

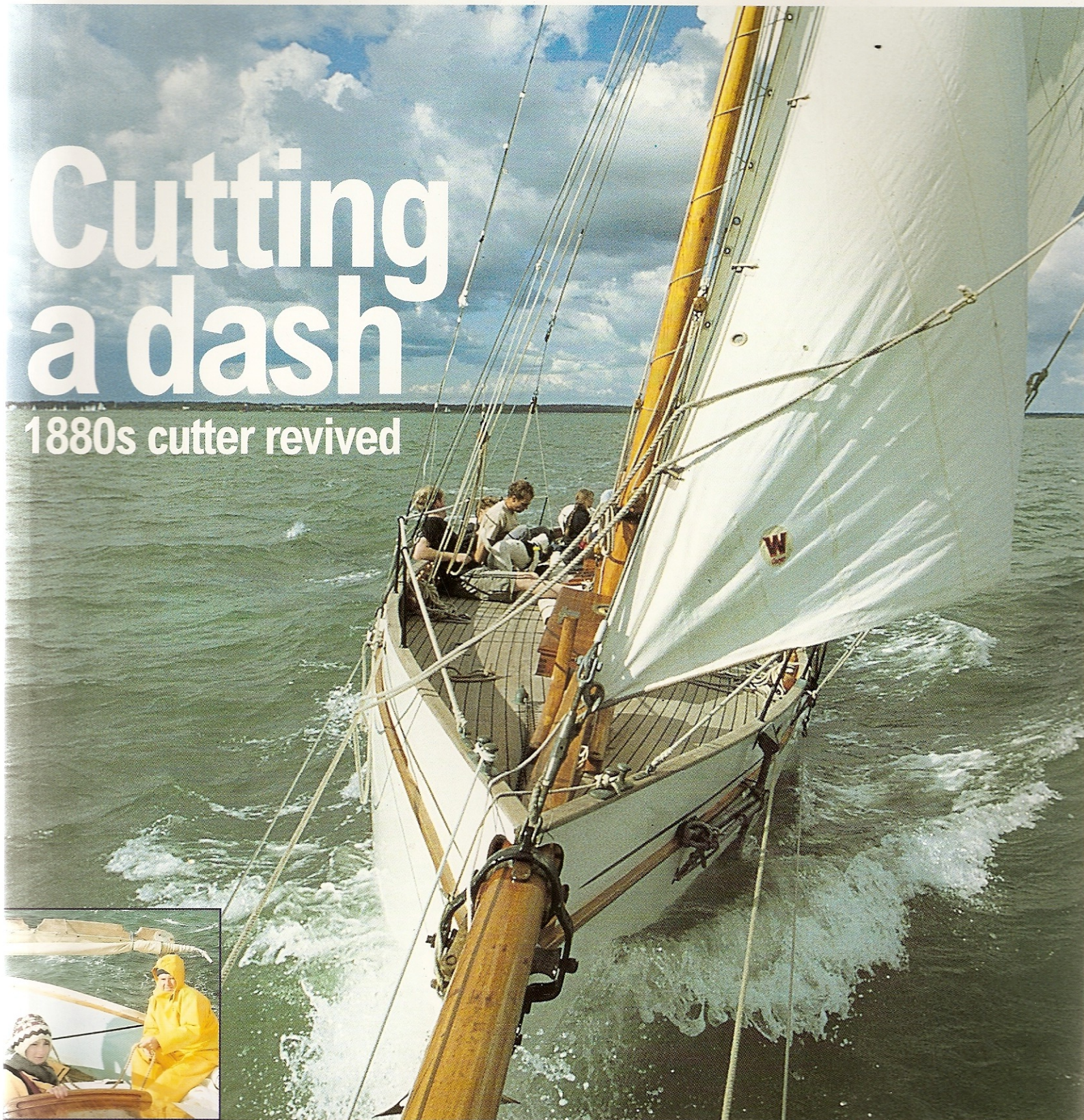
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03



JO CLEGG

American beauty

The ranks of classics at this year's Mediterranean regattas were swollen to capacity with the addition of visitors from across the pond. Jo Clegg talks to US competitors and asks how they enjoyed their season in the Med

