

HIT THE DECKS

From gurgling monsters on the Med to classic yachts from a more elegant age, **Adrian Morgan** selects six thoroughbred boats to stir the senses



'SO,' SAID THE TAXI DRIVER over his shoulder as we turned into London's St James's Place, home of the Royal Ocean Racing Club. 'What's a good boat then?' Before he could say 'I had that Ellen MacArthur (round-the-world British yachts-woman) in my cab the other day' I asked him what he wanted to do with it. 'Just pottering. With the kids. Nothing fancy. Mostly on the reservoir. Mother-in-law. Got to be safe.'

So, just pottering; not a racing boat. Kids? Mother-in-law? Something stable then. Nothing fancy (I took that to mean cheap) – for reservoir sailing. 'How about a Mirror dinghy?' I said.

'Funny you should say that. D'you know, I had that Ellen MacArthur in my cab the other day. She sailed a Mirror...'

But what if money were no object; the kids hated water and you'd no intention of taking them on it anyway? And what about power? Many more powerboats are sold than sailing models, by a factor that reflects our passion for

vehicles with big bonnets – read bows – and huge engines. But six boats? It's an impossible task. If this article were entitled 'Messing about on the river', it would be no problem: a Thames skiff, 1880s, all mahogany with copper rivets, effulgent under 14 coats of varnish, and one of those wicker seats at the stern with ropes to move the rudder. But if it were 'Life on the ocean wave', the task would be harder. Should it be a super-practical, mile-eating passage maker such as the Chuck Paine-designed Bermuda series, an Oyster, a Bowman or an old Swan 65, a direct descendant of the yacht that won the first Whitbread Round the World Race?

The first rule in choosing a boat is an appeal to the heart: 'Would she stir my senses were I to see her at anchor, from a shoreside bar, glass in hand as the sun set?' Now that's almost as important as windward performance, or even the colour of the cushions. Over the next four pages, you'll find a selection of boats to suit all tastes.

POWER AND GLORY

Mighty machines to keep the speed merchants buoyant – from Monte Carlo to Maine

MORE THRUST TO YOUR ELBOW

The contenders in this category are those testosterone-fired, gurgling-exhaust monsters redolent of glitzy Mediterranean resorts. Ferretti, Riva, Mangusta and Pershing are the names to drop when you sidle into boatbuilder Camper & Nicholsons' offices in Monte Carlo. And, certainly, they're what to let slip to posh broker Nick Edmiston over a martini in the Yacht Club Costa Smeralda in Porto Cervo, Sardinia, as you tell him that you're in the market for something to whizz you over from the French Riviera villa near Cap Ferrat to the little house you've taken overlooking the marina. If you're seeking a boat to whizz around in (and not a weekender), something that does 70 knots and has little else (just a lavatory, a couple of day beds and a microwave oven) then a Magnum 60 should do the job. Just fill her up, put your right fist down and hang on as the speed climbs towards the ton.

A Rivarama 44 – built by Italy's most famous yard – would be my ultimate choice. Riva makes

it in seven colours: pride blue; envy green; rage charcoal; sloth silver; gluttony brown; lust Bordeaux and miserliness. Under the bonnet you'll discover a pair of 700hp MAN diesels. And the all-important question? Forty knots and a range of 270 nautical miles. That'll be 1,400 litres of derv please.

For the true British, Marbella-dwelling, wealthy ex-pats, it's got to be a Sunseeker, the largest of which is the Predator 95 or a 23-metre Princess. These are serious yachts of the kind bought by Formula One drivers. British world champion Nigel Mansell set the trend in the late 1980s. For our purposes, Sunseeker's new Portofino 35 should do the trick. It reaches 35 knots, it's sleek (a commonly used marketing term for powerboats) and handles like a... well, like a BMW 7 Series.



Hungry for power: the 34ft Bladerunner from Ice Marine, above; and, from far left, the glitzy Sunseeker Portofino 35 and the sleek Rivarama 44

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

No question: if it's a clam bake on a white-sand beach in Maine in the US; creamy towels; Sperry Topsiders; the distant clanging of a bell buoy far out to sea; and the winking of the Narragansett lighthouse every 10 seconds, then it's got to be a Hinckley. The company has been around since 1928 and epitomises that East Coast sense of understated style. If Jack Kennedy were alive, he'd have a Hinckley Talaria 40 to take his latest girlfriend to secluded beaches.

