



Left: *Magic Carpet* racing in Sardinia in 2003. All three of the Magic Carpets to date have been distinguished by their competitive longevity, which implies a particularly successful result in terms of project planning in an era when many large yachts run out of puff within a couple of years. Her successor is the current *Magic Carpet* (above), here taking line honours on the first day of the 2013 Giraglia soon after her racing debut

# The Magic Carpet story

After a successful season winning in Sardinia and St Tropez Sir Lindsay Owen Jones sat down with Blue Robinson to reflect on a passion for combining speed with elegance...

**Seahorse Magazine:** When did you start sailing?

**Sir Lindsay Owen Jones:** I learned as a teenager in a dinghy at the Ile de Ré islands halfway down the Atlantic coast, but then sailing took a back seat to my other passion in life which was racing cars; so as a family we carried on sailing but not racing. Then, as my 50th year loomed on the horizon, my own self-confidence and that of my shareholders seemed to waiver slightly in the area of car racing... making for a wonderful opportunity to go back to my old love of racing boats.

**SH:** Why the Wally class as opposed to, say, a *Wild Oats XI* or a *Rán*?

**LOJ:** I looked at everything and of course the then new 30m *Wild Oats XI* and *Alfa Romeo* were incredibly exciting and I thought that was where it was at, but I realised this meant we would have to have two boats – a family boat plus a racing boat, and that didn't seem like a fun idea at all. Taking a family cruising boat racing was OK, but my wife Cristina didn't want to be lying in the bottom of a hollow carbon fibre shell being doused with water... so we had to look at where we could get satisfaction and excitement in a racing yacht that could be converted back to a good family cruising boat.

We made a first attempt with a 53ft ULDB that only weighed eight tons and was great downwind but not upwind – but we were getting closer to the answer. Then one day I saw a photo of *Genie of the Lamp*, the first Wally, so I immediately rang to see if we could look at it; as soon as I got onboard *Genie* I said 'this is what I am looking for!' Fast enough to be exciting and everywhere

was smooth, with no exposed cables or brackets so my wife can go anywhere and feel safe... and she liked it.

**SH:** *Magic Carpet* is a beautiful boat, so what drove your vision for that?

**LOJ:** By the time we got round to the next project, *Magic Carpet*, we knew exactly what we were after. *Magic Carpet 1* was a close sistership to *Genie* and as such wasn't set up for furling jibs – you had to hank on the headsails, plus the pivoting arm for the anchor was cumbersome. So we built *Magic Carpet* with the same-sized interior but with some space at either end – a decent lazaret for a tender and bow locker for sails. This weight in the middle with space at each end is one reason it performed so well... and still does!

**SH:** When did you start thinking about *Magic Carpet*?

**LOJ:** The next step was purely a technological move. After about five years with *Magic Carpet* I started thinking about what the next step was, and that wasn't really clear. Despite a whole series of boats coming out there was nothing performing

much better than *MC* in the Wally Class and so we started talking to Jim Pugh. Jim is a very good Welshman: he sings a good song, like myself... And Jim started pointing out things he could do even within the constraints of a family cruising boat. Then right in the middle of all this he did something really very clever. He said to prove he could do some things for us – despite *MC* being a German Frers design – here were some ideas to improve *MC*, and the series of things he worked on improved the boat immensely. It really was eye-opening and we all felt a little silly for not having done this before.

**SH:** I sense that elegance in form and function are very important to you, and so people around you must both understand and provide this. Who were these key people?

**LOJ:** There is Luca Bassani of Wally, of course; in many ways we think along similar lines. While I was looking for excitement in a family boat, so was Luca – *Genie* was built for him. And the other point about Luca is he only likes beautiful boats.

So Luca was always very present, but we knew we also had to go to people who had experience in other top racing boats, to ensure we had access to their design knowledge. We could see boats getting wider then thinner then wider again, and then they went through the fashion of the chines and that was a bit of a disaster, and so we were waiting for all that technology to stabilise. Eventually we came to a point where the projected numbers – and for a 100ft cruising boat it is very much a numbers game – were miles different from *MC*, and we thought if we really can do 25kt+ downwind cruising with the family, that is going to be fantastic.

**SH:** And your design brief to Reichel-Pugh?

**LOJ:** We said we wanted it to look like a dark blue line on the ocean – not much of a design brief but that is what I wanted! Jim said that was not incompatible and so he and Luca fought it out on how negative the sheer should be. In the end we agreed it should be just a hint – then suddenly we had something that Luca put through the Wally 3D model. He showed us the first image about four years before this boat was launched, but if you look quickly you'd say it was the actual boat.

They were so close to the end result and we fell in love with it immediately, but being rational people we went through the process of trying to verify the numbers and angles, and we also tried to see if we could make this something that other Wally owners might want to buy. That was important... I knew from experience that if we just built a quick boat and went out on our own it would be boring, so attracting other owners was important, getting a sub-group of three or four quick boats competing. This cost us some time and

also some design compromise.

Everyone said no to water ballast – it's noisy and it smells and takes away light from the living area. We accepted that was one complication too many. The process took a lot of time but what we see now are two boats on the water, a third being built and a fourth I think about to be ordered.

**SH:** How close has actual performance come to the predictions from designers?

**LOJ:** It's now very close. When we started I think we underestimated just how much tuning was required for this boat. The first time we sailed this boat we knew it was very fast, but that is not enough – it has to be as fast as its rating... which is very high!

We now have a small performance group that comes up with ideas that gain seconds here and there. If you can save 20 seconds on a spinnaker hoist, this is worth a lot. So we had to ensure our winches would be powerful enough to get spinners up the rig in seconds – despite these sails being much heavier than pure racing sails. Right now I think the winches we have are among the fastest in the world – which is also a challenge as if there is a snag you rapidly start to shred things...

