TIME FLIES WHEN YOU ARE HAVING FUN. Nonetheless, it came as a shock to realise – as I was writing about my 1968 trip across the Atlantic (see PBO February) – that this relatively modest voyage started in the same year as Robin Knox-Johnston’s truly epic non-stop solo circumnavigation aboard Suhaili in the 1968 Golden Globe Race. After more than 300 days at sea, he was the sole finisher and thus won this extraordinary event.

So, as I kick off my summary of 34-36ft cruisers, it’s a fortuitous fluke that this size bracket encompasses many of the yachts that will be competing in GGR 2018 – the 50th anniversary re-run of this groundbreaking event. Race organiser and serial sailing adventurer Don McIntyre writes: ‘In 2008, I listened to Sir Robin Knox-Johnston speaking on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of his record-setting non-stop solo circumnavigation back in 1968. ‘Comparing the space-age building materials and the high-tech satellite and computer systems supporting today’s solo sailors to what was available to him, he said simply “This takes the spice out of it!”’

McIntyre’s simple race rules stipulate that entrants are limited to yacht types (GRP production models) and equipment similar to what was available to Sir Robin back in 1968. That means sailing without modern technology or...
Biscay 36: available second-hand from £40,000

Not surprisingly, most entrants have gone for the bigger boats. A longer waterline and larger displacement will give more speed and add to carrying capacity and comfort. GGR entrants Antoine Cousot (French) and Nabil Amra (American/Palestinian) have bought Alan Hill-designed Biscay 36s (35ft 11in). Both boats are being overhauled by the Falmouth Boat Company, their original builders. This attractive design came out in 1974 and was available as a ketch or sloop. It displaces 13,228lb with a DLR (displacement/length ratio) of 355, SA/displacement (sail area to displacement ratio) of 14.61 and ballast ratio of 42% – which puts it firmly in the comfortable-but-quick cruiser camp. Nabil told me: ‘While all the GGR-approved boats are heavy compared to modern standards, the Biscay seems lighter when looking at the big picture. For its LWL and LOA, it’s light compared to the others. I’m hoping this gives the advantage I’ll be looking for in light winds, without compromising safety in a blow. When it does come on a blow, there’s no boat one would rather be on than a traditional, full-keeled “brick house”. All the boats on the GGR-approved list have this in common. But we’ll be fighting both calms and blows. It will be nice to not need half a gale to get her moving... advantage Biscay. Its beam of 10ft 9in and draught of 5ft 9in – combined with a “grippy” long keel – should provide good directional stability.’

Nabil is also a fan of his Biscay’s ketch rig. He likes the fact that it does not have a triatic stay, increases sail setting versatility and offers the option of a mizzen staysail, concluding: ‘Costs aside, it’s a superior rig in nearly every measurable metric. Some will say that it won’t point as well as a sloop, but that if last five degrees into the wind is going to make or break your cruise, you have bigger issues brewing. Besides, 90% of modern cruising is on some type of reach. If that’s the case, what do you need that extra pointing for? In the grand compromise of things, I prefer a reaching machine.’

Antoine Cousot went for a Biscay 36 for similar reasons, telling me that for the GGR ‘she is the best compromise: light, fast and sturdy. And I very much like its ketch rig, allowing me to keep the right sail plan up in all wind conditions. The cockpit is also well designed and safe, while heavy loads can be stowed low down to improve stability.’ And what about preparation for the GGR? Antoine told me: ‘I’ve only owned her for a year so we are still in the early stages of getting to know each other but the signs are good. I like to keep things safe and simple and that’s how I will be approaching the GGR.’

Safe and simple

The 1975 John Rock-designed and cutter-rigged Tradewind 35 (35ft 0in) has also found favour with GGR entrants. At 19,442lb it is considerably heavier than the slightly longer Biscay 36 and has a higher DLR of 504, a ballast ratio of 42 and a generous SA/disp ratio of 16.1. Kevin Farebrother – who bought GGR organiser Don McIntyre’s T35 – told me: ‘I’ve only owned her for a year so we are still in the early stages of getting to know each other but the signs are looking good. I like to keep things safe and simple and that’s how I will be approaching the GGR.’

