

**Jack Cunningham took the Embassy Trophy in the Season of '78 to become British National Offshore Champion in Class 1 and 2. The bare fact was a probability from early August, when Cunningham took the third race of the series, against minimal opposition, to give him a three strait but the championship posed other problems and asked other questions of the competitors, and the sport.**

It is an unfortunate fact but the class of offshore powerboats that brings the whole sport to life, at least in the eyes and ears of the great unwashed, is the worst supported in the United Kingdom. Thus it transpired, and not for the first time, that all but two of the eight heats in the Embassy Championship came to the line with only one or two Class 1 boats to stir the blood and quicken the senses. The Embassy is, of course, not just restricted to Class 1 but for a variety of reasons, some associated with logistics, some with finance, some with reliability and some with how long it takes to build tin cats, the hitherto totally reliable Class 2 circus never came alive and the whole Championship teetered on the edge of farce.

Much of the racing has already been reported and in retrospect, the Championship divided itself neatly into two portions. Portion one was the first half of the season, when the Cunningham equipe still had the machinery, the will and the finance to race while portion two consisted of the second half, when the Hagan/Nott team re-introduced the grand old lady of offshore racing to the fray. The rest was almost incidental. This is not to denigrate Cunningham's title, for didn't he find yet another backer with the funds and bring his travelling circus to the line to prove himself best of the bunch in the early year? The fact that he didn't have to race after Margate is an observation on the sorry state of the sport as much as on his own reticence.

Briefly, Cunningham took the Southern Speed Trophy, the Poole National and the Margate Race to record 1200 points in a 40-foot glass reinforced plastic hull, designed by Don Shead and moulded by Planatec. Students will know that it was the replacement ABO for Bobby Buchanan-Michaelson, with which he took the Embassy title in 1974, the sometime Radio Rentals which Tim Powell drove in the 1975 Cowes, Torquay, Cowes and more recently, Cunningham's own team with Faberge backing as Macho. Her two 600 horse power Mercruisers were initially built and installed by Jim Brooker and her charts were often read by Frank Wyatt while the whole lot was bankrolled by a quiet and retiring character called Bill Walker.

In those three races, Walker's Ballerina beat Derek Pobjoy in the rough Solent, Nicky Cripps in Poole Bay and Eric Walton along the holiday beaches of Kent while the only other driver to get in

amongst the Embassy points was Pobjoy's lovely wife Reni, also in that first rough race and driving hubby's bog standard 34-foot cruiser. So much for the opposition. Of the boats that might have challenged Ballerina, only Nicky Cripps was consistent and consistently unlucky. His 36-foot Cigarette hull, ex-Dry Martini, ex-Yellowdrama 2, ex-Bain Dawes, Ex-Crown of Crusis and now called Colt Sapporo, a subtle reference to his Japanese car importer sponsors, was tired to begin with. Her machinery was suspect and her luck was out. With Cassir concentrating on Europe, Doxford concentrating on doing nothing much and Team UNO concentrating on doing nothing at all, Cunningham had things all his own way. Until mid-season, that is.

### Turning Point

Turning point was the Needles Trophy International. Cunningham didn't show. Rumour had it he was out of money again and that Walker had been blown out by successive mechanical failures but the truth was probably that he didn't need to run and that he was saving his strength for Cowes, Torquay, Cowes the following week. With a gaggle of hot-shot foreigners around that didn't count in the reckoning but who could all blow out the good British boats, the Poole beanfeast turned into a British one/two with Ken Cassir and Jimmy Beard bringing Yellowdrama 3 in ahead of Mike Doxford and Tim Powell in Limit Up.

Then there was the Hagan/Nott combo. With the purchase of the old HTS from John Craxford and a quick trip stateside to acquire bits, the newly identified Apache turned up looking for all the world like a new boat again and not one entering her eleventh year of racing. She slipped in quietly to grab 225 points and third place, ahead of Ray McEnhill in his Kevlar-built Fletcher 25 footer and Fiona Arran, now relegated to her smaller three pointer, Skean Dhu. Big talking point at the Needles was the unfortunate sidelining of the Craxford's new diesel catamaran, Romans Sabre, by the flying Pobjoy for the car had been seen doing some interesting speeds and everyone wanted to see the face-off but for that, they had to wait another week.

