My Adventure that was the Golden Cockerel

Golden Cockerel 1967
A 43 foot ocean racing catamaran, designed by Rudi Choy in Hawaii in 1966
Duncan in cockpit & Raymond on aft trampoline, both on the port side.

By Raymond Simonds
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I spent much of spring and summer 1967 preparing, training and racing Golden Cockerel. It was a huge adventure for me aged only 19 and just left school and the events that followed had a lasting impact on my approach to life in general. She was a 43 foot catamaran, built in the UK as an ocean racing machine to win the third 'Single Handed Trans Atlantic Race' scheduled to run from Plymouth to Rhode Island in summer 1968. She was the last word in innovative light weight design by Rudi Choy from Hawaii. Ocean going catamarans were completely new and dagger boards in an offshore boat were a revolution at the time. Bill Howell had enormous experience both racing and cruising long distance. His book 'White Cliffs to Coral Reef' was published in 1957 and related his cruise, much single handed, from Dover across the Atlantic & Caribbean to the Pacific Ocean, where he spent 2 years cruising from The Galapagos to the Marquesas, Tahiti, Hawaii and Vancouver. All in a tiny gaff rigged sloop called Wanderer 2 that was just 24 feet long and had no engine! He bought it from the legendary post war cruiser, Eric Hiscox. Bill was an Australian dentist, so he was able to earn his passage by practising dentistry on the natives of Polynesia, who paid in chickens or pearls, whatever they could afford. This was before Sir Francis Chichester's inspiring 1966 circumnavigation and books, so his book only sold a few hundred copies and he gave me his own, inscribed for his wife Gwen. Bill approached Courage Brewery to sponsor him in his quest to win the Single Handed Trans-Atlantic Race (OSTAR) of 1968 and Duncan Simonds [my father] as Sales Director became responsible for the project. This is how we both ended up as part of the rather scratch crew.

On July 8th 1967 I was very excited to be off on another long ocean race. The Crystal Trophy race for ocean going Catamarans started in Cowes then, over three days, would take us past the Nab to Cherbourg No1 buoy, followed by a long slog down the Channel to Wolf Rock, finishing in Plymouth. Blowing a blustery force 5 Westerly, when we left Cowes, we had a fast spinnaker run to the Nab then turned onto a starboard shy reach towards France at what would have been 14 - 16 knots. We were accustomed to winning, but on this occasion found ourselves lying 4th, the three leaders had slowly pulled ahead on the spinnaker run down from Cowes and two more were right on our heels, this despite our pushing the boat hard and regularly flying a hull. As a result, when we left the lee of the Isle of Wight about noon and the wind piped up to force 6 gusting more, we were reluctant to put up the smaller jib in place of the big No 2 genoa. When we did decide to change down, a succession of small problems delayed the change and meant that 3 crew were right forward on the leeward hull. When a squall hit and the weather hull lifted too high, the mainsheet was released too late and to no great effect. The genoa was then released but the sheet snarled on the winch and it did not go out far enough, so we capsized.

I was off watch, so with a long race ahead and already feeling a little seasick, I had retired to a bunk in the windward hull to rest, with my sailing kit off. When the boat lurched over I was thrown out, scrambled across the cabin (on the wall by now) and helped Mike get out of the cabin door. As he left, the boat collapsed upside down and the water flooded in. The sensation in the cabin as we sank must match that of being inside a full washing machine, with no idea which way is up – or which way to go to find air to breathe. Added to which, as the boat went past 90º all hell broke loose in the cabin. Lockers emptied their contents and I particularly remember the ships radio, in those days the size of a school tuck box, fly past in front of my face and smash on the opposite cabin wall. I ended up part swept, part hiding from the chaos and part searching for air, in one of the upturned hulls, where the air pocket was certainly a couple of feet deep. In the main cabin the water level was sometimes just six inches from the floor and I had to twist my head sideways to get a breath of air. The water was also oily and cold, but there was sufficient light filtering down through the water and into the cabin to see quite clearly.

Just as suddenly as the chaos started, it stopped and there was just a stream of bubbles from near my feet, which were planted on the cabin roof, as the water swirled round my head. There was also a loud hissing nearby, that I discovered was being made by my precious supply of air as it whistled out of the sink's seacock in the cabin, so I turned it off. About this time I heard the crew shouting from the other side of the cabin floor out in the open, calling my name and asking if I was OK. Mike had arrived safely on the surface and had told them he last saw me inside the upturned hull. I could hear them shouting to me in the now eerily quiet cabin, but I later learned that they could not hear me well enough to understand that I was fine and planned on joining them shortly. I can only imagine the emotions going on in Dad's head knowing that I was

somewhere underneath him in the upturned cabin and that there was nothing any of them could do to help me. My immediate problem, of air supply, solved I started to think about getting out and of the conditions outside. At some point I found and put on my sea boots, but strangely not my windproof top, life jacket or harness! Then I hauled the floating canister of flares down out of its flooded locker, where it was jammed against the 'ceiling' by its flotation, tied a rope to it and forced it down out of the hatch in the coach roof to the outside. This proved remarkably difficult to do, forcing about a 2 gallon 'float' 5 feet down underwater. Sadly, despite it being on a rope and my warning the crew that it was coming, they somehow dropped it and it was swept away by the waves! We did however have the rope, which became essential in helping us stop sliding off the slippery underside of the cabin floor, as it was swept by the waves. Having pushed out the flares, I followed them down through the coach roof and up into the cockpit [now upside down] to look for a breath of air. Sadly there was none trapped there as it was a self draining cockpit, so I had to make a rather hasty and very breathless exit to the surface and a rousing welcome from the rest of the assembled crew, each of whom also had their own remarkable tale to tell of how they had survived the capsize.