JO CLEGG





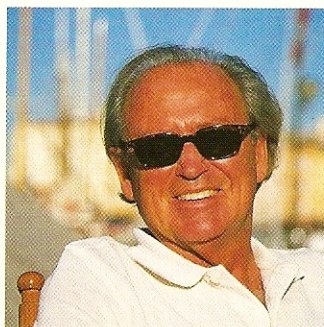
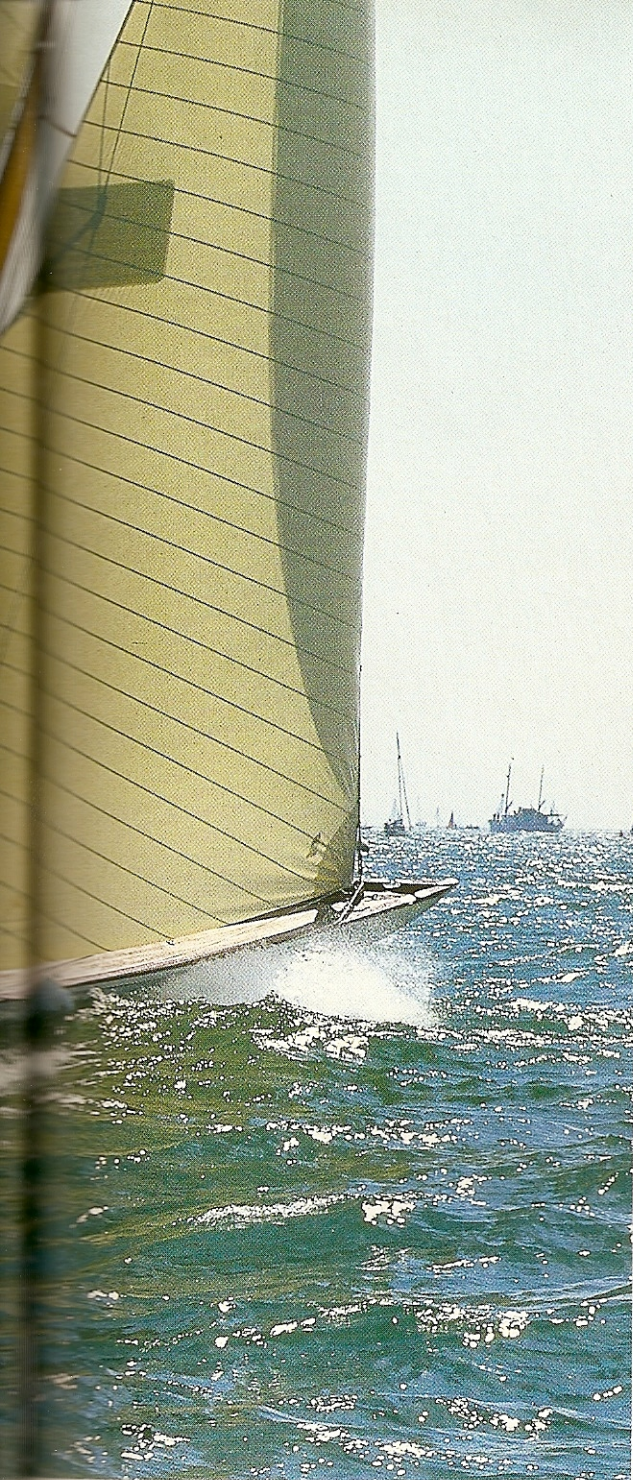
You can always count on the last event of the Mediterranean classic circuit to be spectacular, but Les Voiles de St Tropez 2001 raised the event to an entirely new level. High above the harbour, in the light of early evening, I looked down on an unbelievable collection of giant classics. *Orion, Thendara, Shenandoah, Shamrock V, Cambria, Mariette, Altair, Moonbeam, Tuiga, The Lady Anne* and *Puritan*, all lay side by side below. But what made the regatta so special was the presence of the fleet of US classics that had travelled on from the America's Cup Jubilee at Cowes to compete in The Prada Challenge for Classic Yachts.

Despite the horrific events of September 11 last year, which fell during the first of the Mediterranean regattas at Porto Cervo, Sardinia, most US competitors resolved to

Owner of Nirvana, David Warren Ray: "The people in Cowes were extraordinarily friendly. They did a superb job. It's something that I will remember forever."

stay and race on. And, as the last of the racing came to a close, all seemed to conclude that this had been a truly unforgettable racing circuit, christened 'The Grand Tour'.

This was the third event since the regatta's reincarnation as Les Voiles de St Tropez, 20 years on from the original challenge between the 12-Metre *Ikra* and the Swan *Pride*, which started the famous Nioulargue. And the racing fleet was in full strength: at Régates Royales in Cannes the previous week a record number of competitors in the race's 23-year history had forced organisers to requisition a second quay to accommodate the large number of yachts. And, at St Tropez, demand for places was such that many were forced to anchor outside the harbour or across the bay in Port Grimaud and Port Cogolin.



