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Bounty tragedy

My night of h

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Out of Africa
Schooner returns

Super 6-Metre
Rebuilt to race

30 glorious years
Building wood
boats on the Tham



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Bounty tragedy My night of hell

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Six Metre *Valdai*
returns to racing



COVER PHOTO NIC COMPTON

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TIM WRIGHT

COVER STORY

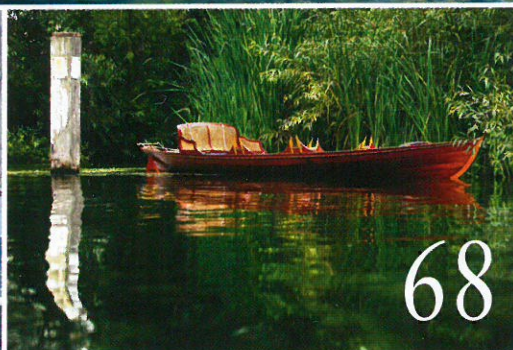
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VALDAI Metre Maid

In a class known for sleek looks and fast, wet racing, the Six Metre *Valdai* stands out, not least for a glorious restoration. *Kathy Mansfield* has the story



Above: Note the two strong ring frames in way of *Valdai's* mast
Left: Redecked, and sporting new Meissner winches

Amere 106 years after the first Six Metre was launched, this famous class continues to enthuse sailors, designers and boatbuilders alike, determined to keep or return these fast and exciting boats to racing condition.

Sixes always were the most popular and numerous class within the Metre Rule, and they are seeing a resurgence now. Only a handful of the classics remain to be restored, and there is a full schedule of racing at national and European level, with Six Metre fleets on both coasts of the US and further afield.

Valdai was one of a pair of Six Metres designed by Alfred Mylne in 1930 to the Second International Racing Rule – the other was *Beausobre*, restored recently and sailing on Lac Léman in Switzerland. *Beausobre* came to the Solent during the Six Metre Worlds and the Metre Centenary Regatta in 2007 and did well in a strong class of 25 boats. Now her sistership *Valdai* has been restored in Cornwall by Tom Owen, raising the tantalising prospect of a head-to-head race.

Mylne started his career back in the 1890s, working in the design office of the highly respected naval architect GL Watson, known for his scientific approach to yacht design. This was not lost on the young Mylne, and the drawings for *Valdai* reflect this careful calculation. His boats carried



KATHY MANSFIELD

massive sail areas, which would have imposed large stresses on hull form, so they were carefully built and reinforced using top quality materials. Mylne and his namesake nephew encouraged contemporary designers and builders to keep standards high to achieve good value for the first owner and subsequent ones – though they would all doubtless have been amazed to see so many of these boats still sailing in the 21st century.

PASSED THROUGH MANY HANDS

However, *Valdai* has had a hard life with many owners, unusually little racing and episodes of neglect. One previous owner, seeing her newly restored, was moved to say that she has at long last reached a loving family. “I doubt that she has ever looked as impressive as she does now since the day she was launched.”

She was built at the well-known Bute Slip Dock Company in Port Bannatyne on the Isle of Bute, for one Robert Clark of Glasgow, who along with his brothers commissioned a number of Six Metres, all beginning with the letter ‘V.’ He very soon sold her to Dr Robert Carslaw of Rhu, Dunbartonshire, who converted her to a cruiser and renamed her *Rowan III*, basing her on the Clyde at Greenock. He cruised her on the west coast of Scotland with his family, having installed a Stuart Turner engine and a forward hatch.

