

Crest of a Wave

Gipsy Moth IV sails again, with Corum on board

Simon de Burton



QP's writers are often whisked off to exotic destinations by watch brands eager to remind us of the excellence of their products. But Corum only had to take Simon de Burton as far as the Isle of Wight to make a lasting impression. Amid the bustle of Cowes Week, *QP* was shown why the freshly restored *Gipsy Moth IV* is the stuff of sailing legend, and is afforded a sneak preview of the commemorative watch being specially developed by the vessel's global partner.

It was back in May 1967 that Sir Francis Chichester returned to Plymouth in the sea-stained and barnacled *Gipsy Moth IV*, having sailed solo around the world in a record-breaking time of 226 days. Soon afterwards, the 53-foot ketch was put on display in dry dock beside the *Cutty Sark* at Greenwich. But unlike the famous tea clipper, *Gipsy Moth* somehow failed to command the status of National Treasure and, as the years passed by, the English weather beat her up in a way that the world's oceans never managed.

By the end of 2004 she was in such a state of disrepair that *Yachting Monthly* magazine felt

compelled to step in, imploring the Maritime Trust – then *Gipsy Moth's* owner – to do something to arrest her deterioration. As a result, she was sold to the Cowes-based United Kingdom Sailing Academy (UKSA) for the token sum of “£1 and a gin and tonic” – either a fabulous bargain or a huge liability, depending on how you view it.

Ship shape

That was when David Green, CEO of the UKSA, set about raising the £500,000 needed to pay for the yacht's meticulous restoration by her original builder, Camper & Nicholsons. Among the 70-odd benefactors was Corum – well known for its connection with



Boat images courtesy of PPL media: www.pplmedia.com



yachting through the Admiral's Cup. It became involved with the Gipsy Moth project when Green and the brand's UK head Steve Ramsay met through Corum's role as official Admiral's Cup timekeeper and sponsorship of the Corum trophy races.

"As soon as David told me about the plan to restore *Gipsy Moth IV* to her former glory, I knew we had to help," Ramsay told QP. "It seemed like a perfect match. If ever there was a dream project for us, this was it. I have never known such a photographed boat; she is a sailing icon."

After little more than six months of frantic activity, *Gipsy Moth IV* was re-launched this summer looking as good as, if not better, than the day she was originally finished 40 years ago. Resplendent in fresh white livery, she earned pride of place in the marina at this year's Cowes regatta where she attracted almost as much attention as she did on the day that Chichester brought her safely back to Plymouth in 1967.

Her newly repaired mahogany hull carries the original pair of aluminium masts, which have been painstakingly hand-polished



(Above left) The *Gipsy Moth's* restorers have left the original radio and navigation equipment below decks. (Left) Having secured the necessary £500,000, *Gipsy Moth IV* was restored over six months at Camper & Nicholsons - the boat's original builder in 1966 - in Gosport.

to mirror sheen, while down below, the swinging-balance Primus stove on which Chichester cooked up his rations is back in full working order. Even the paraffin heater, with its eccentric flue and pierced heatshield on which he dried his clothes, remains just where it always was. The restorers have left the old Marconi radio in place too, along with all the navigation gear; state-of-the-art technology when *Gipsy Moth* first left Plymouth.

Taking the helm

QP's esteemed Editor and I felt honoured to be asked aboard by Corum to view the completed work and, weather permitting, maybe even sail out into the Solent amid the hectic traffic of Cowes Week. Both being enamoured with the *Gipsy Moth*/Chichester story, this seemed like a dream come true - although knowing the bad behaviour of the English weather, I for one had already decided that I would be content with just treading the hallowed decks and nosing around the cabin.

But English weather can work both ways and on this day it was kind. More than kind. The sun beat down, and out in the Solent a 20-knot wind made conditions just perfect for messing about



(Left) Your author takes the helm at Cowes Week in July.

(Below) Limited to 250 units, the new rose-gold 'Gipsy Moth IV' watch from Corum. This commemorates the restoration of the historic ketch and its second voyage around the world, following Francis Chichester's record-breaking solo circumnavigation in 1967.

