

60s star in a new venture



The Bates Starcraft range established a distinctive look in the postwar decades. Now one of the 40ft models has been elegantly refurbished to provide charter luxury on the Thames. *Martin Smith* and photographer *Ray Little* went along to her relaunch



Above: Powerful and distinctive, the Bates Starcraft 40 *New Venture*

Left: Stepping back in time

Gillian Nahum has worked up and down the Thames, buying, selling and chartering river craft for many years. So for her latest project, refurbishing the 40ft (12.2m) Bates Starcraft cruiser *New Venture*, for a five-star charter service, she knew exactly who she was going to ask to carry out the work. The Dennett yard, run by father and son team, Mike and Steve Dennett, has such a good reputation for high quality and on-time work that there was no contest.

"When you're running a business, it makes such a difference to use people you can rely on," says Gillian, "and, to be honest, if I hadn't known about Mike and Steve, I probably wouldn't even have gone ahead with the *New Venture* project."

New Venture had been up for sale for with Gillian's Henley Sales and Charter business for a while before she and her partner Steve decided, in the middle of the

2009 summer, to buy the boat themselves – which allowed Dennetts just one month to complete the refurbishment in order for Gillian to catch the end of the 2009 charter season. Though the work that was required was of a fairly known quantity, the pressure was on for the yard to live up to its reputation for speed and quality.

Extensive rejigging

New Venture required extensive rejigging of her interior layout to suit her new role, as well as untold amounts of hand scraping to take faded and peeling varnish back to clean wood, prior to application of numerous coats of Skipper one-pack varnish.

When she was unveiled last September, not only was the Dennetts carpentry work finished and lustrous, but the boat was fully dressed with linen, crockery and period features inside and out, completely ready for charter customers to step aboard.

The aim is to provide skippered charter for one or two couples anywhere along the Thames from Oxford to London. Guests can attend the big Thames events such as the Henley Royal Regatta, swan-umping and the Traditional Boat Rally in true 60s style, or simply cruise as their pleasure takes them in the luxury of head-turning elegance while being cosseted en route.

A skipper will take care of all navigational needs, such as locks, river conditions and mooring in a suitable secluded spot, before leaving those on board to enjoy themselves in private.

Food can be provided by an on-board chef if required, but the quality of the Thames-side restaurants now available in place such as Henley, Sonning and Bray, may see guests opting for more of a gastronomic tour than an on-board all-day party. Whatever the choice of tour structure, *New Venture's* new layout allows for up to four



Above: The steering position: chrome dials aplenty



Left: Time for tea on the river



Right: The spacious saloon

the flybridge over the aft cabin. This small, raised platform, sheltered by its blue canvas dodgers, has an auxiliary steering position plus low chairs and a table. It's the perfect area for adopting a superior position to enhance the view or soak up the jealous looks of ordinary mortals while partaking of afternoon tea or cocktails.

Restaurant catering

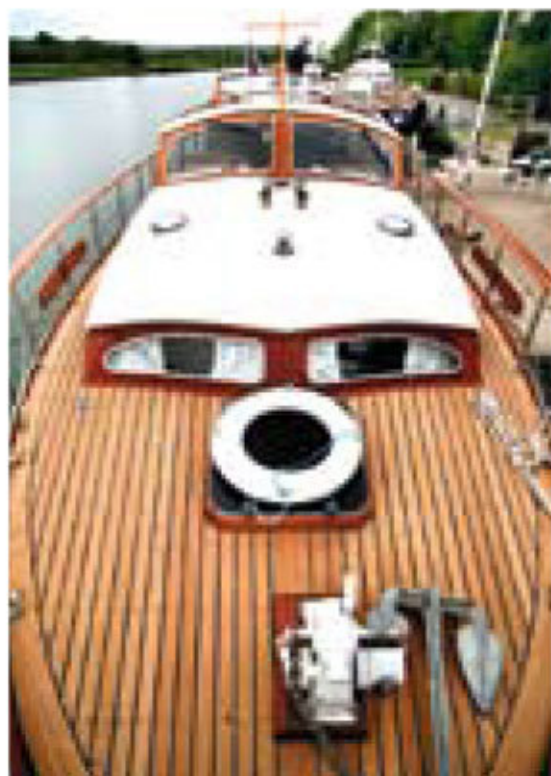
An attractive blend of 60s styling and 21st-century comfort, *New Venture* will be based at Moulsoford near Oxford, at the well-regarded riverside Beetle and Wedge restaurant – which can also supply food, wines or qualified chef on board if desired – but pick up and drop off to start or end a trip can be arranged anywhere between Oxford and Windsor and packages can be tailored to suit individual requirements.



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New Venture

New Venture, the 11th of around 25 40ft (12.2m) Starcraft built, was constructed in 1960 of double diagonal teak planking and at this time was powered by twin 115hp Chrysler Crown 6-cylinder petrol engines. She is believed to have been built for a Mr Smart, or possibly Clarke, but she soon changed hands, being owned jointly by Brian Rutland and Roy Smith until 1987.

At some time during her early years her name had been changed; when she was bought by Graham and Sue Mackareth in 1987 she was called *Yarnspinner*. Her new owners renamed her again, this time calling her *Pleione*, after a star in the Seven Sisters constellation, and went on to cruise her extensively before putting her through a major rebuild in 1994. Following this work the Mackareths continued their cruising until parting company with her in 2002.

At this time she was restored to her original name of *New Venture* by her new owners, Mr and Mrs John Martin.

Specifications

LOA: 40ft (12.2m)

Beam: 11ft 3in (3.4m)

Draught: 3ft 10in (1.2m)

Built: 1960

Engines: Twin Perkins 145hp diesel