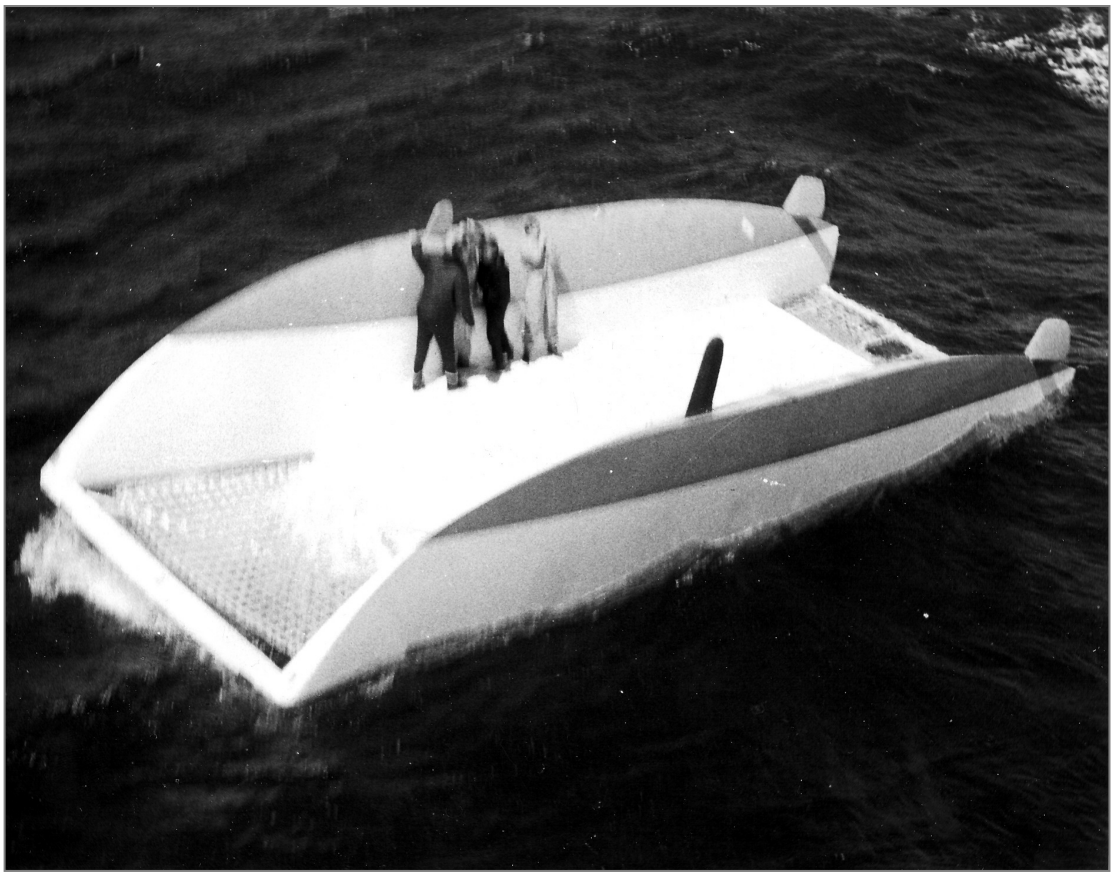
Our immediate problem was to recover the life raft, which was securely tied on the 'wrong' side of the aft trampoline. Much slashing with knives later we had it cut free, but it inflated upside down so another batch of flares and our emergency supplies floated away out of reach. (Soon after and partly as a result of this, all life rafts had to have their supplies tied into them) I was asked many times, was I afraid during all this. The truthful answer is 'No', as I think I was just too busy surviving to have time for any other emotions.

Very soon after this the first of two competitors to have witnessed the capsize sailed up and hove too nearby, offering to help. One also radioed for help. After an hour or so a RNR Minesweeper arrived and started to try to either come alongside or approach 'bow on' in an effort to get us to jump in the sea, swim down one side of it – and grab a step ladder hanging off a boat that was rolling like a barrel! This plan was doomed as nobody was going to try that suicidal plan in the wind and big sea that was running! So Bill Howell and two more crew took to the life raft and were let off on the rope, hoping to guide them to the rope ladder. Disaster was narrowly averted when the ship was blown sideways across the rope, risking to drag the life raft under it – but the rope broke first. The minesweeper then left us, in pursuit of the fast disappearing life raft.

