

RACING 5.5's IN EUROPE

BY STEPHEN FLESCH

owned and sailed by Robin Aisher (Great Britain), is the latest product from the drawing board of Ohlson of Sweden and is the fastest boat this season, especially to windward in medium breezes.

Yeoman (in which I was fortunate enough to spend the season) was designed for the light to medium stuff, but seems to do quite well in most conditions.

Most owners have at least £300 worth of sails from different sources, the most popular being Hood and Hard—Hard especially for good heavy weather mainsails and spinnakers, Hood for light mainsails (mitre cut); but some people swear by Ulmer jibs.

Racing with the 5.5s I saw for the first time how really important sails are, especially in a class where in spite of the differing designs all the boats are closely matched. During one race, where we had a light jib up, as the wind was force 1-2, the weather suddenly freshened to force 3-4 during the last long beat home and I was forced to sheet the jib hard in. This inevitably stretched it out of shape (in spite of the oft-repeated cry "Terylene can't stretch!") and the leech developed a very slight curl which immediately affected our performance and lost us a place.

The class is popular in Europe and although they are designed and are at their best for offshore work, Switzerland is in the forefront with a fleet of more than 50 boats. Strangely, there are very few in Germany—hardly a dozen—while Italy has nearly 40, France 25, Sweden 30 and Russia 110. Great Britain has fewer than would be expected, with about 30 boats. As is to be expected in a restricted class where boats are continually being superseded by a more advanced design, only the latest groups of boats in each country race seriously and attend the half-dozen or so International Regattas that are held for the class every season.

Usually the season starts with a regatta in Genoa in February. It was cancelled this year, however, after last year's experience when races were held while it was snowing—in some cases ice formed on the decks!

The first major regatta was at Cannes and lasted seven days over Easter. It is the ideal place to go to for combined holiday and sailing—it boasts the largest port on the Riviera, barring Marseilles. Few of the 5.5 fraternity regarded it as a time for jollification however—they take their racing very seriously.

The setting is extremely beautiful. The town is framed by the hills behind and the magnificent sweep of the front, La Croisette, with its huge hotels and flats which bound right on to the beach. The bay itself curves round gracefully and the only (but unfortunately from a sailing point of view), major complaint that could be levelled was the almost complete lack of wind on three of the six days of racing. Only once was there a decent breeze of about force 3.

A few days there put me on familiar terms with the charming and dedicated group of people and their boats, usually to be found at the big 5.5 regattas. The Swiss were there in force, among them being Louis Noverraz, the then reigning world champion, and Willi Pieper who was always in good spirits and one of the nicest people I met, although he did not have much success with his new Hunt boat *Artemix IV*. From Italy came the veteran Max Oberti with *Twins XII* supposed to be the twin of *Yeoman X* and new this year. Also there was Signor Carcano with *Volpina*, his revolutionary amateur design of two years ago, still doing very well.

Uffa Fox came down from his home in Paris for a couple of days with his wife and on one day was lent a boat, but this was one of the three days where racing was cancelled due to lack of wind. The French were well represented by M. Cadot with *Gilliant VII*, who provided an amusing incident on one of the very calm days.

A bunch of about half a dozen boats rounded the

weather mark and began to drift slowly down, with the crews working furiously to coax a breath into the spinnakers. After making good about 400 yards in half an hour Cadot was ready to try desperate measures and told his paid hand to change to his new French model of the "venturi" spinnaker. As soon as this sail was hanging limply from the hoist—there being no wind at all by then—a great shout of laughter went up from Mme Baezner in *Opale*. We all looked round and there was this sail looking like a gigantic net—all holes and no cloth. The whole lot of us started to laugh and after a while Cadot's very embarrassed and ashamed hand took it down.

Seen later with a capful of wind in it, it looked much more reasonable.

We had a Ratsey venturi with us and used it once or twice, too. It had far fewer vents and seems quite effective, though it is impossible to say whether we actually gained anything as a direct result of it.

It was handy to set and did not seem to foul up as easily as one would imagine. Once set, it was a little steadier than a conventional sail and showed more reluctance to collapse—but to get it doing its best and lifting high it had to be played with great care.

