

Homecoming of the classics

It's time to celebrate the return of the beautiful – and the fast – to our waters, says BCYC's Tim Blackman



WATER BABE

Thendara was built in 1961 but still retains her traditional splendour and enjoys the races in and around the Solent

In the past 25 years, Cowes has undoubtedly maintained its world lead as a yachting centre, and has been an excellent playground for the ever-developing and advancing fleets of modern yachts.

Each year, a season packed with racing events of every kind, IRC handicap races and class and

association events, ably hosted by the yacht clubs, until in the height of the season the Solent seems packed.

And now, a new phenomenon – the latest growth area for yachting. Somehow, among this wall-to-wall, full-on racing programme, the British Classic Yacht Club Regatta has taken a foothold in Cowes, slap-bang in the middle of the season.



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It's not hard to see why. The 20 years from 1960 to 1980 was one of the great periods for yachting at Cowes. British yacht designers and Cowes yacht builders were hand-building beautiful racing yachts for a driven racing fraternity, and the recent founding of the British Classic Yacht Club (BCYC) has brought together these yachts once more. So for the annual BCYC Regatta to come to Cowes is welcomed by many of the Cowes yachting luminaries through misty eyes.

THE YACHTS

For anyone who grew up sailing in the '60s and '70s, the list of BCYC member yachts holds an extraordinary resonance of Fastnet Races and Admiral's Cup competitions; *Outlaw*, *Whirlaway*, Sir Max Aitken's *Drumbeat*, *Swanilda* and *Zulu* (now *Cetewayo*), and other RORC yachts like *Thendara*, *Zoom*, *Daneveld*, *John Dory*, *Dawn Goddess*, *Droleen II* and *Whooper*.

Add to this the yachts from earlier in the century, from designers like William Fife III, Robert Clark, C.E. Nicholson, Alfred Mylne and Laurent Giles; yachts like *Foglio*, *Mikado*, *Talisker Mhor*, *Pazienza*, *Elona*, *Mingary*, *Corrie*, *Iolaire* and *Sybil of Cumae* and before you is 75 years of UK yachting history.

The fleet also comprises a strong Classic International Metre boat contingent. All are meticulously presented, glinting in the sun, without doubt the sexiest, long, slim, pointed yachts – and each are like a scaled down J Class.

The Regatta sports 5, 6, 8 and 12 International Metre yachts, among them *Sensa*, *Nancy*, *Monsoon*, *Ilderim*, *Amorevita*, *If*, *Sceptre* and *Vanity V*. These yachts are fast and furious to sail, designed for speed and discomfort; with submarine tendencies and no guard rails they are not for the fainthearted. *Glukauf* is a 30-square-metre, owned by Andy King. She measures 38'7" (11.78m) loa, 25' (7.65m) on the waterline with a beam of 6'5" (1.96m) – King wears goggles to windward!

THE PASSION

The BCYC has been pivotal in kick-starting the renaissance of classic yachting in the UK. Owning and maintaining a classic requires a strong maverick streak, and it places a heavy cost on enjoying the aesthetic side of yachting – but classic yachts provide style and charisma in large quantities.

Up until now, each classic yacht owner had been made to think that they must be slightly mad – or certainly out of step with reality. Why



HIGH SEAS

Clockwise from top left: a tall ship out enjoying the regatta; *Frenesi of Clynder* was voted "Best on Show" at the 1961 London Boat Show; *Endeavour*, a J-class classic

could they not build an affinity with a "wash and go" plastic yacht and save time and money? Did they have an addiction to snorting the dust from rubbing down varnish?

But every classic owner knows that there is no sight better than sitting in the lee side of the cockpit, hard on the wind, lee rail under, the stanchions fizzing through the water sending a fine spray across glinting chrome and varnish with her 16 tons of displacement pounding through each wave, blasting aside sheets of white spume – and in the harbour, she stands out from the crowd and is admired by many.

Nevertheless, it seemed a lonely life – especially when they looked at the



WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Top to bottom: *Tiuga* at the America's Cup Jubilee Regatta; the BCYC Regatta is a key link to future classic events at Cowes

Mediterranean and saw how that classic circuit had developed; it was difficult to understand why there was such a void in the UK. So now it is that the BCYC and its Cowes Regatta has brought together the yachts, brought together the people and come to the best place to stage a classic event – at the birthplace of yachting.

FUTURE FROM THE PAST

The America's Cup Jubilee Regatta, the world's greatest ever classic regatta, was staged at Cowes in 2001 and still the sights and sounds of that fantastic week echo around the town. The staging of the annual BCYC Regatta, and indeed the club itself, has started to act as a permanent link back to that event and to provide a link to future classic events at Cowes.

