

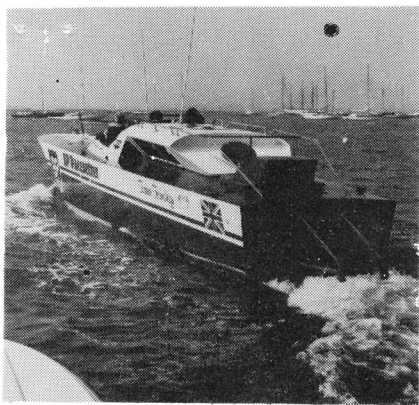
Turbine blows it

The development of the new gas-turbine offshore racer which I mentioned a few months ago has suffered a setback.

This craft is a joint commercial venture between Rolls-Royce and BP and is mainly seen as an avenue into new high-speed, seagoing vessels. The aluminium hull incorporates the dynamo principle of American Eugene Clement. This is a small dish-like plate which is hydraulically lowered under the stern and reduces wetted surface by lifting the hull, which runs balanced between the plate and a forward step.

The 40ft hull has apparently been heavily constructed and its internal layout, wiring and equipment bears a stronger resemblance to a warship than a high-speed boat of the racing variety.

It was originally hoped that we would see this revolutionary racer performing in the Cowes/Torquay/-Cowes. Very good speeds had been forecast but those who have gained a closer look feel that her mammoth scantlings could prove a hindrance. It was also reported that she tended to suffer torque effect with her single propeller, causing the boat to run at a slight angle of heel. All these problems can of course be overcome and are not unusual with a new design, but perhaps the unluckiest incident happened when the turbine suddenly ran away with itself, achieved horrendous revolutions and exploded into a thousand pieces. This is not unknown with gas turbines but the whole engine area was peppered as if hit by a machine gun.



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THE TICKING OF HIS CLOCK

Within the last twelve months, the Ear has twice trailed a sometime story about revolutionary hull shapes and phenomenal speeds in the turbine bit of

the offshore circus. Gentle reader, you can now hear it like it is. It seems that British Petroleum and Rolls Royce were of a mind to do something original and dynamic in waterborne transport and thought that offshore racing might provide just the vehicle to tax their ingenuity. How right they were. Rumours persisted that all manner of funny Sea Knives and/or Dynaplanes had been seen and, what is more, photographed, in the region of Cowes. British Hovercraft were supposed to be in on the act.

Enter Eugene Clement, a myopic designer from America and Bill Williamson from Maidstone who jointly and severally were responsible for a giant structure which bore striking resemblance to a stepped Dynaplane with stabilising hydrofoils and which was engineered like a brick outhouse. Enter Peter Gaydon, he of the skill and knowledge in motor racing promotion and currently doing a stormer of a job in terms of getting Tom Wheatcroft's Donington circuit on its feet, as nominated number one driver with Mike Mantle invited to read charts. The whole project came to watery fruition in about May of this year, when it was found to be sadly lacking in two directions. First, it went in two directions, never sure of which it should be and second, it was very, very slow.

Someone who was present at its first speed trials recalled that the assembled populace were proudly informed that it had hit 45 miles per hour at its last try and in the silence that followed, a voice was heard to remark that the first 45 were the easy ones and the next 45 were the difficult ones. At the next try, things improved a little on the water but as the craft returned to its dock, things on this very expensive project got a trifle out of hand. In a static run up of the RR turbine, the engineer took it all up to its normal 18,000 RPM or whatever turbines revolve at, when the governor gave out.

In a delightful bit of freewheeling, the turbine spun up to about 78,000 RPM, before the engineer could get to grips with it, at which juncture, all the turbine rotor tips got red hot and parted company, producing an effect not altogether unlike a mid-ships mounted, revolving Gatling gun. Hastily, the best brains in the land recovered their toy as it became a perforated, slowly sinking Dynaplane, very like a cullender in reverse. The de-

briefing that followed was laced with euphemisms and the high point came when someone very important described the slowly sinking disaster area as 'in a recovery mode'.

Things did not improve later. First, the craft still refused to steer, even with the designer standing abaft the transom and having clambered over the stern once more, that same designer watched aghast as the whole steering structure was carried away on the next high-speed run. Next, they threw other worthy designers into the fray and with each new design brain, the shape was in for a potential change. Finally, in a last ditch attempt to see if things got better the faster it went, P. Gaydon was pitched back and forth to the disaffection of the designer and the beast eventually fell off its planes, onto its side and lay still in the measured mile. So far, the cost of the project is being kept a closely guarded secret and the Ear hopes that some tangible results can be obtained, before our state-owned oil company and our state-owned engine manufacturer loose interest.

THREE POINT TO PROGRESS

Still on the multi-hull tack, and not boring you I hope, is the news of three, three pointers. Fiona Arran has disposed of Ceal na Nara. The slightly impecunious Countess advertised her blue Vauxhall estate car somewhere and the only photograph she could find was complete with boat attached. Out of the woods strode a scrap metal man from somewhere in England and bid for both, 'cause he liked the shape didn't he. Later on, discovered that shape isn't everything and nose dived it going quite quickly in Southampton water, since which time, very little has been seen or heard of him.

Fiona is considering doing a Class 2 season next year in the truly amazing Skean Dhu, possibly re-engined but that benefactor of mankind Dereck Pobjoy, has tentatively thought about giving the Lady a run in Pobjoy Mint, just for openers. A good publicity gatherer if ever we heard one. The third three pointer is still shrouded in a misty pall of mystery. It is an open secret that Don Shead has had a multi-hull on the stocks for years but has never pushed the idea of getting it built. Now, word reaches the Ear that hard on the heels of his third 36 foot plus aluminium mono for de Angelis to drive in Argentina, alongside Niccolai and Cosentino, a three pointer might be lofted in Picchiotti's Cantiere at Viareggio for either Niccolai or Harry Hyams.

Now neither of those worthies is exactly suffering from a terminal case of poverty so either is possible but if Harry H is the punter, five gets you ten that the tin bending will be done by Ernie Sims at Wootten Creek or Alldays. Can't happen soon enough. Let's get to grips with all these cats at the top.