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Motor & Yachting Boat



LONDON BOAT SHOW PREVIEW
NAVIGATION COURSE, Part 1
CHANNEL ISLANDS COASTGUIDE

**WIN A BOAT
AND ENGINE**

ONCE AGAIN

A race-bred blend of old and new, the Spearfish was Fairey Marine's first glassfibre express cruiser. Alan Harper reports on a modern classic. Photographs by Lester McCarthy



SOME BOATS are born great, and others have greatness thrust upon them. Christopher Columbus's *Santa Maria* was one of the latter. A tubby little coaster, the last thing she was built for was an Atlantic crossing, particularly as her skipper thought he was going all the way round to India. She appears in the history books unwillingly.

The Fairey Marine express cruisers of the 1960s, however, were born great. Early histories of British offshore powerboat racing are filled with their exploits, and the sea-keeping qualities of one type in particular, the Huntsman, have passed into legend. They were built as day-boats for the Mediterranean, but found their niche in the rough-and-tumble of offshore endurance events.

George Morgan-Harris of Bursledon, Hampshire, is a Fairey fan. He used to have a Huntsman — he has had a number of Fairey boats, going back to his first in 1974 — but now has a Spearfish, appropriately named *Once Again*. She is registered in Cannes, which is also appropriate — George spent part of his youth living there aboard a 65ft motor yacht. The only school his parents could find for him, he recalls with a smile, was *L'Ecole des Jeunes Filles*.

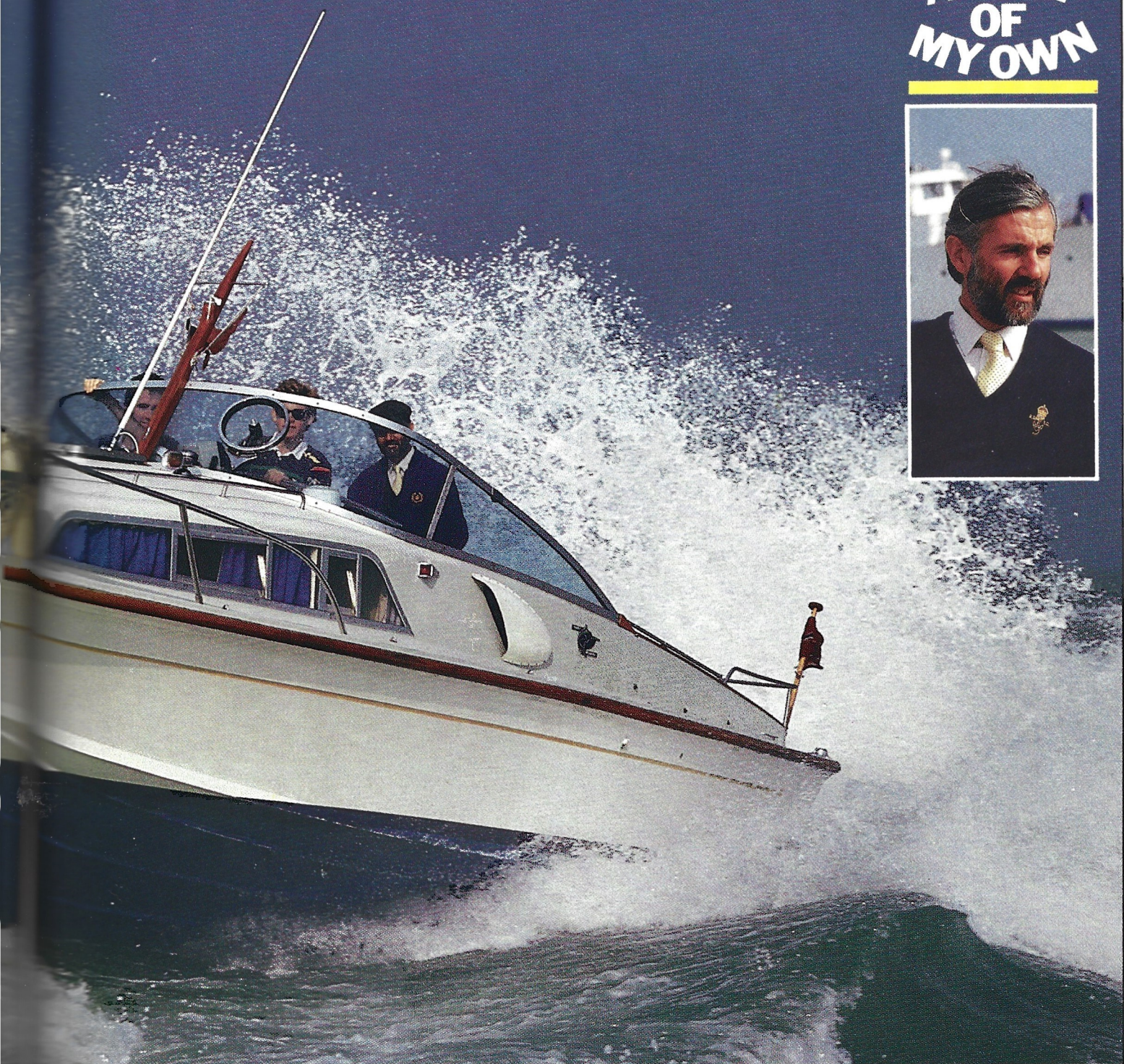
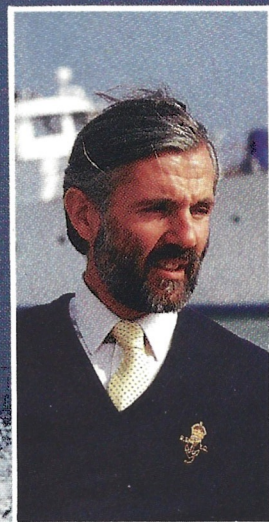
The Spearfish was a development of the Huntsman which first appeared in 1970. Fairey were famous for hot-moulding, a boatbuilding technique giving great strength and light weight, where up to ten 2½mm laminations of agba wood were laid on a male

