

OFFSHORE POWER REVIEW

by John Irving

IN a very full year it is not easy to pick out the highlights but there are four that will be remembered longer than most. The Daily Telegraph/BP Round Britain race was obviously the major European event and although there were no foreign competitors, interest abroad was high. Certainly, the foreign reports of the race were much more objective and interesting than the bickering in the British press, discussing and criticising the organisation behind the scene rather than telling us what was happening on the high seas. A lot of people say that the race, because of the weather, achieved little. I believe the contrary — powerful outboard engines, hitherto regarded as sprint race machinery stayed the course magnificently — and won. The Ford diesel proved itself an admirable marine power unit; cruising boats, varying widely in design and construction showed their worth and many other items of equipment, particularly radios, surprised even the manufacturers by their reliability. Let's have another race soon with the minor changes in rules and courses that sensible administration will make.

The second significant highlight was the appearance of the big Mercruiser V8 married to an outdrive that could take the power and still have a slimline underwater unit. I see this as a big step forward in marine propulsion engineering and a feather in the cap of the highly adaptable and practical sterndrive unit. With the additional use of power trim, much more sensitive trim angles can be achieved for varying sea conditions. Balestrieri and Cosentino proved this point so well by trimming out on the flat calm Wills International and slaughtering the opposition. (Incidentally, the remark of the year must go to Balestrieri's Texan co-driver Don Pruett. When asked if there was any difference between the two Tornados he drawled 'sure there's a difference — one's red and one's white!') The power unit itself, a detuned Chevrolet V8, also proved its worth. Although not as powerful as the Daytona which uses the same block, it can be run wide open for far longer periods, enabling first Balestrieri and then Don Aronow to knock offshore records for six.

1969 saw the emergence of another young British powerboat designer of talent — James Beard. His Class III/OPII catamaran 'Volare II' was the first twin hulled boat to work successfully offshore. In saying this, one must

not forget Tommy Sopwith's 'Flyover' or Lady Aitken's 'Fat Cat', which pioneered the way, but Beard's use of an efficient aerodynamic wing section between stepped hulls started a new era in powerboat racing which others have been quick to follow. Beard has received three commissions — offshore boats for Lord Normanton and Ken Cassir and a circuit boat for Lady Arran, while Balestrieri and Cosentino already have two big offshore cats designed by the American Ted Jones, already famous in the States for his very fast unlimited hydros. Don Shead, with another highly successful season behind him (boats to his design picked up twenty firsts in major offshore races this year) has had catamaran designs on his board for some time and the first of these will be seen in the hands of the Renwick/Parker and Stableford/Salter partnerships. Rumour also has it that Tommy Sopwith is to have an OPI cat in which to do battle with the Italians on the world circuit next year. Certainly, the catamaran and three pointer configurations point the way to the future, but they will take time to develop to their fullest, so those already with, or contemplating, deep vee boats should not lose heart! From a pure racing point of view one is bound to say that the unrestricted use of lifting devices must stimulate a lot of radical thinking.

Having followed the development in America of the use of aluminium for racing hulls, it has been a source of pleasure this year to see the emergence of a brand new firm, Enfield Marine, building in all welded aluminium. Their designer, Don Shead, has the distinction now of having boats to his design racing in every material except concrete! Despite the fact that 'Miss Enfield' was an experimental prototype, launched only days before the Cowes-Torquay-Cowes she instantly proved her potential and the weight advantage to be gained from her material. It may be that what was instantly dubbed the 'Tin Shead' became renamed the 'Corrugated Shead' but she won three out of the four races in which she was entered and the lessons learned will undoubtedly produce a far superior 'Miss Enfield II' for 1970. At any rate, a most important bi-product of her success is that aluminium as a material is no longer regarded with grave suspicion. For those interested in one-off boats it can be cheaper and quicker to build and so it is not surprising to hear that a number of enthusiasts have already been converted.

All one needs, therefore, to be certain of sweeping the board next

year is an all-welded catamaran, powered by Mercruisers and designed by either Shead or Beard. The rest is easy!

As yet I have made scant mention of those that make the sport what it really is — the competitors. In an unusually calm season there are obviously few heroic deeds that hit the headlines. But there are some names that should not go unnoticed. Names like Timo Makinen, who not only drove 'Avenger Too' to victory in the Round Britain race, but also clinched the Scandinavian offshore championship for the second year running in his smaller 'Avenger'; John Caulcutt and his crew who put the pundits to shame with 'Psychedelic Surfer'; Don Aronow, of course, for winning the world championship in 'The Cigarette', despite arm and internal injuries and the two South African crews in 'Meteor' and 'Lucy Too' who made the long journey to Cowes, remaining cheerful and keen to return despite their setbacks. From the ranks of Class III I would mention John Campfield, who won this year's championship, and his great rival Alf Bullen — both are tremendously keen competitors. Also David Stableford, Richard Eldridge and, later on, Tom Salter, who in their first season with 'Hellfire', raised the Class III record to over 61mph.

But what can we expect from 1970? Certainly some rough weather to test the men and their machines. I have said earlier that we can expect a flock of catamarans (or is it a covey?) and I have mentioned a 'Miss Enfield II'. At the moment most people are playing things fairly close to the chest, but it is known that Tim Powell ('U.F.O.') and Pascoe Watson ('Avenger Too') are joining forces on a big fast boat, probably aluminium. One suspects that John Kennerly will replace 'Maltese Magnum Twin' with another American boat. John Galliford is buying a fourth 125 Mercury to join the three already nestling on the transom of 'Melodrama'. David Bassett has bought 'T2' — she has been renamed 'Hot Bovril' and one hopes to see her showing her rough weather potential. Bob Bolton, John Frost and Geoffrey Marsh are forming a three boat team of Freezer built diesel powered aluminium boats to an American design which features a stepped monohull. The Hon. Edward Greenall has 'Gee' up for sale and the rumour has it that he will be appearing in something faster. At the same time one doesn't anticipate that Ford will rest on their laurels, but part of the fun of the winter is waiting to see what the summer brings along.