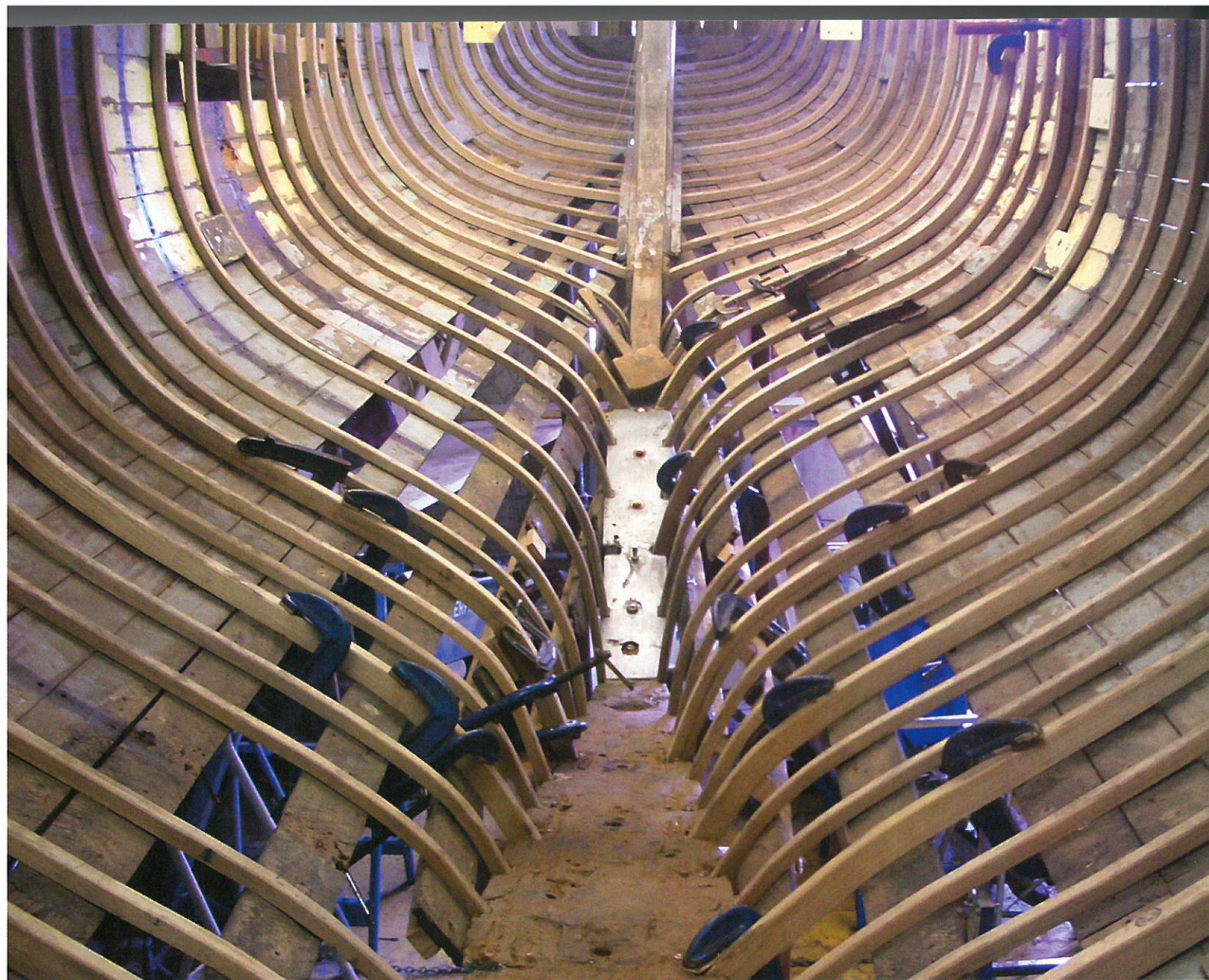
She changed hands several times after the war, becoming *Mameno*, then *Valdai* again when George Andrews of Newcastle took over in the 1950s. He let his teenage son John sail her with two friends, one of whom was Ed Cartner, who remembers the time fondly. They day-raced the boat under the burgee of the Royal Northumberland Yacht Club.

“*Valdai* was fast and wet, sailing through short seas rather than over them,” Ed said. “During one race, we had a fairly heavy collision with another Six Metre, *Rozelle*, that took a chunk out of our forefoot and resulted in a minor start of a seam at the stem. She seemed to suffer a slight but persistent leak after that. Needless to say, guardrails, lifejackets, flares, VHF and other ‘softy’ equipment was unknown, but we did carry a Fairey Duckling dinghy on long trips.

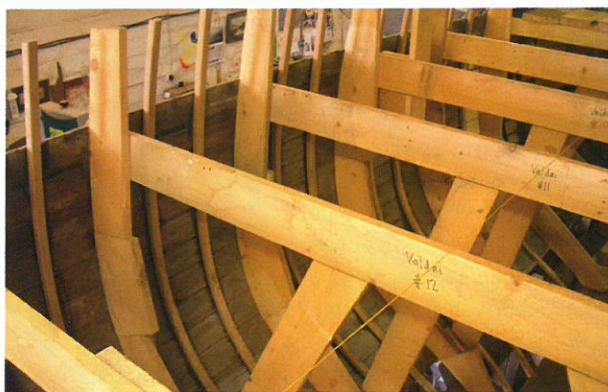
“Once John and I had shown we could handle *Valdai*, Mr Andrews allowed us to take the boat away during the long summer holidays from school. We would be at sea for up to three weeks at a time and usually headed north to visit havens and harbours of the Scottish southeast and the Firth of Forth. Occasionally we would be invited to join a local club race. Things were primitive, but perfectly adequate for adventurous teenage lads.”

Ed’s sister bought *Valdai* in the late 1960s and sailed her out of Sunderland until 1972, when she was bought

Previous spread and above: Valdai put in a creditable run at the British Championships off Mylor, Cornwall



Above: The boat was retimbered
Clockwise from right: Tom Owen produced a full set of moulds to correct her shape; she had new floors and new African mahogany planks below the waterline; new decks in Douglas fir; but kept her 2½ tonne keel





KATHY MANSFIELD

VALDAI

DESIGNER
Alfred Mylne

BUILT
Bute Slip Dock
Co, 1930

LENGTH
35ft 1in (10.7m)

WATERLINE LENGTH
24ft 11in
(7.6m)

BEAM
6ft 9in (2.1m)

DRAUGHT
5ft 3in (1.6m)

SAIL AREA
469sqft
(43.5m²)

by three new owners, Martin Royle, Philip Robino and Tom Sillwen and based in West Mersea, Essex. She was next identified in 1995, lying neglected on her side on the saltings of the River Deben in Suffolk. A man who hoped to buy her dealt with the Harwich Harbourmaster and the Receiver of Wrecks, who finally tracked down two alleged owners. They took the matter to court, and eventually she appeared for sale on eBay and was bought by Peter Wilson of Aldeburgh Boatyard, who began the process of saving her.