So how did the European classic race scene compare to racing in the States, I asked the owner of *Nirvana*, David Warren Ray. "The main difference is that there are so many classic boats and so many classic events," he told me. "We have a few in the States, but certainly not of the same level enjoyed over here. There aren't that many races for classic boats in the States and with NYYC [New York Yacht Club] we often find ourselves racing with modern boats." One of the main problems according to Warren Ray, was that many of the best American classics had been brought over to Europe where there is more enthusiasm for classic restorations.

Nirvana herself was one of the most admired visitors, winning the Concourse d'Elegance at Cowes and a similar prize for her authenticity at Porto Cervo. While most

Pictured top left: Onawa, the oldest 12-metre racing.
This page, top: Smiles, despite setbacks, atop the *Mariette*
Bottom: *Northen Star*
Above: David Warren Ray, owner of *Nirvana*.

boats of her age have now gone through extensive refits or rebuilds, *Nirvana* has been kept in the same impeccable condition throughout her life. Built at the Hinkley yard in Maine, she was designed by John Alden in 1948 and launched in 1950. After two years she was sold to Nelson Rockefeller, who owned her for 23 years, before she was bought by her current owner who has kept her in shape for a further 22 years. "When you sail a boat for so long it becomes an extension of you," confided Warren Ray. Although it was her first visit to Europe, *Nirvana* races regularly in NYYC regattas and is a consistent victor at Antigua Classics where, Warren Ray assured me, she has never lost a race.

Like most of the owners I spoke to, Warren Ray praised the excellent organisation that had made the America's Cup Jubilee such a



Left: Halsey Herreshoff holds up the Herreshoff Constitution Trophy 1901 for winning the ACJ Vintage Class overall, which he won with his crew of *Rugosa*, a New York 40 designed by his grandfather the legendary Capt Nat Herreshoff.



memorable event and said: "Cowes was amazing. It was as much to do with the people as the boats. It was the largest collection of the most famous sailors in the world.

"Also, the people in Cowes were extraordinarily friendly. They did a superb job. It's something that I will remember forever."

For the owners of the newly restored Herreshoff, *Marilee*, it had been an expensive season with a broken boom and spreader in Cowes, a bust jib in Porto Cervo and a broken mast at St Tropez, but part-owner Michael Shivers still enthused about the tour: "You could not have had a better racing experience than these regattas. I was talking to Charles Dana (NYC Commodore) saying that it's hard to imagine that this happens here every year. It's wonderful. There's real competition, but it's friendly too."

Michael Shivers, part-owner of Marilee: "You could not have a better racing experience. There's real competition, but it's friendly too."

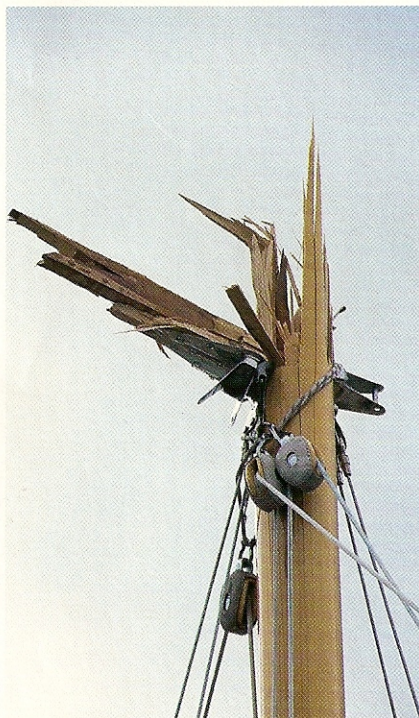
Shivers was particularly impressed with the sense of camaraderie at the Mediterranean regattas: "We lost our mast and the crew of one of the boats moored near us brought us champagne to cheer us up."

It was a good year for the Americans. *Mariette*, in the words of skipper Chris Gartner, had "her best season ever", taking the Prada Challenge having won firsts at Porto Cervo and Cannes, and second at Monaco. The three top boats in the Vintage class of the Prada Challenge were American owned, *Mariette*, *Marilee* and *Tamara IX*, and the Spirit of Tradition class was won by Donald Tofias' W-Class *Wild Horses*.

Tofias' twin W-Class yachts were the only boats to be seen flying the Stars and Stripes when I first visited the regatta three years ago. At that time there was no class suitable for



KATHY MANSFIELD



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Far left: *Marilee*, a New York 40, was designed for the NYYC for blue-water racing.
Left: A bust mast in St Tropez added to *Marilee*'s repair bill.
Below: *Marilee* has the classic Herreshoff pedigree



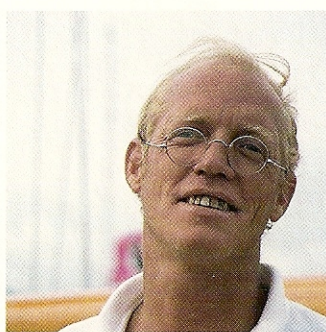
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these beautiful modern classics. Now, the Spirit of Tradition class is well established, bringing together boats like *Shamrock V*, *Alejandra*, and *The Lady Anne*, which was not allowed to race with the classics at St Tropez due to the carbon fibre in her mast.