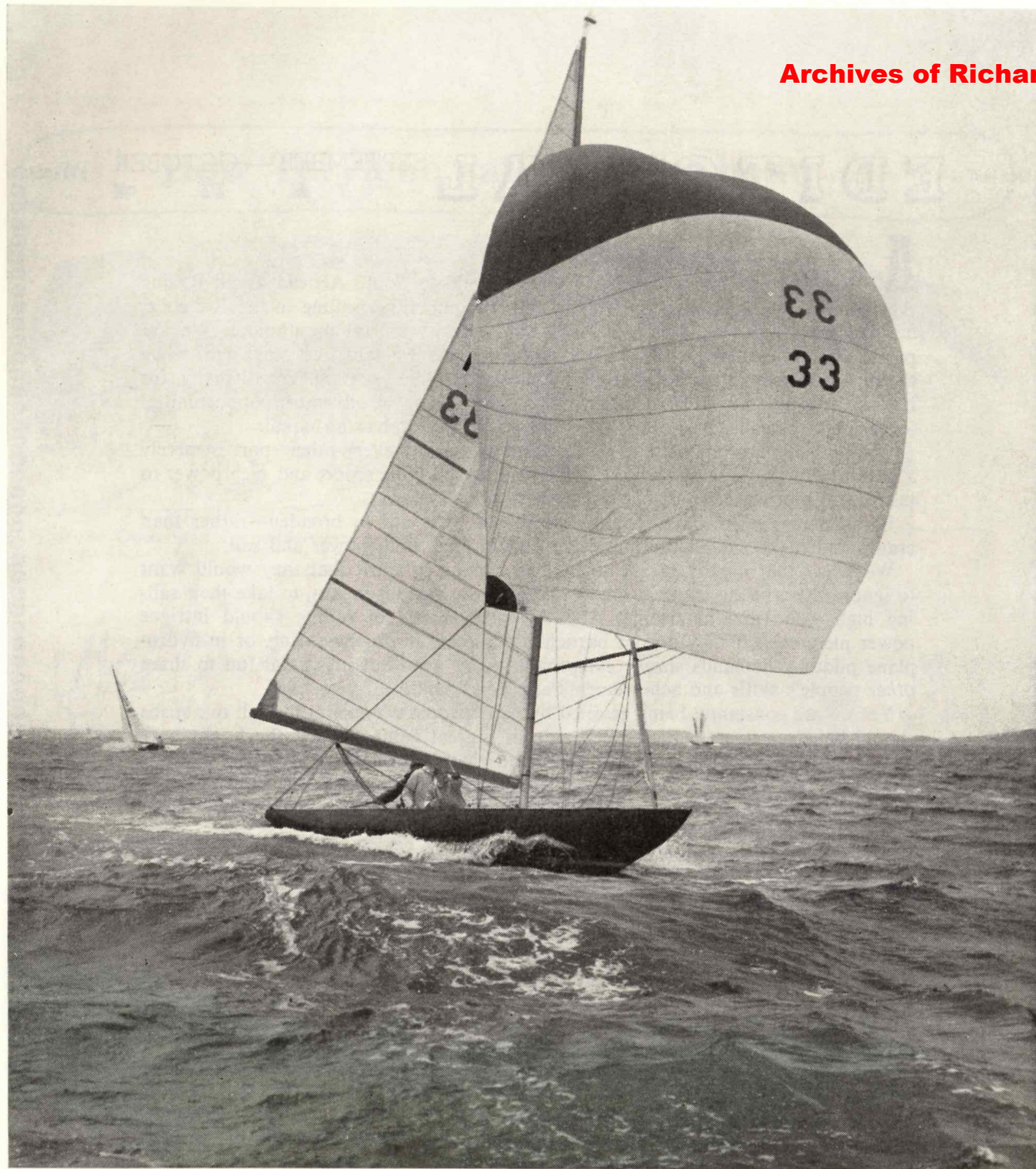
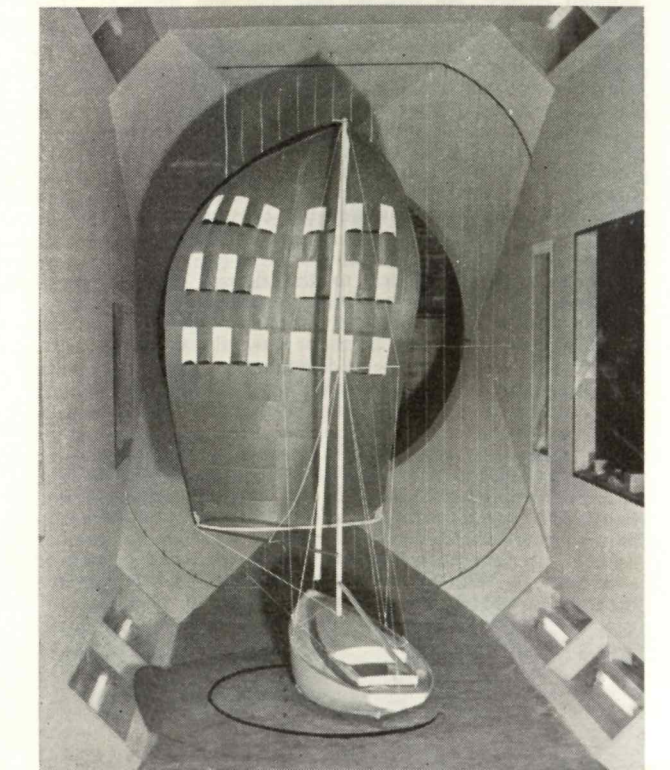
Ohlson, the Swedish designer, was there too, to see how his latest brainchild would perform. This was the first time that *Yeoman X* had been in the water—she came straight down from his yard in Sweden, to Cannes, on a lorry.