CAREFUL RESTORATION

But it was boatbuilder Tom Owen who was to finish the job, and fortunately for *Valdai*, he had trained at the International Yacht Restoration School in Newport, Rhode Island. His interest in Tumblaren and in Scandinavian designers must have led fairly easily to an interest in Metre boats, and Six Metre expert Tim Street guided him towards *Valdai*.

The deal done, Tom had the boat transported to his yard in Fowey, where he realised she was badly out of shape and hogged, exacerbated by the loss of her deck. He had to redraw *Valdai*'s lines and bring her back to the original shape, helped by the detailed plans left by Mylne, now part of the Mylne & Co archives owned by David Gray. Tom lofted the original plans, building and

installing a full set of moulds. Then the entire boat was retimbered and refloored with some good French oak sourced by John Moody in Modbury.

It certainly helped that Tom works with designer Ian Howlett, ex-chairman of the International Six Metre Association's technical committee. He had also worked with Andy Postle of Allspars rigging, who owns the classic Six Metre *Titia*, and Rees Martin, for many years Secretary of the British International Six Metre Association, and owner of a modern Six and a Tumlare.

About two-thirds of *Valdai*'s mahogany planking above the waterline was saved, being of good quality and perhaps partly protected by the mud in her Deben berth. She also has her original mahogany backbone and transom, her lead keel and rudder. But there was plenty of wet plywood and glassfibre to remove from poor repairs over the years. Tom removed the 2½-tonne keel in order to replace the keelbolts with new bronze ones, and replanked the boat below the waterline with African mahogany.

Tristan Stone in Salcombe found some Sitka spruce through his father in British Columbia to replace the beamshelf and the deck beams, along with some 40ft (12.2m) lengths of Douglas fir to plank the decks. John Moody also provided some beautiful Honduras mahogany for the covering boards and kingplank, coamings and trim – a wood not easy to find these days.

“People stop to gaze, to admire her lines, her uncluttered deck layout”



Clockwise from top left: Close-hauled off Mylor; boatbuilder Tom Owen; *Valdai* before; and after
Above: As *Rowan III* in Scotland

Valdai's mast needed to be repositioned and keel-stepped, an owner in the 1970s having reverted to a deck-stepped mast to save money at the time.

To strengthen the boat internally, Tom installed four ring frames, as per the class rules: two in way of the mast, one at the mainsheet track location and the final one where the runners are located. The two at the mast are rigged to take the full load through the shrouds, which come straight through the deck onto a metal tube. This tube is supported by the ring frames, and has an additional rigging wire and bottlescrew down to a metal plate that sits beneath the mast step.

The runner turning cheek blocks are mounted on a substantial box construction, which is bonded to the aft ring frame and bolted to the keelson, helping to spread the significant loads. And the forestay is mounted on a Bartels underdeck furler in bronze finish to match the beautiful Meissner bronze winches from Holmatro.

Tom had found three owners for *Valdai* who were able to be involved in the restoration process – Sir Robert Owen, his friend James Fairrie, and a Dutch colleague of his, Dirk Stolp. She was finished just in time to sail over from Fowey with a borrowed set of sails to the British Championships taking place at Mylor Yacht Haven near Falmouth, Cornwall. Her maiden voyage was a long one, due to lack of wind, setting out mid-morning and arriving at Mylor in the early hours of the next day, and racing a few hours later.

During the next few days, winds were lively, to say the least. It was a brave step to enter a fiercely contested championship with an untried boat, but it proved a good one. From that experience they were able to go on to the European Championships at Nynäshamn in Sweden, where they performed better still.

There will be more ‘bests’ to come as *Valdai*'s crew gets to know her, and meanwhile she is winning the beauty stakes everywhere. People stop to gaze, to admire her lines, her uncluttered and elegant deck layout. Her white aluminium mast looks good, but Tom is determined to build a competitive wooden spar for her further down the line, to show that it is possible.

Valdai will be much enjoyed. She's balanced both upwind and down, quickest in up to 12 knots of wind and able to catch the newer Third Rule boats, though after that, her lighter frame begins to tell against her. Like all Sixes, she's a wet ride, but that's part of the fun.

Meanwhile Tom has bought another exciting Six to restore: the 1947 David Boyd design *Marletta*, built to the Third Rule to race in the Olympics. She'll be subtly different, and a great temptation for anyone considering racing with Sixes. It's clear that Tom won't rest on his laurels for long, it's straight in to the next project.

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