



The restored *Trivial Pursuit* finally takes to the water outside the yard of R J Prior & Sons

Tender spot

Once tender to one of the most famous superyachts in the world, the exquisite motor launch *Trivial Pursuit* was recently saved thanks to an extensive refit. Best of all, it was a rebuild that managed to retain much of this classic's original soul

Words and pictures by Phil Draper



Shemara in her heyday with tender *Trivial Pursuit* hanging from her boat-deck davits

The elegant and recently refitted motor launch *Trivial Pursuit* was once tender to one of the most famous superyachts of the 1940s, '50s and '60s – *MY Shemara*.

When launched in 1939 at British yard J I Thornycroft & Co back in 1939, *Shemara* was as one of the world's largest private yachts. Indeed, prior to the launch of *HMY Britannia* in 1953, she was generally acknowledged as the largest yacht in the British Empire. Measuring 201ft (61.3m) and weighing 878 tons, she accommodated up to 14 guests and a crew of no fewer than 32.

Commissioned by Sir Bernard Docker, the flamboyant chairman of British motorbike group BSA, *Shemara* spent



With a 56hp Volvo Penta engine in harness, Liz Wastnage's son Daniel drives the launch hard

her first five or six years not under his captain's command, but under the command of the Royal Navy. That was because she was pressed into service at the outbreak of the Second World War.

In 1946 she was returned to her owner with whom she remained until the end of the 1960s.

During that period Sir Bernard and his wife, Lady Norah, kept both themselves and their yacht firmly in the spotlight. For at least two decades *Shemara* was seldom out of the newspapers. Regular guests included the great and the good of the day: royalty, heads of state and film stars. And, unlike today's superyacht owners, who for the most part insist that those who work around the boats

guard their privacy jealously, dockers never attempted to conceal their association with *Shemara*, or their lavish entertaining. Indeed parties of local groups were often invited aboard, as were dignitaries from ports of call – not to mention the occasional Fleet Street journalist.

As for *Trivial Pursuit*, she is believed to have been built in 1938 at J I Thornycroft in Southampton, now better known as Vosper Thornycroft. Measuring 26ft (7.9m) from stem to stern, her home for 30 or more years was to be a pair of davits on the starboard side of *Shemara*'s boat deck.

It's not clear at what point *Trivial Pursuit* and *Shemara* parted company, but it's thought to have been sometime

during the 1970s. After an uncertain period between then and 1990, she was acquired as a family runabout by her current owner, Liz Wastnage. A member of the Royal Burnham Yacht Club, Liz provided her with her own identity at last, giving her the name *Trivial Pursuit*.

However, there was work to do. Many of the boat's oak frames and much of her mahogany planking needed replacing. In consultation with classic boat specialist R J Prior & Son of Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex, Liz decided that it would be best to skin her hull with GRP rather than attempt a rebuild from scratch. This way, not only would the boat's original construction and lines be preserved within a strong and durable



Flagship marine enamel was used for her hull and Flagship varnish for her brightwork



The boat's teak deck was completely relaid and the hardware revitalised; the guest cockpit area (above) with its distinctive trio of windows

shell, but also her authenticity and, most importantly, classic feel, smell and very spirit, would be maintained.

Initially the outside of her hull was stripped bare. Then a 1/8in (3mm) skin of CSM (chopped-strand mat) and epoxy was added before she was finally finished with two coats of deep blue Flagship marine enamel.

Her brightwork was given no fewer than a dozen coats of Flagship varnish and all her teak decks were relaid. Below, all her ribs and planking were left as original, the result being that she oozes that glorious classic aroma. Nevertheless all her interior – the open aft deck area, the enclosed cabin and the exposed forward helm position – was

lovingly restored to original condition. On deck, most of the hardware and fittings are also revitalised originals.

However, one item that didn't make it to the restored launch was the propulsion system. An old, but not original, 36hp engine block was scrapped in favour of a more modern and practical solution. This came in the form of a 56hp Volvo Penta diesel engine that drives out to a larger bronze propeller. The engine bay is actually located well forward under the large teak-clad foredeck hatch, which means her shaft runs for over 16ft (4.9m). One advantage of this arrangement is that the new drivetrain gives her a useful semi-planing performance of 16 knots.

In terms of styling, *Trivial Pursuit* is reminiscent of the New England commuter launches that existed between the wars. She boasts a forward exposed helm position, with only a small plateglass screen for protection, although there is also a small emergency tiller that can be used at the stern. The rest of the launch is given over to a simple guest cockpit area with cushioned seating along each side, half of which is protected by that raked coachroof and those distinctive three side windows.

Having left her high davits behind, *Trivial Pursuit's* home is now a low-swing mooring on the River Crouch, outside the Royal Burnham Yacht Club. Here she is truly cherished. 