

Adrian Morgan



Ol' blue eyes

As the years roll by, *Adrian* finds it important to keep an open mind

Those of you who don't habitually skip this column for deeper waters might recall that last month I left muddy boot prints on a friend's newly painted deck. To make me feel less of a heel (ha!) he told me about Olin Stephens catching a splinter and bleeding all over the bare woodwork of a new boat he'd designed. The owner simply encapsulated the great man's stigmata under six coats of varnish, for ever. Can't imagine my boot mark survived much beyond Tim's first expletive.

It's always the people you most respect in front of whom you find yourself making the biggest fool. Maybe I was overcome with admiration for the boat he had built, single-handed in a cold shed for all those months. More likely, for all the years I've messed around boats, I'm still a clumsy so-and-so.

On the embarrassment scale it cannot compare to the time we charged into Cowes under full canvas and missed T-boning a *Daring* by a weasel's whisker, or blocked the Wareham Channel on a Bank Holiday Monday, causing a cursing tail-back as far as Round Island. Yes, of cock-ups (as Sinatra might have sung), I've had my share.

Mention of Sinatra reminds me of my age. Is it automatic that after 50 we start to get cranky? Wear blue serge yachtsman's caps, covered in badges, and sport red ochre trousers? Grow a beard? Delight in obscure nautical phraseology, or insist on correct flag etiquette? Do 'classic yachtsmen' need to affect a uniform, dress down? Must we all hold opinions about glassfibre that, if applied to foreigners, would be called racist, and generally complain that "things ain't what they used to be"?

It's refreshing to see classic boats owned by the under 30s, not always the over 50s, with their predictable views of the other man's plastic boat. I've been guilty myself, denigrating everything from plywood and epoxy to what I see as ugly boats. My opinions come back to haunt me from time to time, and I have to remind myself to keep an open mind as the years roll by, admit that flying from a trapeze in a carbon-fibre sportsboat might just be more exciting than trundling along at 5 knots in a 70-year-old *Vertue*.

Reading the reports from the Volvo Race is a case in point. Despite keels failing and bulkheads cracking there's no denying it sounds fun, racing on the edge of control, bouncing off sunken containers and skimming icebergs. However, I did baulk some weeks back when one of the yachts hit and



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killed a shark. "Exciting," the skipper called it. At which I thought: "What, bludgeoning an animal to death with a lump of lead? Surely not."

Are we so drunk on speed and adrenalin that we've forgotten our respect for a poor old shark going about its business? So I emailed a friend, a veteran of several round-the-world races, America's and Admiral's Cups. The oceans of the world to him were magical places. Racing yachtsmen were in danger of forgetting what a privilege they now enjoy: "... they have drifted apart from reality and could be described as un-human, doing something that few other people could or would do," he wrote; "... in the process their flotsam of feelings seems caught up on the hanging branches of commerce. The oceans are an intoxicating place for us humans to float over... what a unique feeling and privilege, that mere humans at a basic level can endure the passage of the wind, waves and currents of an ancient leviathan."

Has a way with words, our Craig. But then, having spent half a lifetime screaming around the world on Kevlar ironing boards, he now sails a 70-year-old *Harrison Butler* with which

he terrorises *Sigmas* and *Moodys* around the Solent. Kind of settles a man's mind owning an old wooden boat. Not one of your flimsy plastic jobs (Heck! Here I go again...)

"The oceans are an intoxicating place for us humans to float over..."