

ROUND BRITAIN '69

Ray Bulman looks at recent developments in the entry for the Daily Telegraph-BP Race, scheduled to start on July 26.

THE ONE big offshore powerboating event on this season's calendar that everyone is talking about is without doubt the *Daily Telegraph* and BP Round Britain, due to start off Southsea on July 26. For at approximately 1,700 nautical miles it will be the longest powerboat race in the world, albeit in 11 separate sections, beating its nearest rival—the Bahamas 500—by 1,200 miles. And it is proving to be an equally mammoth exercise in race organisation.

To some people, particularly the owners of larger craft, the compulsory overnight stops are a disappointment: many would have much preferred to carry on night and day as in a car rally—only entering port when fuel was needed. But this would have been a serious handicap to the organisation as it would have proved almost impossible to keep a safety check on competitors' positions, especially during the hours of darkness, and by the time the first boat reached Scotland, the field would have been spread out over several hundred miles. Both large and small craft would also have been exposed to other dangers when travelling at speed through the night. The large unseen wave or driftwood could easily cause a sudden sinking without hope of rescue.

The length and therefore midweek running make the rescue facilities, such as they are, almost unique in offshore racing. The popular yachting areas are easy to cover as there will be plenty of owners willing to patrol their local section, but these are few and far between and in the more remote regions the only safety cover will probably come from the Services or patrolling aircraft. This is the main reason why all competitors have to comply with stringent safety rules and carry two life rafts.

The weather problem is also a headache. If it is considered too rough to start a particular section, will this apply to all boats, or will the standard of seaworthiness be taken from the smallest? If this is

so, and I cannot see any other way it can logically be enforced, the owners of the slower heavy weather craft will gain no advantage while the small man will feel burdened with responsibility for their annoyance.

Physical punishment

Few prospective competitors appear to have considered the length of the race in terms of physical punishment. How many who finished last year's Cowes/Torquay/Cowes were fit to carry out the ordeal again the next day, and the next, and for eight more? Drivers of *Spirit of Ecstasy* or *Horatia* type craft maybe, but certainly not those in the out-and-out racers that will make up about a third of the Round Britain entry.

A problem some are beginning to encounter is that of overnight accommodation at the stopping points. It is bang in the middle of the holiday season and few hotels and boarding houses are keen to lose a week's booking for the sake of one night. One or two competitors plan to sleep aboard, but this is only practicable on large craft with good accommodation whose crew would need complete rest least of all.

Those who have been bounced around and soaked to the skin will be in the OP Class racer, and if the only bed they can find is the floor, they will soon retire from fatigue if nothing else! This is the one great advantage of the large boat where refreshment, if only a cup of tea, can be taken during the race, while the small man has nothing plus the possibility of nowhere to rest after crossing the line.

The duration could also affect some people. There is a strong likelihood that bad weather could cause the event to last longer than 11 days. If this happens, some crews may be forced to return to their business commitments and this will be particularly attractive

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as an excuse to those lying well down the field. Their craft, and any others that retire with mechanical trouble, will have to be left up country to be either transported home by road (an expensive business), or by sea at some later date.

Champagne course

Yet another factor that sounds appealing now, but may not be so welcome at the time, is the official receptions. These have been generously laid on by local authorities and other organisations at each port of call, but halfway through after six days of hard racing with accompanying receptions, some drivers may prefer a steady bed to champagne as soon as they step ashore.

No racing crew will be in a fit condition to overhaul their craft at the end of each day, so any entry with a good chance of winning will have to be accompanied by a team of road-transported mechanics and other helpers. Many have arranged this already but are now finding one team insufficient as they will not be able to reach the next port of call with enough time in hand to be effective. Therefore, two will be needed—one leap-frogging the other to alternate points to allow a spare day for travelling.