This coming season, the Royal Yacht Squadron is liaising with the BCYC to link up with the classic class of the Rolex Transatlantic Challenge after its arrival at Cowes and, after the Rolex Round the Island Race on 13 June, both the classic and modern class will be invited to participate in the BCYC Ozannes Race to Guernsey, where Ozannes and the Guernsey Tourist Board are hosting the event.

Similarly, in early July, the Rolex Classic Class is invited to race with the BCYC from Cowes to Dartmouth for the Dartmouth Classic Rally and the Classic Channel Race, returning to Cowes to take part in the BCYC Regatta from 16 to 23 July.

So any organisation in the UK or around the world, looking to the UK for a classic event seeks the involvement of the BCYC in the knowledge that, with more than 50 member yachts, the BCYC fleet is a party on the water waiting to happen.

With the mooted decision that Cowes will host the Six Metre World Championships and the 100th anniversary of the Metre Rule, both in 2007, an enormous selection of 6, 8 and 12 metre class, America's Cup yachts, the J Class and many of the big Mediterranean classics, which were also built as part of the International Metre Rule, will be attracted to Cowes.

The BCYC's 2005 and 2006 regattas are seen as build-up opportunities to these huge events, by providing such good Metre Rule and handicap racing.

The regatta is an open event, and welcomes visiting classic yachts in addition to member yachts, provided they are eligible. This provides an

international flavour to the event with yachts from Belgium, France and Holland taking part last year.

THE RACING

All these yachts were built to sail well. Many were built in an era when engines were not fitted, or were as small as possible to keep the weight down. The International Metre yachts were of course built as out-and-out racers – as were the Admiral's Cuppers. Indeed, almost all the classic yachts have a racing past, so how important is the racing to the regatta, or is it really a rally?

When asked while sitting in the harbour, quite a lot of classic owners will reply in the very British way that: "Well, you know, we don't really race." But out on the water it is a different matter; the boat takes over, the genoas are cranked back tight, the skirt flipped over the guard rail, crews are hanging out to windward, sails are changed at speed, spinnakers blown out and "water" called. The racing is taken seriously, and the reason for this is that the handicapping is accurate and proper.

All the yachts have a current IRC rating. The IRC rating system became seriously established in the '50s and '60s, when many of these boats were

originally racing. Even though all the yachts are different, this sets a level playing field.

Criticisms of the Mediterranean Classic Circuit, run by CIM, include the facts that the rating system is not adequately scientific, creates anomalies and mixes too many aesthetic requirements into the calculation. It works well in maintaining the big classics, but is not applicable to this style of racing.

The BCYC adopting IRC has been a masterstroke, as the racing is tight and competitive. Some of the classics – *Frenesi of Clynder*, *Cetewayo* and *Whooper* – have endorsed IRC Certificates, and race

SAILS TALK

Clockwise from below: the 12m *Vanity V* was designed by William Fife III; peace and tranquility before a big race; the powerful racing yacht *Cetewayo* is one of a kind

regularly in the modern IRC fleets. Both *Frenesi* and *Cetewayo* have won the Warsash series outright. Last year *Whooper* won the IRC Class 3 Championship outright, and the IRC Gold Roman Bowl for the Round the Island Race.

Each of the International Metre boats is designed and built as a one-off and, as classics, they are not so competitive against the modern versions. With IRC, at the regatta,

the Royal Corinthian Yacht Club and the Royal Yacht Squadron.

As a result, the BCYC Regatta has become a "must do" event for those who find their heart in classic yachts as part of their life and lifestyle. Bill Green, best known for building superb state-of-the-art modern racing hulls, races his gorgeous classic 6m *Nancy* at the regatta; while Giovanni Belgrano, co-opted to the New Zealand America's Cup design team, enthalls in his 1939 *Whooper*.

The regatta, the racing, the yachts, the style, the charisma, the club ... all add up to a new emerging side to yachting, attracting new interest and individuals. People who like to stand out from the crowd. A marina the other day was described as a "Mondeo car park", and you can kind of get the drift – the annual BCYC Regatta has certainly provided a new and interesting challenge to yachting, and a charismatic spectacle to Cowes.

So far, this event has been driven by the determination of the members of the BCYC, but clearly its style and clean image hold a superb sponsorship opportunity, wide open for the right company, who can benefit from its future growth and international appeal.

For information on the BCYC – Rolex events, the annual regatta and the club in general – log on to www.britishclassicyachtclub.org

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the 6m (for example) race against each other for prizes, but within a Racing Yacht Class comprising 5m, 6m, 8m, Clyde Linear 30s, International ODs, West Solent ODs, 30 square metres and any other classic racing yachts of more than 8m lod. This is good sport.

REGATTA'S APPEAL

The Old Gaffers is a sociable event, but the rally is a bit like working boats in retirement. The BCYC and its regatta are designed to bring out the best in classic yachts that were built to race, using the IRC rating, superb trophies, yachts in excellent condition and dipping into the classic heart of Cowes yachting at



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