Twenty boats raced during the week, Louis Noverraz again proving his absolute light weather mastery by winning the series hands down. Robin Aisher, my skipper, was sailing a completely strange, untuned boat and did very well to come fifth.

At the end of the regatta *Yeoman X* was lifted straight on to a lorry to be taken to Neuchatel, in Switzerland. There we were to take part in the Swiss National 5.5 Championships, which for the first time had been declared an international regatta, on May 23. We went back to England in the interim.

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Also tried on the 5.5 metre circuit in Europe this year were the new Venturi spinnakers. Here is an experimental version in the new Ratsey and Lapthorn wind tunnel at their sail-loft in Cowes. At their present state of development they have shown no marked superiority.



The writer of this account of world championship sailing in the needle-keen 5.5 metre keelboat class is the crewman amidships in this splendid action shot of the British No. 1 *Yeoman X*, sailing in Poole Bay this summer. The latest twin-shouldered spinnaker cut is beautifully demonstrated. Stephen Flesch is a member of the Royal Cape Yacht Club. Photo: Beken, Cowes.

HAVING just returned from Europe after a most exciting season's racing in what is to-day one of the fiercest competitive classes, I feel that some of my experiences may be of interest in South Africa.

The 5.5s are a thoroughbred class of offshore racers—a distillation of the old 6 metres which, although magnificent in their heyday, have now become so expensive (£9,500) that they are beyond the reach of even more-than-ordinarily well-off men. The average 5.5 out of the water is a joy to the eye. They are about 32 ft. overall, 21 ft. on the waterline and 6 ft. 6 in. beam; draught is usually about 4 ft. 6 in. These dimensions and the hull form are all determined by the designer, who works to a formula similar to that of the 12 metres. Sails are about 300 sq. ft. The most out-

standing feature is that the ballast ratio is almost 75 per cent. Hull weight from a good builder is about 1,100 lb. and lead keel 3,000 lb.

The evolution of design up to its present near-perfect form is interesting to trace. Early post-war boats incorporated a lot of the Dragon's characteristics and, over the years, these have gradually disappeared. One of the greatest influences on design in recent years was Ray Hunt's *Minotaur* which appeared at the past Olympics. She introduced a much sharper rise in the floors and a shallower fin in addition to being almost maximum weight. This trend has been continued with most notable success by Ohlson and Luders. Prices differ quite a lot between builders, but range between £2,800 and a maximum of £3,500. *Yeoman X*,

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When Bobby Bothner was tragically killed in October 1956 his widow invited Peter to drive the very fast *Sugar III*, which gave him another Gold Cup win.

Soon afterwards he bought the hull himself and fitted it with one of the famous 300 SLR. Mercedes fuel-injection motors. Only three litres, it managed to hold its own against the powerful V.8. Chevrolets and Fords, becoming famous for its high, screaming, beautifully-tuned exhaust note.

About this time Peter was suffering absolute agonies from a back injury that was thought to be cancer. Very few people realised that he was driving in nearly every regatta in unbearable pain. Sometimes accused of shirking a beating, he was forced to sit powerless at home.

Then came that fabulous Bothner Memorial Trophy of 1959 when Peter averaged 77 m.p.h. over a 100-mile course to win the event. Most of the way he was semi-blinded by hot oil from an over-filled engine and even had to tear away his goggles. The fantastic speed included a stop to refuel at Vereeniging before beginning the wild ride back to the Loch Vaal Club.

