

My teenage years were spent reading about pioneering sailors like Joshua Slocum, Bernard Moitessier and Robin Knox-Johnston. It was their hair-raising stories of huge seas, dramatic sunsets and being at one with the oceans that first inspired me to get immersed in the sport. The dream back then, of course, was to emulate their great voyages. That didn't quite happen, but five decades on from the *Sunday Times* Golden Globe Race, I've finally been rewarded with a God-given opportunity to sail on Moitessier's yacht *Joshua* – a true Red Letter occasion that readers of *Classic Boat* will soon have the opportunity to share.

Now owned and maintained as a living museum piece by the French National Maritime Museum in La Rochelle, the distinctive bright red ketch is cared for by a team of Moitessier enthusiasts as passionate about their charge as the steam buffs who run the historic engines on my local Watercress Line.

In France, *Joshua* is treated as a national treasure and Moitessier as the father figure of French solo sailing. It has taken a year of planning to gain permission from the French Government

for her to be sailed over to England in 2018 to join the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the 1968/9 *Sunday Times* Golden Globe Race. *Joshua* and her enthusiastic crew have been given a month-long licence to return to Plymouth in June next year for the start of the 2018 Golden Globe Race. It is here that *Classic Boat* readers will get the opportunity to sail on her and two other classics from that era, Sir Francis Chichester's *Gipsy Moth IV* and *Lively Lady*, made famous by Sir Alec Rose.

Moitessier is best remembered as the man who after rounding Cape Horn, turned his back on glory to continue to make a second circuit of the Southern Ocean. "Because," he said, "I am happy at sea, and perhaps to save my soul."

Instead of chasing after Knox-Johnston's *Subhaili* for the Golden Globe trophy and £5,000 cash prize for the fastest circumnavigation, Moitessier turned east. The first the world knew of this dramatic change of heart was when he appeared off Cape Town about the time he was expected in the English Channel and he catapulted a film canister containing the famous message on to the bridge of an anchored tanker, for the crew to pass on to Paris and London.

Biographer Peter Nichols believes the Frenchman became a hero, not so much for his epic voyages but for his epic ambivalence and human frailty. He was almost certainly bipolar; unstoppably enthusiastic and grimly depressive by turns. This wire, alternately taut and loose, threaded itself through everything he did and compounded the contradictions of his life and outlook.

Much of this is reflected in *Joshua*. First launched in 1961, French naval architect Jean Knocker took 14 months to turn Moitessier's detailed sketches into a workable plan. At 40ft overall with a 6ft bowsprit, steel was chosen as the construction material to minimise maintenance and maximise strength. He wanted a yacht with good upwind performance. His previous boats had been traditional Asian-built fishing boats and junks that lacked any performance close-hauled. He wanted shallow draft to explore the coral seas. Knocker had suggested a centreboard but Moitessier refused. In the end they compromised on a 5ft draught.

Moitessier also specified a Norwegian-styled pointed stern which he said divides and eases a breaking sea's violent push when running. He also specified a bermudan ketch rig.

He wanted a comfortable interior divided between two independent cabins with full headroom in each, though the Norwegian stern shape made the aft cabin less roomy. He used this for storage, which gave him all the more space in the main cabin to eat, navigate and sleep. When the weather was bad, he

Bernard Moitessier's yacht from the 1968 Golden Globe race almost perished in a Mexican hurricane. But she's still sailing in Brittany and is coming to England next year

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SAILING ON JOSHUA



Joshua today, sailing in Brittany



authenticated, Patrick Schnepf, director of the French National Maritime Museum in La Rochelle, flew across in mid-winter to buy her and arranged for *Joshua* to be shipped back to France.

There, a team of Moitessier disciples painstakingly restored the yacht to near-original condition. The metal masts fitted after the hurricane remain, she has a new engine and the aft cabin is now fitted out with bunks to give more people the opportunity to sail on her.