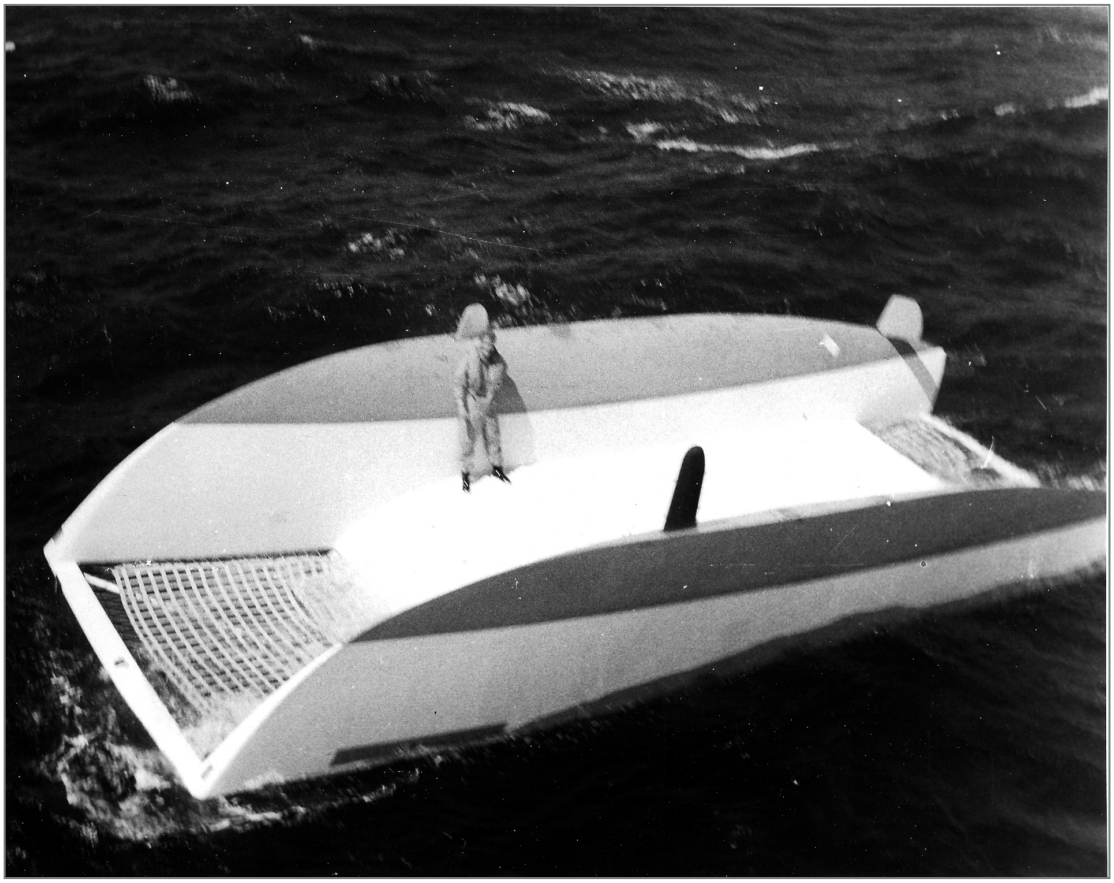
An RAF Westland Air / Sea rescue helicopter arrived soon after, with his winch man swinging in a huge arc below. The poor man was dunked in the ocean a couple of times before landing momentarily on the upturned hull. Pointing at me he threw a padded webbing loop over my head, pulled it tight across my chest and shouted very loudly that I had to; 'keep my arms down or you will fall out!' Then we hurtled up in the air apparently with me kicking my legs most of the way up to the helicopter hatch. The others were soon picked up too and in a surreal twist, when we were asked where we needed to go we said 'Seaview', so about 15 minutes later we landed on the Duver and headed promptly to Sandrock, where we had to break in to get hot baths!

The next day was calm so Golden Cockerel was beached in Bembridge Harbour entrance with the help of Attrill's yard. We spent two days bailing her out and stripping off anything that the Dutch crew had not already taken. Attrill's then stripped out the wrecked hull, both strengthened and lightened it and had it re-launched for the following season's racing calendar. Golden Cockerel remained under the care of Attrill's yard for the rest of her long career. Some of those aboard when we capsized left the crew, but the rest of us had a lot more fun racing her the next season, reaching the then ridiculous speed of 20 knots under spinnaker on several occasions.

Bill took her in the third Single Handed Trans-Atlantic race [known as the OSTAR] in 1968, finishing a very creditable 5th in 31 days 16 hours. All of the five original 1964 race competitors entered, and all five improved their original times, but Eric Tabarly in Pen Duik 2 stormed across in 27 days 3 hours. Bill had finished 6th place in the ground breaking 1964 race in 38 days 3 hours, sailing his 30 foot monohull Stardrift. All a far cry from the 10 or 11 days common by the 1992 race and the record of 6 days 19 hours set by Mari-Cha IV in 2003. The other competitors in 1964 were the legends of post war racing, Eric Tabarly, Sir Francis Chichester, Sir Alec Rose and Blondie Hasler. The rest as they say 'is history'.



Golden Cockerel from the RAF helicopter just after the first crew member [me] was lifted off.
Note the hole in the aft trampoline where we had cut out the life raft.



Last man left aboard, Billy Mobbs.
Note the bow beam & trampoline up in the air – before slamming back into the next wave.

The life raft finally gets a line from aboard the Minesweeper and is pulled alongside.

Golden Cockerel was lying about 16 miles south of St Catherine's Point, off the Isle of Wight. The Coastguard lookout at Ventnor had not seen us so, having lost our flares and before the days of VHF, it was fortunate that one of the other competitors did, and was able to radio for assistance.

Aside the two other competitors who stood by us, a RNR [Royal Navy Reserve] minesweeper was first on the scene. It was crewed by just 4 or 5 part time reserve officers with a party of cadets on a 'Sea Experience' outing. In a rough sea and at low speeds, a wooden minesweeper is remarkably difficult to manoeuvre and has no visibility over the bow at objects close up to it. They tried to come alongside, but failed. They tried to approach bow on to take a line, but only succeeded in hitting us so hard that it made a crack in one hull, that then started slowly to sink.