A charismatic figure, Tofias was one of the first to voice his feelings in public about the terrorist attacks. As we talked at the Prada prize-giving party at the Citadel Tofias told me: “It was important for me to stay and race because going home would be giving in to terrorists.

“There were a few people who went home and I honour their opinion, but we set out to do this and committed to do this.

“I’m proud to be an American and more so now than ever, and I won’t be intimidated by some cowardly terrorists. I said publicly



JO CLEGG

Above: Like many Americans, Ben Becker, co-skipper of *Marilee*, continued racing despite the events back home.

that we were not only racing and winning for ourselves, but also for those people who died and would never sail and race again.

“I think that September 11 will go down as one of those dates of infamy. For our lifetimes it is a day that changed the world.”

While many of the Americans with whom I spoke expressed a feeling of dislocation from the events in New York, it was clear that, despite their enjoyment of the regattas, the shadow of impending war was never far from people’s minds. Several described the bizarre experience of hearing the news in Porto Cervo and attending the special service of mourning organised by their Italian hosts, conducted entirely in the native tongue.

Speaking to Ben Becker, the American co-skipper of *Marilee*, I asked him how the events of September 11 had affected him.



KATHY MANFIELD

This picture: Gleam's big genoa touches the water as she heels. Above: Gleam was the main rival to the 12-Metre Onawa.



Shielded from the barrage of media cover he told me "It's much better here in fantasy land. I've been on board since Porto Cervo, and all I've seen is Italian and French TV.

"I used to work on Wall Street in the mid-80s and have lots of friends who still work there, and I know people who disappeared in the rubble."

Warren Ray echoed his sentiments: "It was bizarre. You are in a make-believe world when the rest of the world is falling apart."

Yet, despite it all, most of the crews of the US boats seemed to have had a fantastic time in Europe. Annalea Mills, bowman of the 12-Metre *Gleam* was one of a 16-strong crew that had competed in all the European regattas. Asked about the highlights she told me: "There's been something special in each regatta. They've all been so different and so

Annalea Mills, Gleam's bowman: "Cowes was really hardcore with a tough schedule. Monaco had great parties and Cannes was really well organised."

good. Cowes was really hardcore with a tough schedule. Monaco had great parties and Cannes was really well organised." At St Tropez she'd enjoyed the crew parade for which the *Gleam* crew dressed in Medieval garb as horses, maidens and knights. "It was so funny, I fell off twice," laughed Annalea.

A seasoned competitor, Annalea has participated in many events across the pond, but told me that she'd never experienced anything quite like the the Grand Tour. "Antigua Classics is really up there, but there's a totally different feeling. Here there's just a continual run of it."

One of *Gleam's* main rivals was *Onawa*, designed by Burgess Starling in 1928, the oldest 12-Metre competing. In 1999, after 20 years ashore she was bought by a consortium of five owners of whom the best known is



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Elizabeth Meyer. These new owners put her through a refit in Newport RI lasting 14 months, with Earl MacMillan overseeing the work as project manager.

Describing the regatta at St Tropez, crew member Rudy Jurg told me: "For a last place to come it's been a beautiful close to the season." Other *Onawa* crew members told me how much they had appreciated the lay-days, which had allowed them to recover from partying. One of the US crew members continued: "St Tropez has been the best all round for partying and I really like it that the Europeans get up at noon to start sailing."

The vast logistical operation of transporting the US yachts from destination to destination on the Grand Tour fell to the New York Yacht Club and the club's sailing secretary Emily Wigutow. Travelling around the regattas she



JO CLEGG

Above, from top to bottom: A first trip to Europe for *Nirvana* earned prizes aplenty; crew of *Onawa*; Annalea Mills, bowman on *Gleam*; Emily Wigutow, NYYC sailing secretary.

liaised with the host yacht clubs, arranged berths and made sure that everything went smoothly for all NYYC members. With 25 yachts and around 200 crew members this was no small task yet everything seemed to have gone smoothly.

On their return to the States, participants of the Grand Tour held a get-together at the NYYC. Wigutow said that evening the tour had lived up to their expectations and "that they had all had a fantastic time".

While in France, numerous NYYC members told me how eager they were to get the European classics over to the States to race at Newport. Asked whether she thought this would become a reality all Wigutow was prepared to disclose was that it is certainly still under discussion. Let's hope there's another great regatta in the pipeline. 