

*Ian Birnie and crew in their Class
winning Phantom 23'*



III's rule the Seas

**A Round up of the offshore season
from Ian Birnie**

Boat Name: Miss Avia Watches
Driver: Ian Birnie
Navigators: Alan Baldwin and
Graham Stuart
Boat Make: Phantom 23'
Engines: 2x175hp Mercury
Results 1981: 1st UKOBA
Championship Class III; 1st
UKOBA Championship Class IIID;
1st Overall Poole Bay Trophy; 1st
IIID Southern Speed; 1st IIID
Brighton; 2nd IIID Fowey
Sponsors: Avia Watches; Clifton
Jewellers & West Centre Hotel,
London

For all of us involved in offshore racing and indeed, any competitor in any sport, the close season is a time of appraisal, of repair, of reassessment and of frustration. In the highly competitive world of Class 3, every year brings up the questions of what hull form and what engines to use to be in and amongst the pots. For us, the choice of a monohull was, to a large extent, dictated by needing to run well in worse than average conditions as well as to fly in the flat. We had built up a good deal of confidence in

Phantom and looked forward to putting it well to the test at the opening offshore race in Poole on May 2nd. With the not inconsiderable backing of Peter Stuyvesant for the UKOBA races in 1981, the scrutineering and briefing for the Poole Bay Race took place at the Poole Harbour Yacht Club, before boats and drivers headed for the start line off Bournemouth.

As with most years, only a few of the expected new rigs made this first race venue; quite a lot of interest was generated by the arrival of the Toleman twins, who looked set to thrash all of us in 3D and who brought their 26 foot Phantom mono for the rough races as well as a newly prepared 25 foot Cougar multihull for the flat ones. At Poole, they needed all the rough weather capability and help that they could get because the conditions weren't desperately good and many of the Class 3 rigs didn't even get as far as the start line. There is an awful lot of sand at the entrance to the Haven and some of our competitors rediscovered it. Poole also saw the debut of the newly painted, Jaguar engined, Limit Up Team, running this year in the colours of

Peter Stuyvesant but they didn't make the start either, not due to the sand though.

After two very rough and uncomfortably bumpy laps of Poole Bay, Alan Baldwin and I took the flag in Miss Avia Watches, much to our delight while the Tolemans took second — their best result all season as it happened — and Paul Sinclair took third slot in Gus It, only to be disqualified later for running illegal water pick-ups. This did not help Paul's frame of mind and he ran all the rest of the season in Class 2 or 1, wherever he could see most points coming his way.

Raging gales

For many of us, the pretty Cornish town of Fowey was only a name on a map until the offshore circus descended upon it on the spring bank holiday for the second race in the Stuyvesant/UKOBA series.

The locals certainly threw all they had into the organisation of the race — and the social side too — but even they couldn't arrange the weather. After the long haul by road down to the tip of England, race day came and went, with

gales raging in the Western Approaches and the decision to run on the Sunday was only marginal. The new 25 foot Phantom made its debut and left what might be described as a firm impression in people's minds that it had great potential.

How right they were. The Class 4 boys turned up in force at this event and had a marvellously spectacular if even more uncomfortable ride than we did but honours really went to Howard Wretham, who started his winning streak in 3C with the 21 foot Phantom hull, Computer Automation. Les Walling finished second in Property Growth Assurance and the Pannel brothers came home a battered third.

Our third race of the season was back in the Solent for the Toleman sponsored Southern Speed Trophy and at last, the weather started to behave correctly. Calm waters inside the Wight made for good racing and it was a welcome return to John Craxford's Class 2 diesel cat, Romans Sabre who took the honours in his class and we took the honours in Class IIID from Barry Drinkwater and Len & Jane Hall, in Ray McEnhill's old mono rig — now named Tucktonia. Paul Sinclair was unlucky again and the only real mishap of the race was when Robert Cook in Aquaglide took the high road over Ted Stendler in his 3C Stuart Fyfe. Ah well Robert, keep taking the pills!

For us, the Putney/Calais race was not one of our more successful outings; it wasn't too good for Peter Stuyvesant's catamaran either. With Mike Doxford, Tim Powell, and Mike Mantle bungied in among the life rafts and radar reflectors, eight miles of Thames was enough to kindle not one but two transfer gear boxes and they could be seen putting out the engine hatch covers in fine style.

Congratulations to Les Walling on his first win — and overall too — Eddie Goodwin the only D class to finish the course and to Steve Pile in Capitol Kitchie's for winning Class 3B. Quite an event in itself.

