

“And now the shipping forecast issued by the Met Office at 0505 on Friday 9 September 1994. There are warnings of gales in Dover Wight Portland Plymouth Faeroes Southeast Iceland... Dover Wight Southwesterly 6 to gale 8. Showers. Good...”

SIX OF THE BEST

Awoken by the BBC, Robin Gates rolled out of bed, grabbed cameras and oilies and joined the briefing for the invitation Hermès Mumm Trophy, bringing six classic yachts to the line of the Royal Yacht Squadron at Cowes for some hard, wet racing

Below: The smoke of the starting cannon blows astern of Bloodhound as Harold Cudmore looks aloft to her reefed mainsail.

Opposite: On board Solway Maid, with boom nicely trimmed above the quarter, beating away from Bloodhound, Marigold and Pen Duick.

“There will be no protests, unless there is a really serious collision, so do not enforce your rights too enthusiastically.” The Race Officer was emphatic. I looked out across the start line of the Royal Yacht Squadron and wondered if the wind and the sea had heard, because they seemed to be making a protest loud and clear.

“We’ve tried not to make things too difficult for you. The first windward leg is to the nearest mark we have.” But it was obvious that as soon as a boat was introduced into the equation of wind plus wave the result would be wet. The crew of a half dozen yachts spanning 65 years of design exchanged nervous pleasantries and made their ways thoughtfully to the Cowes Yacht Haven.

prolific growth of lower plant life inhabiting her seams and joints, gave her a thorough refit and returned her to a life of tight-luffed racing.

Glen Allan’s *Marigold*, also a Camper & Nicholsonsbuilt yacht, was designed in a very different era, with gaff cutter rig, rule-straight stem and counter stern as delicate as a hollow-ground chisel blade. She is the epitome of 1892 yachting, not unlike an Essex smack in her lines, once more sailing with contemporary cotton sails and buttoned red leather upholstery stuffed with crunchy horse hair, thanks to the meticulous efforts of Greg Powlesland and his craftsmen.

Classic Boat’s berth was aboard the 1940 vintage *Solway Maid*, a 65-foot (19.8m) bermudan cutter from the Fife stable. She was first owned by F Ivan Carr, a Carlisle biscuit-maker, and today’s owner Rodger Sandiford maintains the yacht in as near original condition as possible, including the stainless steel engineering which Carr designed himself: two-speed halyard winch, stanchions, clew outhaul winch and a battery of other unique and innovative features. The backstay arrangements are unusual, with the forward wire loop of the purchase being secured to a metal hook rising a foot out of the deck, and made up aft with Highfield levers. “They’re fine, except they’re on when you want them off and off when you want them on,” someone said. *Solway Maid* winters in the cradle of her birth on the Clyde, and was visiting the Solent at the end of her summer tour.

Berthed on an adjacent pontoon was a yacht of identical waterline length, 35ft (10.67m), but from a distinctively different architect. *Cetewayo* is a Laurent Giles design built in Sandbank, Argyll by Morris & Lorimer for Sir Henry Spurrier in 1957, originally under the name *Zulu*. In this yacht we participated in the 1993 Round the Island Race (see CB63, Sep ’93), and knew from first-hand experience that her owner/skipper David Murrin and his gung-ho crew would not be taking prisoners. For sure, there would be

We had come to Cowes to race for the Hermès Mumm Trophy for classic yachts. There was the ex-Class I ocean racer *Bloodhound*, designed by CE Nicholson and built by Camper & Nicholsonsbuilt for Isaac Bell in 1935, winner of the 1939 Fastnet Race. This 63-foot (19.2m) fast cruiser was owned by the Queen and Prince Philip from 1961 until 1969. Her current owner discovered the yacht with





a spirited rivalry between *Cetewayo* and *Solway Maid*, beaten in last year's light-weather match-race by the big spinnaker of the younger boat.

This year's race had drawn a famous French competitor, Eric Tabarly, with his glassfibre Fife *Pen Duick* (see CB54, Dec '92), a 49ft 6in (15m) gaff cutter flying a jib top-sail crowning a rig widely regarded as the prettiest afloat. And then there was the 1898 gentleman's yawl *Samphire*, of the same length on deck and same age as *Pen Duick*, but of very different design. In place of Fife's long, smooth curve from beaky bow to rudder heel, the Summers & Payne design *Samphire* has a shorter, more rounded cruising bow and a sheerline which dips almost all the way aft in contrast to the Fife's more balanced ends.

which the colour of the owner's face drained as if by venturi bailers.

At the start of the first race, it must be admitted, we crossed the line a trifle early, as did *Bloodhound* and *Cetewayo*, but only the Laurent Giles returned to cross again while we continued. One was left feeling as though we had been less than sporting, and the only antidote for our guilt was to hammer *Cetewayo* for being such annoyingly good fellows. We would do our best to hem them in along the shore.