‘Sailing-wise – although not the fastest – she tracks great. Set the sails well and she will keep going, taking on the heaviest of conditions. With a high displacement and ballast she gives you the impression of a boat bigger than her 35ft. Internally the headroom is amazing. She’s very comfortable, which is important for a long trip across the Southern Ocean.’ Kevin rounded off by
telling me his Tradewind was designer John Rock’s personal boat and built to higher specifications than normal with double-bonded bulkheads, hull-to-deck joints and stringers. He will also be fitting bigger hull-to-deck joints and stringers.

Australian Shane Freeman is another Tradewind 35 convert. He also looked at a Saga 34 and Nicholson 32 for the GGR but went for the Tradewind because, he told me, it’s ‘an incredibly sea-friendly boat. It has a gentle motion even in some of the most demanding seaways, is built like the proverbial brick s***house and is incredibly forgiving of mistakes made by skippers. The cutter rig gives flexibility for sail configuration and she is a perfect size for single-handing. And, of course, she has that old-world charm both above and below decks. I sailed the boat down from Brisbane to Melbourne, a trip of about 1,200NM, and most of that single-handed. I was caught in a gale about 50 miles off the New South Wales coastline and hove to for about 18 hours. I was very impressed with the way the boat managed this, letting me spend most of the time down below getting sleep. I’ve made several trips to Tasmania through the Bass Strait – notoriously difficult waters – and the boat has behaved fabulously.’ Shane’s website http://freemansailing.com will show you more.

Shane’s delivery trip to the GGR start line in Falmouth adds up to a shakedown half-circumnavigation; ample to assess his boat’s new rigging, sails and recently-strengthened windvane steering and chainplates, not to mention the steering and rudder systems that he has taken apart and reassembled. Shane adds: ‘I feel I have got to know every nut, bolt and fastening on the boat.’

Impeccable pedigree

The exquisitely pretty Holman and Pye-designed Rustler 36 (39ft 4in) is another long-keeler to have attracted the attention of GGR entrants. Displacing 16,805lb, she has a DLR of 384, ballast ratio of 45% and relatively modest SA/disp ratio of 11.43. So – on paper at least – she’s not the most potent of the entrants. But her pedigree is impeccable. Perhaps the Rustler 36’s most famous owner was Princess Anne – but legendary Frenchman Jean-Luc van den Heede (who has doubled Cape Horn 10 times and completed five solo circumnavigations) will run her a close second. He has bought a Rustler 36 specifically for the GGR. When I asked him why he chose this boat, he replied: ‘When I got the list of the boats available for the GGR, I tried to figure which was the best. Also, I didn’t want a boat that was too old. I think – and hope! – that the Rustler was a good compromise.’

And what does he now like about his new steed? ‘It’s hard to compare with other modern boats. I usually race on a Feeling 10.40, which is a lot faster than the Rustler, but I like the way the Rustler sails through big waves. It has a sweet movement... but I don’t like it in harbour, especially in reverse. It does what it wants, not what I want!’

When under sail, Jean-Luc said, ‘We were at sea in strong winds last winter, and I think the boat is a nice compromise – but we are not going to surf down the Roaring Forties!’ When I asked if he had any other comments on his Rustler, Jean-Luc simply replied: ‘I will tell you more in March 2019!’

Susie Goodall (a mere nipper at 26 years old) also chose a Rustler. ‘We were at sea in strong winds last winter, and I think the boat is a nice compromise – but we are not going to surf down the Roaring Forties!’ When I asked if she had any other comments on his Rustler, Jean-Luc simply replied: ‘I will tell you more in March 2019!’

Susie Goodall (a mere nipper at 26 years old) also chose a Rustler 36 for her GGR adventure. When I asked her why she selected this yacht, Susie replied: ‘I wanted to
get a boat that was at the bigger end of the scale approved. It meant more cost but has the added comfort and space for supplies, of which there are a lot.

