

## BERNARD MOITESSIER'S JOSHUA

could also steer the boat from inside the main cabin, by simply removing the tiny spoked wheel on the outside of the cabin bulkhead and re-attaching it on the opposite end of the spindle inside.

Born in Hanoi in 1925, Moitessier spent his first 20 years in French Indochina. He and his three brothers were free spirits and to their father's frustration did not take school seriously. Peter Nichols describes the man not as a winner in the normal sense. "Arrival, finishing a race, or completion were not his thing. Moitessier only experienced bliss when he was deep in the middle of something, far from its beginning or its end, wrapped up in the purity of the effort itself. He turned his back on what he called the 'false gods' of fame and fortune and disappeared for decades into Polynesian backwaters to ruminate, to plant coconut trees and smoke dope."

Yet, he was not insusceptible to false gods. He was enormously egotistical, pleased by his fame, the money he earned, the reception of the books he wrote, and the power this gave to his voice. He can be seen as an epic loser for the way he repeatedly failed to capitalise on the successes he seemed able to achieve, without design, simply by being himself.

He was also acutely aware and afraid of this susceptibility, and time and again, turned away from wealth – at one stage, he tried to give away the royalties from a book to the Pope. It was this yin and yang aspect of Moitessier's character that forever tore at him and spun him in circles.

Joshua was launched as a bare hull early in 1962 and finished in something of a rush – Moitessier's first booking for the sailing school he had started was on 15 April. Her mainmast was a heavy 57ft (17.4m) telegraph pole rigged with galvanised wire scrounged from the same telephone company. Her mizzen mast had similar parentage. Halyards, sheets and mooring ropes were pulled from garbage bins and spliced together to make up usable lengths. He relied on block and tackle and there was no money for an engine. Moitessier planned to ship two sets of oars before a friend took pity and donated a two-stroke 7hp engine. Joshua was ready just in time, but by the season's end he and his new bride Françoise were exhausted by it all.

That was when the idea of a honeymoon cruising around the world was first mooted. The two set off from Marseille bound for Tahiti via Panama in 1963. Three years later, they returned non-stop via Cape Horn finishing up in Alicante, Spain, but Françoise had needed some persuasion and it was during preparations for this trip that Moitessier fitted the inside steering position and also the domed Plexiglass windows in the cabin roof hatch. A heavy hoisting net from a cargo ship was shipped as a possible sea anchor and five trailing lines were readied, weighed down by 40lb (18kg) iron lumps.

Moitessier's book about the voyage, *Cape Horn – the Logical Route*, sold in its thousands. He and Françoise were awarded the Cruising Club of America's Blue Water Medal, the British gave them the Wren Medal and the French presented them with a Golden Neptune. The story of the voyage made them household names.

It was the following year that Francis Chichester became the first to complete a one-stop solo





Moitessier's famous book about the voyage, published in 1971

circumnavigation aboard *Gipsy Moth IV*. That got everyone including Moitessier thinking about doing it non-stop. But when the *Sunday Times* newspaper stepped in to make a race of it, he was appalled. Approached by the paper, Moitessier exploded: "This proposal makes me want to throw up. It is a sacrilege to turn what is the ultimate challenge into a race."

He expanded in *Bateaux* magazine: "In a passage like this, a man must look into himself without facing a competitor. I disapprove of a race; it makes you lose sight of the essential: a voyage to your own limits, this search for a profound truth with as sole witness the sea, the wind, the boat, the infinitely big, the infinitely small."

Undaunted, the man from the *Sunday Times* persisted with a suggestion that the rules be amended to allow a competitor to start from France. To their utter amazement, Moitessier performed a complete volte face. "I shall leave Toulon as soon as possible for Plymouth where I shall start the race." There was a barb: "If I'm both the first home and fastest, I'll snatch the cheque without saying thank you, auction off the Golden Globe and leave without a word for the *Sunday Times*. That way I will make a public statement of the contempt I feel for your paper's project!"

The story of the race is well known. *Joshua* made good speed through the Southern Ocean and by the time the French yacht reached Cape Horn 17 days behind *Suhaili*, the bigger red yacht had shrunk Knox-Johnston's lead by 40 days. Could Moitessier have caught the Englishman on the final leg back up the Atlantic? Five decades on, Sir Robin admits it would have been close. Opinion in France of course is that their man would have won. In fact, there is a common myth across the Channel that Moitessier was first to round Cape Horn.

One person who got to know Moitessier well is catamaran designer James Wharram who, many years later, built a boat with the Frenchman. "Bernard told me that he decided to continue on for a second circuit of the Southern Ocean because he said "I couldn't bear the thought of President de Gaulle kissing me"!

Moitessier and Joshua finally pitched up in Papeete, Tahiti on 21 June, 1969 after 300 days at sea. He then stayed away from France and his wife Françoise for another 17 years and fathered a child, Stephan, with new partner Ileana in 1971. He continued cruising on Joshua until the yacht was wrecked in 1982 during a hurricane while at anchor in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. She was one of 26 vessels to be blown ashore that night. Dismasted, stanchions and pulpit flattened, hatches shattered, rudder gone, she finished up full of sand and seawater, dug deep into the beach. That might have been the end of the story, but a team that included local lad Reto Filli, saw that the hull was still intact and spent the week digging a trench to pull Joshua up the beach. Once this was achieved, Moitessier gave his yacht to Filli, telling him to use what money he had to put *Ioshua* back in shape.

By all accounts, Filli rebuilt the yacht beautifully and sailed her to Seattle where American Johanna Slee, a professional mariner, bought her. In 1989, Virginia Connor spotted the distinctive red ketch in Seattle and sent a picture to *Voiles et Voiliers* magazine. Once











authenticated, Patrick Schnepp, 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 I-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 *Suhaili* 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. *Suhaili* 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 Morbiban, where Moitessier is buried, on 16 and 17 June. *See longueroute 2018 com*