"I'm going to need some water soon!" David Murrin yelled across to us, the weather boat. "What's he saying?" helmsman Andy asked. "Says he's got plenty of water. Not to worry," someone volunteered. Skipper Iain McAllister gained a few inches on our foresail sheet in a momentary luff, and the harder the wind blew the higher *Solway Maid* pointed. Meanwhile, a *Cetewayo* crew-member was becoming noticeably anxious in his calling out of the depth to the helmsman. The backstay crew was poised with the lee backstay lever half cocked, ready for the tack. At last, *Cetewayo* had to tack or become a hazard to shipping in the next update of Admiralty Charts for the Solent, and we threw in a tack to make room. In a great barking of sail and whipping of sheet upon deck, *Cetewayo* flew through our wake with bows lunging skywards and sliced away to port. Her battery of Andersen winches quickly gathered in the slack and shaped her sails for the new course.

The first beat westwards into the southwesterly was every bit as wet as expected, and more, with each break of sea over the rail bringing forth a mad laugh of exhilaration from our crew perched on the weather deck. *Solway Maid* cut forward

with the ease and grace of a painted horse on a merry-go-round. Early tacks brought a couple of riding turns to the staysail sheet but the crew soon settled down, hauling on the clew to ease the work of the winchman.

The wind did not ease for the rest of the 90-minute race. It being neither easy nor speedy to further reef a gaffer while racing, *Pen Duick* and *Samphire* did not finish the race. *Marigold*, however, stuck to her course and canvas, charging round the buoys with the valour of a pre-war Bentley licking the edge of the Brooklands banking. There was a shared sense of achievement as we crossed the line and bore away with eased sheets.

Before the second race we managed to down a sandwich while reaching up and down the River Medina, and then it was eyes down to our watches for the run in to the start line. The cannon sounded and the RYS lights came together as *Solway Maid* hit the line, *Bloodhound* sawing water abeam of us with the action of a treadle sewing machine. Then she was astern, with Harold Cudmore unable to find the boatspeed he needed to overhaul the old *Maid*.

With each plunge of the bow *Bloodhound* sent sheets of white spray squirting to leeward on the wind. Andy Cassell isn't a man to make a meal out of such a start line victory, but his broad grin of satisfaction spread through our boat like ink through blotting paper as *Bloodhound* bore away behind us to find clear water.

The rest of this shorter race was wet, exciting and not a little tiring. At some point skipper Iain disappeared from view under green water which came rolling down the lee deck as he was winching, and he collected a stanchion between the eyes, but his Scottish skull



Above: Andy Cassell, at the wheel, and skipper Iain McAllister to his right grit their teeth as spray bursts on *Solway Maid*'s cockpit.

Opposite. Top: *Marigold* shows a bold spread of cotton sails to weather of *Pen Duick*. Note the curvature in *Marigold*'s bowsprit as bobstay and jib luff oppose. **Below:** *Cetewayo* finds herself heading into shallow waters to leeward of *Solway Maid*. Note the good setting of *Cetewayo*'s roller-reefed mainsail.

These, then, were the protagonists, drawn by invitation to pick up the gauntlet thrown down by Hermès Mumm in a challenge which sets out to prove that classic yachts can be raced with vigour and still excite the senses. There is more for these old yachts to live for than mere polishing and parading.

As we made our way out of the marina into the full flow of the River Medina, I glimpsed out into Cowes Roads. *Pen Duick* was the first into the fray of bright water, with jib and reefed main alone, yet laid so flat by the wind that she appeared to be aground. I turned my attention to the reef we were tying in our mainsail and checked again that I hadn't made a granny knot of the job. Skipper Iain wrote the course directions on waterproof paper and taped them to the binnacle. On *Cetewayo* David Murrin appeared to be eating some kind of a special pre-race pudding while his labrador crew Hugo looked up enviously.

The ten and five minute signals found us engaged in a few practice tacks. On the stroke of 11.30am smoke puffed from the RYS and the crack of the starting cannon followed on the wind. We found ourselves to leeward of *Bloodhound*, which has made a tradition in this race of putting a 'fast' hand on the helm. Two years ago it was Peter Blake, who steered the yacht to a trouncing of her old rival *Drumbeat*, formerly owned by Sir Max Aitken. This year, as we crossed the starting line we glimpsed the white teeth of Harold Cudmore behind the dark blue yawl's wheel. Having recently achieved a convincing grounding for the Irish Admiral's Cup team, Harold had his leg pulled so hard he could stand level on a deck with 30° of heel. "But I haven't been aground in anything this year..." he quipped, "...yet." At



OCEAN IMAGES



ROBIN CARTER



bounced right back up again.

