



BULMAN

ON RACING

THE NEEDLES TROPHY

Despite its sheltered course, the Needles has become a war of attrition in recent years. Only a handful of boats survive to take the chequered flag – most retire with mechanical problems of one sort or another as the punishing 128 miles take their toll.

This year's race, staged by the Royal Motor Yacht Club at Poole on August 20, was no exception. Over half of the eighteen Class I starters failed to complete the course.

The overall prize was taken by Italian Fabio Buzzi who set a new British race record, averaging 102.25mph in his 47ft Class I catamaran *Cesa 1882*. The win assured him of victory in the 1989 European offshore championship – a series that he has dominated since ironing out the mechanical bugs in his new rig half-way through the season.

Britain's main hope in this race was Steve Curtis in his Lamborghini-powered Cougar catamaran *Reporter*. Much to Steve's frustration, *Reporter* suffered ignition problems on the start line and went no further.

This left the Italians to clean up in Class I. Second place was taken by Edoardo Polli, averaging 99.13mph in his Lamborghini-powered Cougar-Stain catamaran *S.D.A.*, and Riccardo Ravizza took third in *Annabella* (Cuv/Isotta Fraschini) after averaging 83.93mph.

It was another eleven minutes before the only British team left racing crossed the line. This was *Follett Car Group*, driven by Richard Lawson, John Craxford and John Walker, which took seventh place after averaging 76.86mph – an impressive speed in national offshore competitions, but no longer a



Three Buzzi-designed rigs readied for the Needles Trophy. From left to right: Casiraghi's *Gancia dei Gancia*, Buzzi's *Cesa* and Bonomi's *Ebel*.

competitive speed on the international scene.

Britain's fleet did little better in Class II. *Alba* (Buzzi/Aifo) driven by Danieli Scioli from Argentina averaged 86.54mph, and finished twelve minutes ahead of the closest Brit, John Yeoman in *Unipart Lambs* (Cougar/Chevrolet).

The popularity of Class III in Britain was obvious to all, and the percentage of finishers in this category was far higher. This is probably a reflection on the time Class III crews spend preparing for the event – because they face a far tougher battle than boats in the larger categories when the weather is rough.

Current world four-litre champion, Neil Holmes, finished first overall averaging 67.95mph in *Fina Unleaded* (Midas/Mercury). The two-litre prize went to *Crossley* (Wright/Mercury) driven by Peter Lister, and the little IIIB, 1.3-litre group went to Roy Smith in *Heavy Metal* (Forgecraft/Mercury) at 42.33mph.

Cruiser class racing was also well supported, but many were forced to retire. The new, high-performance Mercruiser-powered Ring, SVC, won the day in the hands of its designer/builder, Mike Ring, crewed on this occasion by fellow *MBY*

journalist Graham Bailey.

The calm seas proved a big temptation for some who could not resist full-throttle driving. Surprisingly, this included *Gancia dei Gancia* (Buzzi/Seatek) of Stefano Casiraghi. He challenged Buzzi for the lead early on, and then slipped down the fleet to finish eighth – a complete contrast to his performance in the Cowes Classic – one week later (see p52).

THAT SINKING FEELING

The sinking of *Cesa 1882* during the Ancasta Cowes Classic (p52) could prevent it from competing in the world championship. Fabio Buzzi told me that he had just signed a charter deal with American Al Copeland who planned to use the boat for the world Superboat championships in Atlantic City held in conjunction with the Sam Griffith world UIM title heats on October 17-21.

Such is the performance of this craft that it had every chance of passing not only the UIM Open Class I (16-litre) contenders but also the best of the unlimited fleet – a category unique to the United States. These boats have as many as four engines and get there by sheer brute force. When it comes to sophisticated hull

shapes and innovative engineering, however, one has to go a long way to better the Italians.

Cesa 1882 suffered severe damage when she sank off Paignton. Whether Fabio Buzzi will be able to repair her in time is anyone's guess, but the charter does make sound commercial sense.

The late American builder/driver, Don Aronow, once said a race boat producer should never compete against the customers. Buzzi appears to have heeded this warning.

By not competing, Buzzi has left Seatek team-mate Stephano Casiraghi with an excellent chance of winning at Atlantic City. Casiraghi currently drives Buzzi's 1988 rig which won the World and European Class I titles last year. He would have little chance of beating Buzzi in *Cesa 1882*.

TRACY CLINCHES WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Britain has a new world offshore champion – and what a champion. Against genuine international competition from Scandinavia, Italy and Argentina, Tracy Clarke and her co-driver Donna James have won the two-litre Class III championship and become the first all-female ▶