

# WHAT MAKES BERTRAM GO

*Those magnificent Moppies  
return to racing  
in a bid for glory  
in the Bahamas 500*

By Frank Rohr



Richard Bertram's triumphant expression clearly confirms his competitive viewpoint: "I race for the fun of it."

No matter what the outcome of the Bahamas 500 this month, a brace of brave and well-prepared drivers will have entered with all expectations of success. Their boats, which were nearing completion just a month before the start, two 31' fiberglass Bertrams; their names, Dick Bertram and Peter Rittmaster; their cause, competition.

This dual entry marks the consolidated return of the Bertram manufacturing plant to ocean powerboat racing after a four-year hiatus. As one of the two drivers for the company to which he's given his name, Richard H. Bertram will drive *My Moppie*. Pete Rittmaster of Bertram Yacht Division of Nautec Corp., who sparked this company effort, will helm *Master Moppie*.

The Bertram *Moppie* hull itself, young ancestor of the new boats, is legend in this stern sport, and well worthy of the aura. From 1960 to 1965 for example, Bertrams literally dominated ocean powerboat racing.

Whence—and what—the *Moppie*? Seems that rag sailor Bertram, in Newport for a 1958 America's Cup berth in the 12-Meter contender *Vim*, noticed the splendid rough water performance of a then new powerboat designed by G. Raymond Hunt of Marblehead, Mass. The Hunt concept inspired Dick's initial *Moppie*, a 30-footer powered by twin 275-hp Interceptors.

"We built her for our own use," says Bertram, "but she turned into such a fantastic rough water craft, we determined to enter her in the 1960 Miami-Nassau race."

That 185-mile bout, roughest ever, was won by Dick Bertram with co-driver Sam Griffith, the late and acknowledged father of ocean powerboat racing, and crewman-author Carleton Mitchell, in the record time

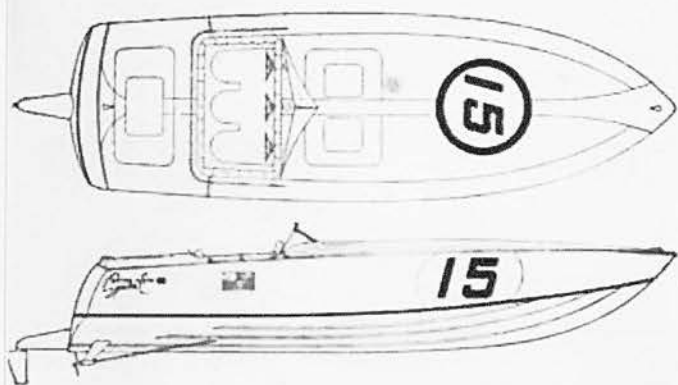
of eight hours and at speeds to 50 knots. Second finisher, Jim Wynne's 23' *Aqua Hunter*, also a Ray Hunt design, came in two and a half hours later. The rest of the fleet finished the following day.

This performance was a stunning surprise to practicing designers, racers, and practical boatmen everywhere. An imaginative adaptation of the displacement hull, V-shaped from stem to stern, the remarkable *Moppie* leaped two decades of hull design to provide a stable seakindly shape with the high-speed ability of a conventional planing type. The four underwater strakes on each side of her bottom damped and encouraged planing, and the deep-V itself produced a dramatically softer ride even at wave-shattering speeds of 40 and 50 knots.

Chines now appeared above the waterline, helping keep the boat dry. She clung to her course with bulldog tenacity, even in following seas, and banked like a Le Mans racing car.

Says Bertram: "She was our prototype, and became a pattern. We cast a mold from her, founded Bertram Yacht Co., to build *Moppie* replicas."

The rest is history. Until 1964, *Moppies* swept the classic Miami-Nassau race consistently, with Dick himself driving again in 1961 in the 32' *Glass Moppie*. Outside the Islands of June, factory built and, since '63, privately owned *Moppie* types, stoking everything from I/O's to diesels, have lapped up laurels in the Around L.I. Marathon, the Sam Griffith Memorial and Miami-Key West races and, abroad, the English Cowes-Torquay and Italian Viareggio-Bastia bouts. The *Moppie's* existence altered our concepts of hull forms, and she inspired, naturally, a host of



New 31' Moppie—Bertram Nautec Special. Bertram will drive My Moppie; Rittmaster, Master Moppie.



Left to right: engineer and co-driver Sammy James, driver Peter Rittmaster and new Moppie designer Russell Specht.

Frank Rose

imitators, many quite successful. After the company withdrew from factory competition in 1963, Dick built and raced his own *Moppies* through '65. That year, almost inevitably, he became the world's powerboat racing champion in his 36' Detroit Diesel-powered *Brave Moppie*.

The two new Bertram competition hulls are not radically different from the Hunt configuration. They are, rather, logical engineering extensions of that flashing deep-V design, drawn this year by veteran racer and Bertram engineer Russ Specht. An old Miami-Havana powerboat driver "before that place changed hands," Specht, who is now vice president of engineering, research and production at Bertram Yacht Division of Nautec, says: "We've had these plans on the boards for nearly two years; might have been back in factory racing sooner if we hadn't been too busy with regular production."

According to Specht, the new 31' *Moppies* are different in that their entry is keener, sharper. They also have a hopefully more advantageous length/beam ratio, which should improve speed in a seaway. The traditional *Moppie* lift strakes have been refined in size, and there's been a subtle improvement in their placement on the hull. Deadrise, at this writing, was still a deep secret, this dimension being as jealously guarded by powerboat designers as are rudder shapes by America's Cup contenders.

