



The Maxis

Maxi yachts, those 80ft-plus behemoths that reigned supreme during the free-spending 1980s, were statements of art, style and wealth as much as racing machines. Costing \$2–3 million to build and another \$1 million to campaign each year, they attracted an exclusive band of entrepreneurs, men such as Californian real estate developer Jim Kilroy, Greek shipping magnate George Coumantaros, shipping broker Summer A (Huey) Long, Frenchman Jacques Dewailly, Italian Gianni Varasi, American Bill Koch and Italian Raoul Gardini. All winners in their respective worlds, these men found the cut and thrust of racing these ultimate yachts the ultimate of sports too.

The yachts they campaigned with such ferocity in the exclusive waters off Hawaii, San Francisco, Nassau, Costa Smeralda and Cowes represented the very best – and worst – of racing under the International Offshore Rule. They were built to make and break passage records in such races as the Bermuda, Fastnet and Sydney-Hobart classics, but an uncontrolled arms-race transformed them into oversized day-racers. That, and the continuous rule changes under the IOR, slowly killed the sport.

In their heyday, there was no sight more dramatic than a fleet of these 35-ton maxis barrelling along, yards apart, towards a mark, with twenty-five or more crewmen on each, all straining to control the mass of canvas above them. They were raced like dinghies with no quarter given and became the glamour end of the sport.

The championship winners changed from year to year, but for most of that decade the winning designs invariably stemmed from the drawing board of one man – Germán Frers. His run of successes began with John Kahlbetzer's *Bumblebee 4*, which won the maxi world championship in 1980 and was followed by Cornelis van Rietschoten's famous Whitbread round the world race winner *Flyer*; George Coumantaros' all-conquering *Boomerang*, which won the world championship in 1985 and 1986, *Kialoa V*, Jim Kilroy's winner in 1987, and Raoul Gardini's famous *II Moro di Venezia III*, the top boat in 1988.

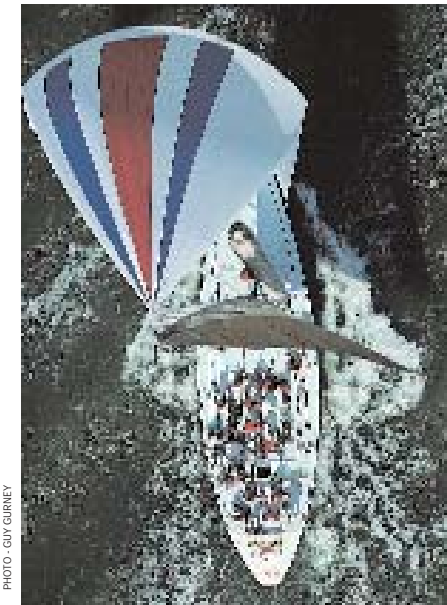


PHOTO: GUY GURNEY

Racing at its best. (opposite) 'Three Frers' designed maxis - 'Matador' owned by Bill Koch, Raoul Gardini's 'Il Moro di Venezia III' and 'Ondine VII' owned and campaigned by shipping magnate Huey A Long, during the 1988 Kenwood Cup series off Hawaii.

'Kialoa V' (above) the last of Jim Kilroy's illustrious line of maxi racing yachts. In 1987, she won the SORC series and maxi championships at Newport and Porto Cervo before clinching the world championship.

PHOTO: ALASTAIR BLACKPILL