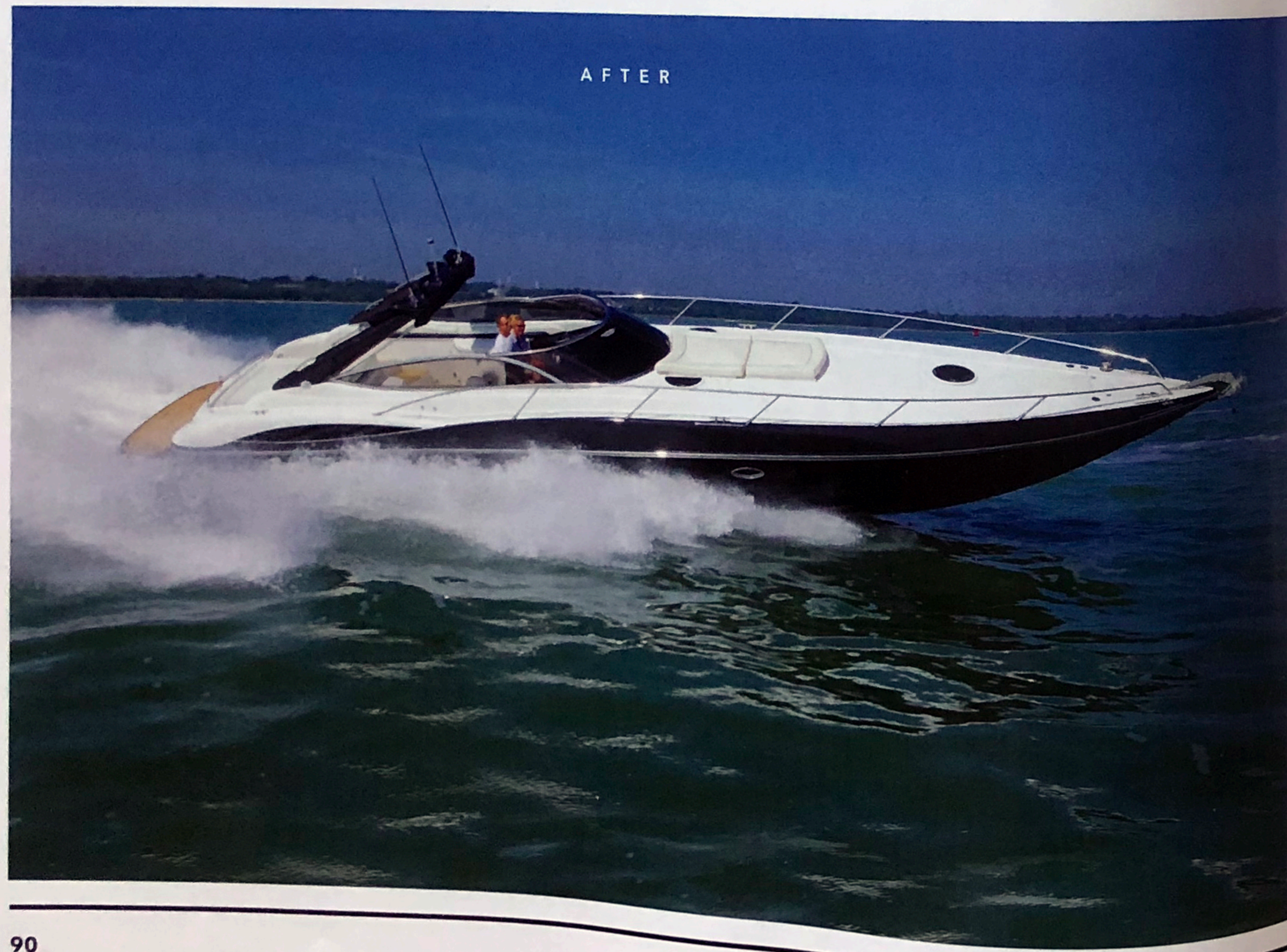




BEFORE



AFTER

SUPERHAWK 50 FLIES AGAIN

A busy family life set Tom Wiggin on a quest to find an affordable used sports cruiser that he could transform into the ultimate fast dayboat



Words Tom Wiggin Pictures Joe McCarthy and Jon Bagge

Friends and family regard me as a bit of a boat bore. My fascination for all things floating dates back to my childhood and a father who was a keen sailor. Indeed, all the holidays of my youth were spent, come rain or shine, on a comfortable 36ft ketch.

