



*The Pobjoy Needles Trophy, Toyota Grand Prix and the Peter Stuyvesant Torbay International all carry great emphasis within the World forum of Class I and II Offshore racing. Both of the former are legs of the coveted Harmsworth Series, and in conjunction with the Torbay event comprise the closing stages of the European Championship.*

## By Sue Drinkwater

**T**he greatest challenge to an American win in the World Championships comes traditionally from the European contingent spearheaded by Italy and Great Britain. This year there was little hope that a British boat would even figure in the top three placings as Powell and Doxford had concentrated all their efforts on the development of the Jaguar Turbeau engines on the National circuit, whilst Ted Toleman had chosen to compete in America in an effort to promote Cougar designs still further across the Atlantic. His position as Australian Champion had already secured him a place in the Worlds at Key West.

Paul Clauser was the only driver from the States to take up the Harmsworth challenge. His first race, the Pobjoy Needles, was almost his last when a confusion arose over American and British race rules. Two miles after the start Clauser took the Boscombe mark on the wrong side, and carried on racing quite unaware that he had secured an immediate disqualification. In the States he would have been advised of his mistake by a marker boat waving a black flag, and carried a time penalty. So when Paul arrived back in harbour, thinking he was first overall, the fireworks began to well and truly fly. Although his ensuing protest was considered by the race committee they had no alternative but to maintain his disqualification, and Clauser left vowing he would be on the first flight back to the U.S.A.

Ted Toleman made an identical mistake to Clauser at this event, as did Guido Niccolai and Tim Powell. Mike Mantle, navigating in Dry Martini, realised his error and brought Niccolai back to re-take the buoy. Tim Powell, in the Peter Stuyvesant monohull also realised the course was wrong, but lost a water pump belt as he turned causing one engine to overheat and forcing him to

Maxwell Aitkin began to delaminate and sink off the Needles in the 39' Cougar. The damage was considerable, and it was unlikely the boat would be ready to race for several weeks.

The race was eventually won by Italian Renato Della Valle in a 38' Sheard monohull, navigated by an Englishman, Grant Wilson, who most definitely knew his way around the Solent. Niccolai was



Ted Toleman — first in the Torbay event.

retire. Toleman flew straight on in pursuit of Clauser, and his throttleman Smitty assumed all was well. He was racing in strange waters, being a compatriot of Clausers, and had quite enough on his hands as he attempted to throttle the boat through the confusion.

Stuyvesant's hopes of a victory were finally destroyed when Mike Doxford and

second, and these two were the only official finishers in their class. John Craxford in Romans Sabre, a 34' aluminium Cougar, was third overall whilst Aquaglide, driven by Robert Cook was fourth. Fifth was Arli Bene, an Abbate hull from Germany, crewed by Albert Ehrich and Derek Lloyd.

The Class III race was dominated from start to finish by John Clark and Len Fergusson in the 26' Phantom Clarke Group. Clarke's driving is a wonder to behold as he appears to get away unscathed from situations that would normally prove disastrous. Cynical, well seasoned competitors suggest that he will cease to drive so courageously after his first major incident (Phantom drivers have a deep fear of 'stuffing' their boats in a following sea, and most will tell you of the extreme discomfort involved). They may be right, but for the time being John Clarke is doing very nicely thank you, and has little intention of slowing down on the basis that he may one day hit a large wave head on. ▶



John Clark, a driver with no fear.



Renato Della Valle won the Needles Trophy.

◀ Len and Jane Hall came in second in their new Cougar catamaran Tucktonia. This boat used to be raced as Aquaglide by Robert Cook, and it doesn't look yet as if Len has quite mastered the driving of it to the extent of its previous owner. He is however learning fast, and will very soon be a severe thorn in the side of fellow cat driver Peter Bloomfield. Class IIC went to Howard Wretham and John Hedges in their 21' Phantom Computer Automation. These two have dominated IIC racing this year, and should be assured of the Championship. IIB was won by Roger Allen in a Crusader boat which he himself manufactures, although Simon Wood Power and Fiona Shead were not far behind.

So, on to Cowes and the Toyota Grand Prix — a wonderful event full of colour, which promised to provide the greatest spectacle of the year with over 50 boats taking the rolling start past the Royal Yacht Squadron. In the event the race developed into one of the most difficult ever known. The weather reports received that morning gave no indication of the sea's stormy state, and right from the word go the drivers realised they would have to throttle well back to avoid damage. By the end of the first Solent loop over 70% of the fleet had retired — whilst the sun shone on the spectators the crews were facing walls of water breaking over the bows of their boats, and tackling the Offshore sport at its toughest.

