



Sail *of the*
Century



A 72-foot, two-masted Bermudian ketch set young female hearts racing in 1982 when she provided the stage for Simon Le Bon and bandmates and became the enduring symbol of school disco staple *Rio*. Almost 30 years later, and following a complete makeover courtesy of Panerai, Eilean is causing a stir again.

Tracey Llewellyn

Eilean has certainly caused a ripple or two this summer around the Mediterranean and even across the Pond - and with good reason, as this year saw the completion of a two and a half year restoration project carried out on behalf of Panerai and its CEO Angelo Bonati. And this time those falling in love were not a teenage army of Duran Duran fans but classic yacht lovers - many of who were present in Antibes in June - to witness the first official Panerai ambassador take to the water during the Voile d'Antibes edition of the Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge (PCYC).

The ties between Panerai and the sea go back a long way and are already well known to most *QP* readers: in 1936 - coincidentally the year Eilean was built - the Florentine watch producer created the first prototype of an underwater watch for use by the Italian Royal Navy's Commander Submarine Group One. Since then the bond has remained strong and since 2005, the brand has sponsored the PCYC - the leading international regatta circuit for vintage and classic yachts (which from 2010 also includes the Cowes British Classic Yacht Challenge bringing the total number of events to nine worldwide). So why sponsor a regatta? On this Bonati is clear: "The link highlights the passion of the brand and keeps the culture of Panerai alive - it recognises our naval history and I believe that the craftsmanship in classic yachting and *haute horlogerie* is parallel.

In the 1930s, Panerai was an unassuming family business, which secured an order from the Italian Navy. The watch was the Luminor but, as Bonati points out, few people knew of its -



Left: An original 1936 technical drawing.

Below: Eilean in 1939. Image from Beken of Cowes



Winner's Time

Since 2005 Panerai has gifted a limited-edition timepiece to the winner of each Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge. For 2010 the watch was the Radiomir Regatta 1/8th Second Titanio, a 47mm, split-second foudroyante chronograph, featuring a scale for calculating boat speed in knots.

The split-second function allows two simultaneous events to be clocked, thanks to two overlapping hands while the foudroyante function activates a small hand at 9 o'clock that completes one rotation every second and is precise to one eighth of a second.

Featuring the automatic OP XXI calibre, a power reserve of 42 hours, the Radiomir Regatta 1/8th Second Titanio has been produced in a single edition of 500 units and can be yours for £10,600.



or the brand's - existence outside of collectors of military watches. All of that changed when Sylvester Stallone was spotted wearing a Luminor Marina in *Daylight* in 1996 and all of a sudden Panerai became the watch of the moment and according to Bonati, "everyone knew who we were - but not necessarily for the right reasons."

"Take modern superyachts and classic yachts. The former make you wonder how much they cost while the latter evoke feelings of freedom and tradition. And it is the same with our watches. We never think in terms of who will buy the piece or who the wearer will be - whether they will be male or female and so on. We simply create a Panerai watch - something beautiful, true to the brand and ultimately Italian. Tastes change but Panerai does not bow to fashion and that is why our markets constantly shift.

"We are not a flashy brand we are very understated and this can cause problems when looking at promotional strategies. The connection with yachts was perfect for Panerai - we are an exclusive brand with a history linked to the sea. There are few classic yachts around just as Panerai is not interested in churning out tens of thousands of pieces but the beauty and tradition surrounding the boats is a perfect match to Panerai watches. The connection is not that the owners of these boats will buy a Panerai. Our aim is to build an image for the brand. Eilean is not a commercial purchase, she won't be chartered, instead she will represent Panerai and all that we stand for and she will allow people to see our genuine commitment."

Sea for history

The mere fact that Eilean is sailing at all today is underlined by a tale of luck, determination and dedication. Built in 1936 by William Fife of Fairlie in Scotland, Eilean was originally owned by two local brothers who sadly did not return from their time fighting in the Second World War. She then passed through several owners until 1970 when she was bought by architect John Shearer who took her to Antigua and chartered her to the rich and famous.

Following her heady showbiz days of the 1980s, and during one of many Atlantic crossings, an unfortunate incident with a ferry caused major



Above left: Eilean's dragon - a symbol carved by local Fairlie craftsmen and common to all Fifes - is recreated.



Left and below: The unique Panerai chronometer and other instruments made for Eilean.

Bottom: Angelo Bonati at an early Viareggio briefing.



damage and on her return to Antigua Eilean was moored among the mangroves while Shearer began a losing battle of repair versus further decay. And this is how Bonati, who had been a keen sailor for 20 years, first found her in 2006.

Bonati says that he knew immediately the potential for communication that the boat - inspired by the elegant J-Class yachts of the 1930s America's Cup - had. Bonati had a vision for Eilean and with the financial might of the Richemont Group behind him was one of the few people with the ability and drive to see her restored. Later in 2006 Bonati persuaded Shearer to sell and the same year arranged for Eilean to be transported to the Francesco Del Carlo boatyard in Viareggio, Italy where, under the project management of Enrico Zaccagni, Guido del Carlo and his team of craftsmen the massive task of restoration began.

At Bonati's insistence as much of the original materials as possible were refurbished, replacing only where restoration was impossible. Eilean's original plans were seconded from the Fife library; her steel interior structure - rusted beyond repair - was replaced while a specialist team of marine architects worked to preserve the outer skin. Alaskan silver spruce and seven-year stored South African mahogany were imported for use where timber was unsalvageable. And a unique set of Panerai sailing instruments, including a barometer, hygrometer, thermometer and wall clock were created.

So after two and a half years and 40,000 man-hours Eilean was painstakingly restored and in June 2010 her new skipper Andrew Cully treated her first guests to a taste of her capabilities in the Mediterranean. And at the end of this year she will once again set sail across the Atlantic for Antigua - this time flying the Italian flag and definitely only visiting ☺



Work progresses in the Francesco Del Carlo shipyard.

