

EXTREME BOATS

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MAGAZINE

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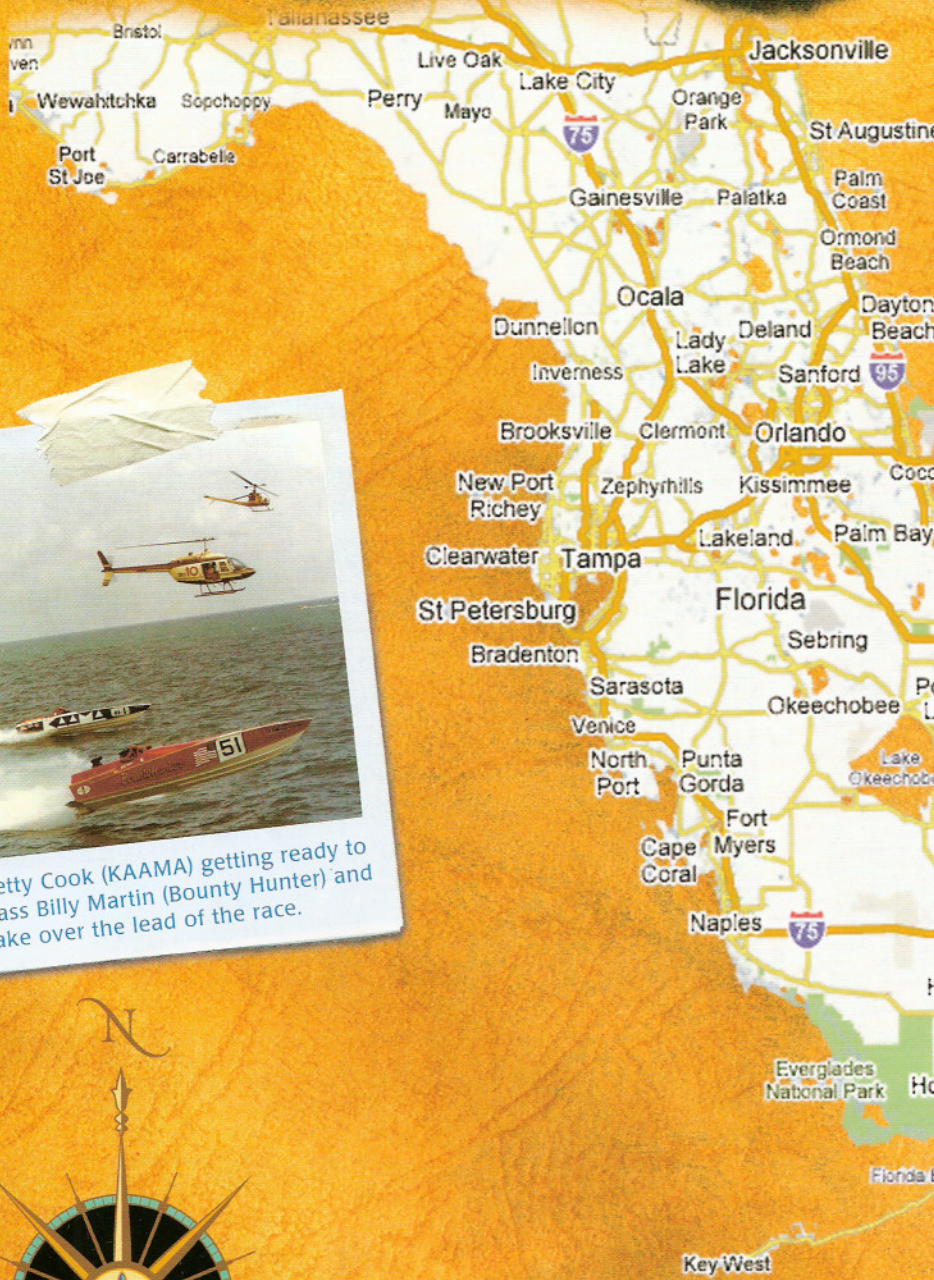


