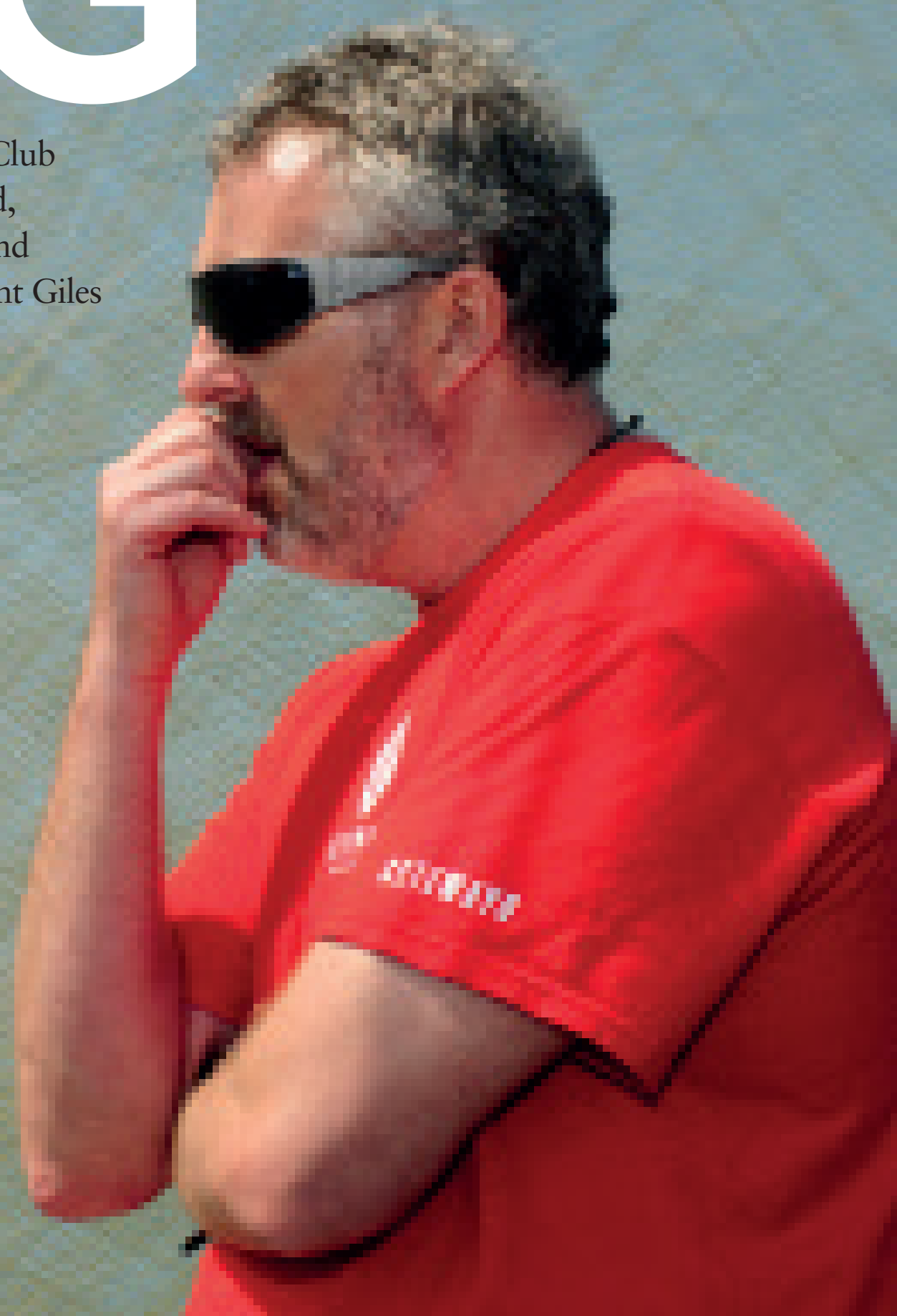


# THINKING BIG

The British Classic Yacht Club commodore on fatherhood, collective empowerment and having a drink with Laurent Giles

STORY ROB PEAKE



David Murrin tells a story about a Hamble Winter Series race he was sailing in, back in the mid-1990s. For Murrin and crew to clinch the series in the final race, they had to finish first, while their rivals had to finish fifth. So Murrin gets his crew down below before the start and exhorts them to silently intone the words ‘one’ and ‘five’.

