



RESTORATION REVIVAL

As more and more dinghy classes jump on the restoration wave, **DAVID HENSHALL** was at this year's Bosham Classic Boat Revival to find out what's behind the shift

A sure-fire way to attract fresh attention to any topic – from cars to bikes to rock music – is to prefix the word 'classic'. And if levels of interest at Bosham Sailing Club's recent Classic Boat Revival event are anything to go by, the 'classic' aspect of dinghy sailing is rapidly on the up. There's plenty to entice sailors of all ages who enjoy sensible-length races held in picturesque locations. And above all, the classic dinghy scene is an area rich in individualism.

A PERFECT MATCH

Now, in its fifth year, the Classic Boat Revival is widely acknowledged to have moved classic dinghy racing up to a

new level by focusing on the quality of both the racing offered and the dinghies taking part. In doing so the club has ensured that the event has remained accessible to all, whilst carefully weeding out those boats that could perhaps best be described as 'old bangers'.

The event has grown in numbers, stature and quality to arguably become the premier classic dinghy event in the UK. It helps that as a club, Bosham itself could well be described as a 'classic club' in the nicest use of the phrase. A blend of community involvement and volunteer participation (not to mention one of the prettiest locations) and 'classic' dinghy club racing, makes Bosham the perfect host. Then there are the sailing waters, which for the smaller, slow boats

mean the protected area in the creek off Cobnor, whilst the medium and fast fleets can sail in the open expanses of Chichester Harbour. Many classic dinghies are elderly ladies indeed, boats that would struggle in the more robust conditions out on a stretch of open water.

Further testament to the growing interest in the genre comes in the line-up of headline sponsors that this particular event attracts – Top Yacht, Haines Boatyard, Sims Williams, Harken, and Pusser's Navy Rum – whose support has certainly allowed the event to be placed on to a successful and sustainable footing. And, for the sponsors as much as the competitors it seems the attraction lies at the core of what the revival scene is all about: "We are pleased to

also support the classic dinghy fleet as this contains so many fantastic boats," explains Hannah Cotterell, speaking on behalf of Harken, which is also a big supporter of Cowes Classic Week.

NUMBERS AND DIVERSITY

For the 60+ boats competing in this year's event, Saturday saw the early morning clouds rolling back, as the sun shone and the sea breeze gave great racing for all fleets. Even a short squall that ripped through late in the day caused few problems and left a light southerly that carried the boats back in time for some delicious food, re-hydration and great music. The organisers of the Classic Boat Revival certainly know how to throw a party!

Above
A high standard of racing has boosted appeal; local National 18s were out in force; a classic Fireball



“The event is acknowledged to have moved classic dinghy racing to a new level”

Sunday was the perfect early autumnal morning, bright and crisp. With a sea breeze giving ideal conditions for classic boat racing as sun, sparkly water and the gleaming varnished boats all combined to create a real sailing spectacle. The classic fleet though are not just nice-to-see museum pieces, for the competition afloat was fierce in all three fleets.

The greatest diversity and the most eye-catching boats were to be found in the fast handicap fleet, ranging from classic Fireballs, Merlins, International 14s, National 12s, Hornets and the incredibly graceful 12 Sq Metre Sharpies, to the stately National 18s that dominated the front of the fleet.

Bosham itself is home to the largest fleet of classic National 18s in the country, with their number being swelled by the arrival of number 100, Moonraker, straight from a keel-band up restoration that left the boat looking simply superb. Given how much work had gone into this task, credit must be given to owner and helm Jim Gibbon for trying for a port tack start!

In true classic fashion it was the oldest N18 still sailing in the UK, Tinkerbell (sailed by Richard Stirrup, Jono Prosser and Dave Hall) that took the win from Rob and Milly Wilder in their beautifully restored Merlin Rocket – Milly being the youngest competitor at the regatta.

The medium handicap fleet saw a three-way battle between the Fireflies, YW DayBoats and Brightlingsea One Designs (BODs). To the outsider it might look incongruous to suggest that you could race Fireflies against BODs but the handicap-setters at Bosham have built up a wealth of experience at these events which allowed the three classes to enjoy some close and enjoyable racing. Numbers were bolstered by a fleet of beautifully restored classic Enterprises. →



Above
The National 12, Indecision, was in the running for the Concours prize

The medium fleet also provides a home for some real rarities, including Andrew Kennon's Christchurch Coot, and the very shapely Torbay Minnow of Adrian and Jane Weller.

The Fireflies and BODs enjoyed a real tussle, but in the end the Firefly of Paul Kameen and Claire Jones proved victorious over their closest rivals, another Firefly sailed by Will and Mandy Henderson.

