 or 1964, the noise and drama, the personalities, the speed and the danger could be relied upon to create an addictive cocktail, irresistible to journalists in search of great copy. You might say the magazine has racing in its blood.

One of the first editors, T.D. Wynn Weston, was a well-known early racing helmsman, and Frank Snoxell, who took over the editor's chair in 1956, had in his youth won the very first outboard race to be held in the UK, a British Motor Boat Club handicap event at Chelsea, way back in 1923.

Indeed, the magazine was launched on the back of a powerboat race. Within weeks of the first issue hitting the news stands on 14 July 1904, the redoubtable Edmund Dangerfield, proprietor of Temple Press (publishers of *The Motor*) hit upon a spectacular promotion for his new project, filling the fastest ferry of the day with 600 readers, advertisers and VIPs and taking them to watch the cross-Channel race on 8 August.

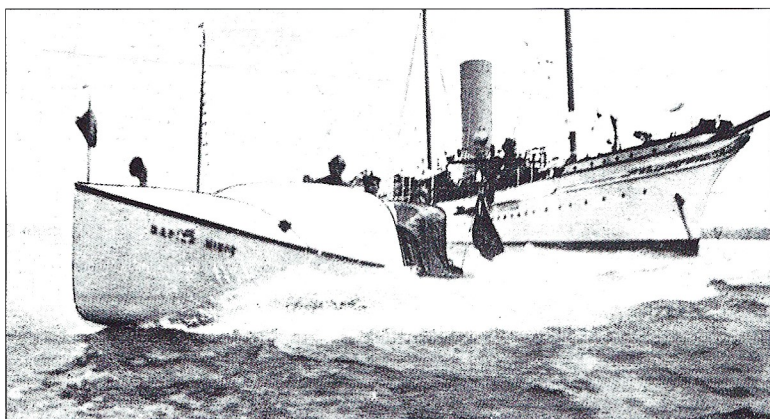


**Mercedes IV, winner
of the 1904 cross-
Channel race.**

Among the VIPs was the journalist from *The Times*, who acknowledged the new magazine by name and marvelled at how an 8,000hp ship could be outpaced from Calais to Dover by an 80hp racer. The winner was the Daimler-engined *Mercedes IV* of Germany, in a few seconds over the hour, with Britain's 73hp *Napier Minor* crossing the line five minutes later.

The biggest contest of the era was the Harmsworth Trophy, put up by the *Daily Mail* and held for the first time the previous year in Cork. A British victory there ensured that the 1904 event would be run in home waters, and as *The Motor Boat* reported approvingly from off Ryde Pier, it had a truly international quality, with entrants from Britain, France and the USA. However, the magazine went on, the meeting "has gone down into history as a series of mishaps and break-downs by which the *Napier Minor*, the last year winner of the event, was permitted again to assume the plume of victory, though she was by

