

Two vintage yachts, Bau Bau and Hallowe'en, jostle for the lead at the 2013 Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge in Naples.

The life aquatic

As guests of the watch brand which truly rules the waves when it comes to seafaring elegance, THE RAKE takes a nautical sojourn to the Naples leg of the Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge.
by **nick scott**



Just as it is for the jazz drummer, the comic actor or the wildlife photographer, split-second timing is paramount for the competitive sailor. Before a race commences, as flags and pistols signal the five-minute, four-minute and one-minute pre-start warnings, he and his crew, while jostling for and defending their position, must slacken or tighten the sails (effectively a boat's accelerator) in order to cross the starting line with full momentum — boats, of course, cannot pull off from stationary like a Ferrari F2002 — at precisely the correct moment. To do this, he must understand exactly how long it takes his particular yacht to execute any given manoeuvre — to complete a single tack or jibe — to the nearest second, and direct his crew accordingly.

Complicating matters for he and his crew, is their amorphous perception of time's passage: for the seafarer, a minute can seem an entirely different period depending on whether the day is blustery or calm, or whether he is moving at two or 20 knots. A split second too early across the line and his race might, if the 'X'-flag-bearers sees his transgression, be over. Get it just right, and both his vessel and his race will roar into life simultaneously.

Given this inextricable link between sailing and the fourth dimension, and the company's long association with the Royal Italian Navy, it's no surprise that Officine Panerai has, for the last nine years, been sponsoring the largest international circuit of classic-yacht regattas on the planet, taking in routes in the US, Europe and the Caribbean. The Florentine brand has invited *The Rake* to witness the latest addition to its extraordinary calendar of races, which sees 34 vintage wooden yachts compete in four races off the shores of Naples: hence our spending today sipping Fiano di Avellino on a small motor yacht, anchored close to a tiny rocky islet just off Massa Lubrense, south of Italy's third largest city.

Behind us, the craggy silhouette of Capri, a city poured from a height into a geological bowl, is the only distraction from the spectacle in front of us: the regatta's competitors rounding a buoy, turning on a sixpence like a Hackney carriage, then embarking on the hypotenuse of this 26-nautical-mile triangular course, back towards the Bay of Pozzuoli on the city's south. And what a spectacle it is. From a distance, even highly competitive sailing looks like a serene pursuit, the vessels moving silently up and down with the swell in majestic, gentle arcs. Up close, it's a different story: all bustle, fury and meticulously orchestrated, wilful hard labour. (This appearance of silent efficiency from a distance belying far more complex ongoingings within does, of course, provide another link between sailing and quality timepieces.)

Enhancing this spectacle of vigour, of athleticism, of man-crafted fabrics silently harnessing nature's mightiest winds to power along beautiful vintage craft created by the artisans of yesteryear, is the history behind so many of the competing craft. *Bona Fide*, a cutter built in 1899, won the gold medal in its class at the Paris Olympic Games in 1900. Another contender is *Manitou*, a 62-foot yawl that once belonged to JFK. More famous for his amorous endeavours than any president before or since, Kennedy used it for sailing jaunts during which he would inspire a young Ms. Monroe's pipe dreams of first-ladydom. Because it was loaded with radio-transmission antennae mechanisms, so that



(and, no doubt, the Kremlin), it was nicknamed 'The Floating White House'. Aristotle Onassis tried, and failed, to buy her twice. Then there's *Capricia*, a boat celebrating two anniversaries this year: it's been 50 years since her launch, and 20 years since former owner Gianni Agnelli — the man whose moniker, 'The Rake of the Riviera', is given an approving doff of the hat by this magazine's name — donated the boat to the Italian Navy.

But the vessel all Panerai guests today have reason to cheer on is a 75-year-old classic Bermuda ketch by the name of *Eilean* — a name which would prompt only the more flimsy-humoured spectator to base his vocal encouragement on a certain 1983 hit single (did I succumb? In my head, *too-bloody-rye-ay*, I did...). As *Rake Time* readers will already be aware, *Eilean* was lovingly restored from a state of termite-ridden disrepair by Officine Panerai Chief Executive Angelo Bonati (indeed, the company's affiliation with the sea comes straight from the top). "It was back in 2005 when Panerai started sponsoring the Antigua Classic that he first spotted it," explains the vessel's skipper Andrew Cully, when *The Rake* takes a tour of *Eilean* after day one of the two-day race. An instantly likable cove with salt in his blood — his parents apparently would often put him to sleep in a spinnaker bag in his formative years — Cully helms not only *Eilean*'s participation in classic-yacht regattas such as this, but also Panerai's social-responsibility projects involving the boat: notably the one which sees terminally ill children get to captain the ship for a day.