A major and public difference, however, between the new *Moppies* and their peers in the Bahamas 500 is in engine layout. Offshore race boats with inboard or I/O power usually have engines mounted side by side behind the cockpit, to keep weight aft and

props in the water when planing. But Dick Bertram's *My Moppie* and Pete Rittmaster's *Master Moppie* have an offset tandem arrangement, with one engine aft of the cockpit with a standard V-drive, the other forward of the cockpit and equipped with a Z-drive. Both are slightly off center.

The latter, to the layman, would show a drive shaft hook-up to a small Pandora's box of gears. But it effects an underwater prop position with an efficiency that unfortunate lady never could have equaled. This unusual arrangement, according to both drivers, has two great assets: 1) Shafts can now be laid advantageously deep in the hull, and as close together as practicable. This has paramount import in the low-flying bombs offshore racing has developed, for when boats leapfrog wave-crests at 50-knot speeds, props that leave the water race wildly and destructively, contributing to great engine attrition. 2) There is far better engine accessibility.

"Not that there are opportunities for major repairs under way" admits Bertram, "but you've got to make adjustments at times and, while ashore, mechanics tinker with powerplants right up to the starting gun. So this accessibility is highly desirable."

The V-Z couple in Bertram's case is a pair of 427-cu.-in. MerCruiser inboards; in Rittmaster's, twin Chrysler 426-cu.-in. "hemi-heads." Both are long proven units in Bertram yachts, though—like most competition powerplants—they will undoubtedly have the benefit of some special refinements for the Bahamas 500.

Both drivers feel that whatever this new arrange-

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ment sacrifices in heavy-weight placement aft—and the sacrifice is negligible," says Rittmaster—it gains immeasurably in deeper shaft and prop location, and engine accessibility. Moreover, the new system obviates the need for one left and one right hand engine.

My *Moppie* and *Master Moppie* are fiberglass, as are all Bertram Yachts these days from the 20' run-about to the brand new 37' Salon Cruiser. Both new *Moppies*, says Specht, are definitely designed for rough water. But those who remember Odell Lewis' 1963 Miami-Nassau victory in a 25' Bertram over glassy seas will expect them to do equally well on the flat. Approximate cost of each, including engine: \$50,000.

Aside from the compelling competition signaled by this Bahamas 500, and its promise of rich personal prizes—about \$27,000 for the overall winner—there are larger reasons why Bertram is returning as a factory team to ocean powerboat racing.

Veteran driver Bertram and knowledgeable newcomer Rittmaster agree that though privately owned *Moppies* have continued to race, after a relatively prolonged company absence, it's time for a formal Bertram re-entry.

Founder of the Bertram Yacht Co., which became a division of Nautec Corp. in 1963, Dick is someone with the style to have bestowed on his wave-dividing *Moppie* the nickname of his pretty wife, Pauline. Bertram, who now heads his own diversified retail yacht enterprises, has like all blue-water men, a profound respect for the experienced and a deep distrust for untried claims, especially in a sport where most good builders and designers are also contenders.

Bertram Pres. Jerry Shishko who endorses his feeling says: "There's no question that racing provides a rigorous test you may achieve in no other way. It's an unequalled chance to discover how to improve a marine product for public sale in all ways—hull, wiring, engine installation."

As fiercely competitive as Dick is young (27) Rittmaster, who when ashore is Director of Merchandising for Bertram Yacht Division of Nautec Corp. Rittmaster, with Russ Specht's support, was largely responsible for the company's return to

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powerboat racing. And to nudge a successful boat manufacturer into something as exotic—and expensive—as racing takes nerve and know-how. Relatively new to the game, but no novice, Tabor Academy alumnus Rittmaster whet his offshore appetite last year as navigator for Alan Brown, who shared Around L.I. Marathon honors with Don Aronow.

Since then, he has served a fairly diligent racing apprenticeship with such masters of the sport as Don Aronow, Dick Bertram, Jake Trotter, and Bill Wishnick. He, too, feels that bettering the breed is one of racing's prime benefits. He clearly has the best reference when he says: "We feel that this factory, with its long experience in the field, can put together as fine a racing boat as anyone. We wanted impact with dependability at the line in this Bahamas 500; I think we've achieved it."

On the job, Rittmaster usually shows himself a rather casual executive, arriving often in levis and work shirt for a day of conference and dictation. The race at this writing, however, had become all engrossing. And between bouts of dead earnest temporizing with designers Specht and co-driver-engineer Sammy James on last minute details, it was not unusual to find him in his office doing push-ups to stay in shape. Nor was it unusual for night owls in the profession to find him keeping late hours at Miami's swinging Palm Bay Club, getting out of it. The double standard is not inconsistent with a favorite Rittmaster racing *raison d'être*: "You meet such pretty girls."

A similarly personal postscript from Dick Bertram, who sailed as blithely in Huey Long's Transatlantic Race winner *Ondine* in 1966 as he drove to victory the previous year in *Brave Moppie* in the Cowes-Torquay powerboat contest: "I race for the fun of it."

Racers' rationales vary as widely and wildly as the men themselves, from the somewhat somber: "Like mountain climbing at sea level." (Dr. Emil Savundra); to the fairly frivolous: "A good sport for the middle aged." (Max Aitken). Most are a mixture of personal ethic and professional interest.

A light touch, and true longevity seem to have imbued the new *Moppie* group. May 7 will rightly test their preparation, and their promise. ♀