Bill Howell, with Emile Hartman then went in the life raft that we released on a rope, to try to board the minesweeper. The intention was then to pull the life raft back to us and send two more. The Minesweeper was swept across the rope, which broke, so the life raft then drifted fast away from us, with minesweeper in pursuit, till they managed to get it alongside and the crew could clamber up the steps lowered for the purpose. This was the most hazardous part of the whole day as the ship was rolling violently and in danger of crushing the crew as they drifted along the side then crawled from raft to ladder.

The Minesweeper could not help with salvage, so returned to base, arriving in Portsmouth late that afternoon and abandoning Golden Cockerel to the elements.

HMS Curzon, 'Ton' Class Minesweeper, 1954 – 1976
[Also know as HMS Fittleton]

The crew in the life raft had to clamber up the minesweeper's ladder.
The minesweeper was rolling so badly that, on the extremity of some big rolls, you could see the turn of the bilges, which risked crushing the life raft.

The ‘Thank You’ party

Duncan Simonds threw a party for the RAF aircrew of the Air/Sea helicopter that rescued us, in a Courage pub of course. Two were due to retire at the end that month and they said that, in a career of rescues, none of the host of people that they had saved from the sea had ever held a party for them before.

From the left:
Entertainer & Pianist, then ?, Emile, Quentin, Billy Mobbs, Two rescue crew, Duncan Simonds, Raymond Simonds, Mike Priestly, Bill Howell, Rescue Crew.

Bill Howell – Obituary from the OCC, 1998.
Bill was perhaps the perfect prototype for a founder member of the Ocean Cruising Club when it was set up by Humphrey Barton in 1954. He was using the oceans as a highway for his chosen life rather than for holidays or adventures. His chosen life, of course, was worldwide cruising supported by professional dentistry. The dentist chair and the foot operated drill were notable and unusual fit-out items in his first boat.

After serving as a bomber/navigator in the Royal Australian Air Force, Bill Howell went to University to train as a dentist before coming to England to practice in Hammersmith. His qualifying voyage for the OCC was Falmouth to Gibraltar in 1951 in the famous Wanderer II. In 1955, with Frank McNulty, he set off to return to his native Australia, filling teeth and writing White Cliffs to Coral Reefs along the way. Wanderer II had to be sold when he got to Vancouver and he returned to London to marry Gwen and to set up a full time and very successful dental practice in Wimbledon. Bill specialised in, and became a world authority on, reducing pain and trauma in dentistry.

Notes on the Press Conference following the capsize and rescue of the crew of the 'Golden Cockerel' on Saturday July 8th 1967

Duncan Simonds, Chairman:
Gentlemen, it's very nice of you to come along here and I hope that we've done the right thing by organising this little meeting. We have absolutely no thought in our minds of offering any sort of excuses or whitewashes or defence of this particular incident, but we did feel, and it was all done in very short notice, that it would be extremely helpful to everybody concerned, both to the press and people very interested in the multi-hull world, if there could be a sort of no holds barred run down of what happened, perhaps as we saw it from within the boat and as some other people sailing in the race saw it, which could be to the ultimate advantage of sailing generally and multi-hull sailing in particular.

I would say that this little meeting or conference has been organised in extremely short order and none of us here or Mr Hendy have had the least chance to sort of rehearse what they're going to say; everything's entirely off the cuff and our thought is only to be as helpful as we can be it's really no more than that.

I think that before we plunge into it, it would be right if I could give you some of the general background which led to the launching of the "Golden Cockerel" and ultimately our participation in this race. Bill Howell of course, needs no introduction to anybody here, Bill's got a tremendously distinguished record as a single-handed sailor, and he, for his own extremely good reasons, decided that a multi-hull boat of suitable design would lead the rest of the fleet across the Atlantic in next year's single-handed race. He commissioned the boat to be built and maybe he'll tell us some more about that. I daresay it's pretty well known to everybody, she was built to Rudi Choy's designs up in Yarmouth. He had, what seemed at the time, to be a brainwave he may be regretting it now I don't know!, of coming along to Courages and asking if we would share in the sponsorship of this boat. Well Bill's a most persuasive chap, a great talker and a fine character, and it didn't take him long before he simply steam rollered the Chairman, Richard Courage and myself into this idea and we, indeed adopted it most enthusiastically. From our point of view the idea of having a boat of this distinction with our trade mark on it, the Golden Cockerel, sailing all round the world in all these races and everything, it was tremendous, and I may say my Chairman, Richard Courage, is a very keen sailing man himself, his own boat, conventional hull of course. "The Barley Corn" has been very well known particularly on the East Coast for a great number of years. Indeed the whole firm took up this idea with the utmost enthusiasm and they've all followed the fortunes of the Golden Cockerel very very keenly.

