



## TIME CAPSULE

Loving a classic boat keeps history alive.

**E**VER WONDER what the dawn of our obsession was like? Was Cleopatra's barge a yacht, as some archaeologists suggest? She used it to bed Mark Antony. Was it for work or pleasure?

Before fiberglass, nature had its way with much of yachting's past. Most find the bones of old fiberglass boats an eyesore, but my pal, Nick, sees it differently. He has embraced his passion for old offshore race boats like Indiana Jones embraced the Ark of the Covenant.

I recently inspected Nick's new-old ride: a rare 1969, 31-foot Bertram race boat. She's a time capsule thanks to Nick's hard work and investment. Contrary to the brochures, a fiberglass boat's decomposition begins the day it touches the water, continuing until its last owner can take no more. Its exoskeleton then settles

to the bottom or just washes ashore, like a seashell.

I first spotted Nick's seashell when she was in hospice care at a friend's home for aged fiberglass boats: Cadillac McDaniel's "Field of Dreams" (see *Yachting*, February 2011). Leaning uncomfortably atop a rusty trailer, she'd withered away to little more than a hull and a deck. Her bowels were impacted with decaying bits and pieces of her past. A broken plastic lawn chair sat near what had once been her helm. The cylinders of her rusted

heart were packed with soil and sprouting wildflowers. Her case seemed hopeless.

Another pal, yacht designer Mike Peters, made the first attempt at her resuscitation. Having worked in the raceboat game for years, Mike knew she was worth saving. She was, in fact, something of a missing link: one of maybe a dozen Bertram race boats built in the 1960s that tied the builder's first race boat, the iconic 31-foot *Moppie*, to its last, a 38-footer built and raced in the 1980s. Mike carted her

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remains to a warehouse and began treatment. While Mike was able to stabilize her, Nick later saved her by transporting her to TNT Custom Marine in North Miami for major surgery.

Nick knew the girl had a past, so he also hired a world-class gumshoe to track down her history. Had she raced successfully? Or had she been a drug mule or a gunboat in a banana republic? All were likely, but Nick wanted to know for sure.

The detective work paid off. It turns out she had been *White Tornado*, a thoroughbred from the stable of the late, famed Italian offshore racer Vincenzo Balestrieri. Today, *White Tornado* is like new and dressed in her original racing colors. At her recent sea trial, retired Bertram racing legend Sammy James took her helm and clocked 77 mph!

I had always feared that if our civilization were reduced to a compost pile, the only proof that we'd ever wandered beyond terra firma might be the inch-thick fiberglass exoskeleton of a 1970s-issue, 36-foot Uniflite Double Cabin. If archaeologists swabbed the guts of such a weekend warrior for DNA, what would they think of us?

Thanks to Nick's time capsule, they would know we were much more than simply beer nuts. We were boat nuts! 🍷