The old *Sugar* hull was sold to Arthur Maxwell and a new Ted Jones-designed hydro took the water for the first time at Port Elizabeth. In this, its first race, he took home the Gold Cup from under the noses of Maxwell and Wedell who seemed sure to win it.

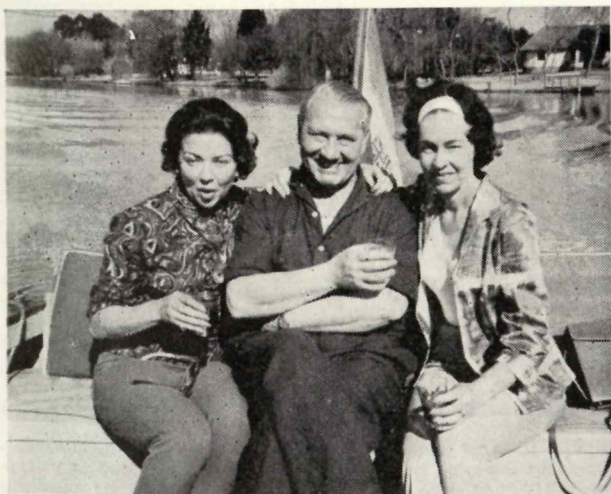
The forces of the big machinery, however, were increasing and though he won the Bluebird last year he was beaten into second place in the Gold Cup.

Realising that the 3-litre motor was outclassed, Peter began to look around for a new power unit while still campaigning with moderate success with the Mercedes. It is common knowledge that his quest has been successful, but as yet the exact nature of the new motor has not been revealed—The coming season will, however, see the debut of what will probably be the fastest boat in the Southern Hemisphere.

Recently Peter was invited to drive Dick Wedell's record-holding three-pointer which he did with the utmost fervour. In an unknown boat he sped down Loch Vaal at well over 100 m.p.h., causing a rival to comment "That old 'Blankety Blank'" has got guts!

Peter Haas has served the executive of S.A.P.B.A. as Chairman till comparatively recently, when he felt obliged to vacate this position while still engaged in active competition. He is an Honorary Vice President of the American Powerboat Association. He is married to Maureen, who can generally be found out of the limelight at a race meeting, watching with a certain amount of apprehension.

Briefly, that is the story. There is still much more to be written in the future. However, Peter Haas has staked his claim to being the most successful inboard pilot in the Republic—perhaps for all time, as his record will be hard to beat. ■■



After the jousting is over, popular Peter Haas comes in for a spot of personal retuning . . .

The Swiss entries predominated here, but there were also boats from Germany, Italy, Finland and, of course, England. All competitors lived in the modern Hotel Beau-lac overlooking the Lake and right next to the harbour. The organisation here—due to the joint efforts of the host club, Cercle de la Voile de Neuchatel, and the president of the Swiss 5.5 Owners' Association, André Grosjean—was superlative. We arrived to find that the boat had already been launched and had the mast stepped, so that there was little work and lots of pleasure! On this occasion Owen Aisher, who is the president of the International 5.5 Association and had previously accompanied us to Cannes, had been lent a boat by M. Paul Chopard. She was *Athena*, a strange-looking Sparkman & Stephens boat with a bulb on her keel—she never seemed to go at all.

Public relations here were also tip-top. Before the regatta started there was an introductory feature on Swiss television and this was continued with daily reports with a half-hour résumé at the end of the series. Louis Noveraz became a national hero, and every day when he came ashore, especially after a win, there was a crowd of small boys clamouring for his autograph.

In addition to the television reports, two boats were provided, both equipped with radio, one to go ahead of the fleet to mark the next buoy and the other to keep spectator boats clear. Both these craft kept up running reports on the race which were received at a control point near the starting line, and then broadcast to the public.

The sailing was very pleasant. We had mostly light winds and two days of good sailing breezes, but never the flat calm as at Cannes. By this time we were a little more used to each other and to *Yeoman X* and we did slightly better on the whole, although one disqualification and a thirteenth place put our overall position back to seventh.

A few highlights stand out. The first day was given over to a practice race where a good breeze of force 3-4 helped us away after a near-perfect start. It was one of those marvellous days when nothing can go wrong and we steadily increased our lead, to finish eight minutes ahead of *Volpina* and *Ylliam XIV*. The Prince Sadruddin Khan (who moored next to us in the harbour) was unlucky enough to have his port spreader collapse during the race and bent his aluminium mast. Fortunately he was able to get a replacement by the next day for the first race of the championships.