Later on as I started to earn money of my own, I was able to pursue my interest more voraciously. My first boat was an 18ft Ring with a huge Mercury outboard that I used for water-skiing in the Bristol Channel. It did almost 80mph and burnt through a 25-litre tank of petrol in under 15 mins. But what a boat! I loved it, even if the girls who were meant to be impressed by it were invariably appalled.

It wasn't until my late twenties that I discovered, thanks to my beautiful Dutch wife, that there was a whole world of boating fun to be had in the South of France. We rented a flat in Villefranche and purchased a 28ft Cranchi Corallo. We had a lot of fun in that boat and managed to sell it for more than we paid for it, a notable but never to be repeated achievement.

Subsequent upgrades included a Monte Carlo Offshorer 30, a Cranchi Aquamarina 31, a Cranchi Endurance 33 (the only new boat I have ever bought), and the then flagship of the Cranchi range, the Méditerranée 50. All of the Cranchis were great boats, designed for a specific purpose, built to a high standard and extremely well priced. Most of the time we used them as glorified day boats with friends and my growing family. The Med 50 was the one boat that we did sleep on occasionally, but a disastrous week of rain one half-term dented the rest of the family's enthusiasm for cruising and we reverted to dayboat use once more.

A brief flirtation with a 1986 Riva Bravo proved to me that an old boat was not necessarily a bad boat: the build quality was second to none and she ran like clockwork. But I wanted to try the 'cruising thing' again and for three years I owned a wonderful Ferretti 57 that we used to explore Sardinia, Corsica and the Italian and French rivieras. However, as our children grew older, our time became more constrained and I again found we had started to use her as a dayboat. This made no sense given the costs of

running a big boat in the South of France, so my thoughts returned to finding the ideal dayboat.

It needed to sit eight people for lunch around a table, have plenty of sunbathing space, a decent heads and the ability for four of us to overnight as and when. Crucially, I wanted more speed to get us further afield in less time.

Plenty of boats met the criteria, including models from Windy, Princess and others but my now boating-wise wife decreed that she didn't want one "that looked like everyone else's". I liked the idea of an Axopar 37 but she didn't like the loo being in the main cabin. The Rivarama 44 was perfect but too expensive. The Mochi 51 was too big. The Itamas and Pershings were only fast enough over a certain size and budget. A couple of friends had had good experiences with Hunttons but I couldn't find a 43 at a price I thought reasonable.

In the end, I concluded that I couldn't find the ideal modern boat so I began to consider buying an older, less expensive one and refitting it to suit my needs. I looked at Magnums and even an OTAM but, again, couldn't find the right boat at the right price. I ruled out the ▶

