



It was a raw, blue day on the Thames when Jason Carrington piped me aboard his 30ft C-Boat C-12 moored at Chelsea Pier in London. As we cast off, Carrington fired the engines and hit the gas. The C-12 leapt forwards, giving me mild whiplash while squashing me into my bucket seat. Within a few seconds, Chelsea Bridge was hurtling towards us at 40 knots (about 46mph). Waves feel as hard as concrete when hit at speed, far more thrilling than when travelling as fast in a car.

The C-12 was riding the waves superbly when Carrington flung the wheel around. The C-12 spun about its axis in a pair of neatly executed 360-degree turns, sending plumes of water into the air, before proceeding down-stream. 'No propellers!' Carrington shouted. 'Nor rudder! Just two water jets. Look...'. I pulled a lever. The bows dipped, and the C-12 lurched to a halt. 'Water brakes!' he said, with a grin. 'Reverse thrust. I'm still trying to work out what exactly she's capable of.'

The C-12 will be this summer's must-have floating fashion accessory, a lightweight, high-performance boat like a jet-ski with a one-bedroom flat on top. Twin impellers send it water via a coarse grille in the front and spit it out at the back, creating thrust. By adjusting the flow of water through each jet, you can make the C-12 accelerate, turn, spin, 'brake', move sideways and probably do somersaults. 'She operates like a Harrier jump jet,' Carrington says. 'Her "clean" hull allows her to skim along in a few inches of water, where propeller

boats wouldn't dare. I love taking her up shallow creeks. Everyone who sees it says, "Wow!"'

Carrington, 40, a professional yachtsman and boatbuilder based in Lymington, Hampshire, is known in yachting circles for constructing the Open 60 racer Hugo Boss. Open 60s are powerful, strong offshore sailing boats that are usually – but not always – raced single-handedly. They are designed to compete in long-distance events, such as the Vendée Globe, the nonstop single-handed round-the-world race. In the 2007 Barcelona World Race, Hugo Boss, crewed by Alex Thomson and Andrew Cape, broke the world record for the greatest distance covered in 24 hours by an Open 60: 501 nautical miles.

In between building yachts for clients, Carrington races them. He is a veteran of four round-the-world races (of which he has finished three); one Jules Verne race (for the fastest global circumnavigation); 10 Fastnets; seven Sydney-to-Hobarts; 15 transatlantic crossings and three Admiral's Cups. But after 20 years of building and crewing for clients, Carrington felt it was time to acquire a boat of his own. Finding nothing new in concept, design and materials, he decided to build his own.

He commissioned Humphreys Yacht Design to carry out the naval architecture, and worked closely with Angus Blair of HYD throughout the design and build phase. The result is sleek, masculine and stripped down. The C-12's dark-grey carbon-fibre hull lends an air of a special-ops naval vessel, like a torpedo boat

crossed with a Stealth bomber. 'I wanted her to be raw, with nothing hidden,' Carrington says. 'I wanted her to look like a classic boat that was also modern, aggressive but sexy.'

Of greater importance to Carrington than aesthetics, however, are the building materials and the qualities that they impart. 'I love the challenge of building a lighter and stronger boat than any other,' he says. The C-12 is handmade from a Nomex honeycomb core shrouded in carbon fibre. These expensive lightweight materials are difficult to work with, but, in the right hands, can produce far stiffer hulls than any other material of the same weight. 'The achievable weight and strength of Nomex and carbon fibre are staggering,' Carrington says. 'The hull, deck and structure of an 8,000kg Open 60 would weigh less than 2,000kg.'

The C-12 has a dry weight (hull, decks, structure, machinery) of 1,200kg. It is the lightest and strongest boat of its class, and, at £300,000, one of the cheapest. The wide-open aft deck has what looks like an upholstered coffee table



in the middle. This houses two Steyr MO236 diesel engines and twin water jets. An open transom gives directly on the water, producing a beach-deck effect, a look that Carrington lifted from modern racing yachts. A few patches of hand-stitched leather and a few sculpted cockpit mountings are just enough to qualify the C-12 for 'luxury goods' status. The bows contain a small cabin with a double berth, lavatory, galley and a tiny wine rack, allowing you and a close friend to test the limits of the C-12's 700-mile range in a modicum of comfort.