We had all of us hoped for full European Championship points status for the 3B boys in Poole but this turned out to be a non-event in that respect due to a dearth of foreign competitors; Bill Matcham and Terry Hedges tried oh so hard to get hold of Irish licences but where were all you Euro types in 3B? You must be out there somewhere, so come in next time please, all is forgiven! Things weren't exactly smooth in the other divisions of Class 3 either; biggest disaster was Bosat wiping out, happily without too much injury to life or limb but our Waterloo came off Boscombe. We seemed to lose power very quickly and when Alan Baldwin climbed over the transom to take a look, there it was — gone! We seemed to have lost a complete gear box and half the engine trunk so if you're looking for a left

hand rotation box, complete with 28" prop, you can find it about five cables to the south of Boscombe Pier.

By complete contrast, the Peter Stuyvesant Brighton Marina Race proved to be a setting where everything went right for everyone — or nearly everyone. After a season of problems, the Stuyvesant monohull actually worked for three whole laps, leading the field in the flat calm, before it expired with something nasty happening below. Ian Rowsell also proved to be an exception to the rule by inverting his 21 foot Phantom in the flattest of all conditions and Paul Sinclair took every advantage of Peter Stuyvesant's demise to take Class 1 honours and points. A whole book could be written about Brighton this year, for it was arguably the best race of the season. Steve and Andy Bourn had their first win of the season in Poco Homes — a Class 3C Phantom — and Robert Cook brought out his new 34 foot Aquaglide in anger, having only just warmed it up in the Cancer Research Race earlier. Although it owes a good deal to his Cougar 3D rig, Robert has designed much of this new boat himself and the funny thing is — in profile it looks just like its little predecessor.

Welcome newcomer

For me, Brighton produced one of the closest finishes ever with only seconds between the first five boats. Racing in the calm certainly has advantages and we just beat Peter Bloomfield in his ageing Pobjoy Mint Two with welcome newcomer, John Clarke, third in one of the new 25 foot Phantom monos. Peter Armstrong deserves a special mention for his organisation and for the parade through the town centre; it must have done a lot of good for the sport.

Most of the Class 3 teams would rather forget the Round Island race this year; come to think of it, there aren't many Class 1 or 2 drivers who loved it much — or its CTC sister and there was much huffing and puffing about who should start with whom and whether the races should have been started at all. Only a handful of boats finished in either race and as always, it was the race committee that caught most of the flack. It ain't easy being an organiser but that day, it was just a bit preferable to being a competitor and you can take my word for that. For Toyota, the day turned out to be a bit of a damp squib as their last sponsorship of this still great weekend but the general concensus of opinion was that maybe we shouldn't have been started so early in the day. For the Stuyvesant Team, their luck was still out and having punched a gaping hole in their Cougar cat the week before in Poole, their mono expired on the Solent loop with no go characteristics. Not good!

Brixham was the usual fun with the Fox brothers winning their 3C division in a brand new boat; good to see Ted Toleman win his first race of the season and the Jaguar engines last the pace at last. Len and Jane Hall also scored in their new boat and the biggest hazard of the race was the murk off Torquay and in Torbay. Gerv Brazier almost sank his aluminium Class 2 cat and the foreign entrants saw some real Devon hospitality at the Brixham Yacht Club — or was it the Imperial?

The season came to a spectacular close for all of us in the Solent for the Spithead Trophy Race. The water made the Round Island look calm! Amid all the mayhem, the hard luck story of the day had to be about Joe Marengi in Have No Fear; first he rescued the unhappy Ginger Donohoo and Robert Cook who watched helplessly as their Aquaglide was assaulted by fire, water and the attentions of the fire float before being taken in tow by Don and Jamie Shead who just happened to be there and having heaped up enough excitement for one day, later nosed his own rig into the inhospitable waters of the Solent. Not that Robert exactly escaped unscathed with massive damage to his pride and joy. After all his hard work and effort — to say nothing of hard cash — it was heart-breaking for all of us to look at the wreckage afterwards; it really was a mess.

Life did not go smoothly for us either. Our season climaxed with a lengthy protest being lodged against us, quoting some obscure rule that apparently did not necessarily apply. Just another example of the constant variety offered by offshore racing to its followers! So here we go again — shall it be mono or cat, inboard or outboard, wood or glass, Class 3 or Class 2 — but this is where I came in.

1981 OFFSHORE NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

Class I/II Overall: Robert Cook; John Craxford; Paul Sinclair. Class I: Ted Toleman; Tim Powell. Class II: Robert Cook, John Craxford, P.Sinclair. National Cruiser Class 'A': David Graham-Smith; Alan Webb; Mike Lloyd.

CLASS III NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Class IIIB: Bill Matcham (Driver); Terry Hedges (Navigator); Class IIIC: Howard Wretham (Driver); John Hedges (Navigator); Class IIID: Peter Bloomfield (Driver); Jim Baker (Navigator).

Overall Champion Driver: Howard Wretham; Overall Champion Navigator: John Hedges