**The 35ft (10.67m),
73hp Napier Minor.**



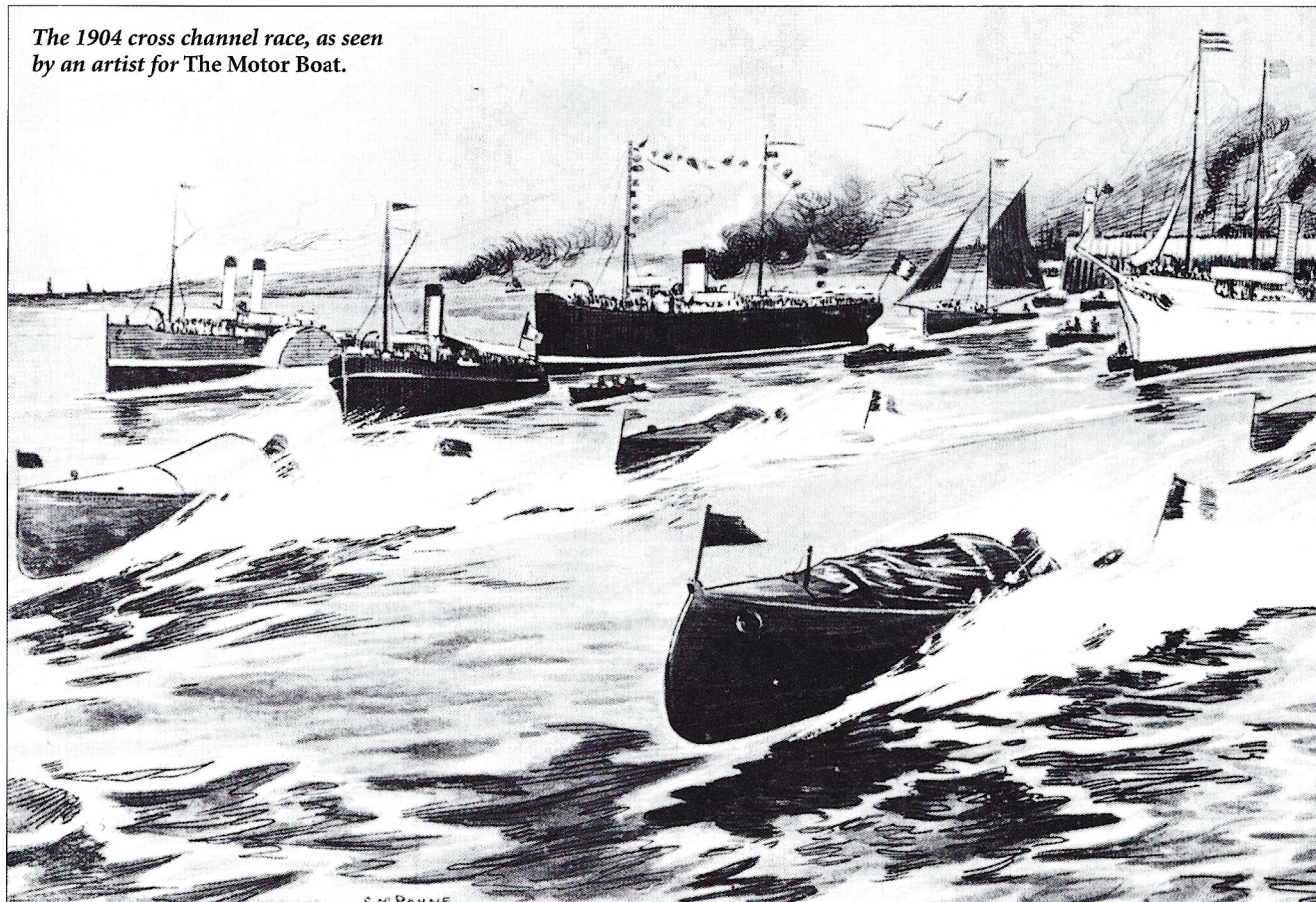
no means the fastest boat in the race." The American boat was clearly the fastest one there, but to the magazine's disappointment it broke down. Later, after a French protest at the English swopping boats, the trophy went to France.

A virtually annual event until the First World War, the Harmsworth – or British International Trophy, as it was more properly known – quickly became a benchmark of performance boating progress, the blue riband event of the emerging sport. In phrasing that was to become familiar to subsequent generations of readers, the magazine in 1905 pronounced on the advantages of racing as a means of helping boat designers develop and perfect their craft: "The racer of yesterday is the cruiser of today; the designer finds his limits in his racer and then fixes his margin of safety for his cruiser. Is it not so?" Indeed it was, and the sentiment was to be echoed repeatedly in later years by columnists extolling the benefits of racing as a means of "improving the breed".

However, such advances come at a cost, and cost is the enemy of competition. One of the first attempts to create as level a playing field as possible was the British Motor Boat Club's 21ft (6.40m) class, which was born out of a committee meeting at the end of the 1909 season. *The Motor Boat* reported the details: "Length not to exceed 21ft; beam not to be less than 3ft 9in; motor to be of British manufacture, and to consist of two cylinders, each of 4in bore or the equivalent, the stroke in no case to exceed 6in..."