The gracious Rustler 36 fitted the profile for a yacht that would take the Southern Ocean waves, with its large bow overhang, LWL of 26ft, and protected cockpit. They are very well-balanced boats, and I wanted a sloop rather than a ketch or yawl. Rustler has always been loyal to good design and build.

The 36 has a solid reputation as an ocean-going boat. Even though it’s heavy, it’s lighter than others at a similar size. Knowing how much weight I will add to her, I didn’t want to go for something that was already at the heavy end of the spectrum.

‘With every mile I sail Ariadne I could not be more pleased with my choice. The most I have been out in her is a severe gale – and how elegantly she can surf waves, and how easy it is to balance the boat in bit of a blow. This just adds to my confidence in the boat.’ She said she hand-steered non-stop for 14 hours in a Force 9 off Portugal after a reef and self-steering lines broke, adding that the easy motion and relatively dry cockpit made sitting in the cockpit for hours quite pleasant.

For extended solo sailing, Susie has replaced and simplified the reefing system, added to storage space in the saloon by removing the table and added several more handholds. Major refit work – including fitting the collision bulkhead required by GGR rules – will follow after this winter. Also designed by Holman and Pye, the long-keeled Bowman 36 won the best cruiser award at the 1970 London Boat Show and is an excellent long-distance cruiser that has also been ‘accepted’ as one of the yachts that qualify for the GGR 2018. At 18,500lb and with a DLR of 435 and SA/displ ratio of 12.67, she is a substantial yacht built to Lloyds 100A1. Her beam of 11ft 4in is wide for her era, although an unusual standard accommodation plan with an aft saloon (under the doghouse), amidships engine and forward galley and heads may not be to everyone’s taste. However, many were built as semi-custom yachts and therefore vary from the standard. Either way, this Bowman is an exceptionally elegant yacht and just as suitable for coastal pottering as for crossing oceans.

Chunky contender

The 1985 Alan Pape-designed Saltram Saga 36 (35ft 9in) is another chunky long-keel contender. Like Knox-Johnston’s trusty Suhaili, she has a canoe stern – a feature many believe to be especially effective at coping with fearsome following seas. Her stern-hung rudder, sweeping sheer and short, low coachroof combine to give her an elegant Scandinavian look.

The Saga 36 is no lightweight. With a displacement of 18,000lb, DLR of 356, ballast ratio of 39% and SA/displ ratio of 13.21 (on a snug sloop cutter rig) she promises easy motion and comfort in a seaway. A beam of 10ft 6in gives good space below, and a conventional layout (complete with a snug quarter and pilot berth) is ideal for a serious, seagoing yacht. Anyone looking for a more modern long-keeled yacht should consider the Vancouver 34. Like its smaller 32ft sister, it is GGR 2018-approved. The 34 (34ft 3in) is basically a stretched version of the 1986 Robert Harris-designed Vancouver 32 (LWL 27ft 6in; beam 10ft 6in; weight approximately 14,000lb; DLR 311; ballast ratio 41%; SA/displ ratio 15.55).

Unlike older long-keelers, the Vancouver’s keel is an external casting and has a ‘cut-out’ aft that helps improve steering in astern. The interior layout is conventional and extremely well finished. These are classy and very comfortable yachts with an excellent reputation as deep-sea cruisers, and this is reflected in second-hand prices. There’s also a Pilot House version for those who prefer the panoramic views offered by a raised saloon. It’s not as pretty as the conventional Vancouver 34, and its large windows could be vulnerable in storm conditions; but it has many benefits for those who like their sailing snug and cosy.

If you fancy something chunkier and with a ketch rig, the 1969 Peter Ibold-designed Endurance 35 is another ‘go-anywhere’ GGR-approved cruiser. Several were
Nicholson 35 – available second-hand from £29,950

Moody 36 – available second-hand from £18,500

built in steel and ferro cement, but GRP examples are also available. With a displacement of 18,550lb and a DLR of 436, the Endurance is not the fastest boat on the block, but owners rave about her steadiness and comfort at sea – and the pilot house makes heavy weather sailing a lot less wet and cold than an exposed cockpit.

