

How one dedicated man is restoring the Proteus-powered sister ship of the Royal Navy's famous Brave Class patrol boats

BRAVE CHALLENGER: THE WORLD'S FASTEST HULL-BORNE SHIP



The fastest patrol boats the Royal Navy ever had, Brave Borderer and Brave Swordsman, are now lost for ever, decommissioned and scrapped.

But a sister ship, built at the same time to help prove the design and which was equipped as a private yacht, is now carefully restored. And it will soon be the world's fastest hull-borne craft - capable of breaking the 60-knot barrier.

The yacht, now named the Brave Challenger, was built in exactly the same way and with similar Rolls-Royce Proteus gas-turbine engines.

The three craft were built at Vosper between 1958 and 1961 after discussions that had started with the Admiralty four years earlier.

Numerous requirements were outlined by senior naval personnel for maintainability, range, adaptability and - primarily - speed.

Top speed was to be 44 knots with all equipment on board and half fuel. The ultimate, unwritten, aim was for a patrol boat capable of more than 50 knots.

Story: GARY ATKINS
Pictures: PETER SCOTT

Vosper's designer, Commander Peter Du Cane's result was a classic plating craft incorporating a sleek, hard chine hull, and powered by three Proteus gas turbines and specially designed propellers.

He had had a job convincing the Admiralty that the gas turbine was the best choice for the appointed task, but his dogged determination produced a craft which was - and potentially still is - the world's fastest hull-borne craft.

HMS Brave Swordsman and HMS Brave Borderer were joined in the shipbuilding yard

by a third hull - Brave Challenger.

Vosper built this as a fast yacht and sold it to the Greek shipping magnate Niarchos, who had only agreed to buy it on the understanding that the Royal Navy craft performed well during their sea trials.

Returned

Vosper clearly had more confidence initially than Niarchos, but perform well they did, and Brave Challenger began a three-year stint in Greek waters.

Niarchos stopped using it in about 1963 but for almost a decade it was maintained in excellent condition at Scaramanga by the owner's shipyard before being re-engined and returned to the Mediterranean.

The man behind the project to preserve Brave Challenger is Wensley Haydon-Baillie who probably inherits his love of ships from his ancestor, the Earl of Oxford, who held a command in the fleet which fought the Armada.

He and his brother, Ormond, were co-founders of the Haydon-Baillie Aircraft and Naval Museum.

No one could have gauged the enormity of the task ahead of Mr Haydon-Baillie when he

visited Ansty almost two years ago to plough through record files on the gas-turbine yacht.

The photographs that were eventually sent to him were just a small part of two-and-a-half years detailed research. In addition, Mr Haydon-Baillie had to work on the purchase of the vessel and its return to Britain and on preparing the refit base.

"People often say to me, 'You don't seem to have done anything yet,'" he said. "I suppose that may seem true to others, but I estimate we are now two-thirds of the way through the project.

"Others never see the years of effort needed to arrive at the position we're in now.

"It was only about four or five weeks ago that I gave the final go-ahead on the last stage.

A trip to the refit shed at Southampton's Shamrock Quay convinced me that the project to preserve the last Brave class ship is a complex and serious undertaking for the small but highly committed team spearheading the work programme.

Promise

Since the final stage started, a flow of sub-contractors have been coming and going, working on the 100-foot ship's sleek hull, electrics, engineering modifications and paintwork preliminaries.

Anything up to a dozen people can be labouring away at any one time in the repair base, though a nucleus of only two are sited there permanently - Roger Sweet, who is in charge of the project, and Captain Drago, an Italian who has been with the craft for more than a decade.

Captain Drago - with a rich sea-going history behind him - first encountered Challenger while working for the second owner, who operated it for more than six years with the help of Vosper's, and Rolls-Royce.

When ownership was transferred to Wensley Haydon-Baillie in the late 1970s, people said that the captain would not come to England with it.

"Everyone told me he'd never leave the Mediterranean, but his knowledge of the maintenance and modification history was crucial," says the present owner, "and he gave me his solemn promise that he would stay with the ship."

And so it proved: when the 106-ton craft was towed back from the south of France to Southampton, Captain Drago was still aboard.

A real sign of his love and dedication for Challenger is that he now lives on board, working on into the night and, even when he's resting, performing the additional duty of nightwatchman.

