



BY MICHAEL PETERS

Learn more about *White Tornado* and her restoration in an upcoming issue of *Power & Motoryacht*.

SIGHTLINES

Speed Thrills

A BOAT CAN BE THE FASTEST ROUTE TO THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH.

I vividly remember watching the rooster tails streak across the horizon during the annual Bushmills Grand Prix and Catalina offshore races of the late 1960s and early '70s. At over 60 miles per hour, those early offshore race boats could make it around the island in less than hour. Wow, those boats were fast!

I was hooked on offshore racing and began reading every boating magazine I could get my hands on. I could name all the race boats such as *Mona Lou*, *Black Tornado*, *Broad Jumper*, *Boss O' Nova*, and *The Cigarette* and followed the exploits of the top racers like Sam Griffith, Dick Bertram, Don Aronow, and Bill Wishnick. The best race boats of that time, including the Magnums, Donzis, Cigarettes, and Bertrams, were all from Florida, so I followed the lure of offshore racing, and eventually moved eastward to Florida.

Along the way to becoming a race-boat designer, I got to know many of my racing heroes, including Jim Wynne, Don Shead, Sonny Levi, Allan Brown, Bob Magoon, Odell Lewis, and Sammy James. In 1978, I met Don Aronow, which marked the start of a nine-year working relationship and friendship that lasted up to the day of his murder.

With this love for the early days of offshore, I purchased a 1969 31-foot Bertram Nautic race boat from my old friend Cadillac McDaniel back in 2010, with the intention of restoring the boat to its original racing condition. After exhaustive Internet research, I never figured out which one of the original seventeen Bertram race boats it was. As I chronicled in my Sightlines column of May 2013, I eventually gave up the restoration.

In early 2014 my friend Nick was looking for a distraction, so he bought the Bertram from me and trucked it back to Miami. Nick hired Mike Thomas of TNT Custom Marine to oversee the restoration project and hired a private investigator to track down the boat's origin. After much research, including help from Sammy James, the former head of Bertam Racing, and Marco Bertini, from Italy, it was agreed that the boat was Vincenzo Balesteri's race boat *White Tornado*.



Sammy James takes the wheel (right) of *White Tornado*. What boat would take you back to your youth? Let Michael know at inbox@pmymag.com.



TNT subbed the boat out to Eddy Guardado and his crew for the fiberglass and paint work and Chris Dilling replicated the original graphics, right down to the smallest detail. The boat was sent back to TNT, where chief rigger Gary Brinker installed a staggered pair of Mercury 520-horsepower engines and Bravo XR drives. Nick researched every detail including fuel fills, exhaust pipes,

upholstery and even Balesteri's dashboard ashtray.

On October 28th of this year, Nick launched the fully restored *White Tornado* at TNT Marine in Miami, in front of all those that had worked on her, former racers and enthusiasts and the new managers at Bertram, including Dick Bertram's son Morgan. As a huge surprise, Sammy James and his wife Patty presented Nick with his 1960s-era racing jersey. Sammy's interest in the project had grown over time with Nick's infectious pursuit of perfection. As the engines started, the rumble of the straight exhaust brought on a deep, visceral reaction that is unique to motor sports.

Johnny Tomlinson, co-owner of TNT and current Class I World Champion, was the designated driver and I was honored to join Cadillac and Sammy James to take the first ride up the Intracoastal. JT took *White Tornado* up to the full speed of 77 mph, and Sammy confirmed that was as fast as her racing days. Then Caddy and I asked Sammy if he wanted to drive. A bit reluctantly, Sammy, at the age of 77, slid over to the driver's bolster and took the wheel. I could see a transformation in his face, his eyes, as he gripped the throttle. The years peeled away as the speed increased, and Sammy got her up to top speed. Those Sammy run *White Tornado* through her paces, than the boat itself.

From that moment on, we couldn't pry Sammy's fingers off the steering wheel. Watching *White Tornado* on the same waters where she was born made me feel like I was going back in time, to when I first fell in love with offshore racing. With Sammy James Hill running a vintage Ferrari GTO at Sebring again. Who says you can't go back in time? □

COVER: STEVEN/ALBEE; ADVERTISING: CADILLAC MCDANIEL