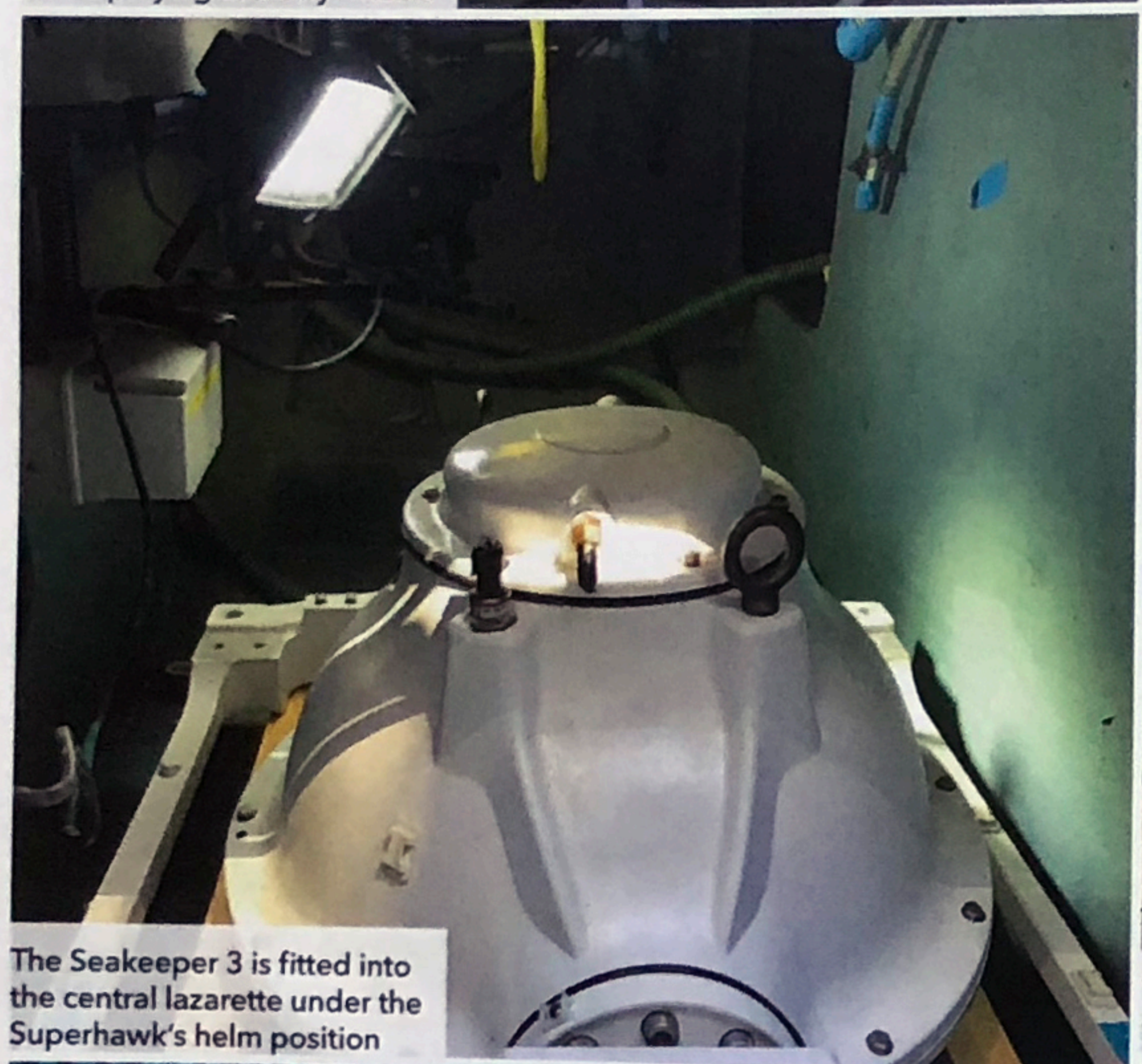
TOP LEFT: Tom's Superhawk 50 arrives back in the UK for the start of her winter transformation
BELOW LEFT: After the refit it looks and drives like a brand new boat with a top speed of almost 50 knots



The original blue and yellow gelcoat is sanded down ready for respraying at Desty Marine