In the slow handicap fleet – dominated

numerically by the large fleet of Tideways – attention fell on the pair of Aldeburgh Lapwings that had travelled down from the east coast. These 12ft 6in dinghies were designed by Morgan Giles, so clearly have a racing pedigree and remain popular up on the River Alde. What made the Lapwings special this year was the presence of number 28, Pipit, sailed by 14-year old Tilly Mattich. Having learnt to sail in her mother's Lapwing, Tilly decided that she wanted her own.

Short of the funds needed, she busked with her violin outside the fish and chip shop in the village. Tilly sailed her boat into third place overall, finishing just ahead of the local Chichester Scow sailed by Izzie Lee. Overall victory went down to the wire, with another Lapwing sailed by John Fildes and Charlotte Clay and Michael Young's Tideway fighting over the top two spots, and the Lapwing just stealing the win.

At Bosham, the coveted Concours d'Elegance prize for superb craftsmanship is almost as important as the racing! The Sharpie of Jim McEwen was always eye-catching, as was the beautiful Kevin Driver (of The Boatyard at Beer) restoration of the National 12 Indecision sailed by Neal and Freya Lillywhite (another young crew that shows that the classic scene is not just the preserve of the older sailors).

Had Indecision been able to sail on Sunday, when the conditions would have shown her restoration off to its full effect, she would have been a serious contender. But ultimately the Concours award this year went to the Firefly of Mandy Henderson, who generously paid tribute to the skills of Tim Coombe, who had prepared the boat.

Inspired to join the restoration trend?

Matthew Law, an instructor at the Boat Building Academy in Lyme Regis, offers some advice

It is a myth that you need to be hugely experienced to undertake a restoration project. We run short courses and see people achieving amazing results who don't have masses of experience – although of course to have some basic woodwork experience helps, and it always helps to be clear about what you want to achieve from the start.

Do you want your boat to win Concours d'Elegance prizes or are you happy to just go sailing? How important is maintaining historical accuracy to you?

A boat described as 'very original' will largely be unrestored, and will have lots of original components. You may want to think about repairing and returning these pieces, rather than replacing them to maintain the authenticity of the boat. Conducting a thorough survey of the boat is a wise move to start with, and may mean some disassembly to get a good overview of what needs doing. Be cautious when disassembling, and only start dismantling if you are sure you have the will – otherwise you will be left with a rather dispiriting pile of wood!

Unfortunately – or fortunately depending on your view – there are very few shortcuts time-wise, as much of the techniques needed involve replicating the original builder's method. However, early decisions about the

scope of your ambitions will determine your timeframe, and working this out in advance will help you to avoid getting in a muddle.

You also need to have a dedicated space available – whether that's your shed, garage or a temporary tarpaulin lean-to. Avoid moving the boat during the process, as this can distort the shape.

Bear in mind that a real enemy to any restoration project is freshwater – whether that's rainwater that's pooled or condensation that's been trapped inside a poorly fitting or non-breathable cover. Saltwater is slightly the lesser of two evils, as the salt actually deters rot and fungi. Carvel boats (XODs, for example) particularly can dry out too much but your boat does need to be dry if you wish to use epoxy adhesives – or paints or varnishes of course. If you are faced with the prospect of wet wood, polyurethane adhesives – which are moisture-curing – may be appropriate.

Shop around when choosing sealing and bedding compounds; brands like Sikaflex offer different products for different purposes; one may be easier to sand, or another may have greater adhesion, for example.

Last but not least, it is worth teaming up with a friend or partner on your project from the outset; the extra pair of hands will come in useful – as will the moral support!

JOINING THE CROWDS

That the 2015 Concours was decided between these two great boatbuilders might suggest that only a professional restoration could win – but this would be very wrong. The two winning boats were pushed all the way by a number of superb home-spun restorations. More and more sailors are setting out on restorations, not just of the typical Fairey boats, Merlins and other development classes, but there are some real rarities out there waiting their turn in the workshop.

There are few shortcuts to creating a beautiful boat, which is in part a love-hate relationship with a sanding block. Yet, with careful use of epoxy to make up fillets and strengthen suspect joints, modern materials can help the home builder make a restoration that is sympathetic to the original construction, yet of Concours class in its finish. For the real aficionado of a classic finish, coatings such as the recently launched Awlwood top coat have removed much of the mystique of achieving that deep, lustrous finish.

If the Bosham Revival is anything to go by, classic dinghy racing can really be said to have come of age – and plans are already under way for a bigger, better and more glamorous event in 2016. ■