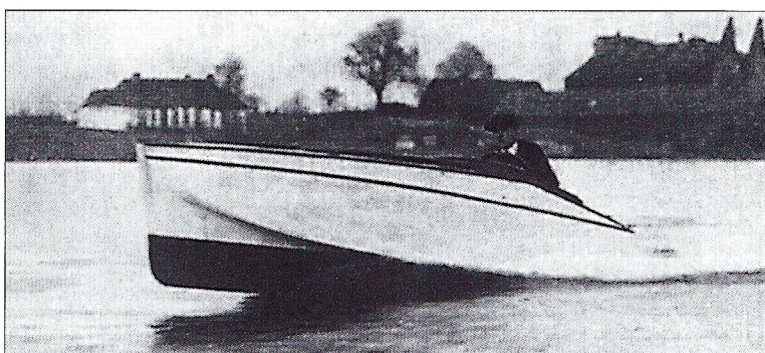
"The class should prove a popular one, as the speed of the boats should be about 15 knots; the boats can be made at the same time to be very

The 1904 cross channel race, as seen by an artist for The Motor Boat.



useful for pleasure use apart from racing. They should be inexpensive, costing anything from £150 to £200 each." And so it proved. The formula was exactly right for the times, and soon a substantial fleet was competing at races all over the country, many of the boats achieving race averages of well over 20 knots. The organisers of the Monaco meeting agreed to admit them to their 6.5m class, and in 1913 a special train was chartered to transport 14 boats from Britain to take part, joining others from France and Italy.

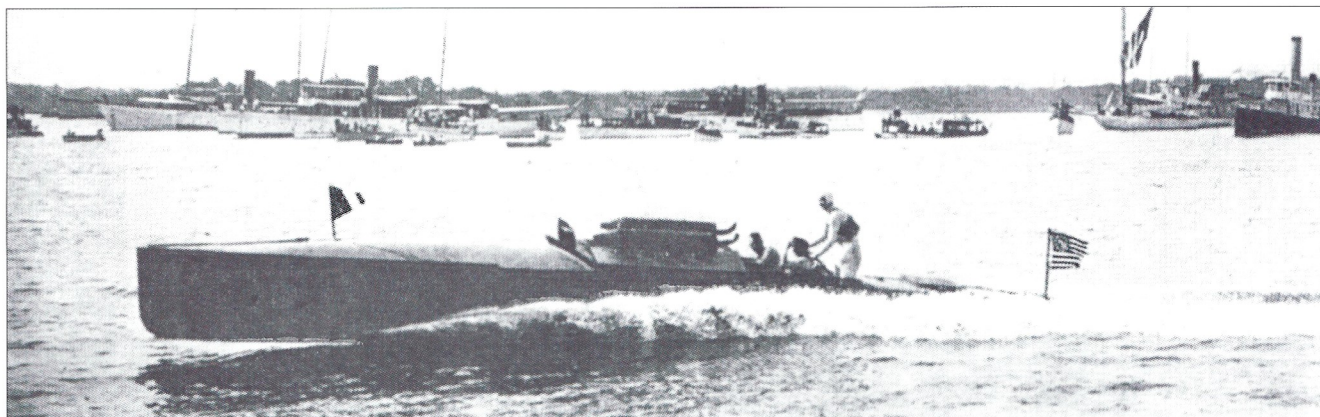
But no matter how competitive and affordable they might have been, the lesser racing classes could not compete for column inches with the Harmsworth Trophy. Between the wars it was held in the unshakeable grip of American technological and competitive superiority, spearheaded by the phenomenal Gar Wood. A superb driver and instinctively brilliant engineer, Wood was also a great sportsman who was not above helping his rivals occasionally, whether by



advising them on propeller and rudder design, lending them his workshops and staff for repairs, or agreeing to delays to allow them to get their boats ready – admirably Corinthian behaviour that was not always reciprocated.

By 1931, with Wood the only winner in the six competitions since the Great War, he was tiring of the predictability of it all and keen for some real competition. Fortunately the British were starting

Cordon Bleu, a representative member of the BMBC's successful 21ft (6.40m) class.



Fred Burnham's Dixie III, winner of both the Harmsworth Trophy and the APBA Gold Cup in 1910.

to get their act together. After three high-profile, well-funded but doomed attempts by the English oil heiress Marion Carstairs, of the sort usually described as 'plucky', the racing driver and ex-RFC pilot Kaye Don challenged for the trophy in *Miss England II*, which had recently raised the world water speed record to 110mph. He won the first heat with ease at an average of nearly 90mph.