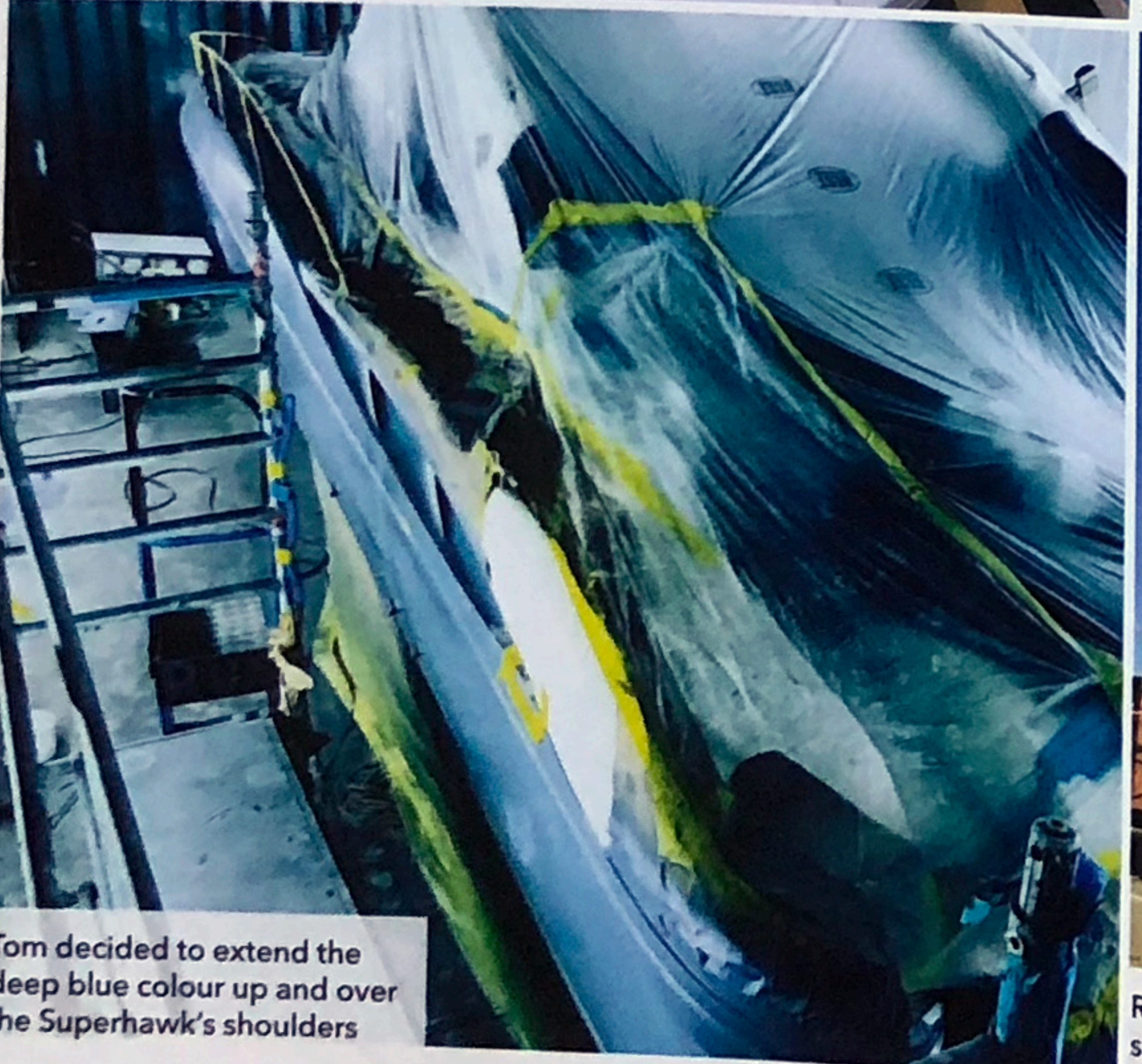
The old antifouling was stripped off and the hull filled and faired for Coppercoating



The Seakeeper 3 is fitted into the central lazarette under the Superhawk's helm position



The colours may be dated but the slender deep-vee hull is still as capable as ever



Tom decided to extend the deep blue colour up and over the Superhawk's shoulders



Resplendent in her new colour scheme with Coppercoat sprayed onto her undersides

I agreed a price of around €110,000 and had it brought back to St Tropez, where we enjoyed it for the summer

Sunseeker Superhawk 34 and 40 as too small but then I remembered that they made a 50 with fixed Trimax surface drives.