“A couple of them were sniggering but most of them did it,” he recalls. In the race, they suffered a dire start, but then something happened. They began to pass boats. “I pictured a cord between us and the boat ahead,” says Murrin. At every mark they’d clawed more distance back. Halfway through, his crew were flying, jubilant with every place gained and redoubling their efforts as they saw victory inch nearer. Who’s to say if it was boat speed or something more, but by the finish line, a heavy wooden yacht built in 1955 had sailed its way past a highly competitive modern fleet. There were celebrations on deck, but was it enough to secure the series? Then the news came through – their rivals had finished fifth. History doesn’t relate how many bottles of beer were drunk that night in Hamble village, but one thing is for sure: Murrin’s crew never forgot the power of “one” and “five”.

“It was a lesson that reminded me of the power of collective thought and harmony, a sense of shared belief,” recalls Murrin today with a smile.

Murrin is an interesting guy. He talks up concepts like collective empowerment – concepts far too leftfield for some – while behind him in his office flicker huge flatscreens displaying share-tracking graphs from the financial markets. Hard statistics on one hand, meaningful ‘Murrinations’ on the other.

Murrinations is what Murrin calls his blog entries. Think the rise of China, the north/south African divide, decline of the West, danger of Russia, the likelihood of a global war at the end of this decade. He’s not shy of making a prediction and was outspoken in the run-up to the UK’s EU referendum, about which he wrote and spoke publicly for the Leave campaign.

Murrin is a regular commentator on CNBC and other channels, as well as a keynote speaker at conferences and corporate events worldwide. Face to face, too, he speaks in big concepts. Some of them might take a moment to get your head around, but it’s difficult not to get swept along by the enthusiasm and sheer force of personality.

Five years ago he published a book, *Breaking the Code of History*. The introduction explains: “Murrin shares what might be called a ‘grand unifying theory’ of the social political dynamics that have propelled us from the first human civilisations to our present perilous position.”

The good news, Murrin tells us, is that “we can save ourselves, if we can take the necessary first steps towards a greater collective consciousness”.

Blimey, and I was only here to talk about sailing.

Murrin grew up in ....., his father was an aeronautical engineer, his mother a nurse. They owned a

Harrison Butler, *Minion*, and the family would take long summer holidays cruising the boat around the Channel. Today he says his father became his ‘best friend’, partly through their shared love of sailing, and Murrin remains appreciative of his non-mollycoddling approach. “He believed in letting my brother and I stand on our own feet as soon as possible.”

Murrin chose to go not to a public school but to the local comprehensive, where as a dyslexic child he recalls having to “fight, physically and emotionally, to learn...it was a tough upbringing”.

He was the first member of his family to go to university, reading Physics with Geophysics at Exeter, after which came three years with a seismic exploration company, living and working with native tribes in the jungles of Papua New Guinea.

He returned to the UK to join JP Morgan bank and a high flying career in investment banking looked set. All was going swimmingly, but something was missing.

“Murrin means ‘of the sea’ in Gaelic,” he tells me with a laugh. “People talk about a boat as a luxury, but for me a boat is a fundamental link to who you are. After all, I was conceived on a wooden boat!”

Murrin was on the national youth windsurfing squad and did his Yachtmaster as a teenager. He was already a competent sailor when aged 24 he began paging through the classifieds and spotted a yacht he fancied. She was a 1955 Laurent Giles sloop, celebrated in her day, but she’d need more than a little TLC to get her afloat again.

“I got a loan from my father – with a high interest rate because he was very commercial – and I broke my back renovating her.”

Thirty years on, the renovation is long finished but it has been the upgrades since then that have turned people’s heads. She’s believed to be the first classic to be fitted with laminate sails, in the mid-1990s, and she packs a Code 0 in her sail locker. *Cetewayo*, in fact, is known locally for having been maximised on deck for IRC racing in almost every respect and is still the subject of hot debate between the purists and the racers. (What’s less well known is that down below she boasts an immaculate interior with period mirrors, cabinetry and more.)

Last season *Cetewayo* had a new Columbian pine mast designed by Classic Boat’s technical editor Theo Rye, made by Collars. It’s two metres longer than the original and is the most sophisticated wooden mast in the world, Murrin says. “It’s given the boat another serious performance enhancement. She learned a whole set of new tricks overnight.”

A new suit of spectre sails has followed, designed by Kevin Sproul and built by Ultimate Sails in Hamble.

Murrin has relished the developmental process and the fact that his heavy long-keeler can now sail upwind at 28 degrees apparent, higher than ever, and faster than an 8-M. But he has not done the optimisation lightly and cares deeply about the classic scene. “I’ve always respected the spirit of Laurent Giles in the boat and I am



absolutely convinced that if he came back for a drink he'd be delighted with what we've done with her.

"Optimising these boats for racing gives you a level of understanding into how finely designed they were. They were the F1 cars of their day. Only by racing them and bringing them alive do you realise that."