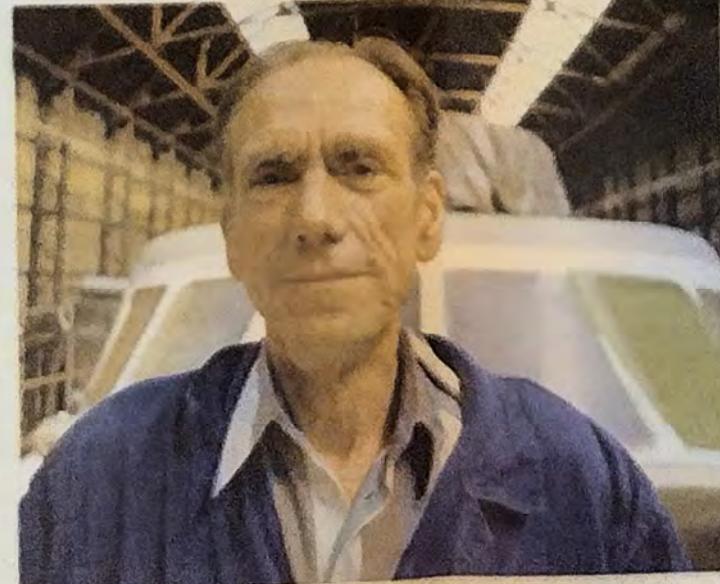
Museum

As its ultimate preservation project, Brave Challenger is the principal project of the Haydon-Baillie Aircraft and Naval Museum, alongside which sit two Olympus 593 Concorde engines, recently acquired for the museum.

Up to 25 aircraft - many Rolls-Royce powered - were acquired by Wensley and his older brother Ormond during the late Sixties and Seventies.

But when Ormond was killed flying a newly-renovated P51 Mustang in Germany, his brother decided on a change of direction.

After five years continuing with the collection and then relocating most of the aircraft,



CAPTAIN Drago, standing sweltering in the Shamrock Quay refit base, his lean body covered in a blue overall, grease and grime, did not quite fit the popular image of someone who had saved a nation's royal family during the war.

But that is just what he then 21-year-old mariner did in 1943 by taking King Umberto and Queen Eleanor to safety in his Brindisi fishing boat.

Over 35 years later, the "Capi" met King Umberto again in Monte Carlo. This time Captain Drago was in charge of a vessel with rather more power!

"Capi" has had a few interest-

involving extensive expeditions - notably to India to recover eight Spitfires - Wensley focused his attention on the only Brave class ship left.

All three Haydon-Baillie brothers (the eldest, Anthony, was killed in a motor accident in 1964) had fallen in love with the Brave design in the early 1960s, and had pledged then that if they ever had the chance to own a marine vessel it would have to be one of these originals.

Some Brave derivatives are still at sea, in the Royal Danish Navy, and the latest versions are the Royal Navy's Scimitar, Sabre and Cutlass, used until recently as fast training boats.

So by the late 1970s, Wensley Haydon-Baillie viewed the acquisition of the last remaining "pure" version as rather more than simply desirable.

Every move along the path to preservation since has displayed all the foundations of this serious and single-minded approach.

He says: "It is not being renovated as a pleasure boat. It's certainly not just for my personal fun. It IS a serious

How Captain Drago saved the King

ing positions in his 40-year sea-going career, such as captain of the King of Tunisia's personal yacht.

He has been with the Haydon-Baillie Aircraft and Naval Museum's current project, the Proteus-powered yacht Brave Challenger, from the outset.

preservation project. "In my opinion it has never yet been run with total success and, since it is a wholly British venture, it never will do until it has a home base in Britain."

Now back in the UK, its new owner is determined to ensure Brave Challenger's long-term future.

The final result will have to be perfect - anything else would be an insult to Vosper, Rolls-Royce and the Royal Navy," he says.

"Equally important, though, are a lifetime of spares and our own permanent, fully-equipped UK overhaul base."

Vigour

The acquisition of spares began even before the purchase of the ship was finalised. It has been continuing with unremitting vigour ever since, and probably will for many years to come.

Roger Sweet showed me round their store room, which contains thousands of new and used engine parts together with nine spare propellers and a vast array of other equipment.

"The trouble is," Roger points out, "that things like the engines and gearboxes are simply not going to be around in a few years time. A lot of things stopped being produced several years ago.

