

# The Butlers did it!

**Almost destroyed by a gas explosion, this early Moonraker 36 has been so lovingly renovated that she looks as good as new. To be accurate, she is better than new.**

Now 33 years old, the Moonraker 36 *Perfect Days* has been through three major transformations, only two of which were deliberate.

When built in 1970, she had an open-backed wheelshelter, but this was later converted to a fully enclosed wheelhouse.

So far so good, but her second revamp was accidental and had quite the opposite effect. After some time away from the boat with the batteries left on charge, her owner returned and switched on the water pump, only for the spark to ignite the gases created by the charging process. The explosion blew out the windows and frames, moved bulkheads, cracked the foredeck and lifted the wheelhouse roof clean off!

Luckily both the owner and his wife were unhurt, but the boat they put back on the market was in a desperate state. Fortunately, she passed into safe hands for her third metamorphosis. Four years and hundreds of man-hours later, *Perfect Days* looks as good as new.

## REDUCED TO CLEAR

The restoration is down to the father-and-son team of Peter and Simon Butler.

Looking for a secondhand boat, their eyes had been drawn to the style and design of the Moonraker 36, which was one of the most popular motor cruisers of the 1970s thanks to its six-berth, aft-cabin layout. But at a typical price of around £24,000, they had found that most examples on the market were out of their price range.

Then, over Christmas in 1998, they received a call from a broker to advise them that one they had admired in Ramsgate was now being offered at a greatly reduced price. The only drawback was that, since they had viewed the boat, it had been ripped apart by an explosion!

She was an early example of the model, one of few built without the flybridge which later became a standard feature. But that had become rather irrelevant because this particular boat no longer had so much as a wheelhouse roof.

Refusing to be put off, the Butlers went along for another look, and saw nothing that would make her irreparable. A deal was done.

Peter has quite extensive boatbuilding experience, having previously rebuilt a Halmatic 25 and a Freeman 30 from wrecks, and home-completed a Birchwood 33. He would take charge of woodwork while Simon, an engineer, would look after the mechanical and electrical systems.

Their friends Tony and Ricky, who are laminators, were to be called in for any GRP work that was needed. The final piece of the jigsaw was persuading Peter's neighbours, John and Jane, to make space for the boat in their garden during the initial restoration work.

"I don't think they realised just how big the boat was going to be," says Peter sheepishly.

## COMING ON STRONGER

Peter found that the original build quality of the boat was poor. So, besides the damage caused by the explosion, there was a lot to be repaired and replaced throughout. Strengthening knees and reinforcement were built into the side decks, foredeck and aft deck, which are notorious weak points on Moonrakers, causing windows to leak as they flex.

The interior was also stripped out and refitted from scratch, so the finished boat retains very little of its original fit-out.

Although he wanted to keep the boat looking as original as possible, Peter liked the redesigned

wheelhouse enough to rebuild it to the same specification, albeit with better quality materials.

The painted ply section was removed, and solid teak doorframes and teak laminated marine ply were used for the rebuild, with the exterior laminated and gelcoated to blend in with the rest of the superstructure.

The interior fibreglass, which had been covered with carpet and cork tiles by a previous owner, was instead dressed with teak laminate.

All of the interior bulkheads were replaced. The originals, made of mahogany veneered blockboard had suffered water damage and were rotting; the one between the aft cabin and the engineroom was also showing signs of soot damage from a leaking exhaust! New teak veneered marine ply bulkheads have given the boat a lighter, more airy feel.

## **INTERIOR REFIT**

In the saloon, Peter and Simon rejigged the layout slightly. Reducing the size of the single settee to starboard allowed them to build a cabinet for a television and video, and more importantly extend the galley, giving it considerably more usable work space.

The forward toilet compartment, opposite the galley, was redesigned to make it feel lighter and more spacious, with grey laminate replacing the old black marble Formica. A new shower tray and sink/worktop were moulded from GRP, using the original units as moulds.

The dinette to port and the vee-berths forward were entirely rebuilt to the original design, again using teak veneered ply.

The aft cabin received similar treatment, with complete replacement of all woodwork and bulkheads. Its en-suite WC was revamped along similar lines to the forward one, with new storage and vanity units.