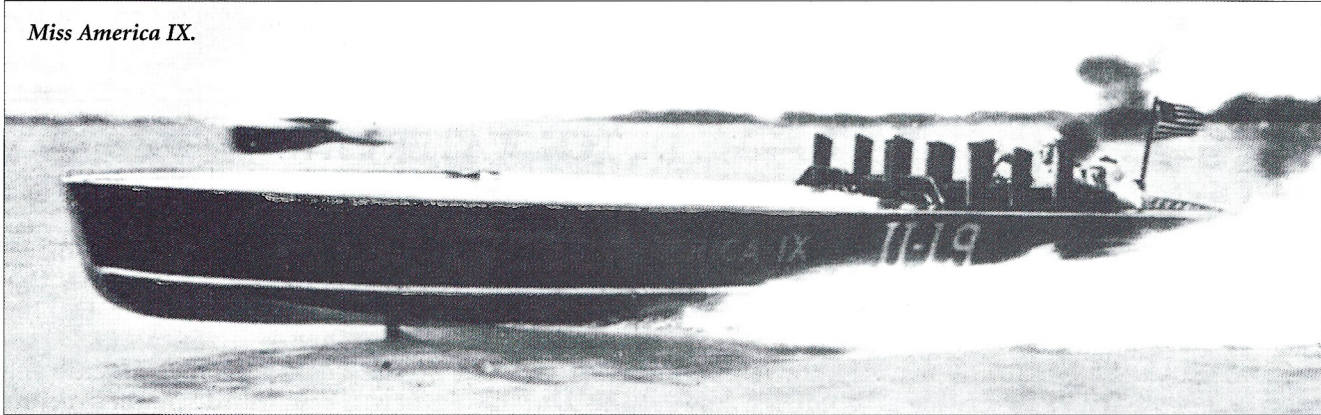
Just before the second, Gar Wood noticed a

split in one of his fuel tanks, and asked the British for a 45-minute delay for repairs. To the general astonishment of the sportsmanlike American and almost everyone else, the British refused, pointing out that Wood had a spare boat. Undaunted, Wood soldered up the split with the tank still full of petrol and came charging from his boatshed towards the start line just as the Briton was starting his own run. Wood beat Don into the first

Golden Years 1: the pre-WW2 Harmsworth Trophy

Year	Boat	Driver (country)	Venue	Speed (mph)
1903	<i>Napier I</i>	E. Campbell Muir (GB)	Queenstown	19.53
1904	<i>Trèfle à Quatre</i>	Henri Brasier (Fr)	Solent	26.63
1905	<i>Napier II</i>	Lord Montagu (GB)	Arcachon	26.03
1906	<i>Yarrow Napier</i>	Lord Montagu (GB)	Solent	15.48
1907	<i>Dixie I</i>	Barclay Pearce (US)	Solent	31.78
1908	<i>Dixie II</i>	Barclay Pearce (US)	New York	36.11
1910	<i>Dixie III</i>	F. K. Burnham (US)	New York	36.04
1911	<i>Dixie IV</i>	F. K. Burnham (US)	New York	40.28
1912	<i>Maple Leaf IV</i>	Thomas Sopwith (GB)	New York	43.18
1913	<i>Maple Leaf IV</i>	Thomas Sopwith (GB)	Solent	57.45
1920	<i>Miss America I</i>	Gar Wood (US)	Solent	61.51
1921	<i>Miss America II</i>	Gar Wood (US)	Detroit	59.75
1926	<i>Miss America V</i>	Gar Wood (US)	Detroit	61.11
1928	<i>Miss America VII</i>	Gar Wood (US)	Detroit	59.32
1929	<i>Miss America VIII</i>	Gar Wood (US)	Detroit	75.29
1930	<i>Miss America IX</i>	Gar Wood (US)	Detroit	77.39
1931	<i>Miss America VIII</i>	George Wood (US)	Detroit	60.00
1932	<i>Miss America X</i>	Gar Wood (US)	Lake St Clair	78.49
1933	<i>Miss America X</i>	Gar Wood (US)	St Clair River	86.94

Miss America IX.



turn and the British boat, built for straight-line speed, spun out on the wash of *Miss America IX* and flipped, throwing its crew into the water. Then Wood himself was waved into the pits. Both boats, it seemed, had jumped the gun and were disqualified, leaving Wood's brother George to take the trophy in the older *Miss America VIII*.