We had a pleasant race, finishing eighth with a bit of a fiasco on the finishing line where four boats arrived together, all of them luffing. In the evening a cocktail party and *fondue* supper at a nearby château were much appreciated, although some of the crews had a little too much of the very rich cheese dish. Most of the rest of the regatta went off without incident and was rounded off with a barbecue at the lovely lakeside home of André Grosjean.

An expensive novelty which turned up here was the all-stainless steel mast brought from Italy by Carcano. This was a rolled tube 3 mm. thick which weighed approximately the same as a normal mast. It was a very expensive experiment at over £500, especially considering the fact that he never used it because the main did not fit the track properly.

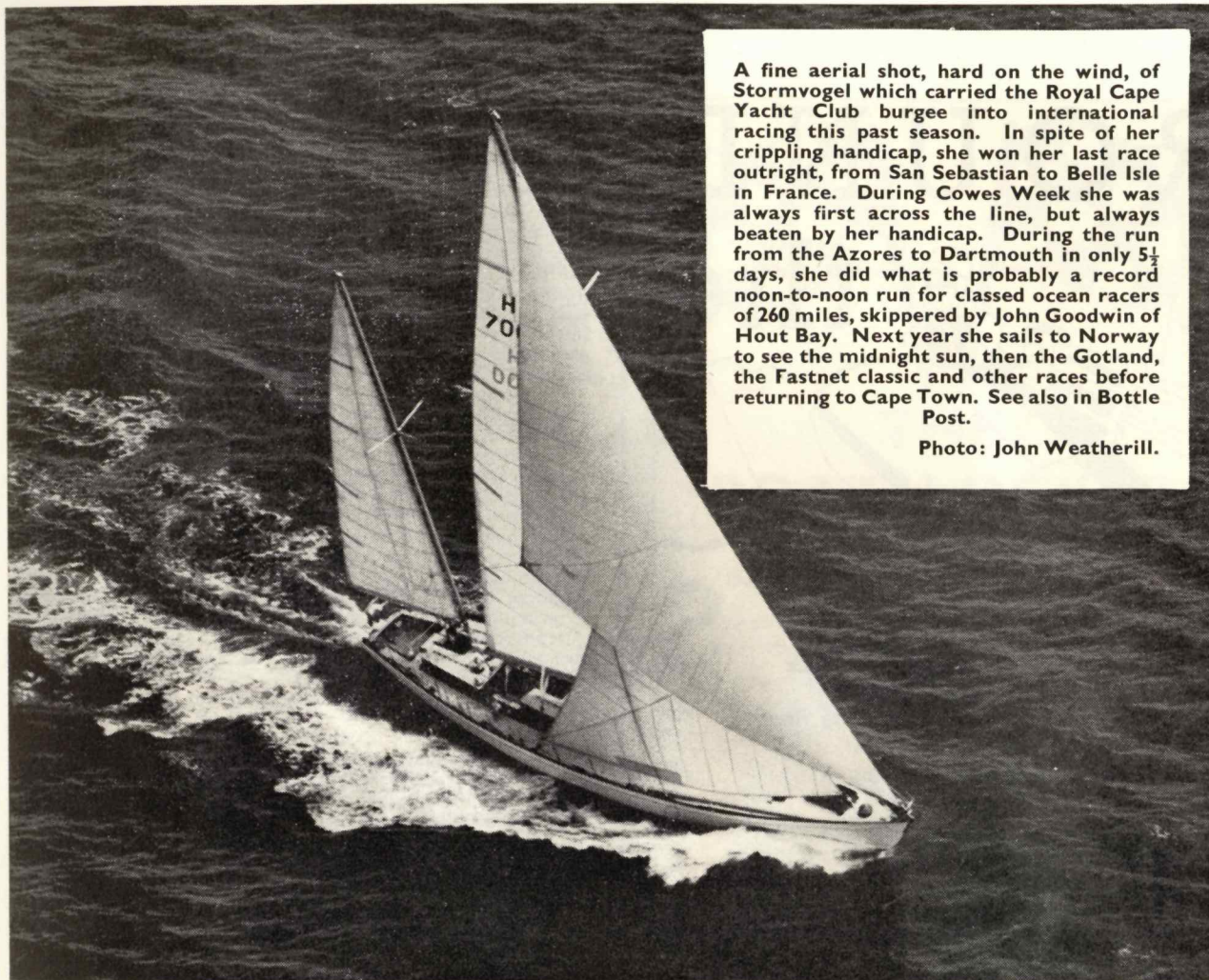
These two regattas had now put us into reasonable trim for the big event of the year, the World Championship, this year held at Poole in conjunction with the New World vs. Old World Championships.