A calorifier was fitted below the bunk, and a warm-air heating system was also installed. A holding tank has been added for black waste, and grey waste is now diverted through a shower sump so that it can be pumped overboard.

This is a great improvement on the old system, which utilised the bilge pumps to empty all grey waste after it had been discharged directly into the bilge. "The smell this left was not very pleasant, It Simon recalls.

## **DOING IT RIGHT**

The many intricate teak mouldings found throughout the boat have all been fabricated by Peter, and the quality of the joinery is excellent.

"The trick is to go to the woodyard and choose the pieces yourself, It he says. "You can look for pieces with interesting grain patterns, as well as trying to match shades as best you can."

His attention to detail does not stop there. He ensured that the same piece of wood was used across doors and drawers, so that the grain pattern was not interrupted. His motto, he tells us, is "It's not worth

doing something unless you do it right."

Sure enough, everywhere you look, there are examples of the Butlers' ingenuity and craftsmanship.

In the wheelhouse, for example, Simon (the ship's navigator) designed a very practical chart table with plenty of storage underneath; Peter then built it from teak. A handhold beside the helm incorporates all the wiring that needed to be run to the top of the wheelhouse, and a void behind the navigator's chair has been utilised by building a fully sealed and vented gas locker.

At the helm itself, a carbonfibre instrument panel has been installed, incorporating new gauges, Morse engine controls and a set of integrated Raymarine electronics. Even the wiper motors have had fibreglass covers moulded for them.

## **FINISHING OFF**

*Perfect Days'* twin 145hp perkins T6.354 diesels were stripped and overhauled in situ, although all their ancillaries were removed for refurbishment and Simon replaced the shafts, stern tubes and rudders.

The engineroom required less treatment than most of the boat, nothing more than a tidy up and

repaint. However, one tweak is that the air ducts have been diverted directly towards the turbochargers, with separators built in to avoid any water ingress.

In contrast, a lot of work went into renovating the exterior of the boat.

The superstructure was found to have stress cracks around the windows and toe rails, and there was evidence of osmosis behind the rubbing strake, where water has been trapped. The damaged areas were ground out and new laminate and gelcoat were applied.

The teak deck above the aft cabin was deemed good enough to save, but still required sanding down, re-fixing, re-caulking and pelleting. All deck hardware was resurfaced, and an anchor winch was fitted.

Under the waterline, the hull was suffering from osmosis, and had to be stripped of its gelcoat, allowed to dry and treated.

By this stage Peter had completed a business deal which made him the owner of the Dover Yacht Company boatyard at Dover Marina, an International Paint specialist. This gave him an ideal opportunity to put their products to the test; the hull was duly treated with Gelshield 200, and the topsides and superstructure with Interspray 900.

### **GOOD AS NEW**

In January of this year, *Perfect Days* was ready for relaunching. To celebrate the occasion, the Butlers invited her previous owner John Musgrove, the survivor of the explosion that almost destroyed her, to break a bottle of champagne on her bow - or rather on a scaffold pole leant against the bow, to avoid damaging the new paint job!

The boat looks as good as new, whilst retaining her classic lines. But how much has the refit cost?

"I wouldn't like to add it up!" says Peter. "I guess we could have bought a new boat for what we have spent, but then this feels like a new boat. It's certainly as near as you can get to a new Moonraker. There is also no better way of getting to know your boat than ripping it apart and rebuilding it."

He has had each stage of the work checked by a surveyor, who has valued the finished article at £96,000.

### **ON THE WATER**

Peter reports a current top speed of 18 knots, although he feels that with some adjustments he might be able to increase this by a knot or two. But what about the model's reported quirky handling and notoriously wet ride?

"She handles very well in head seas, better than many modern boats. In a following sea she can be a bit tricky, but she certainly feels better than other Moonrakers I have been on.

And this particular boat is also very dry. The original owner had a set of sprayrails added to the hull after his maiden sea crossing, during which he got rather wet. I'm glad he did, because it solved the problem."

*Perfect Days* is now berthed in Dover, which is proving an excellent base for the Butlers' cruising plans.

"We wouldn't want to be anywhere else. France is just over an hour away, so we can nip over to Calais or Bolougne for lunch, and we can just as easily head north to the Thames and London, or west to the Solent.

"We are currently planning trips up the East Coast, and over to Belgium and Holland."