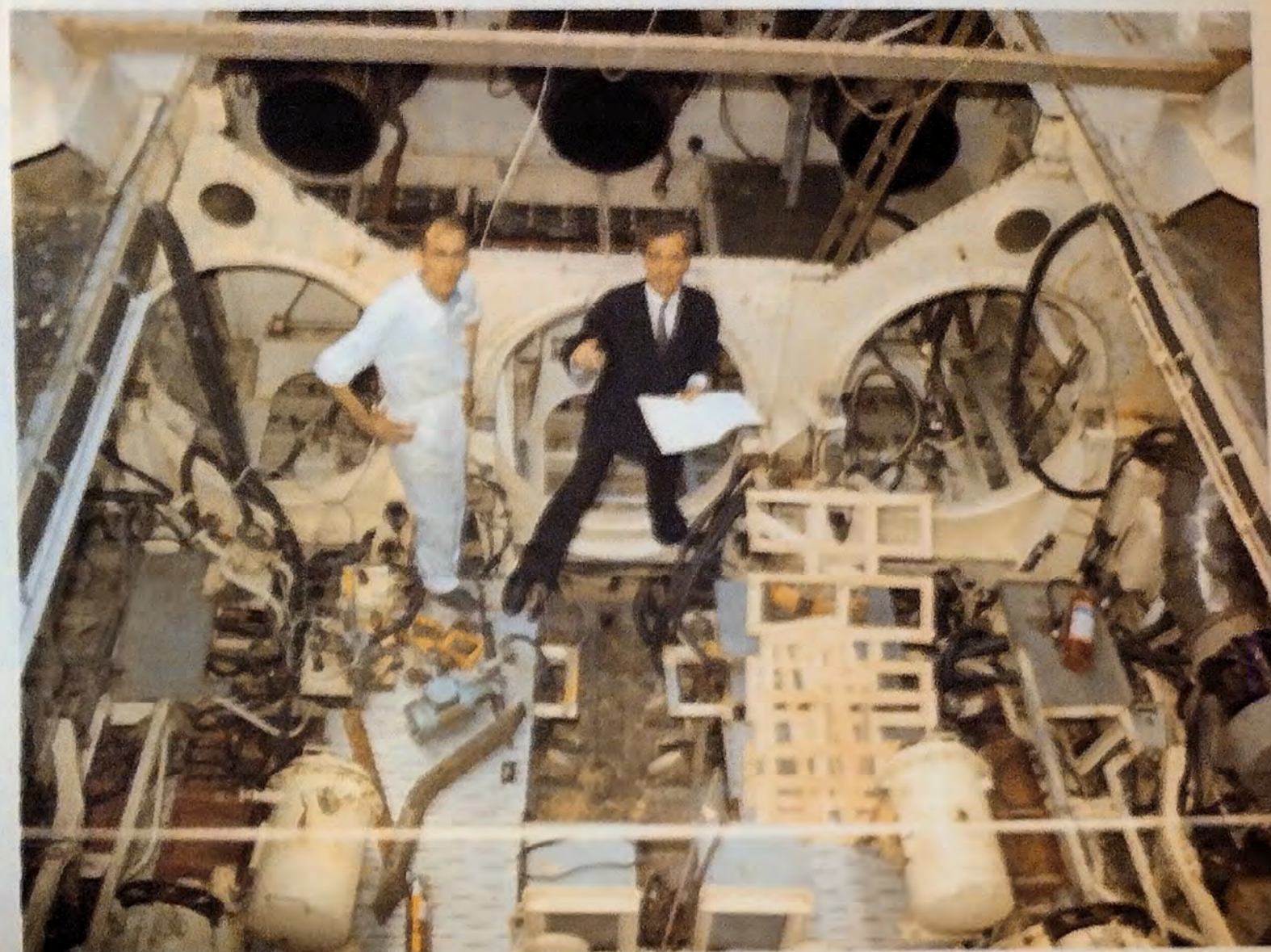
"So we just have to keep looking and get hold of them whenever we can."

To prove the point he showed me several Allen's gearboxes and some of the 19 Proteus they have accumulated and stored away.

The team keep their eyes open for Brave derivatives coming out of service elsewhere in the world and managed to get hold of some large consignments.

The remains of Brave Swordsman, for example, though badly damaged were bought by the Museum and put to use, and Bruner's fast patrol craft Pahlawan provided a wide variety of equipment and accessories - right down to important administrative items such as the maintenance schedules.