In a way I think that enthusiasm may have been a sort of beginning of our, in a sense, of our misfortunes. For one thing Bill obviously had to find a crew and he had the most generous idea, he thought it would be a good thing if he could recruit a crew from Courages. Well that seemed a fine idea and we tried to get a number of young chaps interested, who would be able to take 'long weekends' off to work up this boat, over weekends and so on and get her race-worthy in every respect. Unfortunately, it didn't really come off, because it's extremely difficult for Departmental Heads to release chaps and a certain amount of time of building up a crew was wasted while we were just trying to find the right chaps, and couldn't. So that in the end the building up of a crew was a pretty haphazard arrangement and when you consider that I, with very limited sailing experience, was asked eventually by Bill to take charge of one of his watches, it's quite obvious that there were very severe handicaps placed on Bill. I won't speak for any other member of the crew, except my son, who can't be here today and is purely a nineteen year old dinghy sailor, who was one of them. We had nobody in the crew at all with any experience of catamarans whatever. I'm quite sure that if Bill had not felt himself obligated to the House of Courage, which he did in the most generous way then he would have probably have built up his crew on entirely different lines. As it was, we were most decidedly, a very scratch lot; myself, my son, a very nice but quite inexperienced young man from one of our offices in Bristol, a keen tough boy, but like most of us with no experience, two Australian friends of Bill's, two of the nicest chaps in the world, one of whom is considerably experienced as a dinghy sailor, none in cats and very little in larger multi-hulls and one with, I think I can say, no experience at all and one other friend of mine who had catamaran experience, Oh yes one of us, just one of us, had catamaran

experience, Emile Hartner, I should have said that. Emile who owns his own catamaran, but I don't know how much deep water experience, you would claim Emile? The point I'm trying to make really is that I think that our misfortunes slightly stemmed from the mere fact of the sponsorship, the first reason being that because of this sponsorship and because of Bill's sporting sort of acknowledgement of the firm's support of him, he ended up with a crew which I'm perfectly certain he would never have selected if he'd been absolutely free. I think the sponsorship angle was partly responsible for our misfortunes in another way; and that is that it gave rise to the most unholy desire to win this race. I've no doubt that that desire was present among all boats taking part, everyone who goes in for a race expects to win it. But I can tell you that quite clearly we were all possessed with a sort of feeling that we were battling for the firm and for the Golden Cockerel and we've simply got to win because so many other people are depending on us, kind of feeling, and that sort of moral irresponsibility really, I think also led a little bit to our downfall.

Well Gentlemen, that's the sort of outline of how this ship and this connection with Courages began and I haven't rehearsed these other two points which I've made with my colleagues in any way, but since I'm perfectly certain that this over-commitment to a sponsorship led us first of all to having a terribly inexperienced crew and secondly to an absolutely unholy and quite almost exaggerated desire to win this race because of our commitment to so many other people outside the boat if you know what I mean. I think from that point I'll sit down and rather let the proceedings take their course. Do you want to question me on what I've said?

Bill Howell; Well, It's sort of nice of Duncan to say that. Actually there's a certain amount of truth in what he says. I think, now he's made the point, I wouldn't say it to his face so to speak, and I think this will be realised by people like Chuck Barrows, who was in the other two races, like the Round the Island Race and the Morgan Cup Race, because as we know we had pretty atrocious weather conditions in the Morgan Cup Race with all these cats looking for wind. I've got a ketch rig which was a bit cut down to make it easier for single-handed sailing and the Morgan Cup Race was pretty disappointing, even though we finished ninth out of eighty, and then of course, the Round the Island Race and everybody in the multi-hulls wanted to try and beat Don Robinson's record of five hours and a little more, and then we got caught in a flat calm and things seemed interminable with the conditions of tide, we seemed to have a damn good chance. So on Saturday July 8th I got up in the morning about six o'clock and it was blowing about Force 4 or Force 5 and I was pretty elated and I'm quite sure everybody else was. The multi-hull mob were starting their Crystal Trophy Race and you know, we had such lousy conditions beforehand and there'd been such light winds and everybody was out to prove themselves and I think the other fellows who were in the race, like David Pelly, for instance, probably had the same sort of attitude reigning on Miracat you know, here's the wind at last. And of course when we started off, we had a bit of spinnaker trouble and also for the first time it ever happened, as we jibed the boom caught in the cross stay, we lost a little bit of time and the result was that Trifle and Miracat and Snow-Goose got out ahead of us, which made us more mad keen, we really felt we had to catch them. Pelican was having a lot more trouble behind us because she didn't have a very big spinney and she was only carrying her main for a while. So when we got to the Nab Tower and turned on to a close reach of course, the wind was about Force 5, I looked at the instruments at the time, as we came round that Tower it was about 20 Knots and we were sailing at about 45º to 50º to the apparent wind and we put our number two up which actually is the biggest headsail that we are allowed to carry under the rules, that's a little larger than the mainsail, we had them loose enough as well. We weren't far off carrying a thousand square feet of sail at the time. We were doing about 14 knots on our Harrier log and we were getting a certain amount of pounding. I wouldn't say it was serious but we got the occasional wave slapping underneath the bridge-deck.

I was speaking to Roland Prout and Ken Pearce, Pelican wasn't having this sort of trouble she was a bit higher out of the water, it wasn't serious trouble. We have a flip device on our mainsheet, which we've used experimentally on occasions, it's an adaptation of Roland Prout's design and hitherto it's always worked very well. Its only fault is the fact that it can be sparked off by a wave hitting the side of the hull, just an occasional tip of a wave. We were pounding on, we were catching up on Snowgoose but Miracat and Trifle were sort of way out in front at this stage

of the game, going great guns, Pelican and Stiletto were pounding up pretty hard behind us and the flip device on the mainsheet went out twice.

Another Speaker; Three times I think wasn't it?