He tells *Eilean*'s backstory with relish. "Mr. Bonati was over in Antigua, soaking up the atmosphere and enjoying the race,



Eilean: the 75-year-old classic Bermuda ketch rescued from deterioration by Angelo Bonati, CEO of Officine Panerai. Above left, *Le Vele D'epoca A Napoli* — the race's starting and finishing point.


when he spotted *Eilean* in the mangroves, looking a bit sorry for herself. It was then that he came up with the idea of restoring it to become a Panerai flagship." It was the defining moment in *Eilean*'s troubled history, according to Cully. "She was designed and built by a boatmaker named William Fife III and launched on the River Clyde in Scotland in 1936 [the same year the first Panerai watch prototype was created, incidentally]. The two original owners were two brothers who went to war, never to return, and the boat went through a number of hands before being purchased by French naval architect John Shearer. He spent an extraordinary amount of quality time with her in the Caribbean — it was around this time, in 1982, that Duran Duran filmed their music video for 'Rio' on it.



Left, Gianni Agnelli with his son Umberto on the *Capricia* in 1977; this picture, JFK and his brother-in-law Peter Lawford aboard *Manitou* in 1962. Both vessels competed in Panerai's Classic Yachts Challenge in Naples.



"Shearer was chartering her back and forth across Atlantic when he had a collision off the coast of Malaga and limped home to Antigua with it. Once he got to the other side, he tried to do all the repairs, varnish work and so on, but it was too much for one person, and so it fell into a state of disrepair." A handful of soulless observers hiked an incredulous eyebrow when Mr. Bonati embarked on this €3-million project, but it was a labour of love for a man who had been an avid sailor for three decades. And so, she was stripped down, and her metal frames and much of her exotic woods (such as Burmese teak) either dismantled and replaced, or restored. "They've saved whatever they could," says Cully. It would be three years before the finishing touches were applied — a barometer, hydrometer and thermometer for the instrument panel, all lovingly fashioned by Panerai craftsmen — although the process is ongoing. "You are never finished with a classic-boat restoration, if you want to keep her magnificent," as Mr. Bonati himself puts it.

Cully claims that victory is not first and foremost on his and his crew's minds. "We're all very competitive, but winning's not so important for *Eilean* — she can't be seen to be winning her own regatta," he laughs. Yet, the following day will bring favourable winds — of around 10 to 12 knots, to be exact. The captains of a 1937-built schooner named *Sirius* and a more recent model named *Bufo Blanco* (1963) will take home Panerai watches in the Vintage and Classic categories respectively, but *Eilean* will finish an impressive second in her class. On the closing evening, though, as a congenially boisterous party steps into third gear around me, I look over a line of lovingly restored yachts, captivating maritime history seeming to pore from the grains of every bow, beam or bulwark, and it becomes very apparent that the real winner today is nautical heritage. 

TIME ON YOUR SIDE

The Panerai Luminor 1950 Regatta 3 Days Chrono Flyback Automatic Titano — purpose-built, in the purest sense of the term.



The ritual countdown at the start of any regatta sees boats tussle with competitors and the elements as they prepare to cross an imaginary starting line with impeccable timing. It is from this dynamic process that the Luminor 1950 Regatta 3 Days Chrono Flyback Automatic Titano (pictured opposite) was born. The dial aesthetic will be familiar to all Panerai lovers, but with a difference — namely, the regatta countdown feature. This allows the wearer to zero the chronograph before pushing the button at four o'clock to make the orange minute hand reverse in one-minute increments. Add to that the anti-reflective sapphire crystal and the fact that the watch is water-resistant to 100m, and this becomes a highly desirable sports watch for the more nautically inclined rake.