British hopes again floundered as Peter Stuyvesant I broke down off Bournemouth. Tim Powell was bitterly disappointed, he has raced in all but two Cowes/Torquay races and never yet managed to finish in the winners berth. Mike Doxford shared his disappointment as the Cougar cat was, as expected, not in any state to compete. Toleman was at an immediate disadvantage in his aluminium cat, and must have wished many times for the trusty monohull that won him the Australian series. Before the race even started his visor was wrenched away in the wind leaving him a state of near blindness as the water continued to lash into his face. With the ghastly memory of Joel Halperns death in his mind Toleman told Smitty to throttle back and head for the shore. Video film shot at the time shows that he made a wise decision for the catamaran was standing right on her props and crashing down with a shattering force.

Colin Gervaise-Brazier in the Shead designed catamaran Goldrush lost the newly fitted wing, which was meant to give him more lift and speed, within 15 minutes, but continued on to start the long trek down to Torquay alongside Alberto Smania in Rombo, Guido Niccolai in Dry Martini and Paul Clauser in Satisfaction. Clauser had mellowed somewhat since the Needles event and was determined to gain some points towards the Harmsworth Trophy before he returned to the U.S.A. Paul Sinclair in Gus It and John Craxford in Romans Sabre were both struggling with mechanical problems in the early stages and returned to the safety of Cowes Harbour. Renato Della Valle did the same as did Albert Ehrlich in the Class II Abbate. Tommaso de Simone faced his second retirement in one week. At the Needles he had been down to power on only one of his three Mercury 225 hp engines and Cowes saw an identical situation develop.



Disappointment at Cowes for the Peter Stuyvesant team.

At the same time the normally hardy Class III fleet limped home. After only half an hour it was reported that only a handful of boats had set off round the Island, John Clarke was leading in his inevitable flying form with Peter Bloomfield in the Stapley catamaran Pobjoy Mint Two in hot pursuit. Five cruisers completed the course however, showing the true extent of their seaworthiness, with Mike Lloyd in Pent Up Fury coming in second overall.

Halfway round the Island the hydraulic steering went on Clarke Group, but rather than give up Len Fergusson crawled back into the engine well and manoeuvred the engines with his feet. Words cannot describe the pain he must have been in as the Phantom crashed along through the waves with John indicating which way they should go. Already Fergusson had had his helmet ripped off by the sheer force of water and they had had to turn and retrieve it, now he had to face the long haul back into Cowes in the most unprotected part of the boat.

When they finally reached the finish line, having been overtaken by Bloomfield they were told the most damning truth of all. Clarke Group had been disqualified before she even began the journey around the Isle of Wight, for she had left a marker buoy on the wrong side in the Solent. As Len Fergusson was carried back up the pontoon John Clarke could only shake his head in disbelief and wonder at the nightmare trip that had all been for nothing.

Peter Bloomfield had suffered a similar fate to Clarke in terms of mechanical failure. He had lost the best part of his steering wheel during the race and had continued with only two spokes of the original structure. Both his arms were black from the beating they had taken against the side of the boat, and navigator Jim Baker was hardly able to stand. They had diverted many times on the course to try and find flatter water, but had still experienced the worst conditions of their career.

More amazing still was the completion of the race by Les Walling and Mike Jones in their 21' IIC Phantom Property

Growth, and Bill Matcham and Terry Hedges in the even smaller 16' Blu Fin Armacrly. These two had taken hours to finish a race that is normally over in an hour and a half. They too were physically exhausted, but their smiles reflected the total sense of achievement they felt at taking on the sea and winning.

In the main race the four remaining competitors were finding the journey to Torquay and back just as desperate. Clauser stopped twice with mechanical



L to R: Diridoni, Smania, Bloomfield, Culpin and Baker.