Bill Howell; Twice, I think it went out twice. Duncan was on the helm, Emile was on watch with him watching the mainsheet and another member of the crew, Quinton, who was a young and inexperienced chap, was helping them out and I was working out the course and such like inside the cabin. In any case the flip device went out twice and we were rather cursing this because we were catching up on Snowgoose and every time it flipped out we started slowing down and Pelican was catching up. So I told Emile to hold it by hand. Now Emile's got a bit cat himself called * * and Emile is probably the most cautious member of the crew on board and so that's the reason why I told Emile to do it. I mean Emile lets that mainsheet fly so fast you know he's very aware, having a big cat himself. It is a cruising cat but it's a Woodie Brown design, and he's terribly sensitive to the feel of a hull lifting and so I thought it was pretty safe leaving it with him. There's also the fact that hitherto we had sort of lifted hulls more or less experimentally, you know tried to lift them and the flip device went and the main sheet had gone and we sort of luffed up and she'd always come back again so I thought that she'd be perfectly safe provided she had Emile there at the mainsheet.

In any case as we came out of the lee of the Isle of Wight, the breeze sort of plucked up a bit. I remember I decided it was obvious then we had to take in the big genoa. I went forward and with the extra weight forward we were pounding pretty hard and nobody seemed too keen, so even though I was off watch I put on my Henri Lloyd suit and I went forward with young Quentin to change the head-sail and left Duncan steering and Emile holding the mainsheet. We've got a double forestay and because we were racing, a thing I wouldn't ordinarily do if I was sailing on my own, instead of dropping the genoa first and then putting the working jib up, we started trying to hank on the working jib. Well as I say I remember looking at the instruments as I went out to the cockpit, the wind then was 25 knots, apparent wind, we were still between 45 and 50º off the apparent wind and we were doing between 14 and occasionally surging up to 16 knots, we seemed to be about 14 knots and all of a sudden she seemed to do a leap forward and go about 16 knots, we were doing between 14 and 16 knots and this will probably be verified by Ronald Prout and Ken Pearce who were also doing about the same speed behind us, and I was trying to hank on the working jib and I was having a hell of job forward with this other young chap because with these short seas that were then building up, I should say about 8 or 10 feet, very short seas, not all that much space in between them and she kept on jumping and sometimes we were about three feet up in the air, while we were trying to change the headsail, which meant that we were very slow hanking on the working jib. In any case we had it almost all hanked on, in fact we had all the hanks on and we were just about to put the halyard on and I was clipped on the mast with my safety harness and I remember looking out and the hull began to lift, and as the hull lifted I screamed out at the top of my voice "Let go of the mainsheet, let go of the mainsheet". I was under the impression that the mainsheet hadn't been let go, but in fact what happened then, as I was looking along the hull and I saw the hull lift to about 40º and then she started coming down again and when she came down again I thought thank Christ for that, Emile has let the mainsheet go, and when I saw it come down to 20 I thought she was going to be O.K. Then much to my horror the hull started lifting again and this time she went up very, very slowly it was really a slow motion type of thing, there was nothing fast about it, she went up very very slowly. I understand that a member of the crew did get to the genoa sheet and start letting it out, he let it out at about 4 feet, this was verified by Mike Priestly who was watching it and then it snarled on the winch. What happened then is she just went up very, very slowly and then she skidded along on the flat outside part of the side of the bottom hull and she went along there for quite some time, it seemed to me about 10 seconds or so, probably a little bit less than that, but it seemed a tremendously long length of time and even then - I was talking to Ken Pearce and Roland Prout who were just behind us later - and they also had the feeling that she might even come back then, and I could see the genoa right next to me flapping in the sea like that and then she hung there for quite some time and all of a sudden she went click, and when she want over she went over quite quickly, in fact almost alarmingly quickly because I got trapped underneath the trampoline, the safety net forward. I had my safety harness on and young Quentin also had his

safety harness on. I was wearing an old safety harness of mine which I've been using for many years. We've got some new ones on board but I don't like them, this has got a thicker webbing belt but it hasn't got as long a span. Young Quentin got a knock on the head but he managed to crawl through the guard rails with the length of line he had but I couldn't, my line was too short and I was caught, still attached to the mast, underneath the trampoline safety net. Now luckily we've got collision bulk heads forward and plenty of buoyancy aft too, so I kept on getting a gulp of air as the bow lifted, but the sea she kept on ducking me under and I thought Christ, you know, I'm gonna drown here. I just getting the occasional gulp of air and actually I swallowed about five or six pints of salt water, I can't understand why I wasn't sick afterwards. I think it was just the fear that stopped me being sick. I couldn't reach the end of the line to get the snap hook undone because every time I did the boat surged, you know, and being a very thin line like that, you get your hand around it you can't pull yourself into it and then you get towards the end of it and you surge away. Luckily I had a snap harness .and I got out of the snap harness and I got on board and I found myself standing there with the other five members of the crew and one chap was trapped in the hull, we were all concerned about that. As far as I'm concerned I must be perfectly frank, I such a hell of a struggle getting out there and with all the water as well I was pretty well whacked when I got back on board, and if anybody had said to me; 'Dive in and rescue the other fellow,' I wouldn't have been in a fit state for diving in and rescuing, I needed rescuing myself at that stage of the game.

