



■ ■ PrivatAir  
THE MAGAZINE



*Chef Sam Pang  
photographed for  
PrivatAir at Breeze  
in Bangkok, page 40*



*A competitor in one of  
the trio of events that  
make up the Rolex  
Grand Slam, see p58*



Cover: Steinway piano.  
Image © Piers Cunliffe

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## Contributors (and the things they desire)



### JEREMY TAYLOR

Jeremy, who writes this issue on the Rolex Grand Slam (p58), covets a Series I Jaguar E-type coupe, not the convertible but the hard-top. 'It has the best rear-end of any car, while peering down that long bonnet is motoring nirvana,' he says.



### KATHLEEN SQUIRES

Food scribe Kathleen (who writes on p40) would love her own Périgord black truffle, decadently earthy and perfumey, and the finest variety of truffle in the world. 'It wouldn't hurt to have Daniel Boulud to prepare it for me,' she adds.



### TRISTAN RUTHERFORD

Tristan already owns his object of desire, a 1960s Omega Seamaster which he picked up in Damascus's Omega watch bazaar a decade ago. But it's gone for repair and he desperately wants it back. Meanwhile, he celebrates Turbocraft's return on p68.



### NINA CAPLAN

Evidencing admirable professional dedication, what drinks writer Nina (whose column is on p21) would love above all is a portable drinks cabinet: 'One of those designed to be hoisted aboard a steamer by a flunky,' she specifies.



### ANDREW HUMPHREYS

Editor of this magazine Andrew doesn't have a pilot's licence and, truth be told, is a bit of a nervy flyer but, nonetheless, after visiting Kenya to track down the legendary G-AAMY (p76) he now wants a Gipsy Moth biplane of his own.



### JAMES PARRY

Art writer James (see p25) would love the Rubens Vase on his mantelpiece. Carved from a single piece of agate, it was probably made for a Byzantine emperor. He has to be content with visiting it at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.

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#### EDITOR

Andrew Humphreys

#### ART DIRECTOR

Jamie Trendall

#### DESIGNERS

Adriano Cattini,

Stewart Henson

#### PICTURE EDITOR

Julia Holmes

#### SUB-EDITOR

Steve Handley

#### PRODUCTION

Helen Hind

#### REPROGRAPHICS

KFR Reprographics

#### PRINTING

Wyndeham Grange,

a Wyndeham Group company

#### LOGISTICS

Spatial Global

#### ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

Manuela Festa

+44 (0)20 7625 0909

[manuela.festa@ink-global.com](mailto:manuela.festa@ink-global.com)

#### SALES EXECUTIVE

Ariane Perruchot

#### PUBLISHED BY INK

[www.ink-global.com](http://www.ink-global.com)

#### CEOs

Michael Keating

Simon Leslie

#### FOR

**PrivatAir**

PrivatAir SA

*Chemin des Papillons 18*

*PO Box 572, 1215 Geneva 15*

*Switzerland*

*Telephone +41 (0)22 929 6700*

*Fax +41 (0)22 929 6701*

*[info@privatair.com](mailto:info@privatair.com)*

*[www.privatair.com](http://www.privatair.com)*

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PRIVAT  
BOATING

# Rebirth of a Legend

*A pioneering jet boat that  
briefly flourished in the  
sixties is about to make  
a splashy comeback, writes  
Tristan Rutherford*





IT'S PROBABLY FAIR TO SAY THAT MOST MEN WATCHING the scene in the 1965 movie *Thunderball*, in which James Bond flirts with the alluring, bikini-clad Domino, would have their eyes fixed on the curvaceous former Miss France, Claudine Auger. Not John Clapot, who paused the film and zoomed in to examine the speedboat in the background. It looked a little unusual to him and the name, Buehler Turbocraft, was unfamiliar.

He undertook a little research and was surprised by the results. The Turbocraft, he discovered, was a bit of an oddity. Instead of noisy engines it was propelled by two water jets. This, he learned, was an ultra-efficient design that, in addition to being comparatively quiet, combined high speeds with great range. At one time America's CIA owned a company fleet that they used for covert naval missions. And there's a story that Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev once placed an order for one and it was aboard a transport plane and halfway to Moscow when it was called back mid-flight due to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Odder still, the last example of this revolutionary design was made in 1971 and, after that, nothing.