This is the first year in which the RYA has allowed the use of advertising sponsorship, although much against popular feelings at the time it was first announced. It is unlikely that many craft will be wholly sponsored, even in this race which will carry greater Press and TV coverage than any held so far. Seemingly companies have not rushed to have their trade names painted on topsides, either because of the economic situation, the type of media, or because some racing boat owners have asked for too much in return.

To some extent I feel that this will be reflected in the eventual number of entries (standing at roughly 80 at the end of April), for some enthusiastically entered a proposed craft to be built on a very vague suggestion of sponsorship only to find later that the money was not forthcoming after all. The actual list of entries will not be available until after the closing date (May 31) but it could contain well below the maximum number of 100 because of this.

Winning factors

Most of the owners who have entered appear reluctant to give details of their craft, probably because they consider someone will rush out to build a copy. They should have no fear of this as the factors of a winning boat have been obvious since the event was first announced. Hull and engine reliability come first, and this is why it is almost certain to be a diesel-powered cruiser rather than an out-and-out high-speed racer (the first leg alone is longer than the old Cowes/Torquay where many highly tuned racing craft retired before reaching the halfway mark). Second in importance is the physical reliability of the crew coupled with the will to carry on, and this is finally followed by good navigation. I put this last because it is so obvious that any mistakes here will cost the crew the race well before reaching the Isle of Man.

Nevertheless, some interesting craft are under construction, and the racing powerboat is definitely in the minority even though all owners propose to enter other races beside the Round Britain, some no doubt, to qualify for the required International licence status.

To a certain extent this race will attract several interesting "way-out" craft, much as the first Cowes/Torquay did in 1961. Present boats range from a 23ft catamaran to a brand-new patrol vessel (less armament), destined for a Middle East sheikdom, up to a 75ft revolutionary powered steam yacht. It is difficult to make a prediction about these at present as any one could be the winner given the correct set of circumstances.

Craft from Fairey Marine have always given a good account of themselves in offshore races and their reliability and robustness could prove a deciding factor in an event such as the Round Britain. Several are entered privately, but one interesting team foursome has been entered by Ford.

With racing in mind

It comprises two new 28ft and a 31ft Huntsman craft plus the 28ft *Seaspray* built last season for John Freeman. All will be powered by twin six-cylinder turbo-charged Ford diesels fitted with Sabre marine conversions that produce 164hp continuous rating at 2500 to give a speed of about 30mph. Although probably left behind in the early stages, on past performance they could be well up with the leaders towards the end after the hot-rods have fallen by

the wayside.

The three new boats are being built with racing particularly in mind. The fixed anti-cavitation plate usually fitted as standard in the Fairey Cruiser range will be removed and adjustable trim tabs fitted in their place. An 80-gallon water ballast tank forward also allows further trim adjustment so that the fuel weight can be compensated depending on the direction of sea. They will be principally driven by Lady Aitken, Peter Twiss, John Freeman, and Derek Morris—all very experienced drivers.

Another team of well proven heavy weather design is entered by Keith Nelson—the firm of Cdr Peter Thornycroft. *Grand Espoir* and *Horatia*, both 40ft TT designed and powered by twin 400hp D336 Caterpillar diesels, have already tasted rough seas under race conditions and are noted for their reliability, but in addition to these, a further 40-footer powered by twin 160hp Ford diesels, plus a 56ft naval patrol boat are to be included. All are moulded in glass fibre by Halmatic and finished off at the Nelson yard at Bembridge, and although they are not planing boats in the strict sense they have a useful speed that can be maintained almost regardless of weather.

Perhaps not so race proven as the Fairey, the *Cleopatra*, built by Essex Yacht Builders, is fast becoming a household name in family cruisers so it is therefore not surprising that at least one of these is a possible starter. Alf Bullen, who only lost the offshore championship by the skin of his teeth last season, may be a *Cleopatra* driver and barring accidents one of these boats well prepared could score in the small cruiser class.

