



Race report: Cougar Marine Southern Speed Trophy Class II foiled by Craxford

John Craxford may have set a precedent for offshore racing when he flew to victory — under protest — at the Southern Speed Trophy. Ray Bulman reports

THE appearance of an aerofoil lifting device on John Craxford's Cougar catamaran *Romans Sabre* at the Cougar Marine Southern Speed Trophy threw the race officials into confusion — but the device proved its worth in the race and *Romans Sabre* won the trophy at an average speed of 56.35 knots.

Craxford was only allowed to start the race under protest, but the Royal Yachting Association's Offshore Racing Committee has subsequently decided that the aerofoil is legal.

No-one could question the efficiency of the device. At speed the hull was lifted almost clear of the water, reducing friction and giving *Romans Sabre* a valuable boost in speed. We saw *Romans Sabre* pass the committee boat with light showing under her sponsons.

Romans Sabre is the only diesel-powered catamaran racing, and has a poor power-to-weight ratio. Only a series of modifications over the years have kept her performance up to par. With the heavy engines now producing a worthy 420 bhp and her hull already lightened as much as possible, the aerofoil has greatly aided performance.

There were only two other Class II boats (8-litre petrol, 16-litre diesel) competing in the Southern Speed Trophy, the Cougars *Gus II* and *Aquaglide*. Craxford had little time to ponder the competition — the Solent was calm and the conditions suited the lightweight boats.

Paul Sinclair in *Gus II* and Robert Cook in *Aquaglide* set the early pace, building up a lead of almost a mile during the first two laps around Hill Head, Gurnard and Ryde Middle. On the long leg to Sconce, near Yarmouth, *Romans Sabre* came into her own, and by the time Craxford returned to Hill Head he had turned the tables. Neither *Gus II* in second place nor *Aquaglide* in third stood a chance of catching Craxford. *Romans Sabre* finished first, averaging 56.35 knots for the 81.65-mile course.



Top, John Craxford in his aerofoil-fitted cat *Romans Sabre*; light under her sponsons. Above, *Phanta-C* out front in Class IIIC, which she won with an average speed of 47.46 knots.

The 23 Class III outfits provided one of the best racing fleets seen for almost two seasons, marking a revival of this offshore class. Craft were mostly monohulls, which is in complete contrast to the trend in the mid-Seventies.

The multihulls were poorly represented in the largest, Class IIID (4-litre), category. There were only two — the new Mercury-powered Cougar *Fayana-gin III* of Garry and Michael Toleman and the older Stapley cat *Pobjoy Mint Too* driven by Peter Bloomfield. *Fayana-gin III* had suffered electrical problems on the eve of the race, which returned during the first lap, while Peter Bloomfield suffered mechanical trouble on his Mariner outboards, which forced his retirement, from third place, at the end of the fourth circuit.

Steve Baker-designed Phantoms ruled the day. Ian Bernie in his 23ft (7m) Phantom *Miss Avia Watches* shot ahead at the start, followed closely by Barry Drinkwater in Bentley's *Oyster Bar*, another Mercury-powered Phantom. Although competition was fierce throughout Class IIID, these two were out on their own, finishing well ahead of the 25ft (7.62m) Mercury-powered Fletcher *Tucktonia*, driven by Len Hall.

Cruiser racing is on the increase, and although these craft compete at a more sedate pace over a shorter course, they

were no less competitive. Peter Hewitt in his Wellcraft *Vergo* sped round under the power of his two 198hp Mercruisers, while Colin Stewart, with only 140hp pushing his Picton cruiser *Tuscans Mardigras*, formed the rearguard. Between them were five closely-matched cruisers in Class A (up to 350hp). *Aeon Splashdown* (David Graham-Smith) and *Deep Fresh* (J. Hunton), both Hunton Gazelles, played cat and mouse with Alan Webb in his Wellcraft *Shiral*. The experience of David Graham-Smith eventually won the day in Class A but Peter Hewitt and Colin Stewart collected awards for their efforts. □

Results:

Class II, J. Craxford, *Romans Sabre*, Cougar/Ford Sabre, 56.35 knots.

Class IIID, I. Bernie, *Miss Avia Watches*, Phantom/Mercury, 55 knots.

Class IIIC, H. Wretham, *Phanta-C*, Phantom/Mercury, 47.46 knots.

Class IIIB, W. Matcham, *Armacyrl*, Blu-Fin/Yamaha, 38 knots.

Cruiser A, D. Graham-Smith, *Aeon Splashdown*, Hunton/Mercruiser, 34.59 knots.

Cruiser B, P. Hewitt, *Vergo*, Wellcraft/Mercruiser, 37.64 knots.

Day Cruiser, C. Stewart, *Tuscans Mardigras*, Picton/Mercruiser, 28.08 knots.