Wherever possible, with the help of original Vosper drawings, the same techniques and materials are being used as those applied a quarter of a century ago, but where the modern world has thrown up unarguable advantages, these are not being ignored.



Captain Drago (left) and Wensley Haydon-Baillie discuss details of Challenger's refit before the Proteus engines are replaced.

A prime example of this is the planned incorporation of two diesel engines for cruising. "This is proving probably the most challenging part of the refit," says the project's engineering chief Peter Candy.

"Vosper, in fact, have more or less said it can't be done in the confines of the machinery space, but we've found some small, high-powered diesels we think will do the job."

After Brave Challenger was checked over, bought and towed back to British waters, a hurried search of the south coast uncovered the Shamrock Quay refit shed which was just about to succumb to the destructive attentions of bulldozers when Roger Sweet found it and quickly negotiated a lease agreement.

Since then research, spares supplies, administration and detailed preparation have taken up most of the team's time, but the restoration itself is now well under way.

The Museum officially has the present base until September, 1984, by which time the last original Brave should be ready for the sea once again.

Meanwhile, a search goes on for the permanent overhaul base stipulated as one of the pre-requisites of Challenger's long-term future. It is expected it, too, will be on the south coast.

And the future? Mr Haydon-Baillie says: "I intend to keep Brave Challenger as a privately-owned ship but in fairly constant use, including private exploration or research expeditions."

"I may also attempt to add to the world records the ship already holds. "Since Vosper, the Royal Navy and especially Rolls-Royce have given me so much help in the past few years, I hope it can be used to show overseas and other visitors what this country can achieve."



BRAVE Challenger, which will become the centrepiece of the Haydon-Baillie Aircraft and Naval Museum, is its first-ever marine undertaking and also its major current project.

"It is a bit like taking on ten aircraft of different types at the same time," says Wensley Haydon-Baillie.

The museum's collection began in the mid-1960's after a period of time spent searching for a suitable start.

It came from Australia, when Wensley's brother Ormond, then with the Royal Canadian Air Force, heard that someone was trying to sell a Hawker Sea Fury, powered by the Bristol Centaurus piston engine.

Ormond was horrified shortly after arriving to discover the Sea Fury's owner had accepted a telephone offer.

Realising how keen the young man was and how far he had travelled, the Australian said that if he could produce a cash deposit before any money came in from the other buyer he could have it.

He had, in the meantime, met an Australian couple, Mr and Mrs. King.

Ormond must have made quite an impact on them, Wensley tells us, "because Mrs. King announced

The museum that rebuilds the past

only hours later that she had just been down to see the owner and paid the deposit for him... What a gesture!

"He sent the money on from Canada later, of course."

Spitfires

During the next decade the Haydon-Baillies accumulated two Lockheed Silver Stars, two Blenheim bombers, two Meteors, a Chipmunk, a Tiger Moth, five P8B Saucers, a CF100 and a P51 Mustang.

It was in the renovated Mustang at an air show in Germany that Ormond tragically met his death, before ever seeing the largest aircraft salvage project come to fruition.

But his brother, in continuing and winding up Ormond's affairs, press-

ed on with the expedition - to India to reclaim eight Spitfires. Though the initial seven-strong team were most particularly after a Mk VIII sited at Jaipur, and the others were at four different locations 3,000 miles apart, the agreement was for all eight aircraft!

Problems beset them at every turn: the climate, the snakes, jungle and disease (one of the young, fit men almost wasted away with cholera before recovering in an army hospital).

Instead of taking seven men six to eight weeks, the reclamation had taken 17 men five months. Most of the museum's planes have now been restored, some to flying condition, and are housed at British collections at Duxford and Wroughton, or at sites in the United States.



Flying the flag..

By DAVID HOWIE
FREEFALL parachuting is thrilling enough, but John McBain, a production engineer in the Forge at Hillington, decided to add a little extra spice by flying the flag for Rolls-Royce. John is a member of the Scottish Parachute Club. He made a flag showing the Rolls-Royce logo, and with his mate Grant Willoughby, he jumped, flying it 9,000ft above Strath-

the Strathallan Air Day. The Air Day was to raise funds for the Strathallan Aircraft Museum, which is restoring a Lancaster to its former glory. John maintains that parachuting is not an expensive hobby. The initial training course with the Club is £60, but after that it is only £6 a jump. A day at this exploit, he made a demonstration jump at