After two weeks' holiday I went to Poole for what has been called "the most important regatta in Britain since 1949".

For the New World vs. Old World series, which is an annual event, only four American boats had managed to come so that the Old World team had to be restricted to four nations. Swiss, French, Italian and English boats were chosen, *Yeoman X* having the honour of being included.

The weather for the whole of this team series was absolutely perfect, with blue skies and breezes of a moderate

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A fine aerial shot, hard on the wind, of Stormvogel which carried the Royal Cape Yacht Club burgee into international racing this past season. In spite of her crippling handicap, she won her last race outright, from San Sebastian to Belle Isle in France. During Cowes Week she was always first across the line, but always beaten by her handicap. During the run from the Azores to Dartmouth in only 5½ days, she did what is probably a record noon-to-noon run for classed ocean racers of 260 miles, skippered by John Goodwin of Hout Bay. Next year she sails to Norway to see the midnight sun, then the Gotland, the Fastnet classic and other races before returning to Cape Town. See also in Bottle Post.

Photo: John Weatherill.

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force 2. After very pleasant racing, the Old World won the series. All races were sailed on an Olympic course and Olympic scoring systems were used. The Royal Motor Yacht Club and the Poole Bay Olympic Sailing Association were the hosts.

Twenty-three boats from ten nations arrived for the World Championships which was a really exceptional turn out. During the whole of the six races it blew harder than expected, with winds of force 4 the order of the day. *Yeoman* seemed to be dogged by misfortune all the way. The first race we were dismayed while in the lead. On the second day the halliard of the spare mast pulled its cleat off (the previous mast had had a special hook fitting which held the top of the sail with no strain on the halliard) just after the start and we got a third. Two days after the halliard parted again, and we limped in fifteenth on the spinnaker halliard. One disqualification completed the tale of woe. In spite of all this the fact that we got a fourth place shows *Yeoman X* to be undoubtedly the best new boat this year.

Dr. Britton Chance from the States, in *Complex III*, sailed wonderfully consistently throughout the series and romped home ahead of *John B* (Bobby Symonette, Bahamas) and *Bjarne* (F. Mitchell, Britain). Altogether it was a very exciting week's sailing, if a little disappointing for us.

Some novel sails came up before the measurer, in particular one genoa-cum-reaching spinnaker. This was an equilateral triangle of 5 oz. cloth with two zips down the middle on each side. In between these zips was a quantity of light cloth which enabled the sail to be pulled out to measure as a spinnaker—genoas are not permitted. Although very ingenious it was not allowed.

I returned to South Africa after this regatta while some of the fleet went up to Marsstrand in Sweden. ■

WESTWARD HO!

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them for 1 hour 25 minutes to-day but can't see any difference in the readings.

Yet on that same morning listeners to the B.B.C. programme "To-Day" heard Chichester, 2,500 miles away, talking "loud and clear" to David Fairhall of the *Guardian* on a Kestrel radiotelephone transmitter that was operating far below peak efficiency and could, in fact, have been forgiven if it had refused to work at all on its "diminishing diet of volts" which the sadly-treated Exides somehow dragged up from somewhere.

In fact, before the first words of the *Guardian* serial were published, discussions had taken place between Marconi Marine engineers and officials of the Post Office, who worked out a full schedule of transmission times and frequencies for *Gipsy Moth III*. During those discussions it was generally held that about 40 degrees west of Greenwich was the probable limit of clear radiotelephony from a small battery-operated set with a rather poor aerial, even under the best of conditions. New York is 73 degrees 50 min. west of Greenwich and Chichester was still talking to the *Guardian* when he was off the Long Island coast. In its leader on July 6 the *Guardian* wrote:

This is an immense achievement for British radio engineering, and the credit goes fairly to Marconi Marine, the designers of Gipsy's radio equipment, the Exide batteries which powered it, and to the Marine Service of the Post Office, which maintained a constant watch for Gipsy's calls and made communication with her.

It was a considerable achievement, too, for the Coventry Victor engine and its small Lucas dynamo, called on to perform a task for which it was never designed. And not least, certainly not least, for that 61-year-old dynamo, Francis Chichester himself. ■