Champagne

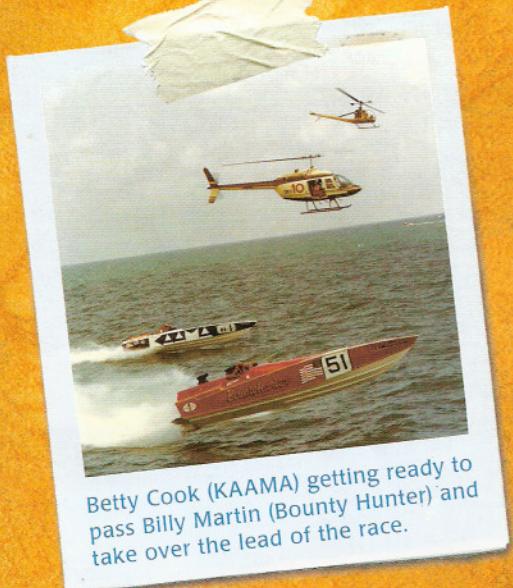
For the Holidays, of course...

Gear & Toys...

News & More...



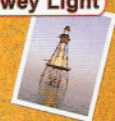
1979



Betty Cook (KAAMA) getting ready to pass Billy Martin (Bounty Hunter) and take over the lead of the race.



...the course was...
194 of the most grueling miles
of my life... - CHARLIE MCCARTHY (1979)*



HISTORIC PHOTOS COURTESY HORBA ARCHIVES



the GLORY days

BY CHARLIE MCCARTHY

MIAMI TO BIMINI RACE

AKA, the Sam "Mr. Offshore" Griffith Trophy Race

Sam Griffith was a larger than life figure. He had inherent leadership qualities that made people want to follow him wherever he went. He was a war hero, a Colonel in the Army, and even survived a parachute landing where the chute didn't open. He was awarded every medal... except the Congressional Medal of Honor, by three governments for his exploits in the war. He was the original Wildman doing everything from flying dangerous missions to smuggling rubies out of India.

Sam Griffith defined the word "Tough".



1979 Winners

Jose Bacardi Race sponsor
 Betty Cook Owner "KAAMA" / Driver
 Bill Vogel Navigator
 John Connor Throttleman



Preston Henn in Natural Light, a 38 ft Bertram, in the run towards Bimini.

The 194 mile Miami-Bimini Course was not a simple open ocean crossing. It ran as follows: Starting at Government Cut, Miami, the racers headed south to Fowey Light (a light house beacon), rounded it and headed back to Miami. Back at Miami, they headed offshore to Bimini.... after rounding Bimini, they headed back to Miami. At Miami, they took a 90 degree turn North to Fort Lauderdale, rounded the marker and headed South back down to the Fowey Light again. They rounded Fowey Light and headed North to the finish line at Government Cut, Miami - 194 miles later...

GLORY DAYS | MIAMI TO BIMINI

TOP BANANA ▶

Charlie McCarthy driving, Ron Morrison as Navigator and Paul Lesnewski as throttleman.



CLASSIC OFFSHORE

BOUNTY HUNTER

Owner Billy Martin was the throttleman and Hal Sahlman as the driver in this 39 ft Cigarette.

When Sam came back from the war, he became consumed by a passion for the sport of offshore racing and he had a real knack for bringing big name sponsors into the sport. Sam loved the Miami - Bimini race more than any other and over the years he helped to turn it into a huge event with thousands of spectator boats and the sexy feel that only Miami can offer. Unfortunately we lost Sam to cancer in 1963. In order to memorialize his name, we named this race after him and the World Championship Trophy. For the next ten years, Hennessy Cognac sponsored the Miami - Bimini race and then Bacardi stepped up as the title sponsor, but to the racers it was always known as the Sam Griffith Trophy Race. Sam was the original Mr. Offshore... Aronow was the second.