Of course, not every sailor craves a long keel, while several more do not want a modern lightweight with a low ballast ratio and wide stern.

But luckily there are plenty of cruisers from around the ’70s onwards that adopted long fin keels combined with robust skeg-hung rudders. The 1971 Raymond Wall-designed Nicholson 35 is a classic example of the qualities and desirability of such boats. To start with first impressions, the Nich 35 (SBR 3in) is supremely elegant, combining balanced overhangs, a graceful sheer and a sleek coachroof. Wall’s yachts all have an uncanny knack of marrying the best of the old and the new to produce a timeless classic. He is a much underestimated designer. The Nich 36 started life as a dual-role yacht. She was a competitive and successful ocean racer as well as a tough and versatile fast cruiser. In the early days, her weight of 15,650lb, DLR of 366, ballast ratio of 47% and SA/disp ratio of 17.92 put her into the versatile fast cruiser class. With first impressions, the Nich 35 was very successful and more than 200 were built over almost 20 years, spanning the original Mark I version to the later Mark VII. Over the years, a few changes were made and the most relevant one concerns the drive train. Initially the prop lived on the back of the keel and was driven via a hydraulic drive, while later models had a conventional shaft drive to a P-bracket. I’d go for the latter.

An old friend of mine – former Concorde captain Noj White – is a confirmed Nich 35 fan... even if her speed is hardly supersonic. He sailed hull No175 (originally bought by his father in 1978) for about 25 years before moving on to an X37. He told me they cruised her for about 5,000 miles a year, adding: ‘She was an excellent boat for the ocean ... very sea-kindly, and she could do all the traditional things like lie a-hull in a storm and heave to while we cooked supper. She was particularly comfortable upwind in a chop – albeit a bit wet – and could also steer herself to windward with the helm lashed. On one occasion while sailing from Portugal to Falmouth we hardly touched the helm for four days, apart from tacking every 100 miles.’ In addition to cruising, Mactoo also regularly took to the race course after moving her home base from Empuriabrava to Hamble. Noj told me: ‘We changed to flush fittings on all seacocks and paid particular attention to bottom finish. We also fitted a feathering prop, removed quite a bit of weight from the over-engineered interior and were one of the first club racers to use Kevlar and Mylar sails from Sobstad. ‘There goes that blasted Mactoo with her plastic sails’ was often overheard at the Royal Southern Yacht Club.’ Over the years, Mactoo won a load of races; inshore and offshore; single-handed, double-handed and fully crewed. I was often amused at the reaction of hot-rod race boat skippers when they realised they had been beaten on corrected time by a venerable 1978 Nicholson 35. Noj said: ‘All in all I sailed over 100,000 miles in her, and it was very difficult to find a suitable replacement.’

**Space plus comfort**

By way of contrast, if you are looking for a budget 36-footer of the same era that provides maximum accommodation, a separate aft cabin and two lofts, the 1977 Angus Primrose-designed Moody 36 is worth a look. Even its best friends won’t claim that it’s a winner on a race course, but when it comes to space plus comfort per £, it’s got a lot going for it.

Like most of the early Moodys, it’s quite light for its size. On an LWL of 30ft 6in, this 36-footer displaces 14,700lb and offers a relatively low DLR (for its era) of 231. Its beam of 12ft 4in is substantial while its fin keel gives a modest draught of just 5ft. The internal finish is of its time and not to a C&N standard. But it’s functional, while the living space is prodigious. You would be hard-pressed to find a yacht more different to the chunkier and more traditional GGR-type yachts and early fin-keel cruiser-racers – but that’s where buyers of second-hand yachts are so fortunate. There’s always something available to suit all needs, tastes and budgets: but make sure you get a thorough survey before signing a cheque.

**NEXT MONTH**

UK-built 34 to 36-footers including Holman, Primrose and S&S designs, Northshore yachts, Fishers, Westerlys and others.