"There is another whole iteration to go with the boat," he adds. "The margins are always in the last three per cent. We have a way to go yet."

*Cetewayo* also has electric winches so that Murrin can sail the boat into his dotage. "If you buy a classic, buy it for life, then all the work pays off."

He has a dream of going off cruising with his four children, now teenagers, as he did with his parents.

"Going sailing, you slow down and the family dynamics are right again," he says. "When I was growing up, every year we were off for the whole summer holiday. Dad would navigate by dead reckoning. He was a phenomenal seaman, not a racing sailor but a navigator. When I got older I learned what generational knowledge was. Whenever I encountered a situation at sea I would think: 'What would my father do?' My children are the same. They don't think they're sailors

*Opposite clockwise from top left: A training day on Cetewayo - a coloured block chart to match wind strengths to sail combos; up the new Collars wooden mast; Murrin, a former Farr 40 owner, marks the car track to the centimetre; comms down below; mast and halyards are calibrated; polars gauge performance*

but put them on a boat and they know what to do."

Now 53, Murrin owns an asset management company with offices in Haslemere, an hour south of London, and amid family duties his other passion is kite-surfing. But sailing first. "Sailing is at the heart of my life," he says. "We've lost our relationship with the sea but classic boats are really celebrating our history as a nation. I would make the argument that democracy started in Britain because of the ratio of our coastline to internal volume, because seafarers have to be independent of thought - they have ultimate responsibility for their actions. Consequently, it was not an accident that Britain was the first effective modern European democracy."

It would be easy to see Murrin's grand theories as grand conceits, but there's a ready laugh if he thinks he's gone too far, and at times he displays a slightly disarming bashfulness. Does he have political ambitions? He admits the question has been asked before. "I do not seek office!" he roars. "There's a price for holding public office. Simply to try to make things better, to find a better way, that might make it happen. But in a way it's a calling I dread."



## An innovative regatta

The Commodore of the British Classic Yacht Club, David Murrin, positively beams when he recalls last year's Panerai British Classic Week. "It was a seminal moment for our organisation," says Murrin, who co-founded the British Classic Yacht Club 15 years ago with Tim Blackman. The club's flagship event in 2015 attracted a record 79 boats, including some of the most famous classic yachts in the world. It ran back to back over a fortnight with the Royal Yacht Squadron's Bicentenary Regatta, with yachts coming from the US and the Med to take part.

"You could compare world class boats with the UK fleet and see what amazing classic boats we have here," says Murrin. "It also showed Med boats another way that classics could be raced."

The regatta takes place this year from July 16-24, with the fleet packed into Cowes Yacht Haven, the dockside Panerai lounge offering food and drinks for competitors and a lively series of shoreside evening events organised by sponsors.

An innovation for 2016 will be the use of trackers for each yacht, allowing visitors to watch races in real time on a screen. "It would be hard to match our regatta for atmosphere," Murrin says.

The club's adherence to IRC is unstinting and Murrin says: "It is an external fairness, not one we create ourselves. IRC means the best boat wins. If you sail your boat well, if it's a fast boat and it's optimised, you will win the regatta. In the Med with the CIM system, which benefits 'authenticity', that's not the case. A boat will do well for reasons other than performance."

"The BCYC was founded on three key tenets," he continues. "Firstly, to encourage the preservation of yachts between 30ft and

60ft that historically were neglected. Secondly, to provide a forum for their owners to share common cause with gentlemanly and friendly values. Lastly to encourage people to race their boats really well under IRC, so that they're living museum pieces."

Murrin is a long-time proponent for optimising a classic yacht for racing and has led by example with his Laurent Giles sloop *Cetewayo*. "You need to optimise your boat for any system," he says. "It's not something you can do in one season, it takes a few years, but it's a fascinating process and you see the boat go faster and get a lower handicap. If you want to understand what a designer intended in a yacht, you race it."

The BCYC committee meets regularly and Murrin praises his colleagues' "moral compass, enthusiasm and collective creativity", as well as their willingness to innovate. "The people who run the regatta also sail in it, which is quite rare, and every year we have the honesty to look at the event and try to improve it."

One change this year will allow members to feed back from the start to the race officers, in the hope that windless or heavily biased lines can be avoided. Another change has seen a waypoint introduced off the Varvassi wreck, so no boat can be tempted to make the cut-through behind the Needles. Another has changed the traditional scoring system, with a combination of class and fleet races aiming to give a more representative view of each boat's regatta performance. There will also be a cruising programme for those not racing and a trial motorboat category.

[britishclassicyachtclub.org](http://britishclassicyachtclub.org)



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