Clapot's interest became an obsession. 'We hired a team of lawyers and researchers in Indiana where the Turbocraft was originally produced,' says the Swiss-French entrepreneur, a former brand manager at Ralph Lauren, who is based in Geneva. The company behind the boat was an industrial gear manufacturer owned by a man called John Buehler. Buehler had read a magazine feature about the pioneering water-propulsion units created by New Zealander Bill Hamilton and snapped up the rights pronto. This was 1954, and Buehler set up a marine division of his Indiana Gearworks and commissioned a prototype boat. Using Hamilton's water jets, the first Turbocraft was a 16-foot affair that could reach a heady 28 knots. But Buehler, a sports fisherman and big-game hunter, wanted more speed so subsequent models were larger and fitted with V-8 engines.

The Jet 35, a powerful 18-footer, became the company's flagship and garnered some high-profile fans. Presidential wife Jacqueline Kennedy owned one, which she used for water-skiing. 'Take the wheel – feel the instant surge of jet thrust... and you'll never settle for anything less!' boasted



PREVIOUS SPREAD:  
*some 44 years after  
 production was halted,  
 the Turbocraft is back  
 with a new model  
 for the 21st century,  
 the 38ft Thunderclap.*  
 LEFT: *the boat combines  
 curvy lines reminiscent  
 of the Sixties with up-to-  
 date features such as its  
 entertainment system*

the tagline in one of the company's magazine ads. Buehler cashed in on the James Bond product placement by launching the Turbocraft Thunderball, and in 1967 he hired Virgil Exner, the man who put the tailfins on American cars, to design that year's models.

Alas, as the 1960s came to an end, the good times were also drawing to a close. Spending on the Vietnam War pushed the US into recession in 1969. To save his business, Buehler's marine division was hived off and production of the Turbocraft ceased.

As an expert in luxury brands, John Clapot saw the value in such a glam-packed backstory. If he could reimagine the product for a modern audience – a trick adeptly performed by Italian speedboat manufacturer Riva – the potential could be huge. He acquired the rights to Turbocraft and as a first step registered the trademark in every potential market from the United States to China, places in which brands like Riva already had a presence. The second step was to design a contemporary boat faithful to the brand's 1950s origins. 'The clientele in this niche market are exceptionally discerning,'

says Clapot, by which he means that it's all very well having classic teak decks and art deco lines but they have to be combined with electric swim steps and fold-out TV screens. From acquiring the brand to final CGI models took four years.

The result is the Turbocraft Thunderclap. At 38 feet, it distills the brand's story and breathless speed into one unmistakably stylish silhouette. As in the 1960s, Hamilton Jets of New Zealand – still going after all this time – provide the water-jet propulsion. The Thunderclap can reach a blistering 42 knots (that's Monaco to St Tropez in one hour flat). The jets also allow sailors to execute the famous 'Hamilton Turn', where a high-speed spin is combined with an open-close-open twist of the throttle, with a resulting showy whirlwind of watery spray.

Onboard, it's all 21st century. An interiors specialist from one of Monaco's leading superyacht players styled Thunderclap's sun awning, driver's bench and central buffet. The latter doubles as a cocktail bar, summer kitchen or alfresco casino table – just bring a yard of baize and a box of poker chips. Naturally, you can custom order your jetboat



LEFT: the compact but plush cabin of the Thunderclap, looking aft

*“If you want to make a two-night trip somewhere with your lover and a case of Sancerre, be my guest,” says Clapot’*

in Night Steel, Carbon Blue or Copper Grey. Elements can be arranged to suit in stainless steel, bronze or carbon fibre, ‘so you get a completely different boat from your neighbour,’ explains Clapot.

Two main markets appeal to Clapot: ‘Firstly it’s a day boat.’ Installed onboard are a queen-sized cabin complete with skylights and leather trim, plus a tiny bathroom. It’s technically designed for afternoon snoozing before cruising to a seaside restaurant for dinner but, says the Turbocraft boss, ‘if you want to make a two-night trip somewhere with your lover and a case of Sancerre, be my guest.’ Importantly, Thunderclap is also tailor-made as a luxury yacht tender. There is a burgeoning market for such runarounds – light, fast speedboats that can be hoisted on hydraulic arms then stowed sideways into a superyacht ‘garage’. Space is everything aboard a yacht, even in the €50m-plus range.