With its WhisperJet power plant – that's a water jet driven by a diesel – shallow draught and joystick control, the T40 is a modern classic. Brasher, but with a production quality that cannot be bettered, you could always invest in a Sea Ray of some description, but it wouldn't have the same kudos. Fairline, Sealine and Princess – all British companies – could come up with something small and classy; so, too, could a host of overseas builders: Cranchi, Mocchi,



Bertram and Ferretti. As an off-the-wall choice marking you out as a high-achieving, high-earning, fun-oriented, risk-taking extrovert, with more wallet than sense, there's always the 34ft Bladerunner from Ice Marine. This is a twin 300hp Mercury ProMax X-powered, three-point, twin-tunnel hydroplane that will top 75 knots – well over 85mph. There's room for a couple of friends and a crate of beers – and no driving licence is necessary.

American excellence: a Hinckley Talaria 40 evokes the restrained East Coast sense of style. The perfect boat for a trip to a secluded beach

Italian job: the Aquariva, right, is a stylish modern-day replica of a classic runabout, the Super Aquarama 33, below



A CLASS APART

In the 1930s, the robber barons of New York would streak to work each morning from their Long Island weekend cottages in pencil-slim mahogany commuter boats.

An American company called Hodgdon Yachts build a replica of these models in wood, using modern techniques but with the same stylish ethos. It turns eyes and causes minimal wake. The boat also screams 'great taste' and connotes an discreet millionaire status.

But for sheer class, no one does it like the Italians and, once again, Riva in particular. The company once built a mahogany runabout called the Super Aquarama 33, costing nearly £500,000. That's for something you could almost fit into a family garage. Its credentials were impressive: every Super Aquarama was

built from a single, huge log of mahogany cut from a forest in Malaysia by a man from Riva who knew a bit about trees.

It was then seasoned for a few hundred years – well, a dozen actually – before being crafted over six months into the kind of gleaming waterborne Steinway grand over which Brigitte Bardot would drape herself, and behind which Omar Sharif, Marcello Mastroianni, or Cary Grant would water-ski in tight shorts, while waving to the paparazzi.

Riva doesn't make it anymore, but it does manufacture a replica, with a heart of glassfibre: the Aquariva. It's certainly a gorgeous boat – there's no regular varnishing required with this model – but the old-style Riva aficionados won't be too impressed.

PLAIN SAILING

Take your pick from chic Italian cruisers, ocean-going racers and pre-war beauties

GRAND LUXE

Once upon a time, a Finnish company on the Gulf of Bothnia established a reputation for elegant cruising boats with flawless, teak interiors designed by the likes of Sparkman & Stephens and German Frers. Then along came the Italians, who bought the yard and injected a little *passione* into the designs. In came carbon-fibre masts, which the Finns had considered a bit over the top, as well as exotic materials, and up rolled the customers.

Nautor now build boats that not only reek of craftsmanship but ooze Italian chic – none more so than the Swan 45. You can race her with 10 people aboard or cruise in her with just four. Pretty much any Swan from any era will do – the marque has been going since the 1970s. The Swan 46 Mark II is destined to become a classic.

Or perhaps you may prefer a J/105 – a modern cruiser that can be sailed by two and raced by six. It's fast, has a big cockpit, and is simple to handle. Then again, there are always the American-designed J Boats; like Swans, they come in a range of sizes to fit everyone.

FLYING BOATS

Ellen MacArthur proved what can be done by small women in large boats. At a stroke, the macho has gone out of the bar room window; if she can sail an absurdly powerful, water-ballasted, canting keel monohull round the world and come within a few hours of beating France's top sailor, the men have no excuses.