Before long I was looking at one in Holland fitted with triple Yanmar 420hp motors. The boat seemed in good condition but a subsequent viewing with a mechanic highlighted a significant problem and I walked away. In June 2017 I found another 2002 example located in the toe of Italy. It was in very good condition and had a full mechanical history. I agreed a price of around €110,000 and arranged for a delivery skipper to bring it back to St Tropez, where we enjoyed it for the summer with the idea of refitting her over the winter.

THE REFIT

The first step was to identify what was good and bad about the boat. Everything worked and the engines were reliable, if a little unloved. However, a previous owner's decision to fit a 4kW generator in the stern as well as a hydraulic passarelle had induced a serious tail-heavy trim that required huge amounts of tab to get it to run flat, not to mention a top speed that was 10 to 15 knots below its 48-knot potential.

The interior was very dated including a carpet that had seen better days. The exterior also had that yellow boot top that Sunseeker used to use back in the 90s, so that needed to go too. I was also keen to look into fitting a gyro stabiliser and it made sense to overhaul the engines, drives and electrical system while we were about it. The cockpit upholstery was in good condition but the nav gear needed updating, as did the sun-faded walnut dashboard and the worn teak on the bathing platform.

The next step was to decide who would do the work. Nigel Cooke at Max Marine One in Grimaud had always looked after me well but I wasn't so confident about the subcontractors we would have to use - not least because I would be less able to monitor the cost, quality and progress of their work. I'd seen Landau UK at various boat shows and chatted to one of

their employees Jon Bagge on several occasions. It was clear to me that here was an individual with the attention to detail, the passion and the encyclopaedic knowledge that I was looking for. And Landau is based on the Hamble, 90 minutes from home.

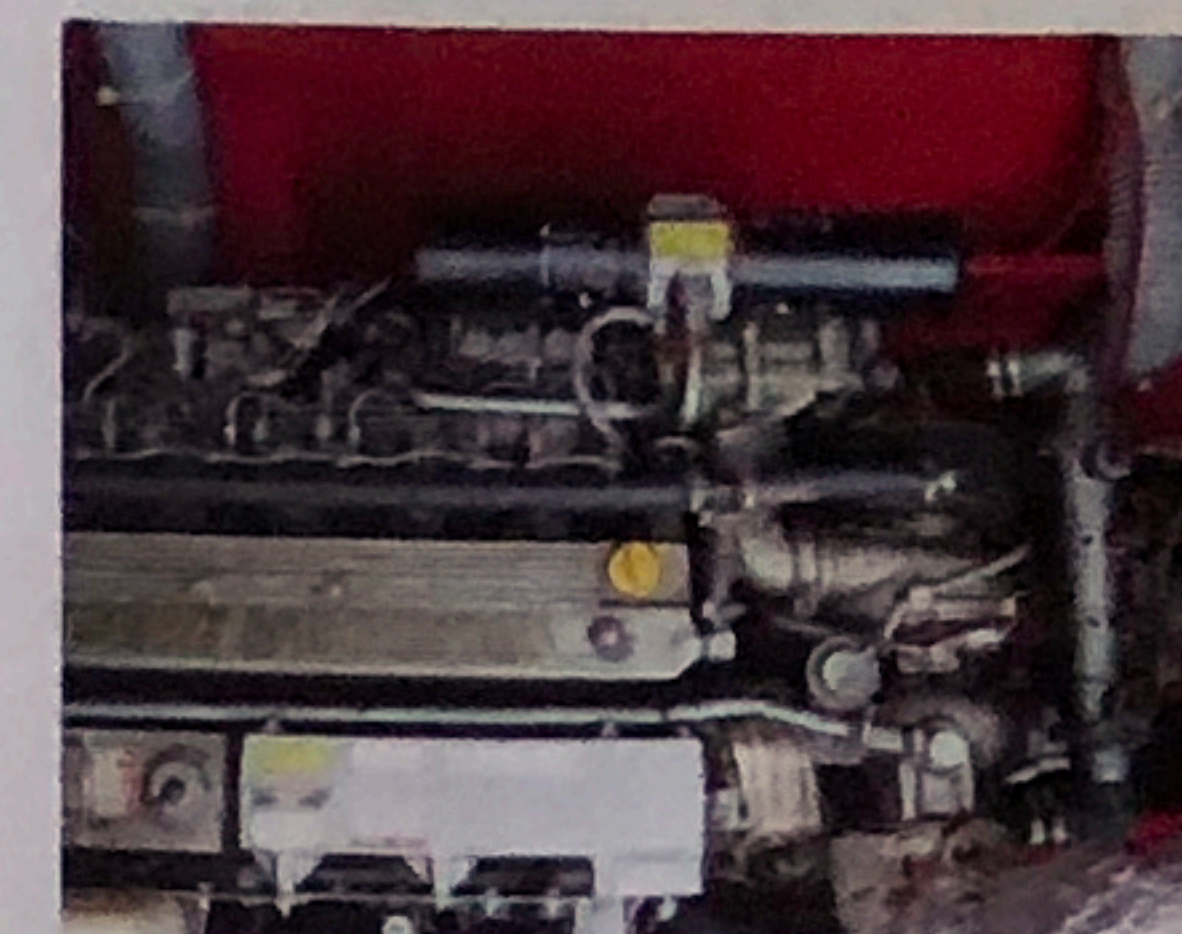
My decision to bring the boat back to the UK was quickly proved to be the right one when I was charged €750 to put her on the lorry in France but only £250 to lift her off the other end. Coast 2 Coast transport did the move, flawlessly and at a competitive price.