**SH:** How has your philosophy changed in the way you've sailed the boat over the past year?

**LOJ:** Last year we were really finding our way and we were not meeting our targets. We were close but we were very much learning about speeds and angles and what worked. With improved sail choices, a lot of detailed ideas and very good crew work we have gradually developed the right way to sail this boat; suddenly we were winning races and sailing to our rating, but this meant everyone in our team had to raise their game – including me!

It is a big challenge to sail a boat that is





The Reichel-Pugh designed *Magic Carpet* arrives in Genoa in very light airs to take line honours in the long race of the 2013 Giraglia. For a high-volume, commodious yacht, what has most distinguished this boat from her similarly sized peers is her excellent light-air pace – a direct result of rigorous weight management during build

so demanding; it can be sailed at 95 per cent but it won't win. Tough sail choices have to be made because if you want to be at 100 per cent of the polars and it is physically possible to set a reaching sail to gain seconds then you must do it.

The pressure on the crew has been huge but they delivered and now sail it much better than they did a year ago. There are still areas we think can improve and a lot of discoveries to be made. This year's discovery is our heavy air spinnaker performs incredibly well in light air! So that starts everyone thinking why, and so the creative process continues... It is very motivating because the boat is beautiful and that is very much part of everyone's pride. I couldn't say she is a low-maintenance girl – but if you can't afford the accessories, what is the point in having the lady...

**SH:** How critical is the skipper to a project like this and what does Danny Gallichan bring to the role?

**LOJ:** First is the question of continuity. The owner can't be constantly present throughout the build and it really doesn't work if he puts in ideas at the beginning and turns up at the end – so you really need someone who deeply understands what you like. Danny has been with us for nearly 20 years. He is a very unusual man; he is both very committed to the boat and its programme and is also deeply committed to the people, the team and my family. I don't think I would have even thought of building this boat if we hadn't had Danny there as the central person who kept an eye on everything.

**SH:** And other key people?

**LOJ:** Two other people played a central role. One is Bob Wylie, who is acting for Reichel-Pugh and applied so much pressure to the builders to ensure everything that went into this boat was weighed and manufactured to the best standard, to allow us the best bulb weight... that made a big difference. The other person is Ed Bell, our #2 and engineer.

Basically this boat works around a large diesel engine, giving propulsion and hydraulic power for all the functions. Said like that it is really simple – a big hydraulic pump with a few tubes attached, so it's all going to work, right? Well, no it isn't!

There are so many questions of how much pressure where, and how many functions at the same time, plus optimum sizes and capabilities of each sub-pump, which means you really need someone with deep engineering skills... and also with a good IT background, as you are writing your own programs. When you hit the button there has to be a computer interface that says 'wait a second, you are pressing button X, but there are four other people pressing other function commands at the same time... which function gets priority and what load sharing is available?'

At the beginning we frequently stalled the system by overloading it, which I can tell you is quite scary as of course maximum function requests occur at critical times. Now it all works very well – and is indeed capable of doing so much more than we first thought.

**SH:** The worlds in Sardinia delivered a great result for the team...

**LOJ:** I think in Sardinia we had to sail the boat very well on every single angle. There are a lot of coastal races with complicated courses and one of the key points is we navigated well. We have a fantastic navigator with Marcel van Trieste, who has a way of seeing the traps way ahead, plus we took the risk of always putting up the most powerful sails the boat could handle and keeping them in one piece. So conservative in care but aggressive in choice. We thought we had the week sewn up, then on the last downwind on the last day in 20kt+ the spinnaker won't unfurl! Everyone is thinking please no... But we got it down and replaced it quicker than perhaps we should have – and so we won by just 1pt!

**SH:** What is important in the competitive sailing you choose to do now?

**LOJ:** Well, two of the answers are in that question. It's competitive, and since I was young I have raced everything, cars and motorbikes – if you give me any sort of machine I will find a way to race it against somebody. Secondly, it is sailing and that is especially magical, the way the boat accelerates in any breeze. And lastly it's good for me because I stopped my occupation where I managed a large company and sailing a boat like this is a management challenge, so that was right up my street, choosing people, motivating them and keeping them.

You asked what was successful about our programme – well, the core of the team have been with us for years and years and that really builds a feeling that the team belongs to something they have created, the Magic Carpet story.

**SH:** Future challenges for the Wally class?

**LOJ:** The Wally class right now is going better than it has for a long time so I am crossing fingers we may have found something. I think the secret of attracting people is that quite a few boats have done well and people have begun to understand the formula: a passionate owner, not necessarily historically a good sailor, but who is patient enough to hang in there and learn, surrounding themselves with a good, motivated crew; and by hanging in there and accepting some guidance they do well. And IRC rates these boats pretty fairly, most of these boat are good enough to win races if they sail well – so that attracted me.

There aren't many other big-boat fleets rising in numbers, so here is a class where you can bring your big boat, you can have fun and it is an owners' association, so we know each other and socialise a bit, and we have also improved things by cutting the number of venues we compete at. Every owner is his own man, so can think of a good reason why he wants to go here or there, but then you end up with four boats at seven venues... So this time there are only four venues, which we all like, so well done to the owners there.

The secret is to go on proving that these are racing boats that – unusually – keep their secondhand value: many of the boats competing in St Tropez last year were pre-owned boats, purchased at a reasonable price. And they will be sold on again.

One day in St Tropez the first three positions were *Magic Carpet*, *Magic Carpet 1* and *Magic Carpet*... So if you want a beautiful secondhand boat that will keep winning, instead of building a pure race maxi that you almost have to give away in a couple of years... well, to me this seems a better option! □