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# Classic Boat

THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL BOATS



Three  
Sisters  
Identical for  
match racing

# *Senior service* MATCH RACING

Built for the Royal Navy's training college at Dartmouth, three of a fleet of seven identical yachts are back sailing together... for charter and kids' adventure holidays

STORY **DAN HOUSTON**





Top: *Water Lily*, for fun days on the water  
Above: tiller steering is much easier when you are learning to sail. Above left: *Gryphis* was David's first acquisition

Three thoroughbred ex-Royal Navy yachts, all once part of a select fleet, have been bought and restored by one owner, for Chichester-based charter – and adventure holidays for kids. The yachts are from the almost mythically-famous Seamanship Training Craft Division, of which seven, of identical design, were built for the Royal Navy, for officer cadet and midshipmen training afloat. From 1959 to 1985 every RN officer cadet attending Britannia Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, or engineering at Manadon, Plymouth, would have had sail-training aboard one of these 43ft (13.1m) Morgan Giles cruiser-racers, built to replace some of the Windfall yachts, which had been taken by the Navy as spoils of war from Germany in the late 1940s.

The list of trainees could have included Prince Charles, almost certainly his brother Prince Andrew and many of our current and recent admirals.

The three yachts now based in Chichester are *Pegasus*, *Gryphis* and *Leopard*. They have been recently brought together by David Foster, who bought *Gryphis* in 2011 as a replacement yacht for his 50ft (15.2m), 1969-built Camper and Nicholson sloop *Quiver V*. David's partner Catherine has established a successful adventure camping holiday business for children and David saw opportunities for extending the business with sailing holidays for older

children, on yachts. "When I bought *Gryphis* I thought that was that," he says, "but then I heard that *Leopard* had come on the market, down in Falmouth. She had been run by Joe Sabien as part of his Sea Sanctuary business (CB282) which had grown, so he needed a bigger boat. So we bought her and she came here in April 2012. Then I found *Pegasus*, in a mud berth on the east coast (via MJ Lewis) and so she came here too, in October 2012.

"I had already become fascinated with this group of yachts which had been used so successfully for naval training – and I think after they were sold in the 1980s no-one would have expected to see them sailing together ever again. I also think it is quite unique to be able to offer these matched boats for charter or for corporate days racing. Basically they can still be used for the purpose they were built for – to race against each other as a way of honing sailing and seamanship skills."

And at CB, dear readers, we have racked our brains about whether three or more identical boats like this, with cabins and offshore capability, exist anywhere on our planet – especially where you could hire them as a fleet and race them across to France, say. There is some match racing of 12s, in America and there are the Folkboats in Sweden which we have covered before but it certainly seems like a very rare fleet. And it's UK-based.

So travelling to Chichester to join David for a day sail on *Leopard* on a balmy day of light airs and sea breezes last summer, was a pleasing prospect! The lovely-lined boats are moored together on a pontoon at the entrance to Chichester marina, there to gladden the eyes of anyone who uses the place. And of course they have the same mesmerising effect as any group of classic wooden boats together. One would be pleasant to look at, two something to remark upon and by the time you get to three it starts to feel sensational.

In this case the three Burmese teak-on-laminated-oak thoroughbreds are joined by *Buller II* – a Gerald Pearne 31ft (9.1m) motor sailer, designed on the lines of the fishing boats of Looe. Built of close-planked iroko on Canadian rock elm with oak floors, she has a steel shoe the length of her keel so can act as a beach-going committee boat and store boat.

*Leopard* is one of those beautiful boats that you know, as soon as you step aboard, could take you into the furthest reaches of the oceans. Climbing aboard her midships rail you get that slight tilting curtsey, almost as if she is nodding in recognition. She smells of warm varnish and that slight zest of teak and other timbers that lets you know she's alive.

She's just the right length for a passage up, down or across the Channel and part of me wishes we were now

Above: ocean thoroughbreds – these yachts would take you anywhere. Left: Wickedly Wonderful teepee camping adventure holidays





to the end of their sail-training lives. “So there was great excitement when these yachts turned up – they were brand spanking new and we got into them straight away! They were used whenever we got a chance and since we logged all our boat hours, the time spent sailing counted towards your sea time. They did not all arrive at once and at first they did not have an engine [engines were fitted to the yachts within a year or two of arriving at Dartmouth and *Gawaine* and *Galahad* arrived at Plymouth with their 8hp Stuart Turners]. So I remember we would get a tow out of harbour from one of the picket boats (P1000) if we needed to. In those days we would do seven terms over a couple of years, with sea time in between, so there were good opportunities to go sailing.

“The yachts also went to Cowes Week, and the picket boats would go there too – to tow them in and out of port. They were great boats to use and Dartmouth is one of the best places to have an evening sail. They were also used offshore and did the Fastnet and other races. There’s nothing like throwing people out in some arduous conditions and frightening them a bit!”

Peter remembers the boats with a higher fractional rig. The original sail area for the class was 772sqft/71m<sup>2</sup> (they had Ratsey sails in 1959). But the rigs were drastically cut down, by 11ft (3.4m) in the late 1960s after a cadet was reportedly lost overboard in bad weather in the North Sea. The booms were also shortened, by around 4ft (1.2m), so



a large panel of leech was taken off the yachts at this time.