Entrants had been divided into gaff and non-gaff yachts. *Pen Duick*, although well reefed, looked fragile in these conditions, but flew her French tricolour proudly. She was overheard on the VHF saying to the race office: "We are flying our French ensign as a sign of national pride. It does not mean that we have retired." The reply: "Vive la France!"

Meanwhile *Samphire* surfed on with her bows up and stern down, boldly going where few Victorian gentleman's yawls are still able to go. On one downwind leg I looked astern to see the gaffers holding their own with us advanced bermudans. *Marigold* was perhaps even doing a little better than that, her big gaff mainsail and spars hanging off to port as she stemmed the Solent tide. Downwind *Solway Maid* tended to weave a little on the helm, perhaps wanting more sail ahead of the mast to pull her on a steadier course, like a spinnaker. "Downwind the mainsail is always trying to push the boat around, and the helm must correct it," Andy Cassell explained.

Cetewayo, meanwhile, took the opportunity to air her sail wardrobe. A frightening red spinnaker with a Zulu motif bulged above her foredeck, flapping and flogging for a minute and drawing camera boats like bears to honey, but the crew quickly regained control and deprived the picture men of their drama. *Cetewayo* surged forward, but the conditions were too much for the big sail and a squeezer soon gathered it in. Skipper David Murrin next launched an asymmetric cruising chute, but with this he could not hold his course dead downwind and could not lay the mark, and that sail too was stowed. The yawls, *Bloodhound* and *Samphire*, also hoisted extra sail when reaching and running, setting mizzens which previously had been doused.

On the last leg, a close reach, some solid water joined us on the deck of *Solway Maid* as gusts of Force 8 hit the sails. Just when I thought it was safe to unzip my jacket and cool off, another great lump of water blew over the weather bow and washed its way into my sea trousers. Again *Marigold*, all rigged in natural fibre cordage and cotton sails, appeared to be matching our pace, raising some eyebrows. Old gaffers are not supposed to perform like this.

"Some of the time we had the Solent on deck from stem to stern," helmsman Tom Cunliffe later revealed. "But it didn't bother her at all. I've sailed right round Britain in my old Bristol Channel pilot cutter *Hirta* this year, but today's race was the best I've had. The boat made it." Her wormed tiller lines damped any kick

from the seas but Tom found she still pulled hard to windward. "The thing about these old gaff cutters is that it takes time for anything to happen. You're pulling like mad and if her mainsheet's still in tight she's bearing away with her lee chainplates a foot under."

Solway Maid thrashed onwards to the line, helmsman Andy steering with a demonic light in his eye and with



fists tight around the spokes of the wheel, ears tuned to the frequency of the RYS finishing cannon. Then, as we made a tack, the wind snapped open the luff clips of our staysail — one, two, three, four — as they were forced behind and then away from the redundant one of the paired forestays. We finished the race with eyes fixed on the straining fifth luff clip, but the Ratsey & Laphorn stitching held good, though it seemed Keith Beken of Cowes was poised with camera in our lee waiting for something to blow out. Not today, as *Solway Maid* crossed the line to win her second race of the day on corrected time.

It was a rare experience for these boats to enjoy a race in gutsy weather, their rigs putting the power into their hulls which their designers intended. But *Solway Maid* skipper Iain McAllister considered this a flat water race. "It's not the wind that makes problems but big seas, which can hammer the boat. The Solent is protected, so you don't get big waves. We've done a lot of deep water sailing this year, and I've been up the mast enough times to know that everything is as good as it can be. If something breaks, there's nothing we can do about that — but that's the same with any boat, new or old."

Having recently crewed aboard Maurizio Gucci's newly-restored 1896 gaff cutter *Avel*, racing in the Mediterranean, we eagerly await the vintage match race of the 1990s: *Avel* and *Marigold* together on the same line, two exquisite but very different Nicholson designs from the 1890s. Will it happen? We can but hope. Meanwhile, more on *Avel* next month in our definitive La Nioulargue report. ✕

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Above: Solway Maid charges for home with everything below the light-boxes well soaked.

Opposite. Top: Cetewayo, to leeward, and Solway Maid just after the start. Inset: Pen Duick, a bald-headed gaff beauty with just one of her usual three jibs set. Below: With companionway doors latched open, Samphire looks well balanced and steady as she ploughs upwind with both foresails and mizzen complementing a single-reefed mainsail.

RESULTS

Hermès Mumm Trophy

Class I: Line honours

Class I: Winner on handicap

Bloodhound

Solway Maid

Hermès Mumm Armada Plate

Class II: Line honours

Marigold

Top foreign entry

Prix d'élégance

Victor Ludorum

Pen Duick

Cetewayo

Samphire