When we sorted of collected our senses and realised that one member of the crew was missing, we got terribly disturbed about this. (He was the youngest member of the crew on board, Raymond Simonds, Duncan's son) We said to Mike, we said; “For Christ sake what happened to him?” He said; “Well he's still there underneath,” because with great presence of mind when the two of them were there and as she began to tip over and Mike was closest to the hatch, he said to Mike; 'You get out first, the two of us can't get out' and Mike dived out and left. He more or less volunteered to stay behind, which first of all showed a great deal of character, and secondly showed great presence of mind because if they'd both tried to get out they probably would've been jammed in the hatch or something more serious. One would've probably have got jammed in the doorway or something like that. So Mike said: “Well he's still down the hull.” So we started pounding on the hull and the next thing we were very relieved to hear young Raymond's voice. We said; “Raymond where are you?” and he said; “I'm alright,” rather indignant because we were asking after him. Any case we pleaded with him to come out but he was very busy, he turned off all the water cocks and things like that, which was irritating us because we thought that poor young bugger if he doesn't bloody well come out shortly..... but he turned off the stop cocks, displaying great presence of mind and also he went and collected a few flares, because he realised that as the boat was lying upside down we wouldn't have any flares to use and so he got some flares and pushed them out to us, and then much to our relief we saw him surface like a big porpoise and the first thing he said to us was; “Did you get those flares?” I said; “*** you!” Then we said; “No, bugger the flares you come up here.”

There was the seven of us standing there, Pelican with Ken Pearce at the helm came around and then Stiletto which had absolutely been going great guns in the race I must say, much to our surprise, but Stiletto was going great guns with Bill Higgins here on board. Bill came up and shouted you alright Bill? And I said yes Bill, you know us Bill's always stick together. Then Tomahawk came back and the three cats weaved in and out, sort of standing by us. All I was worried about at this stage of the game, quite frankly, was salvaging the boat, so we had a big discussion on board about how we were going to salvage it. I'll tell you this much about staying on a cat when it's upside down and all this talk about it being a comfortable life for us is all bull you know. It's an uncomfortable bloody life because it's awful slippery there. We could hardly keep our feet. The dagger plate was sticking up, so we had one of them safety harness wrapped around the dagger plate and everybody just hanging on to their safety harnesses. It was very very difficult standing there.

??; Would you consider having ‘safety walk’ under the Bridge.

Bill Howell; Yeah that's right. The first suggestion that somebody said there should be some hand holds under here. Somebody said it straight away. And between you and me I agree with

them after that experience. I was worried at this stage of the game of salvaging the boat and particularly how as we were racing, the first thing that crossed my mind was how am I covered for insurance?

A Minesweeper came up, seems they just saw us capsize, an R.N.R Minesweeper, they were on an outing, taking some fellows out for experience. They do a recruiting thing from Shoreham and they had these civilians on board which was rather hampering their movements somewhat and I think they were mainly part-timers. Emile and I decided to go over to the minesweeper to try to arrange the salvage and that was where we struck another difficulty because we had our life raft, but we had it strapped underneath the safety net aft. We had a hell of a job getting it out and inflated.

??; You had it on top of the safety net?

Bill Howell: Yes well it was on top, but it was underneath now and it was very buoyant and there was a great deal of pressure there and we had a great deal of difficulty getting this damn thing out and finally we had to cut the safety net to get at it, we had to cut clean through and I've got a very thick webbing which took some getting through. So we inflated the life raft with the idea of going over to the Minesweeper to arrange the salvage. Of course when we inflated it, the bloody thing was upside down, it was full of water, all we were worried about was getting out to this minesweeper and I took Emile with me and we had a hell of a job getting on board the minesweeper, almost killed us about three times, we were right underneath the bows at one stage of the game and I would say quite frankly the most dangerous part of the whole exercise was the minesweeper trying to pick us up and at one stage of the game I was in there underneath the canopy looking for the knife to cut our drogue free and we threw the sea anchor out by mistake. I was out there looking for the knife, next thing I knew Emile, who's South African I think he was speaking English but it sounded like African, the way he was screaming at me, the next thing I see this great big minesweeper just about to pound into us. One minute we were trying to paddle towards it and the next moment we were paddling as fast as we could trying to get away from the damn thing. While we were getting alongside the minesweeper and pulling ourselves to the back, an R.A.F. Rescue Helicopter came along and rescued the other fellows. They don't give you much alternative apparently these R.A.F. Rescue Helicopters, the bloke comes round, he is wearing a helmet, microphone and harness. One of the crew was going to volunteer to stay on board to take a line the fact that •••• as I say they had no alternative, but they wear a big earphone and little things here for the microphone and you can't talk to him, he's not interested in talking to you, he only wants to talk to the bloke up there and he just picks one of the crew and he goes (indicating upwards) and then he goes (shriek & indicating upwards) and up you go. The first bloke that went up was Raymond, his legs were kicking like mad, I said "Christ, don't think I'll go up in that thing". Emile was a bit of a flyer he was saying "Gee, I'd like to go up in that helicopter" I said; "Not me mate I'll stay here." In any case they all got plucked off one by one and oddly enough they landed them within a hundred yards of Duncan's house in Seaview in the Isle of Wight.
So we tried to arrange a salvage, the minesweeper which good Commander *** who knows more about minesweepers than me, explained apparently they only draw about five foot draft and they've got about fifty foot freeboard so it's a hell of a job trying to manoeuvre alongside. He insisted on, for some reason or other, he insisted on coming alongside on the windward side instead of the leeward side, I couldn't understand why but he ended up pulling his own, rubbing strip off underneath our dagger plates. But they were very very nice on board and they gave us something to eat and such like and then we went to Portsmouth and tried to arrange a tow and couldn't find anybody, couldn't hire a Salvage vessel or anything and then we heard through the radio that a Dutch coaster had found and righted her. They put a cable right around her and very roughly dragged her round. Actually as far as we could see, from on board the minesweeper, all the damage that was done to the boat seemed to be, done in the salvage operation, because she was OK, you could see quite plainly from where we were, high up on the minesweeper, you could still see both masts still intact and all the sails still there. The mast wasn't broken, at least I know the rigging was alright. The damage was done in righting her by the Dutch coaster. They put a hole in the stern and such like and they then found they couldn't salvage her because they couldn't lift her on deck. They tried to lift her on deck, apparently they couldn't because they'd