mould, vacuum sealed and then steam-baked. But by 1970 suspicion of glassfibre was giving way to acceptance, particularly abroad. The decision to make the Spearfish in the new material was a nod to market pressures.

The new model was essentially a glassfibre version of the later Huntsmen. At 30ft it was a little shorter, and the freeboard was lower, but at heart the Spearfish was the same turbocharged, deep-vee giant-killer in a new guise.

Fairey's finest hour offshore had been just the year before, in the 1969 Round-Britain race. Ford, anxious to increase their share of the growing powerboat market, entered a team of three Huntsmen in the ten-day

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marathon, each powered by twin 180hp Sabre diesels. *Fordpower* and *Fordspeed* were both original 28ft 10in Huntsmen; *Fordsport* had the later 31ft 3in hull. As well as the Ford team there were two other 28-footers entered: *Seaspray*, helmed by Lady Aitken and also powered by Fords, and *Fiducia*, with twin Perkins 185s.

The Huntsman's offshore prowess was well known. But this was the first time such a long race had been attempted, and the 42-boat field included such opposition as the 42ft, 920hp *Spirit of Ecstasy*, and *Crescendo*, a 30ft Tremlett with four 200hp Jaguar petrol engines.

No one from Ford or Fairey would have dared to predict the result. Behind *UFO*, a

28ft Thunderbird packing 900hp, and Timo Makinen's triple Mercury-powered *Avenger Too*, the finishing order read: *Fordpower* third overall, *Fordsport* fourth, *Seaspray* fifth, *Fiducia* sixth, *Fordspeed* 12th. In Portsmouth at the end of the last stage, it looked as though a number of Huntsmen had just raced each other around Britain, accompanied by an assortment of other craft.

One of the men behind the Ford challenge was John Freeman. His conviction that it was possible to improve the power-to-weight ratios of marine diesels then available had led him, in 1968, to start his own company — Sabre Engines. The same year, he had raced his Sabre-powered Huntsman to eighth overall in the Cowes-Torquay race, also

taking the Index of Performance trophy — a target speed for cruisers calculated from waterline length, horsepower and volume of accommodation. The 1968 race is famous for its rough conditions, when the Sheard-designed *Telstar* beat the Levi-designed *Surfury*, which had won the previous year. Tommy Sopwith gambled that he could skirt around the edge of Lyme Bay to avoid the worst of the weather and still cross the line before the Gardner brothers. It was the first time such tactics had been tried, but they worked.

Two other Huntsmen doggedly ploughed through the seas to Torquay, leaving many larger and more powerful boats behind them — *Fairey Huntsman*, 13th overall and Best

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All-Rounder, and *Flower Power*, 15th. Both were powered by Perkins, but Fords, particularly Sabres, were increasingly being seen as the classic Fairey engines. *Once Again* has twin 180hp Ford Mermaids.

