

UNITED KINGDOM OFFSHORE POWERBOAT RACING ASSOCIATION  
2023 NATIONAL UK CHAMPIONSHIP

## HISTORIC 1963 BERTRAM, “THUNDERSTREAK”, GRABS UK NATIONAL



### CHAMPIONSHIP IN DRAMATIC SOLENT SEASON FINALE SHOOT-OUT.

In her diamond anniversary year, H400 “*Thunderstreak*” secured her second consecutive UK National Class 3E Championship at the end-of-season Southampton Boat Show offshore powerboat race on Saturday 23rd September. Running often neck-and-neck over the six-race calendar against faster, younger Class 3E competitors, the Cowes-based *Team:Royal Yacht Squadron* was declared 2023 UK National Class Champions at the Southampton Boat Show prize-giving and annual awards by the United Kingdom Offshore Powerboat Association [“UKOPRA”].

The UKOPRA 2023 season’s finale race attracted 20 of the sport’s top competitors and was held over two circuits of a 60-80 miles course in the western Solent and around Christchurch Bay. H400 *Thunderstreak* - the oldest boat racing in the series by several decades - had no less than seven Class 3E entrants making it the biggest single Class competing that day. *Thunderstreak* was 4th across the finish-line and secured second in her Class after a hard fought race - and thus accumulating sufficient points to achieve a second consecutive UK Championship.

“We were leading on points as the start flag dropped,” said Hugo Peel, *Thunderstreak*’s owner-driver, “but this wasn’t going to be a walk-over. While the Class 1 and 2 race-boats disappeared off westward to Hurst Castle at well over 100mph, *Team:Royal Yacht Squadron* [“*Team:RYS*”] strained every sinew to stay with our quicker and more youthful Class 3E fleet.”

Sea conditions were deceptively kind as *Thunderstreak* clocked over 65mph in the Solent. However, things changed dramatically at *Shingles Elbow*, the course’s most westerly turn mark opposite The Needles. This buoy marks the notorious *Shingles Bank* which protects the western approaches to the Solent. “Here,” reported Hugo Peel, “the longer, gradually-building Channel swell intermingled with the short, perilous *Shingles*’ tidal overfalls and shallow waters. It was aquatic chaos.” The 2.0m-2.5m waves with steep sides threatened to overwhelm smaller vessels, reducing speed to single figures as competitors sought the safest route.

The strengthening SW wind exacerbated the already dangerous sea conditions. *Thunderstreak* was launched skyward [see photo] on several occasions, landing with bone-shaking force which threatened to split her hull. But her 1950’s designer, the fabled US-born Ray Hunt, had drawn hull lines with flared bows and heavy hull laminates precisely to cope with such conditions.

Cowes-based *Thunderstreak* is crewed by Adrian de Ferranti on throttles/trim and Richard Jessel as navigator with owner/driver Hugo Peel at the helm.

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Credit photo right: *Snap Photography*

## EDITOR'S NOTES:

### TEAM:RYS:

The crew of Team:RYS are all Members of the Royal Yacht Squadron. Now in their second season's racing, **Adrian de Ferranti** controls throttles and trim. Likewise, **Richard Jessel** is race-strategy planner and navigator. Both have supported Hugo Peel's *equipe* since Spring 2022. Shoreside support and race-preparation is provided by Team Skipper, **John Simmonds**.

Hugo, Richard and John have historic/current connections with Bembridge [IoW] and Adrian farms in Hampshire. Hugo raced in Class 3 in the early 1970s. John is a long-time resident of Bembridge.

Team:RYS were titular UKOPRA Class 4 champions in 2020; official Class 3E runners-up in 2021; and official Class 3E winners in 2022.

### PROFILE: H400 *Thunderstreak*:

Design: Penned by fabled American marine designer Ray Hunt in 1958/9, this range of hulls was produced by the Bertram Boat Company of Miami, USA. In 25', 31' and 34' lengths, this range became the most popular 1960s model to compete in the growing sport of offshore powerboat racing in the UK, Europe and Stateside. They represent an early use of glass reinforced plastic in hull construction - the predecessor to today's fibre-glass and carbon-fibre - and are comparatively heavily built by today's standards.

Ownership history: *Thunderstreak* was built for the legendary car and boat racer Tommy Sopwith to compete in the 1963 Daily Express Cowes-Torquay race.

Subsequent years saw her raced by Jeff Quill [BOAC test pilot], Keith Schellenberg [Olympic bob-sleigh medalist], Lloyds' of London insurance personality Robert Doxford and several others. By 1970s, she was uncompetitive and disappeared for 25 years to be rediscovered as a wreck, being employed as a houseboat in an East London marina.

Spotted by Mike James of the Classic Offshore Powerboat Club, it was partially restored by Robin Ward in 2015, and raced a few times in 2016-2017. Acquired by Hugo Peel in 2018, it spent several years being completely restored in Cowes - new engines, drives, steering, navigation and electronics.

Engineering stuff: Originally powered by a pair of petrol 400bhp Ford Inceptor V-8 engines in 1963 tuned by race engineers Holman & Moody [of Indianapolis 500 race fame], *Thunderstreak* was shaft driven through V-drives, with small rudders. Its 1950's design speed was 30mph but Tommy Sopwith's Ford race engines gave her a velocity very close to 50mph - a 66% increase.

Re-engineered and restored by Hugo Peel in 2018/2019, a pair of 435bhp 8.2-litre V8 Mercruiser engines were fitted to Mercruiser XR stern-drives. Up-rated hydraulics replaced standard steering and trimming systems, Axiom chart-plotters replaced older Raymarine C-series [which crashed if you went over 40knots!], and hull and windscreen substantially strengthened. Today, her top speed is a closely guarded secret but rumoured to be approaching 70mph - a 133% increase.

Race engineers **Wills Marine** of Cobbs Quay Poole are responsible for all mechanical and hydraulic systems and machinery. **Wroath Marine** of Cowes look after marine electronics and navigation equipment. **Biltmore Signs** of Newport produce all the vessel's signage and race-decals.

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