In 1932 Don was back with a new boat, *Miss England III*, which had raised the world speed record to just under 120mph. Having seen how serious the British were the previous year, Wood also had a new boat, the four-engined *Miss America X*. Once again Don shot off into an early and commanding lead, but this time mechanical problems prevented him from finishing even one of the best-of-three series, leaving Wood to an



easy victory. He celebrated by taking the world speed record back again.

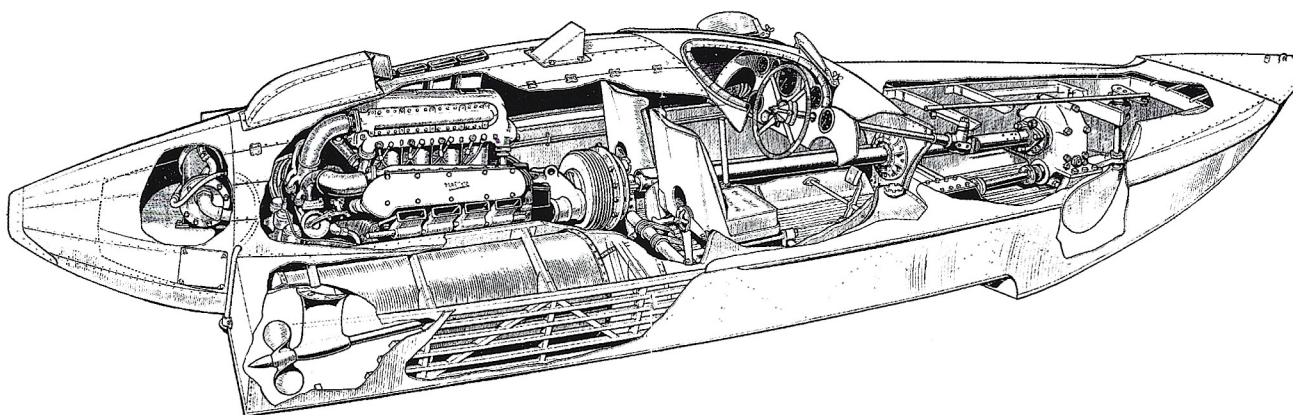
The famous 1933 Harmsworth between Gar Wood and Hubert Scott-Paine was the last of the classic inter-war encounters. Scotty's British Power Boats had built the aluminium *Miss Britain III* in great secrecy at Hythe. With just 1,375hp from its single Napier aero-engine it was a mouse next to Wood's mammoth 6,400hp *Miss America X*, but less than a quarter of the weight. Although driven with great courage by the Englishman it gave Wood few problems, as he took the first heat nearly a minute and a half ahead, and the second by some 22 seconds. Nevertheless, the gallant Wood pronounced this second heat as "the closest race I ever had".

The classic Harmsworth contests were fought over short-lapped courses in sheltered waters – the over-powered, flat-bottomed, stepped-hulled wooden boats of the time, fast though they were,

Missed again: Kaye Don, Harmsworth challenger and record breaker, in Miss England III.



The greatest: Gar Wood.



**Another gallant
British loser: Hubert
Scott-Paine's 1,375hp
aluminium Miss
Britain III.**

could not have survived the open sea. All that changed in 1956, though, when inshore racers and Florida boat industry veterans Sam Griffith and Forrest Johnson started the Miami-Nassau Race. A punishing 188-mile contest in the rough waters of the Gulf Stream, it captured the competitive boating imagination like no event had since the early Harmsworth races.

This was a time of transition in boat design. The war years, with their intense development on both sides of the Atlantic of fast planing boats, had established the primacy of a single hull shape: the fine entry, hard chine and warped bottom of the classic MTB, as seen in the designs of Vosper, British Power Boats and Elco. A compromise bringing together upwind performance, downwind handling and speed, at its best it could produce reasonably capable sea boats, but all its advantages were quickly lost once translated into pleasure boats with a waterline length of just 20 or 25ft (6.10m-7.62m). In rough weather these were just too short and too light, and the question was always whether it would be the