Offshore Racing | Over the years, the Miami - Bimini course changed several times. It varied in length from 145 miles in the early years to 210 miles in the later years. In 1979 the course was 194 of the most grueling miles of my life, it was one race that I'll never forget. We hauled Top Banana into the pits in Miami leading in the point chase for the national championship by virtue of winning the first race of the year two months earlier at the Bushmills Grand Prix in California.

The fleet of race boats back then was huge, we ran in the Open Class and had sixteen other entries to race against. I remember the start of the race being very dramatic. We'd mill under the Miami skyline, then take a running start passed the cruise ships at dock inside Government Cut. Then we raced straight out the Cut into the ocean where

the real fun started. Once we got into the ocean and found a rhythm we adjusted our trim and tried to stay near the leaders. Howard Quam in Flap Jack, a 38 foot Bertram was first out of the channel followed by Joe Ippolito in Michelob Light, a 38 foot Scarab and Preston Henn in Natural Light another 38 foot Bertram, followed by Betty Cook in KAAMA a 38 foot Scarab. I was driving my 38 foot banana boat, Top Banana and was running about 6th alongside Billy Martin in his new 39 foot Cigarette, Bounty Hunter.

Before the race, I couldn't find my helmet so I borrowed one that was a little too big. I ended up wearing a balaclava inside the helmet to take up the extra space. I soon realized that I had made a bad decision, as it was now slipping further down over my eyes with every hard landing. We came off plane and I adjusted it back up inside the helmet and we started off again. Less than ten minutes later, we had to stop again and this time I just took my helmet off and threw the damn balaclava over the side.

By this time we had been passed by all the Open Class boats as they headed south to the checkpoint at Fowey Light. At that checkpoint the boats made a 180 degree turn back to the checkpoint off Government Cut. There was a huge spectator fleet off Government Cut, and by the time that we got back there, some of the spectator boats had gathered in the channel that we were to use to turn toward Bimini. We couldn't find an opening in the spectator fleet and went past the channel. We had to come back to where the Coast Guard was now chasing the spectators away from the channel and we could finally get out and start heading east toward Bimini.



*My throttleman,
being as competitive as always,
kept the boat going just as if
I was still conscious...*

- CHARLIE MCCARTHY (1979)

Needless to say, we were far behind the fleet at this point and we needed all the help we could get. I remembered a conversation that I had with Jim Wynne regarding a previous Miami – Bimini race that he had entered many years before. He said that the racers just get on a heading and hold it the whole way across, then find themselves hitting land a few miles north of the checkpoint because of the way the Gulf Stream currents pushed them North. At this point I had nothing to lose, so I turned the boat a few degrees south from our planned compass heading and we headed off as fast as we could, considering the conditions.

On the Gulf Stream crossing, the seas were running 4 to 6 feet with an occasional 10 footer thrown in for good measure. Even on the inshore run down to Fowey light, the water was big enough for Joey Ippolito to have lost his throttleman, Jack Stuteville, who had injured his knee on reentry after launching off a huge swell. He didn't actually lose him; Jack couldn't continue so he jumped overboard and swam to a spectator boat. Joey didn't even come off plane to let him get out, he didn't lose much time at all, his navigator grabbed the sticks and they continued on. Betty also took some hard hits and even had the wind knocked out of her, forcing her to stop for a couple of minutes and catch her breath. Howard Quam had engine problems and while trying to repair them got very seasick, that ended his day.

During our crossing we never saw another boat, either they were off course or we were. As it turns out, the Gulf Stream was running very strong that day and did it's job

for us. Top Banana came right up on the checkpoint and as we approached we could see other boats coming down from the north as they had drifted too far that way when they crossed. Jim Wynne's advice turned out to be our salvation as we went from last place to sixth by the time we turned at the Bimini checkpoint. On the way back, I slowly distanced Top Banana from everyone else and used the Gulf Stream in reverse for the westerly crossing, things were starting to go our way until we came off a very big wave and landed with a loud cracking that made my heart sink. We discovered that we had cracked the deck from the center to the rubrail on one side. The hull was untouched so we got right back in the hunt.