Cruiser cat

Although Keith Horseman has entered his new Bristol Boats-built 23ft offshore catamaran, he is not alone with this type of craft for the Medina Yacht Co. at Cowes is entering one of its new production cruiser cats. But unlike Keith's, this one is a cabin boat 27ft overall with an extreme beam of 15ft called the *Jaguar 27*. She is designed by Bill Bucknell and built of glass fibre on the sandwich principle using Plasticell D100 PVC foam. The end product gives a very good power/weight ratio for her twin sterndrive 3-litre V6 fuel injection MerCruiser Fords.

Where most large seagoing power-catamarans in the past have been almost identical in hull design to their sailing sisters which rely on lower wetted area for speed, the *Jaguar 27* has twin planing hulls. The result of this design has yet to be proved as the buoyancy aft where the motors are installed is rather low, and it may require a greater power peak than normal to bring her over the "hump". Nevertheless, it is a new design trend in high-speed cabin cruisers for which the Round Britain will prove an ideal testing ground.

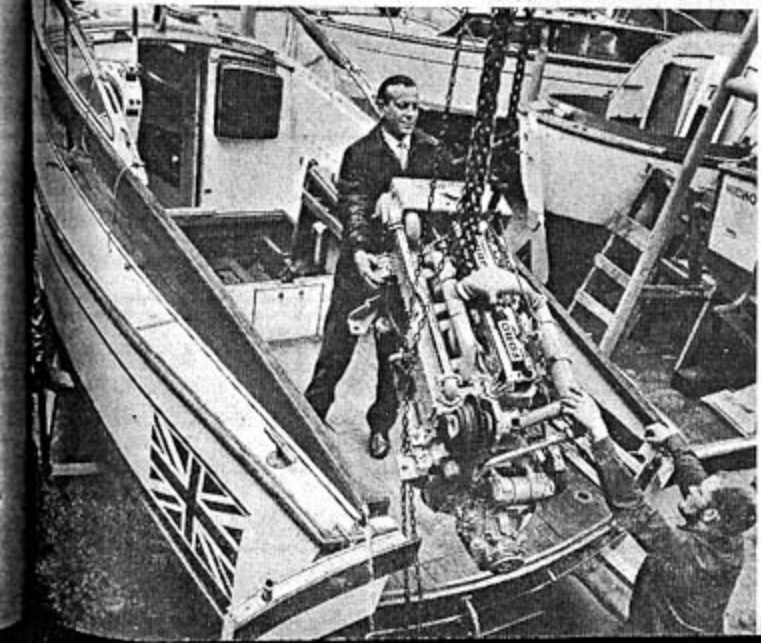
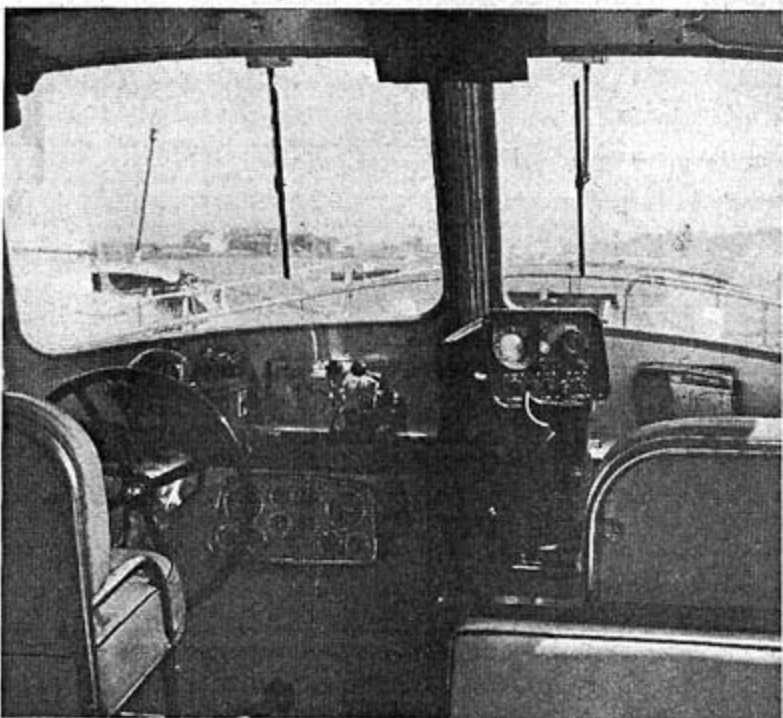
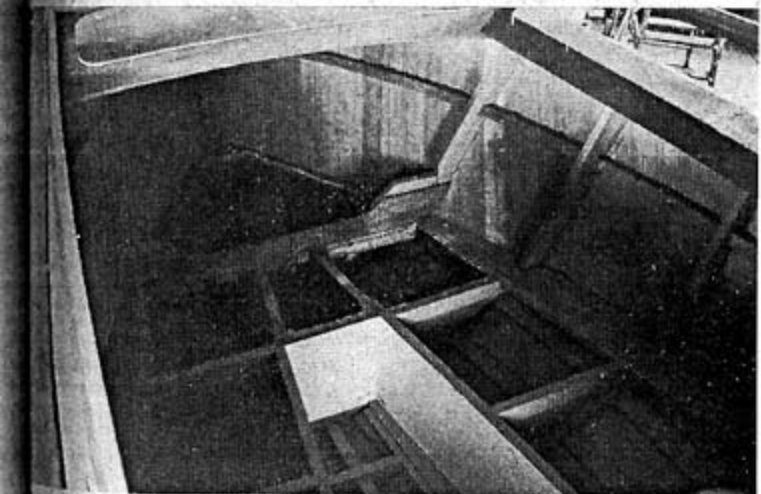
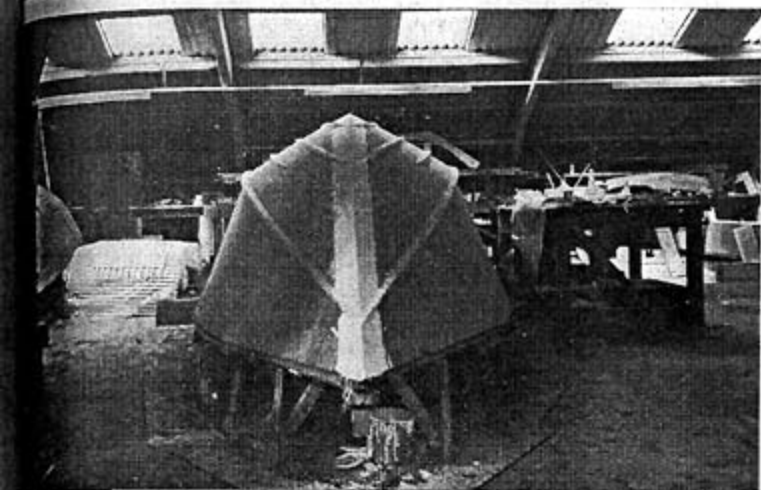
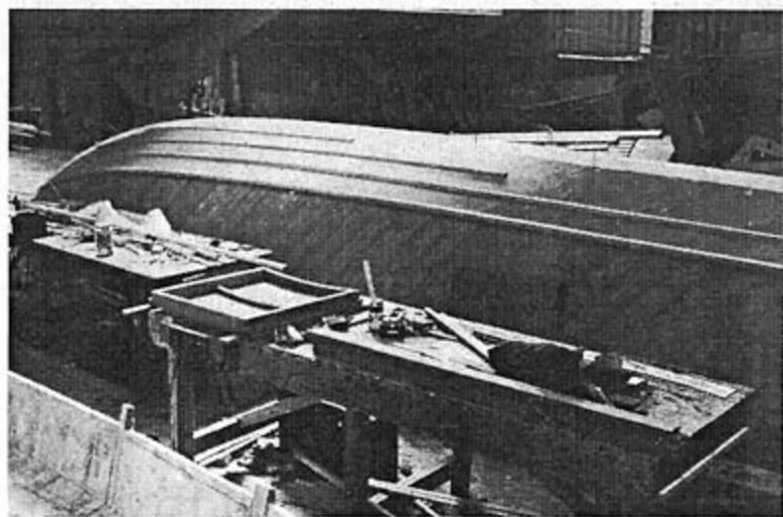
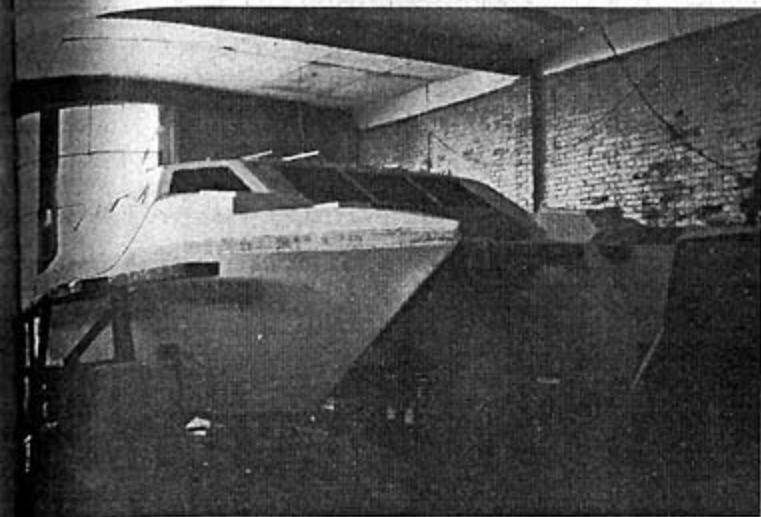
Fred Child is entering one of his Teal cruisers based on the *Kitten Kat* design that did so well offshore racing in Class III over the past two seasons. This one, however, is interesting in her unusual method of propulsion. Unlike the majority which have shaft, sterndrive or outboard, this boat will use a combination—sterndrive and outboard. Fred is installing a MerCruiser on the centreline and a BP Mercury outboard to port and starboard which will produce in total about 400hp.