The crunch? The Thunderclap is twice as long as a Rolls-Royce Phantom and almost entirely handmade. And heritage doesn’t come cheap. ‘Depending on specification, our brokers are offering our latest model at around €750,000,’ says Clapot. Production will start after the Turbocraft team present the

project at this September’s Monaco Yacht Show. If orders and funding continue as planned, their first physical specimens should race around the harbour at the same show in September 2016. Like 50 years ago, initial interest has been Stateside, with Miami broker Moretti Yachts reporting positive feedback about future sales.

For a glimpse of how the jetboat will handle, Clapot refers me to Thunderclap’s naval engineer, Alexandre Fortabat. Fortabat specialises in luxury exploration vessels (his award-winning conversions include the former fisheries vessel *Enigma XK*), so this brand new Turbocraft provided a unique technical challenge.

‘It’s all about the jets,’ says Fortabat from his design studio in the Port of Nice. ‘Yes, they offer extreme velocity. But Thunderclap’s twin water jets allow for shocking levels of range.’ While a similar sized speedboat could span 50 nautical miles without refuelling, he explains, the Turbocraft can go 300 miles. In marketing terms this allows clients to buzz from Florida to the Bahamas, from the Côte d’Azur to Corsica, or from Italy to Croatia, all on one tank. ‘Some of the largest jet-boat commissions are from the US Navy.

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*Turbocraft*

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**BUHLER**  
*Turbocraft*

Photographed at Porters  
Bendish Green Bend

TURBOCRAFT DIVISION • INDIANA GEAR WORKS, INC.  
2117 Roosevelt Avenue • Indianapolis, Indiana

LEFT: vintage ads from American magazines in the Sixties promoting the attractions of the 'most talked about boat in the country'

*“To reach 40 knots you need to fly, not swim,” says naval architect Fortabat*

They're installing new Rolls-Royce water jets, as these provide more power for less weight,' says Fortabat. Although the technology is used on cross-channel ferries and on river boats across the US, the fact that propeller systems are so much cheaper makes this the most popular form of propulsion. That however, may change, claims Fortabat, 'as they can easily snag fishing nets and are an obvious danger to swimmers'.

Turbocraft have always incorporated compact water jets that draw water from a grid mounted flush with the bottom of the boat, so no water scoop, no propeller shaft, no rudder, no underwater appendages at all. This means manoeuvrability in the shallowest of water (Thunderclap's draft – the amount it protrudes underwater – is only 60cm). Fortabat regales me with the story of the 1960 *National Geographic* expedition on the Colorado River, where a fleet of Turbocraft made a record-breaking upstream navigation over deadly rapids. 'I would have loved to have been a member of that nine-man expedition,' says Fortabat, a champion sailor in his own right. 'Leading it was the wonderfully named Otis "Dock" Marston. He was an experienced river runner, as well as being an expert on the Colorado itself.'

'The Turbocrafts started on Lake Mead then they started to climb the 2,000 feet up – not down – the Colorado River to Lees Ferry, something that no boat had ever done before.' *National Geographic* images show the jetboats powering uphill through the boulder-strewn whitewater like giant kayaks in reverse. The expedition completed the 279-mile journey in just nine eventful days. 'In fact, the original water jets designed by Bill Hamilton in the 1950s were built to operate on the shallow, rock-bottomed rivers of New Zealand,' explains Fortabat. 'The Turbocraft team had every reason to make a successful trip.'

For Fortabat there's one final technical trimming. 'That would be the hull, which I designed myself from scratch.' As jetboats sit lightly on the surface Fortabat created a planing hull – which bounces atop the water like a skimming stone – rather than a displacement hull, which pushes through the water like heavier yachts. 'To reach 40 knots you need to fly, not swim,' says the naval architect. Anything else? 'Yes, I designed the hull in lightweight Kevlar, the stuff they use in bulletproof vests. It means you can actually drive the Thunderclap up onto the beach.' How very Bond.