Certainly when Jim Wilson set up Tarrant Marine to re-start Spearfish production Sabres seemed the obvious choice. The first Tarrant Spearfish was on show at the Southampton Boat Show in 1986, and it turned more heads than any other boat on the pontoons. With two successful businesses behind him — one a building firm, the other Seastream Yachts, which he sold to Ancasta — Jim felt that the market still had a place for a boat like the Spearfish. "It seemed a classic hull," he says. "It has a tremendous following, even now. People we met at Southampton were saying they'd owned one and wished they'd kept it; best sea boat they'd ever had. The market is obviously there."

Tarrant have a licensing arrangement with Fairey to use the Spearfish moulds, and actual construction is done at Northshore Yachts, builders of the Fisher motor sailers. Consultation with existing Spearfish owners — like George Morgan-Harris — led to a number of small improvements such as a better engine hatch arrangement in the cockpit. Jim also called in Alan Burnard, who was Fairey's chief designer during the Sixties and Seventies, to advise on construction and lay-up weights.

More than anyone else, Alan Burnard was responsible for the legendary sea-keeping

abilities of the Fairey boats. But he likes to keep things in perspective. "Legendary?" he queries. "Certainly the Huntsman was good in its day, but it had this tremendously bluff bow, and was bloody wet. That was why I got a sheet of paper and drew the 31." The later Huntsman hulls had a dramatically raked and flared bow, which was inherited by the Spearfish.

Burnard's involvement with Fairey Marine goes back to 1957, when the company's output was confined to small sailing boats. Then Bruce Campbell, ex-De Havilland test pilot and lover of all things fast, got them thinking about racing powerboats. At that time the American naval architect Ray Hunt was doing his pioneering work on deep-vee hulls, and film of one of his fast boats was shown at Fairey. They had soon bought the design for an open sportsboat from the American.

The company was geared up to the high-technology and absolute quality control demanded for aircraft production. Strict attention was paid to getting everything as light and strong as possible. "There was nowhere else like it," recalls Burnard. They built six of the new runabouts, found them impossible to sell, and developed the Hunt design into a 23ft fast cruiser with a diesel engine and a small cabin — the Huntress. This was a success. From there the 28ft Huntsman was a logical step, and then the 31. In 1963 Cummins, the engine manufacturers, commissioned Fairey to build them a Cowes-Torquay racer, and the result was a 33-footer. Cummins backed out, but the new boat eventually went into production as the Swordsman.

Alan Burnard left Fairey five years ago, having seen production safely into the glassfibre age, and having watched as the building of express cruisers gradually gave way to commercial and military contracts.

There was even a Kevlar Spearfish made, he recalls, in the late Seventies, after Dupont came up with a free supply of the costly wonder material. That was the most expensive Spearfish ever. It ended up, Burnard thinks, in Senegal.

It is not just the Tarrant boats which will keep the Fairey flag flying in the world of offshore cruisers. As Jim Wilson pointed out, the marque has a committed following of owners and enthusiasts. Few of them can look back, like George Morgan-Harris, on ownership of a string of different Fairey craft, but they all share a love of the boats' sweet handling, powerful performance and effortless seaworthiness.

George keeps *Once Again* at Cougar's boat park on the Hamble — the old Fairey premises, before they sold up in 1983 and moved across to Cowes. Not far away, in Hamble itself, is the office of Tarrant Marine, and at Hamble Point Alan Burnard has his design consultancy firm. You might say it was Fairey country.

Once Again is used as Burnard always insisted the Huntsman family was intended — as a high-speed day-boat. Sundays in summer are likely to see George and his family blasting across to Yarmouth for a leisurely lunch, followed by a trip to Lymington for tea. If the weather wants to cut up rough, as it can in the Solent if the wind picks up over the tide, they have no worries. The boat takes it in its stride.

Justin Birt of Dyfed wrote to *Motor Boat & Yachting* early in 1986 to suggest starting a Fairey Marine owners' club. He owns two 28ft Huntsmen, one of which he has just completely refitted. The response to his letter, published in the April issue, was immediate, and the new club held its first rally at Yarmouth in July. By the first official meeting in early October, membership stood at 52 boats and owners. □



The power and the glory — *Once Again* at 30 knots in the Solent.