ENGINES

Soon after her arrival, Golden Arrow removed the engines, gearboxes, shafts and rudders. A bench test confirmed they were still delivering their prescribed power, much to my relief, as a full rebuild would have been prohibitively expensive. So, instead, I asked for all the ancillary parts to be removed, reconditioned, serviced or replaced. This included oil coolers, heat exchangers, starter motors, alternators and turbos. All the hoses were also replaced and the gearboxes sent back to ZF for a full overhaul. I would not hesitate to use Golden Arrow again.

STABILISER

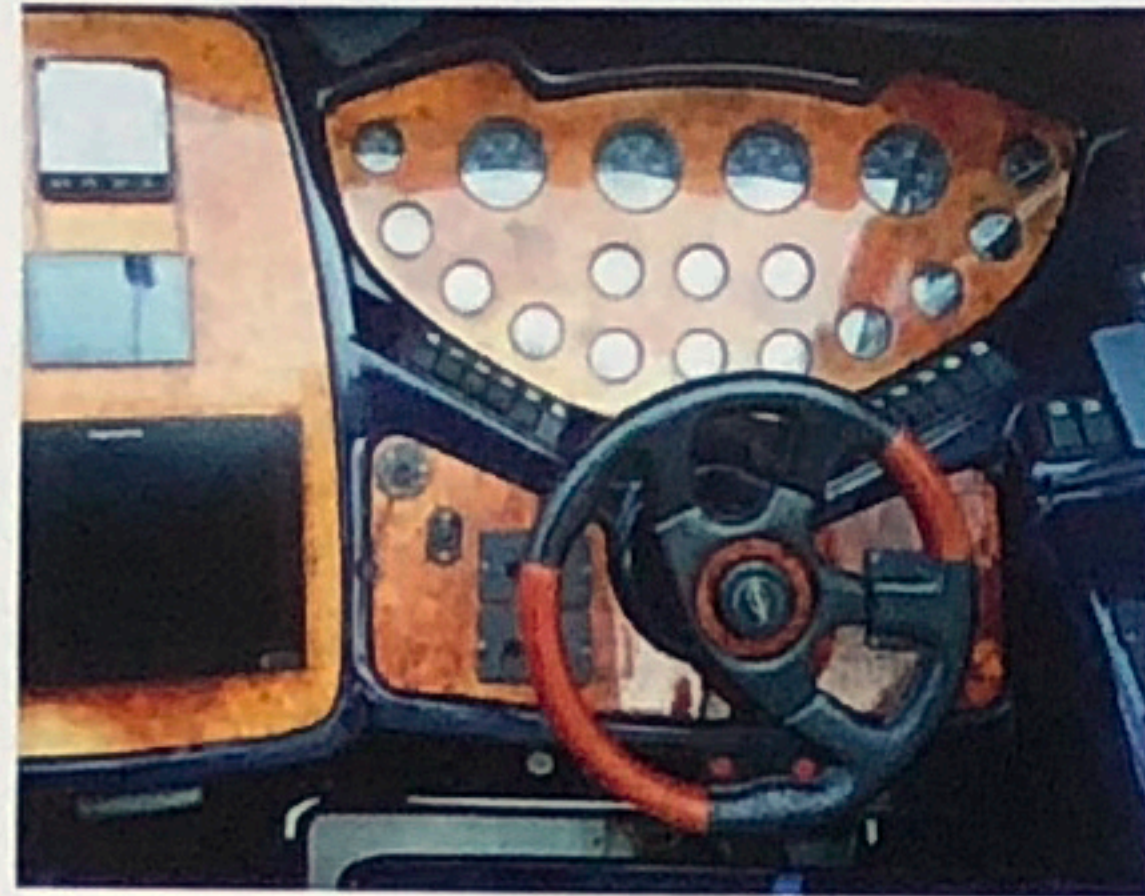
Owing to the speed of the Superhawk, the only real option was a gyro stabiliser. I looked at the Quick MC2 X but they didn't seem very interested in the project, so I went to see Seakeeper's UK agent Osmotech instead. Limited space meant that only the smallest ▶



TOP All three Yanmar engines were removed, serviced and refurbished with new pumps, hoses and ancillaries

MIDDLE The surface drive propellers were reground and polished to maximise performance

BOTTOM The lazarette where the Seakeeper 3 stabiliser was installed



TOP: The existing teak on the bathing platform was badly worn and had to be replaced with Flexiteek

MIDDLE: The burr walnut helm was faded and the original 2002 nav gear needed updating

BOTTOM: The interior was in good condition but the high gloss cabinetry looked dated

I can run the whole boat on batteries, knowing that the generator will kick in as and when it is required