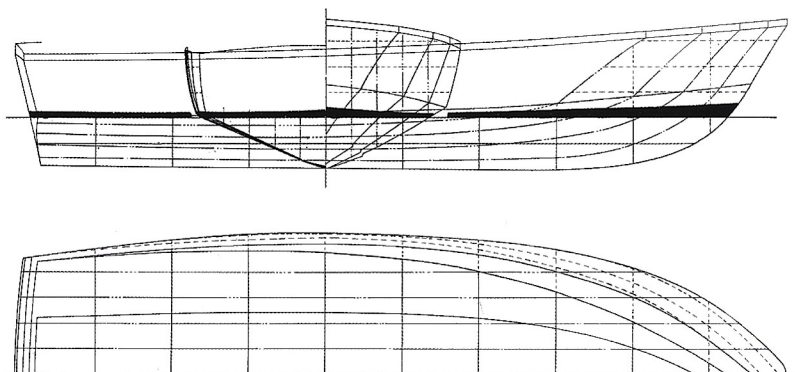
boat or the crew that came apart first.

Enter Ray Hunt. A respected sailboat designer, he was commissioned to do a 23ft (7.01m) tender in 1958 which is known to posterity thanks to the auspicious circumstances of its debut. At that year's America's Cup trials the renowned yachtsman Dick Bertram, crewing aboard *Vim* against *Columbia*, was transfixed by the little speedboat's easy motion through the big seas, and immediately commissioned a 31-footer from her designer.

With 24° of deadrise amidships reducing to just 23° at the transom, Hunt's 31ft (9.45m) deep-vee was the most influential hull design ever produced, and helped write offshore racing history by allowing it to become a halfway mainstream sport – instead of the exclusive preserve of lonely masochists. Bertram christened her *Moppie* – his wife's nickname – took a mould off the hull, and went into glassfibre production. Over the next two decades, more than 2,000 Bertram 31s were built.

With Griffith, Bertram won the 1960 Miami-Nassau, the roughest on record, and Max Aitken, proprietor of Express Newspapers, brought the sport to Europe the next year and launched the International Offshore Powerboat Race from Cowes to Torquay, sponsored – as was the London boat show at the time – by the *Daily Express*.

Motor Boat & Yachting was quick to catch on. Its report on the 1961 event seems a little rushed, but by the following year it had truly caught the offshore bug, and for the rest of the decade felled forests to satisfy its need to spread the word. New boat designs were described in obsessive detail, cutaway drawings were commissioned, and tactics and strategies were picked over exhaustively.



A true original: the lines of Ray Hunt's deep-vee Moppie, the first Bertram 31.

Joe and the Duke of York

What can you make of an English heiress with a love of men's clothes, women's company and a leather doll called Lord Tod Wadley, who called herself Joe? Marion Carstairs was a one-off, and it was fortunate for the sport of powerboat racing that she became one of its most enthusiastic supporters, because she had lots of money and knew how to spend it.

Estranged from her family aged 11 and sent to boarding school in the US, she drove ambulances in WW1 and the Irish Civil War and then set up a chauffeuring company with friends in London. On coming of age in 1921 she inherited a fortune from her grandfather, one of the founders of Standard Oil, and in 1924 commissioned a boat to compete in 1.5-litre 'Z' class races.

Named *Newg* ('Gwen' backwards) after girlfriend Gwen Farrar, this first boat was a copper-sewn 17-footer built by Sam Saunders in Cowes with a supercharged Sunbeam engine, capable of nearly 50 knots. It was designed by Fred Cooper. After learning the ropes during the 1925 season, Carstairs and mechanic Joe Harris won virtually everything going in 1926, including the prestigious Duke of York's Trophy, and set a 30-mile record for the class of 54.97mph.

Carstairs continued to campaign *Newg* for the next three seasons, but in the meantime she had become fascinated by the ultimate powerboating prize – the Harmsworth. A virtually unlimited class – hulls had to be a maximum length of 40ft, but there was no ceiling on engine size, number, or horsepower – the Harmsworth required the very best in boat design and engineering, and had the capacity to soak up huge amounts of money. Again Carstairs went to Saunders, and to the designs of F.P. Hyde-Beadle he built the heiress two single-step hydroplanes, *Estelle I* and *II*, of 26ft and 21ft, each with one 900hp Napier engine. She raced them against each other at Windermere, and even though the results were discouraging she elected to take the smaller boat to America to challenge the redoubtable Gar Wood in the 1928 Harmsworth Trophy.