At half way point in the season and with the biggest racing yet to come, Cunningham (1200) led Cassir (400), Pobjoy, Cripps and Doxford (300) and Nott (225) in what looked like a big whitewash. As is so often the case, however, Cowes, Torquay, Cowes didn't do what it was supposed to. Cassir, Doxford, Cripps and Cunningham all blew out early on, leaving the Class 2 cat of Keith Dallas and Eddie Chater to scoop the pool, ahead of Keith Heynes and Tim Cotton, Hagan and Nott, Roger Allan and Henry Hector with Dougie Grob. Dallas had not enjoyed his season at all in Penthouse Rizla and was obviously losing interest, while after spending a small fortune in re-equipping RHS, the Heynes team were still not having the luck or the prizes they deserved. Roger Allan's British Buzzard

# EM TRO '78



# BASSY OPHY

was unpredictable to say the least while the Grob idea with GEE was simply to win the Beaverbrook Trophy, which he did.

## Calculated Gamble

Brighton Marina staged heat six. In flat calm conditions, it had to be Fiona Arran's day. With only Nicky Cripps there in Class I, and he a non-starter, the only big metal to have made the

## JOHN WALKER

pilgrimage was Apache and Romans Sabre, both of which the little Skean Dhu can waltz over on a good day. After a certain amount of acrimony, Skean Dhu duly beat the Craxfords and Apache and there were the only three to score. A word is due here on the Craxford efforts. After immensely successful years with HTS, John Craxford took a calculated gamble with an untried aluminium diesel catamaran, albeit designed by Jimmy Beard, built by Ernie Sims and powered by Sabre. It was unfortunate to say the least that they should be late into the fray and then have such bad luck but there is obviously potential there to be had.

And then there was Torbay. In an almost non-starter due to weather, Brixham Trophy at last saw the emergence of Derek Pobjoy the Class 1 racer as opposed to the Class 2 version of the same. Pobjoy should have done better this year, of that there is little doubt but he tended to complicate his life to an

amazing degree. Only the very best can get away with running two boats in offshore competition, a fact made manifest by Bonomi, Cook, Halpern and Doxford. To attempt to run one good Class 2 boat in Sundancer/Pobjoy Mint and on top of that, to get a Class 1 act together with ex-UNO, now Pobjoy Mint Jewellery is asking a lot and, inevitably, the equipe fell on its face more than once. At Torbay, however, Derek got his balls in the air together and ran out a winner, ahead of a surprised Roger Allan, the irrepressible Nott/Hagan boat and Fiona Arran yet again.

With the spectre of the Spithead debacle in 1977 hanging over UKOBA, force 8 gales stopped the repeat run, and the Championship, in its tracks then and there. For Cunningham it was, perhaps, a lucky let off. For Nott it was total disappointment. For the Countess it was frustration. For everyone else, it was the sound of one hand clapping and the end of a very inconclusive season offshore that most people will wish to forget and for the sponsors, it may well be the last knocking in their support of offshore powerboat racing in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, history records that the 1978 Embassy Trophy went to Cunningham (1200), ahead of Nott (900), Derek Pobjoy (700), Fiona Arran (696), Allan (469), Dallas and Cassir (400), Doxford, Cripps, Walton, Craxford and Heynes (300), Reni Pobjoy (225), McEnhill (169) and Henry Hector (127).

The prospects for 1979 are rather better. Pobjoy can only get better and Cripps has a new cat coming. Craxford must improve and Nott will continue but Cunningham's future is uncertain as is that of Heynes. Cassir has sold his cat and Doxford threatens to run his team in America while the Hyams new rig is, as yet, unconfirmed. However, the cake is cut though, the sport needs its Embassy Trophy and we are all grateful for their continuing support. Long may that remain part of our offshore scene.



	Solent 70 Trophy	Poole National Trophy	Margate Trophy	Needles Trophy	Cowes, Torquay, Cowes	Brighton Marina Trophy	Brixham Trophy	TOTAL
Jack Cunningham	400	400	400		000			1200
David Nott				225	225	225	225	900
Derek Pobjoy	300	000		000	000		400	700
Fiona Arran	000	000		127		400	169	696
Roger Allan		000		000	169	000	300	469
Keith Dallas					400			400
Ken Cassir	000			400	000			400
Mike Doxford				300	000			300
Nicky Cripps	000	300	000	000	000	000	000	300
Eric Walton			300					300
John Craxford				000	000	300	000	300
Keith Heynes				000	300			300
Reni Pobjoy	225							225
Ray McEnhill				169				169
Henry Hector					127			127