You can see from photos in the 1960s on p31 how the rig has altered compared to today. Basically they are now masthead rigged – so saving the need to cut new headsails when they were altered. This is something David hopes to replace, restoring them back to wooden masts and the original rig – for authenticity as much as for looks or sailing ability, “but there’s a large cost involved in that and we are not in a position to do that just yet,” he says.

David hopes to keep up with most of the work using a local team at Chichester: “*Gryphis* was 90 per cent restored when we got her; we just finished her off. *Leopard* was in A1 condition and *Pegasus* is our long-term project – we’ll be doing more work over the winter of 2014/15 and then the plan is to start business in earnest in the 2015 season. But really there was nothing wrong with these boats structurally. They were superbly built to start with and they have stayed like that.”

There’s something very right about seeing a group of yachts brought back together like this and surely readers will be watching out for them, sailing the Solent, soon.

For more information [classicsail.co.uk](http://classicsail.co.uk); [wicked sail.co.uk](http://wicked sail.co.uk) [wickedlywonderful.com](http://wickedlywonderful.com)

**Above:** Morgan Giles in the inter-war years and below, a Beken shot of *Wyvern*, one of the seven Seamanship Class yachts at Cowes. Where is she now?

heading off to St Malo, with an exciting beat down Big Russel, between Sark and Guernsey, perhaps... She is a boat that makes you hungry to be off.

For most charters the boats will have professional skippers, but today it’s just myself and David, going for a jolly out to East Head. We motor out, through the locks of the marina and come head to wind to raise our sails. The dacron slides effortlessly up the sail track and a minute or so later, with headsail set, we are tilting to the breeze and making four knots going past Itchenor.

I’ve got the helm and she’s doing everything you’d expect: she’s balanced and you can edge her up to windward on each puff of pressure with a sense of her long lead keel carrying her forward when the wind heads her or dies away. She comes through stays smoothly and easily, again with her weight carrying her forward through the eye of the wind. We didn’t have much time to practise but you could leave the helm for periods at a time – perhaps with a shoelace to keep it in check, and she’d be happy to sail herself.

The condition of all three of these yachts is impressive, and testament to their materials and how they were built, as well as how they have been cared for in service and since. The committee boat, *Buller II*, belongs to Peter Cope, who remembers being a naval cadet when the first yachts arrived at Dartmouth in 1959. “At the time we still had Windfall yachts, taken from the Germans and used for sail-training. Each of the five divisions at Dartmouth – Blake, Drake, Exmouth, Grenville and St Vincent – had a 50 Square Metre and there was a 100 Square there as well,” Peter remembers. The Windfalls were mostly from the 1930s and getting



**Top to bottom:** *Maid of Malham*, *Pegasus* and *Martlet* in 1960 – note fractional rig; David Foster and his unique fleet; the yachts’ clean and functional interiors

## Morgan Giles: design genius who also built boats

Francis Charles Morgan Giles, 1882 – 1964, was a naval architect of superlative ability who designed hundreds of dinghies and yachts including several famous One Designs – like the Shannon OD in 1920, which are still raced competitively today.

From boyhood summer holidays at Shaldon in South Devon, Morgan Giles had raced dinghies competitively and by the end of his teens he was known as an outstanding helmsman with good knowledge of racing rules. He was active in the West of England Conference Class 14-footers which later became the international 14s, and also in the WEC 18ft Jollyboats – centreplate dinghies sailed by three crew. He’d also been studying design, first as a fee-paying pupil at the Pengelly yard at Shaldon on the River Teign, and then later at Gann and Palmer in Teignmouth. This was the site where he would later establish his business and boatyard, which would run until 1969. But first he went to London, in 1901 and established a design business in Hammersmith. In 1909 in partnership with Harry May he also opened a boatyard in Hammersmith until the outbreak of war in 1914.

During the war Giles was in the RNVR commanding coastal patrol craft. He left in 1920

and set up his design, building and brokerage business at Teignmouth, marrying Ivy Carus Wilson – see page 34 – in the process.

He gained a worldwide reputation for design and by the time of his death in 1964 the company boasted 800 designs, including many Admiralty craft during World War Two. Most designs were timber boats but by the 1960s the business had moved into glassfibre yachts and was run by his son, Capt Michael Morgan Giles. Another son Rear Admiral Morgan Morgan Giles was an MP.

**The seven 43ft Seamanship Training Craft designed (and mostly built) by Morgan Giles, Teignmouth, are:**

*Leopard*, 1959 BRNC, now at Chichester  
*Gryphis*, 1959 BRNC, now at Chichester  
*Pegasus*, 1959 BRNC, now at Chichester  
*Martlett*, 1959 BRNC, now in north Spain  
*Wyvern*, 1959 BRNC, whereabouts unknown  
*Galahad*, 8-1961 Manadon-Plymouth, now in Italy  
*Gawaine* 5-1962, Manadon-Plymouth, built by James Taylor, Shoreham, whereabouts unknown



### Seamanship Training Craft

LOA  
42ft 6in (13m)  
LWL  
30ft 6in (9.3m)  
BEAM  
9ft 6in (2.9m)  
DRAUGHT  
6ft 10in (2.1m)  
ORIGINAL SAIL AREA  
772sqft (71.7m<sup>2</sup>)  
DISPLACEMENT  
30,864lbs (14 tonnes)



# Sail - Race - Regatta

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