All these are either in the cruiser classes or have been based on cruiser hulls, but a good proportion of entries will be pure racing boats. Perhaps no British yard has more experience in building high class offshore powerboats than Souter of Cowes, and two entries are under construction there. The larger is a 33ft CI racer for Mr Ralph Hilton that will be powered by twin Leyland diesels and could well be hot competition in her class. The smaller is *Avenger Too*, a 27ft OPH being built for Alan "Pascoe" Watson. It will be fitted with three Mercury 125hp standard outboards, which perhaps, will gain further laurels for Souter in the outboard group. Both are designed by Don Shead.

Big rewards

This then is a brief review of a few of the new craft making up the huge fleet preparing for July 26. It does not include the British boats from past seasons or the powerful American, Italian, and other overseas outfits, any of which could dominate the scene.

The problems are enormous, but the rewards are equally so, and most stumbling blocks can be overcome. In fact, there are likely to be so many money prizes that each of the few boats that cross the finishing line two weeks later (for there will undoubtedly be many retirements), is almost bound to collect something!



Race preparation shots show LEFT, top to bottom: the Jaguar 27ft cat building at Medina Yacht Co's shed; Pascoe Watson's 27ft *Avenger Too* at Souters; view inside a Fairey 28ft Huntsman for the Ford team, showing forward ballast tank; installation of 6-litre Ford marinised by Sabre Marine and here being lifted aboard another of Ford's four-boat armada. RIGHT hand photos, top to bottom: further shot of *Avenger Too*: the 33-footer built by Souters for Ralph Hilton; and, bottom, interior of the Keith Nelson *Horatio*, one of the race's best prospects.