When I join her in La Rochelle, Bruno Quinton, always wearing his Breton beret, is in charge, with Jean-Marc Joubert, Joel le Laic and Lionel Vigreux acting as co-skippers. Quinton explained: “We keep her as a living museum piece so as many people as possible can experience sailing the Moitessier way.”

The main cabin is roomy with a large dinette table to port and expansive navigator's berth, while the forward section remains utilitarian, but also now has a fitted bunk. When fellow French sailing legend Eric Tabarly came across *Joshua* during a sailing visit to Tahiti, he marvelled at the comfort of the interior compared to his own *Pen Duck IV*.

On deck everything remains simple. The Goiot winches that Moitessier fitted shortly before the start of the *Sunday Times* race to replace his handy billy block and tackle remain in good working order.

Everything about *Joshua* is minimalistic and simple. Look at the deck cleats – radiused pieces of steel pipe welded to the deck with two horns drilled through at right angles. Galvanised chain is used for the top lifelines and lower parts of the standard rigging. Amidships, just astern of where Moitessier practiced his yoga each day, the simple dorade with a tyre inner tube looking like an elephant's trunk continues to provide fresh air below, collapsing whenever there is green water on deck.

The bowsprit is also original, made from steel pipe. When it buckled sideways during Moitessier's solo circumnavigation, he simply rigged up his handy billy block and tackle to pull it back into shape and replaced the broken stay. It remained that way for the rest of the voyage. Moitessier's domed hatch has gone, replaced by a standard sliding affair, but the ship's wheel remains, along with its ability to be refitted inside the cabin. But the wheel is tiddly, and set too low for the likes of me to stand and steer. This didn't matter to Moitessier, who

Above l-r: the main cabin's comfort impressed Tabarly; fitted bunk forward for modern-day crew

was small in stature. Nor did he mind the control lines running out on the side decks back to the tiller. Sailing singlehanded, you are not going to tread on them when trying to turn. But it is a frustration now, leading to French expletives from the helmsman when anyone stands on the ropes!

The only concessions to the 21st century are a set of electronic instruments, a radio and a reliable diesel engine – all required now for the vessel to be coded to take out paying passengers. *Gipsy Moth IV* has much the same – hidden behind a façade of 1966 vintage analogue sailing instruments.

Whatever criticism I have about the size of *Joshua's* wheel, the steering is very light (unless someone is standing on the control lines). There was a gentle 10-knot breeze when we hoisted sails off Les Sables-d'Olonne and Moitessier's yacht responded beautifully. Once away from land she proved very close-winded, pointing much higher than *Subaili* can, and she cut through the swell with little ado.

With her cutter rig set, she presents a cloud of sail and has the ballast to carry it upwind through quite a large wind range. There is no roller furling so the hanked jibs have to be pulled down by hand, with one person having to climb out onto the bowsprit to retrieve the sail. *Subaili* by contrast has a highfield lever to slacken tension on the stay and allow the sail to be pulled in to the bow.

We ran back to port on a broad reach, making five knots without fuss or setting a mizzen staysail. *Joshua* was a delight to sail, and it is little wonder that there are several hundred replicas floating around the globe as she makes a great bluewater cruising yacht. Try her yourself, when she visits the UK next year. 🌐

Golden Globe 50th anniversary events

The **2018 GOLDEN GLOBE RACE** starts from Plymouth on 30 June. Maximum entry of 30 yachts, long-keeled designs 32ft-36ft LOA, sailed using sextant, paper charts and wind vanes steering systems. See goldengloberace.com

The **LONGUE ROUTE 2018** is an anything-goes event. Sailors start from any port north of 45° north of Europe, or 41° north of America's east coast between 18 June and 30 September, and return to a French port north of 45° North. A gathering of Moitessier disciples will take place in Le Bono, on the Gulf of Morbihan, where Moitessier is buried, on 16 and 17 June. See longueroute2018.com