The French are at the sharp end of the sport, and it comes no more competitive than in the Open 60 trimaran class. 'Imagine going on a three-week bungee jump and you'll come close to what it feels like to sail a race-tuned 60ft trimaran single-handed across the Atlantic,' was how one writer put it. These boats top 35 knots, at which speed only one of the three hulls is touching the water – barely. Capsizing 2,000 miles out in the Atlantic is not uncommon. As they can cover over 600 miles a day (the record held by Yvan Bourgnon is 624 miles in 24 hours), reaching America takes only a week or so.

For a taste of multihull sailing, a Dart or Hobie catamaran is a good introduction. Or, just to show that not all multihulls have a crazy streak, why not charter a French-built Lagoon catamaran in the Seychelles?



KNOCK ON WOOD

Arguably, yacht design never became much better than in the 1930s. Materials were good, labour was cheap and impending world war exercised the minds of great designers. It was the era of the Spitfire, the embryonic jet engine, rockets and J-class boats.

Of the 10 boats of this type built, three survive: *Velsheda* (named after a tycoon's daughters Velma, Sheila and Daphne); *Endeavour* (owned and raced in the America's Cup by Tom Sopwith, whose company built the first world war Camel and the second world war Hurricane) and Shamrock, whose owner Thomas Lipton was grocer to the British Empire.

It would be impossible to match the glamour of those days. But many much smaller yachts from the era survive and, for the cost of a second-hand Honda Civic, will give huge pleasure.

Choose from a variety of classic names: Hillyard, Harrison Butler, Buchanan, S&S, Albert Strange and Robert Clark. Boats from these builders measure typically between 20ft and 30ft, are made of wood (the best from pitch pine with steamed oak frames), are copper fastened and will be good for another 50 years.

Perhaps the greatest of all pre-war designers was Jack Laurent Giles. He was an aircraft specialist and heir to a chocolate fortune – which meant he didn't need to make money out of yacht design. And it shows. You can tell a Giles boat from a mile away by its extravagant sheer-line, the sweep from bow to stern. Giles had a particular way with them, none more so than in his 1936 Vertue class. This little 25-footer has crossed the Atlantic, rounded Cape Horn, traversed the Pacific and earned a reputation as the finest small boat ever designed.



Top right: the *Velsheda*, one of three remaining J-class boats in the world; and left to right, the stylish Swan 45 – ideal for racing and cruising – and *Primagaz*, star of the French multihull fleet

LOOK SHIPSHAPE

GO WITH THE FLOW

Travel on the surface of the water is all very well – but what about under it? Abandon your flippers and opt for a Sea-Doo SeaScooter instead. It's safe, compact, light (5kg), has rechargeable electric power and will tow you along at a stately 3kmh. Let go accidentally and it will stop, as well as float to the surface. It costs around \$350 (£350 in the UK). Visit www.seascooter.com for more details.



TIME AT THE BAR

Allegedly, people buy Suunto Yachtsman watches because the on-board compass and countdown function allow the crew time to manoeuvre precisely, but we know that what they're really for is pinpointing the bar and watching the seconds tick away until it's time for a long, cold one. From \$339, (£219). More details at www.suunto.fi

WATER MUSIC

You will, of course, want to listen to the soundtrack to *Jaws*, or maybe a recording of Melville's *Moby-Dick* while on board. AquaTunes, designed originally to be used while swimming, effectively waterproofs your personal tape, radio or CD player and comes with waterproof earplugs. Around \$40 (£27). Log on to www.aquatunes.com for more details.



AN EYE FOR STYLE

While you can always shield your eyes from the sun with your hand, it doesn't look as cool as a pair of sunglasses, does it? Oakley Water Jackets are made with high-performance everything so at least you'll look the part even if you get seasick in the bath. The company claims 'rogue waves only increase the adhesive properties of their Unobtanium® nosebombs and earsocks' – which, we assume, is a good thing. The sunglasses, from \$190 (£150), are available from most major stores.

AT THE SHARP END

Leatherman tools turn everyone who owns one into a devotee. Its top-of-the-range product is called Wave; it allows one-handed opening of knife blades, which might come in handy in tight situations on board, and is made from top-grade stainless steel. It costs from \$100 (£150). Visit www.leatherman.com



BLUE GREEN, GETTY, KOS, MAGNUM