Things did not go well. She and mechanic Joe



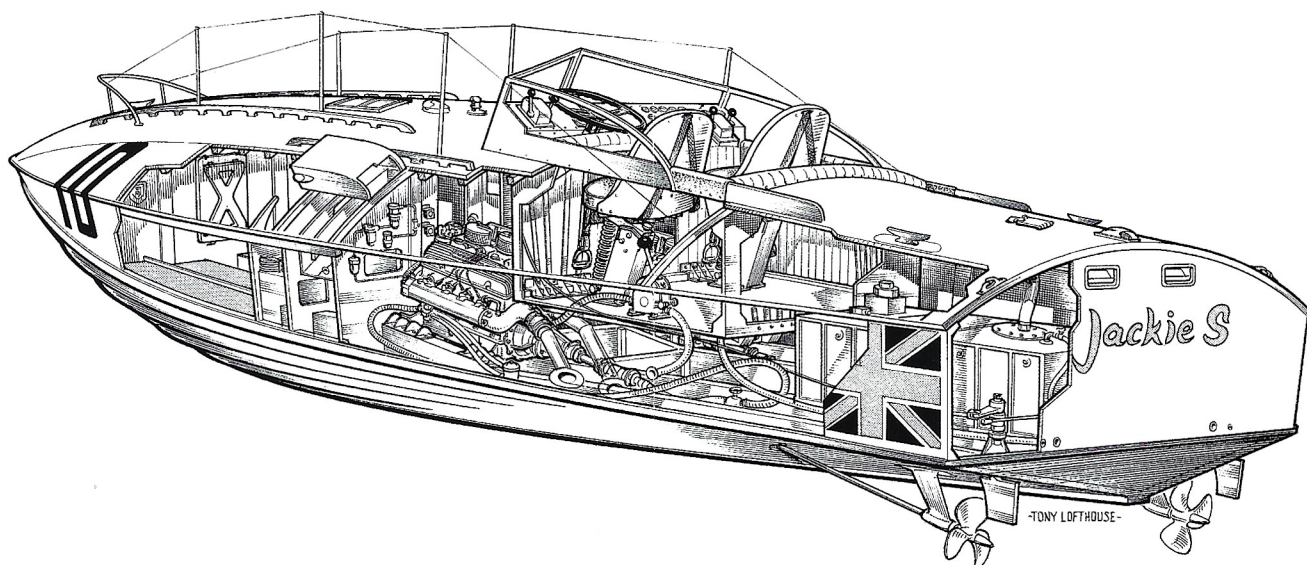
Harris spun out in the first heat, damaging the boat and themselves in the process, but she was back the following year with the larger *Estelle IV*, 35ft in length and packing three 1000hp Napier Lion engines. However, *The Motor Boat* reported, "it had not proved possible to try out *Estelle IV* to an extent which was desirable, and although the boat travelled well it was obvious that she was likely to do better with two engines than three; therefore, the forward engine was removed."

This time a floating log put paid to her attempt, bending a prop shaft when she hit it at over 60mph. Her final attempt – understandably, since each boat was costing her in the region of £30,000 – was in 1930, with yet another *Estelle* (the fifth), a 28-footer designed by Bert Hawker with twin 1300hp Napier aero engines.

Hawker drove the new boat and Carstairs took the helm of *Estelle IV*, while Gar Wood and his two brothers Phil and George fielded *Miss Americas IX*, *V* and *VIII*. This time fuel tank problems in both *Estelles* were the cause of British failure, and Carstairs retired gracefully. "I tried for the Harmsworth three times without success," she said. "I cannot afford another attempt."

Shortly afterwards Carstairs bought an island in the Bahamas and lived there until the 1970s, running it as her own personal fiefdom. She died in 1993, aged 93.

One-off: Betty Carstairs and her leather mascot, Lord Tod Wadley.



Cutaway of Emil Savundra's Jackie S, which came fifth in the 1964 Cowes-Torquay race.

Fabio Buzzi's Cesa 1882, perhaps the greatest of all the monohulls.