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in boats. *Gipsy Moth's* skipper, a local lad called Richard Baggett who has been sailing solo since the age of eight, expertly manoeuvred her out of the marina under motor power until we were mixing it in open water with everything from two-man racing dinghies to liner-sized gin palaces.

Aware that I was obviously desperate to get involved, Baggett asked me to help haul the mainsail, which immediately made me realise what an absolute hero Chichester must have been. It seems impossible that such a frail-looking, myopic man looked after *Gipsy Moth's* 10 sails, controlled the rudder, navigated and kept her yards of ropes and lines in order for 226 days and 30,000 miles.

As Baggett raised sail after sail, the *Moth* became alive, heeling over until her starboard deck rail was skimming the water. It soon became clear that here was a yacht with a soul. And just

when we thought it could not get much better, Baggett allowed your Editor and I to take turns at the tiller. For the next hour-and-a-half we could honestly say we were sailing the most famous little yacht in the world - and it was bliss.

With the latest satellite navigation equipment discreetly fitted, *Gipsy Moth IV* left Plymouth on September 25th this year to embark on her second circumnavigation of the globe with a crew partly made up from varying backgrounds, selected by organisations including the Ellen MacArthur Trust and the Sea Cadets.

Pupils from schools in deprived areas have also been nominated for the 22-month voyage, much of which will be screened on international television networks. When she returns, *Gipsy Moth IV* will become a floating exhibit





(Left) Navigating the busy traffic of Cowes Week - the Isle of Wight's annual eight-day sailing regatta, which attracts around 1,000 keelboats, split into 40 racing classes. Left to right: Frank Fletcher and David Green (UKSA), Richard Baggett (skipper), Jo McConnell (Corum), Ed, and Steve Ramsay (Corum).

at Cowes in a new maritime heritage centre and will make regular voyages into the Solent and beyond.

The watch

Corum, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, will be 'Global Partner' to *Gipsy Moth IV* until at least 2009. The Swiss manufacturer presented a chronometer to David Green at the yacht's official rededication by Princess Anne on September 7th in Greenwich, London - home to maritime chronometry itself. The watch will be used as a symbolic navigation aid during the round-the-world voyage and Corum will also produce a brand new, limited edition of 250 *Gipsy Moth IV* wristwatches, to be sold through selected retailers worldwide.

The final specification of the watch is yet to be confirmed, but *QP* has been given advance information that it is likely to have a round 44-mm case, water resistant to 100 metres, and a chronometer-rated automatic

movement. A "GMIV" logo and a map of Chichester's original route will be incorporated into the dial and the caseback will feature an engraved portrait of Chichester himself. One hundred pieces will be available in yellow gold, 100 in pink gold and 50 in white gold at a starting price of around £10,000. This model will propagate a strong lineage of sailing timepieces from Corum, which started with the square-cased Admiral's Cup Carrée in 1960 - just five years after Corum's foundation. It wasn't until 1983 however that Corum actually became involved with the Admiral's Cup itself when its famous 12-sided timepiece was first launched.

Anyone who buys one of the GMIV watches will also receive a numbered certificate and the entitlement to sail on *Gipsy Moth IV*. Speaking as someone lucky enough to have already experienced the latter, this is as persuasive an incentive as one could get. ○

Further information: Corum, 01932 574 674, www.corum.ch

Donations toward the upkeep of and her round-the-world voyage can be made by calling 01983 203 017, by visiting www.gipsymoth.org or by sending a cheque to UKSA, Arctic Road, West Cowes, Isle of Wight, PO31 7PQ UK.

To appreciate Sir Francis Chichester's achievement to the full, *QP* recommends reading his personal account of the epic voyage *Gipsy Moth Circles the World*. By the end, you will feel as though you have personally experienced everything from 'rounding the Horn' to living at a 40° angle in a 60-knot winds for four days. Gripping stuff! Published by McGraw Hill; ISBN 0071414282; £9.99.