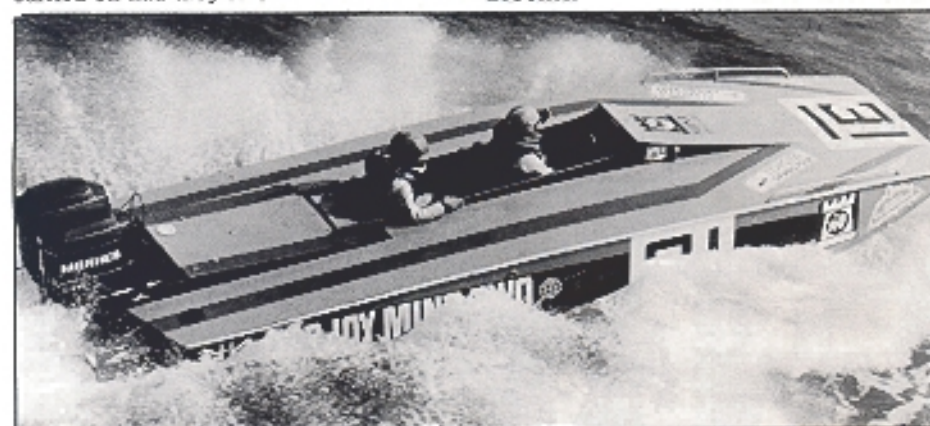
problems and Dry Martini was completely swamped by a monster wave that flattened the windscreen and stunned the entire crew. Smania plodded on in the lead and returned to Cowes the winner with an average speed of only 42.02 knots. The tiredness he and his crew, Alberto Diridoni and Robin Culpin, must have felt melted away as the first of the champagne corks popped. They laughed, they sang, and they shouted as well they might after such a monumental victory in some of the worst conditions the race has ever seen. Once again the Italians had emerged victorious, and the European Championship looked lost for British hopes.

Behind Smania, Niccolai and Clauser limped Colin Gervaise-Brazier in the only Class II boat to finish. His disappointment was to mirror John Clarke as he was outside the time limit of 5½ hours and a protest by the Germans and Italians over a time extension was upheld. Originally the race committee had decreed that the limit was to be lifted, but they were forced to back down when other Class II competitors claimed they too would have carried on had they known the time limit



Les Walling and Mike Jones completed the Round the Island race.

competitors were present. This meant that Gerv. had to forfeit his European Championship points, and is hence relegated to fourth instead of third. A sad and in many ways unnecessary reward for both Gerv. and his navigator, Jimmy Brooker.



Peter Bloomfield crashing through the waves.

was to be extended. The true point of the controversy was that the committee had taken the decision during the course of the race and not before, although it is a pity that the whole question was not raised at briefing and clarified whilst all

The Peter Stuyvesant Torbay International followed the next weekend. Clauser had finally returned to the States with his valuable Harmsworth points and Smania and Niccolai left secure in the knowledge that they now held first and

second position in the European Championship. Renato Della Valle stayed and achieved a well fought second position whilst the crowds roared and cheered to see Ted Toleman finally break his duck and romp home first. Ted and Smitty led from start to finish in fine style. Their average speed was 66.71 mph — a clear four miles an hour faster than Della Valle. Even Tim Powell found Peter Stuyvesant's form at this event — it was the first race that the Jaguar Turbeau engines had finished and marks a great breakthrough in the development project. A slight problem with one of the Jaguars dropped Tim down to fourth overall, with Robert Cook driving superbly to capture the third slot in his Class II boat built by Gordon Wright.

Paul Sinclair gained more Class I points by coming fifth overall and third in the National. This now puts him in with an extremely good chance of the

National title, and the whole championship now hinges on the final race at Hamble on October 3rd. De Simone finally got the result he had been chasing and came second, followed by Albert Ehrich in the Abbate. Unconfirmed calculations now showed the ghastly truth for the British drivers. The Class I European Championship had gone to Niccolai, Smania and Della Valle, whilst the Class II went to Ehrich, De Simone and Cook. We can only hope now that Doxford, Powell and Brazier can win through the qualifying heats necessary to compete in the Worlds.

Clarke and Pobjoy again battled it out for supremacy in Class III, with Bloomfield coming home the eventual winner. Tucktonia was third and Ian Birnie in West Centre Hotels fourth. In IIC the Flying Foxes, Phil and Mike took the honours whilst Bill Matcham and Terry Hedges, fully recovered from their Cowes ordeal, won IIIB.

All three races had been long and tough, causing damage to both the boats and their drivers. Tempers had been lost and trophies had been won. But they will all be back next year, with the determination to do better and race faster, for that is the Offshore challenge after all! ●