The world of jet boats is still relatively young. They were pioneered by Sir Bill Hamilton in New Zealand more than 50 years ago. His company HamiltonJet still leads the way in water jet development. One of the most famous jet boats is the Hamilton-powered Picnic Boat, built by the Maine-based Hinckley. Owing a Hinckley is like owning a vintage Bentley, and the Picnic Boat is the US old-money status symbol for the discreet seafaring rich. In Europe jet boats have caught on as working boats more than as pleasure boats. In Sweden they are popular for navigating the Stockholm archipelago, which demands tight manoeuvring in shallow waters. In Britain the RNLI uses jet boats as inshore lifeboats; the Royal Navy deploys them as patrol boats.

Sea water runs in Jason Carrington's veins. His father, Chris Carrington, built Contessa 26 racing yachts and raced offshore powerboats. His finest hour was finishing second in the Cowes-Torquay powerboat race in the 1970s.

'I wouldn't want to mass-produce the C-12. I just want a beautifully tailored exclusive boat for a handful of clients'

When he was eight, Jason met Clare Francis as she was preparing to take part in the Whitbread round-the-world race in 1977. He determined that he too would race round-the-world yachts.

At 17, he took an apprenticeship at Green Marine, a Lymington racing boat builder, and through it met the Swedish sailor Magnus Olsson. Olsson was supervising construction of Intrum Justitia, which was being groomed for the 1993-4 Whitbread. Carrington pestered Olsson daily and managed to climb aboard Intrum for the now defunct Round Europe race. Meanwhile, the British yachtsman Lawrie Smith offered him the prospect of a Whitbread berth aboard Fortuna, a maxi boat (the largest type of racer, some 80ft long). 'I brought an understanding of how boats are built and how to fix them,' he explains. But the calamities that befell the Fortuna went way beyond the abilities of a boatbuilder of even Carrington's skill. 'The Fortuna campaign was, at best, a well-publicised disaster,' he says. 'We broke both masts and just about everything else. But it got me on to the British scene. Lawrie was considered the best guy to be offshore sailing with.'

C-Boat, the brand name of the C-12, is a spin-off of Carrington's day job running Carrington Yachts, which he founded in 2006. His partner at C-Boat is the photographer

Jonathan Glynn-Smith. 'Until I glimpsed the C-12, I had seen nothing beyond the original Riva yachts of the 1960s that were aesthetically true to our time,' Glynn-Smith says. 'I knew that, given the right ingredients, the C-12 would excite people. I saw C-Boat as a business, not as a one-off for Jason.'

'We agreed that the C-Boat would always revert to being the boat that I wanted to build for myself,' Carrington says tersely, before adding, 'But it has evolved into a boat that might inspire future projects about aesthetics, design and a water-borne lifestyle.' One commercial idea is that the C-12 could be used as a super-yacht's tender for ferrying passengers to and from land. 'At the Monaco Boat Show, people asked if we could make a larger 44ft version as a chase boat,' Carrington says. 'A chase boat supports the mother ship, but, unlike a tender, doesn't get lifted on board.'

According to Carrington, C-Boats will never be mass-produced. Whether in 30ft or 44ft versions, they will be crafted at a rate of only four per year. 'Few boatyards can work with Nomex and carbon fibre. The carbon skin must be perfectly bonded to the Nomex core in temperature-controlled vacuum conditions. C-Boats can only ever be semi-custom-built. In car terms, she's more Aston Martin or Ferrari than Ford or Toyota. There is no waiting list, but once we have confirmed a couple of orders, there might be one. I wouldn't want to mass-produce the C-12. I just want a beautifully tailored exclusive boat for a handful of clients.'

Sexy beast

Like a jet-propelled cross between a torpedo boat and a Stealth bomber, the C-Boat C-12 is setting pulses racing. Rory Ross takes a spin

Top Jason Carrington building and piloting the C-12. **Above** Carrington, right, with Angus Blair of Humphreys Yacht Design, his collaborator on the C-12. 'I wanted her to look like a classic boat that was also modern, aggressive but sexy,' Carrington says