Seakeeper 3 would fit. It's only recommended for boats up to 40ft but because the Superhawk is so narrow and light everyone agreed it would work. There was some debate about whether an AC or a DC powered unit would be better but my desire to avoid running the generator all the time won over and Landau came up with the brilliant idea of increasing the battery bank and installing a new lightweight Fischer Panda genset (less than half the weight of the old Kohler) that would start automatically when needed. I can now run the whole boat on batteries, including the air conditioning and icemaker, knowing that the generator will kick in when required. Once spooled up the Seakeeper uses relatively little power and should run for four to five hours on batteries alone, longer if everything else is switched off. It also showed an 86% reduction in roll on tests and has already proved to be a transformational bit of kit.

EXTERIOR

I wanted to make the most of the Superhawk's natural curves so after much agonising over whether to paint or vinyl wrap it, I decided to have it painted but extend the colour above the rubbing strake to take in the boat's curvaceous 'shoulders' as well as the insides of the engine vents. This has proved to be highly effective, although I have to take extra care with lines and fenders to avoid any wear and have fitted stainless rubbing bars on the bow and midships as well as a pair of chunky fairleads at the bow. Desty Marine did the work, stripping off all the old antifoul, repairing any imperfections and spray painting the underwater sections with Coppercoat to avoid the annual cost of antifouling and facilitate a hoped for increase in performance. In cost terms, I should break even in two to three years, but I haven't seen a perceptible increase in top speed.

