

VETERAN POWERBOAT “THUNDERSTREAK” SNATCHES DOUBLE VICTORY AT ROUGH POOLE RACES.

HISTORIC 1963 BERTRAM 31 POUNDED HOME TO HARD-FOUGHT CLASS WINS AT “BUMPY” OPENING OFFSHORE POWERBOAT RACE CALENDAR. “ONE UP FOR THE OLDIES!”



The UK offshore powerboat racing season kicked off at Poole Bay this weekend with the late Tommy Sopwith's historic 1963 Bertram 31, *Thunderstreak* [#H400] taking first places in the Class 4 [Historic/ Offshore] on both days at the UKOPRA-organised race weekend in Poole Bay. Not only was the Isle of Wight-restored and -rigged H400, at 58 years, the oldest boat in the 20-30 boat fleet by several decades and more, but the crew's average age was “comfortably north of 71”.

Thunderstreak was entered by “Team: Royal Yacht Squadron” with race-boat owner-driver Hugo Peel joined by RYS Members - navigator Johnny Raymond and James Gaggero on throttles/trim. Based in Cowes, Isle of Wight, H400'S extensive three-year restoration programme at local boatyard Solent Marine Services, was the subject of an extensive article in *Motorboat&Yachting* magazine in 2020, “From Wreck to Racer”. This charted her history from 1960's/1970's contender to derelict 2013 houseboat - and back to racer again.

Hugo Peel comments: “Saturday's ‘shakedown race’ in near perfect sea-conditions enabled the crew to work up H400”s systems and work as a team. Sunday's longer, much tougher race let *Team Royal Yacht Squadron* put them to [often] severe test over 80+ miles of close racing in an ugly swell underlying a confused sea. Many competitors with contemporary race-boats sadly failed to finish with mechanical breakdowns and electrical failures. We got off lightly with bruises, tired legs and knees - and just one broken finger. This is one for the Oldies!”

A fleet of between 20 and 30 Class 1-to4 offshore race-boats competed over courses of 30, 70 and 120 miles during the two-day Bank Holiday weekend around Poole Bay, organised by official body, the UK Offshore Powerboat Racing Association [“UKOPRA”]. While the newest 21st century boats have 90-120mph capabilities, it was the race-officials, other competitors and race enthusiasts who remarked how well H400 still competed at top level among her peers after 58 years - but also her ability to produce velocities over 65mph, double her original 1950s designed-speed.

“To me, racing is all about history,” continued **Hugo Peel**. “Among all the modern and historic entries, *Thunderstreak*’s provenance is probably without equal. Some of the sport’s best known names have raced her since her first [1963] Cowes-Torquay outing including **Tommy Sopwith** four-times race winner]; **Jeffrey Quill** [WW2 Spitfire pilot and Vickers’ chief test pilot]; **Keith Schellenberg** [eccentric Scottish landowner and British Winter Olympian]; and **Robin Doxford**.

Thunderstreak and its crew are scheduled to race again at the classic **Cowes-Torquay-Cowes** race over August Bank Holiday, which will celebrate the race’s 60th anniversary of the world-famous offshore race.



Left: L-R: **James Gaggero** [Throttles/trim]; **Hugo Peel** [Owner-driver]; and **Johnny Raymond** [Navigator]

THUNDERSTREAK'S LONG HISTORY

1963: Cowes-Torquay and the season. **Tommy Sopwith** with 2x400hp Holman & Moody race-prepared Ford Interceptors on shafts and V-drives for Cowes-Torquay race. Tommy had originally ordered a 35ft racing hull, but it was “dropped” before shipping and, at short notice, was replaced by a factory Bertram 31 Competition. [Currently the only 31 Competition still afloat].

1964: Cowes-Torquay: helmed by **Jeffrey Quill**. Tommy had been invited to helm Tramontana 2, normally Quill's ride. Quill was a celebrated WW2 Spitfire and Hurricane pilot, and latterly Vickers Aviation's chief test pilot.

1965: Cowes-Torquay and season. **Tommy Sopwith** again [this time with de-tuned Fords in an attempt to reduce drive-train stress - but to little avail!].

1966: Cowes-Torquay. **Keith Schellenberg** for the race and a few outings then “retired” from racing. This eccentric Scottish landowner was a British Olympian winter sportsman and attracted press attention for his tenure on the island of Eigg.

1967 & 1969: Cowes-Torquay. **Robin Doxford** [re-numbered 955 and re-engined with low-powered Perkins' diesels for the Round Britain marathon 1969].

Years of obscurity followed when Thunderstreak disappeared from view. It was rediscovered, according to Mike James of the Classic Offshore Powerboat Club, in an East London marina [see right]. It was for sale for a few thousand pounds and in a sorry condition, having been used as a houseboat for several decades and sported a B&Q shed affixed to her hull.



2014 - 2017: rescued, restored & raced by **Robin Ward**.

2018 - 2021 acquired by **Hugo Peel**. Solent Marine Services of Clarence Boatyard on the River Medina, East Cowes, refitted H400 with a pair of new fuel-injected 8.2L V-8 Mercruiser Mag H/Os and Bravo X race legs; a completely rebuilt back end to accommodate the stern-drives [from original shafts and Velvet Drive gearboxes, Precision-Glide v-drives and a pair of tired, naturally-aspirated 7-litre Ford Dearborn 460s]; re-floored; re-tanked; re-wired; and up to date fire-suppression and instruments.

2019: **Hugo Peel & Robin Ward** Cowes 100 race: DNS.

2020: **Hugo Peel & Johnny Raymond** : competed at Poole 100 Revival races. Won Class 4. Other races curtailed by pandemic.

2021: Launched April for extensive sea-trials and prop-testing. Entered Poole Bay 100 “Shakedown Race May 29-30: Class 4 wins both days.

THE H400 THUNDERSTREAK REFIT TEAM:

BOATBUILDING AND ENGINE: Solent Marine Services, Clarence Yard, E.Cowes - Jim Willcock & Tristan Ormiston.

MARINE ELECTRONICS: Cowes Marine Electronics Ltd, Clarence Yard, E.Cowes.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT: Peter Hewitt & Hugo Peel.