When we got back to the Government Cut checkpoint, we were in fourth place with Billy Martin in Bounty Hunter leading, followed by Betty Cook in KAAMA and Joey Ippolito in Michelob Light just in front of us and there only three boats left behind us. The Gulf Stream had lived up to it's reputation that day. By the time the fleet had turned for Port Everglades, 11 of the 17 boats in the Open class had either broken or dropped out due to injury.

The next leg took us north to Fort Lauderdale with a right turn off Port Everglades then head back south. On the way north we came off another exceptionally large wave and landed at an angle that threw me forward and pinned me between the steering wheel and the bolster and knocked me out for a few seconds. My throttleman, being as competitive as always, kept the boat going just as if I was still conscious.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 56 ▼



FLAP JACK
Howard Quam was the driver and Keit Hazell was the throttleman in this 38 foot Bertram.

Jack couldn't continue... so he jumped overboard and swam to a spectator boat. Joey didn't even come off plane to let him get out...



MICHELOB LIGHT
Joe Ippolito in the 38 foot Scarab, along with Bobby Moore and Jack Stuteville.

When we made the turn at Port Everglades in fourth place, I drove the boat right toward the beach instead of the 180 degree turn as planned. My navigator thought I had lost my mind or was still damaged from being knocked out, as he tried to get me to correct my course and get back on the planned heading. Three years earlier, this had been the exact spot that I had suffered mechanical failure in this

race and was left with only one engine. I noticed that the closer I got to the beach, the calmer the water became. I was hoping for the same conditions today.

I put the Top Banana 100 feet off the beach and trimmed up to get every ounce of speed out of a boat that was now light on fuel load and in calm waters. I will admit that we ran inside of some swimmers in front of the hotels and I regret doing it but all I could see was Joey Ippolito's Michelob Light, in front of us and I was on a mission to pass him. He was about a mile offshore fighting the Gulf Stream as we passed him by for third while running almost in the surf line. Betty had passed Martin taking

over first place and we were closing in on both of them. Unfortunately, we ran out of calm water and had to go seaward again to make the checkpoint at Government Cut.

As we raced by Government Cut, we passed the checkpoint in that order, Betty in KAAMA, then Martin in Bounty Hunter and then the Top Banana. There was just a few miles left, south to Fowey Light then back to Government Cut for the finish line. We ran hard to Fowey and almost caught Billy when we threw a prop blade which made one engine vibrate badly forcing us to slow down or tear it apart completely. In a moment we realized that our gallant charge for the front was over. We made the turn at Fowey and ran it as hard as we dared in order to keep Ippolito behind us. It worked, at the finish we came in third with Joey a close fourth.

The race ended in that order. Betty Cook and KAAMA won \$13,000 for first place and a beautiful trophy from Tiffany & Company. Billy Martin and Bounty Hunter finished second. As for me and the Top Banana team... well we finished third, but I wouldn't trade that day for anything.

-Charlie

Charlie McCarthy is founder of the Banana Boat Company (under the guidance and help of Don Aronow), he's a longtime boater/racer and Managing Director of HORBA - And we are positive that he's got a few more stories to tell...

I remember that race!!!

Billy Martin has recently come out of retirement and is now racing again in the OPA circuit. While at the OPA race in Ocean City, MD (see story on page 72) we got a chance to ask Billy about this particular race.

I should have won it but I beat myself. We took such a pounding that day going back and forth across to Bimini; I was punchy and just lost my concentration. On the last leg of the race, I thought I was trimming down when I was actually trimming up. The boat was flying all over the place and I thought something was broken. I was broken, everything else was working fine. Betty got by us before I figured it out and got the boat under control again. I should have won that race!

- BILLY MARTIN (2006)



To find out more about the Historic Offshore Race Boat Association visit www.historicraceboats.com