I replaced the worn teak on the bathing platform and the walkway into the cockpit with Flexiteek G2 to match the existing teak in the cockpit. I then designed a mast for the top of the radar arch and added a pair of searchlights and aerials - more for symmetry than practical use! All the hatches were resealed and the locks upgraded, and I replaced the plastic cockpit

table with a gorgeous teak affair with detachable leaves to extend it when needed. I had the bimini covers serviced and the aft one replaced. Finally, I decided to wrap the radar arch and dashboard moulding to match the hull, as painting them would have meant removing the windscreen at considerable cost.

INTERIOR

I wanted to avoid reupholstering the main cabin as the leather was in good condition and the cost high. Instead, I asked the Wild Group to vinyl wrap all the woodwork. Assuming it lasts, this has been a brilliant way of modernising the look. Add to this a Flexiteek floor in the galley, bathroom and saloon and the interior now looks much more contemporary. Upgrades to the fresh water pump, LED lights instead of halogens and various wall linings means it looks and feels like new inside.

HELM

The original Raymarine autopilot functioned perfectly and I like the modern Raymarine kit so I fitted a new Axiom 12 with 3D transducer and a repeater i70s so that I can keep an eye on depth or speed without touching the Axiom. It also shows the AIS received from other vessels on a new Raymarine VHF. To top it off I went to the expense of having a piece of software designed so that I could display my exhaust gas temperatures on the Axiom via Maretron control units and sensors. The Seakeeper display fitted neatly in to the remaining space but to refresh the look of the dash I ordered a custom-made solid aluminium fascia, turned by hand to resemble a 1920s Bugatti dashboard. I kept the old steering wheel partly for sentimental



The custom-made machined aluminium dash transforms the look of the helm



New Flexiteek G2 decking looks the part and will be easier to maintain in the Med



All the cabinet doors are wrapped in cream and oak vinyl for a contemporary look



The forward cabin got the same vinyl trim treatment along with new LED lighting



New bathroom fittings and the vinyl wrapping treatment also transform the bathroom



ABOVE: The Superhawk's elegant lines have been subtly enhanced by Tom's new colour scheme and it still drives as well as ever

BELOW: Triple 440hp Yanmar engines and Trimax surface drives will get Tom to the best South of France anchorages ahead of the chasing pack

I now have a superb, good-as-new boat capable of 47 knots with graceful lines and full stabilisation

reasons, but also because it's comfortable and effective. The helm now looks the part and has all the equipment to make life easy on board.

CONCLUSIONS

I am delighted with the end result. Not only do I now have a superb good-as-new boat capable of 47 knots and fully stabilised but it has also, in my opinion, got the graceful lines and sleek looks that its modern counterparts fail to achieve. Budget wise, I am sorry to report that I did get a bit carried away, not because I miscalculated, but more from not being able

to say no to those myriad simple fixes, like re-seating all the cockpit drains that had been boded at some point with excessive amounts of Sikaflex, the remoulding of the anchor locker to stop the chain from piling up, or simply changing the lights in the engine room (for no better reason than that the old ones were ugly and stained).

The mechanical overhaul did cost substantially more than I had originally budgeted for but I think that was my own naivety; this boat has three engines not two, so every job is 50% more expensive than normal, and certain aspects like sending the gearboxes back to ZF I simply hadn't really allowed for. The aim, however, was to get a perfect condition, fast, stabilised boat for less than the cost of new or newer one, and I think I managed that. The stabiliser is astonishingly effective both at rest and perhaps surprisingly, also underway. But most of all, I have hugely enjoyed the whole process. I owe Jon Bagge from Landau UK a huge thank you for his tireless devotion and energy and wouldn't hesitate to recommend him to anyone thinking of a similar project. Without him this project would have been very hard and full of hideous errors. Paying an overseer is a significant cost but in this case it was worth every penny.



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