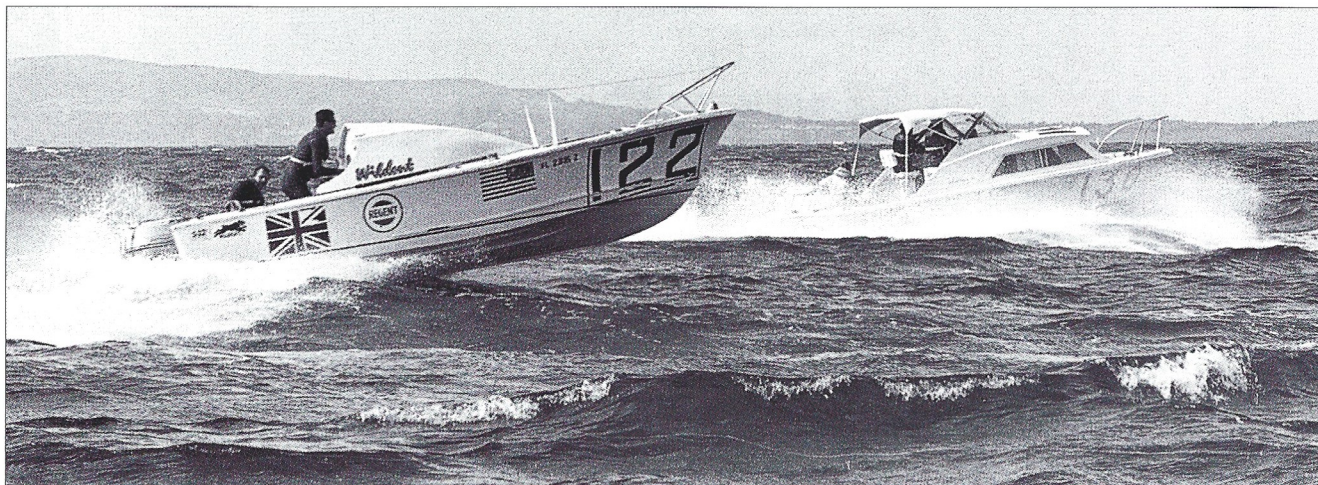
Rides were hitched in helicopters, light aircraft, naval destroyers and fast patrol boats to keep up with the racers. Pickets were posted on every headland between Cowes and Torquay to report exactly when each boat passed the marks.

Designers were fêted. The magazine fell completely under the spell of Sonny Levi. Celebrities, from Spitfire test pilot Jeffrey Quill to the disgraced insurance swindler and nautical liability Emil Savundra, were dutifully name-checked. Boatbuilders were treated with a respect that bordered on reverence – particularly if they

built winning boats, and especially if, like Dick Bertram and the improbably glamorous and urbane Don Aronow, they were American.

The Sixties exploded in *Motor Boat & Yachting* like they exploded in all other walks of British life. New layouts gave photography the same importance as the words, and a fresh breeze of change blew through the pages. Pretty girls sprang up in varying states of undress in both advertisements and articles. Typography took on new and occasionally bizarre forms, but at their best, the magazine's layouts exhibited the cool





class of a Blue Note record cover.

No-one talks about racing “improving the breed” any more. Those days ended when monohulls hit a plateau in the 1970s, and pioneer designers led by James Beard’s and Clive Curtis’s Cougar Marine started experimenting with catamarans. The sport became more professional, private entrants became a rare breed and the boats seemed less relevant to the realities of cruising.

The magazine’s interest waned, but never quite disappeared, thanks largely to two men. The great Italian engineer and naval architect Fabio Buzzi in the late 1980s developed the Seatek diesel specifically to satisfy the race rules, and for three glorious seasons won virtually everything in

Class 1, on both sides of the Atlantic, in his magnificent Cesa 1882 monohull and catamaran. The rules were soon changed.

At the same time a young star was rising closer to home. As the son of the founder of Cougar Marine, Steve Curtis grew up amid the sounds, sights and smells of offshore racing, just across the water from the fabled Cowes finish line, and like *MBY* he has racing in his blood. The magazine was quick to spot his extraordinary talent, and has followed his career closely. In this centenary year, Curtis was defending his fifth world Class 1 title – an achievement to eclipse all the great British Harmsworth racers, and comparable with the record of the great Gar Wood himself.

Like father: Clive Curtis’s Wildcat pursues the Bertram Wee Moppie in the 1965 Cowes-Torquay.

Like son: five-time world Class 1 champion Steve Curtis in Spirit of Norway.