filled her up with water and I was rather disturbed at this because I was speaking to the Dutch Captain, he was threatening to take her to Belfast, but I said Christ the last place I want it to be is Belfast. I managed to arrange for a tow from Attrills in Bembridge, the Dutch coaster took her near there and Attrill's towed her in. We then pumped her out on the beach in the harbour entrance, actually quite a deal of damage had been done in salvage. We were hoping to have her ready for the Fastnet Race to sort of go round if any other multi hulls were going round the course, but unfortunately she won't be ready.
The only thing I can do is apologise to everybody for capsizing. But I'm just explaining what happened and as I say Duncan was at the helm. I was on the foredeck changing the headsails, Emile was at the mainsheet, I didn't think that he'd let the main sheet go, he's not quite sure when, well you can ask him any questions you like about that. As I said the sort of general cycle of the actual flip was that she went up to about 40º, came back to about 20º or 30º, she sort of recovered then, I then think that she slewed sideways on to the sea. As she came down I think that the wind or gust of wind punched into the genoa and started sending her up again, perhaps she got a couple of little upper cuts from those little short seas which helped her on her way; then, very very slowly she went up again and she hung for quite some time right up, absolutely vertical. Even then I thought she was going to come down, Ken Pearce and Roland Prout thought the same thing.
They had an outsiders view, pity they didn't have a movie camera, then she went over very, very quickly it was then that I think was the main danger to life, that she went over so quickly that the blokes inside the cabin and everybody, sort of didn't have much chance when she did go, she flipped very quickly from the vertical position, so we didn't have much chance to move or even jump. I know I didn't have much chance of even starting to release safety lines or anything. Once she went from the vertical she went very quickly. So that's the rough idea of what happened fellows. If you now want to ask me or Mike or Emile who was on the mainsheet or Duncan any questions, then afterwards I'd like your suggestions.

Duncan Simonds: Well Gentlemen I think we might keep the safety, rescue and salvage aspect of this until later and probably you'd like to concentrate at the moment on the actual business of turning over. In that connection Mike Priestley here was inside the cabin, I think he was at the time occupying himself or interesting himself in studying the inclinometer?
I don't know if you can say what you saw on that, as you were standing by it.

Bill Howell: We have a little inclinometer there in the hatch, it isn't really a racing inclinometer, it's one I got off a sailing bloke, it's an inclinometer that's suspended in oil, it's quite accurate and quite sort of damped down, so I think it's better than the usual type of inclinometer like they sell in the yachting industry. This is the sort of inclinometer Mike was staring at as we went over.

Mike Priestly: Well there isn't very much to say about the inclinometer except there was nothing frightening, but being rather inexperienced I didn't know whether I should've been frightened or not. I was more concerned about what everybody else felt. It seemed to me though that it was all OK. It had been constantly for at least a couple of minutes, over 20º and in the last phase it was over 30º heeling I suppose. It's difficult to tell because we were pounding a bit and even with the oil in the inclinometer the little instrument was bouncing around, but it certainly seemed to be taking jumps consistently over 40° and I suppose at this stage it was well on the way. I couldn't say just at what point it was too late or at what point it was too far because I didn't really have enough feel of the boat. It seemed though that the point where I got scared and I gathered afterwards it was the point where I should've been scared, was round about 30º and certainly anything over 20º is enough to cause serious worry.

Duncan Simonds: Just concentrating for the moment on the actual mechanics of the capsize, leaving the other aspect aside for the moment. What questions could we have? Yes. What happened to the mainsheet? Poor Emile's been in bed for the last four days with flu and he's been jolly sick so I hope he'll be able to answer you OK.

Emile Hartner: There's very little to add to what Bill said, but the mechanism had slipped out twice and this slipped out at about 22°. So it was decided to hang on to it by hand, which I did and knowing that the mechanism trips out at about 22º I was determined to hang on to it much

longer. So when I actually did let go, it is impossible for me to say accurately at what angle I did let go, it was obviously in excess of the safety angle because I was holding that manually. I did let it go and I must've have let it go before 45º obviously, otherwise it wouldn't have come back. The mainsheet having gone out, I think exposed the genoa which was then quite taut and as it is a bigger sail than the mainsail itself, I think that then took charge and pushed us over.

Name; ? of The Financial Times: Did you let it go completely?

Emile: Yes, the whole thing was flogging.

David Pelly; Yachting World: Did the boom bit the water?

Emile: I didn't see it I was facing aft but Mike Priestly was behind me and I think he was trying to help me at one stage.

Pelly: I'm interested in this because in a dinghy very often, if you leave it too late, the boom hits the water and then the main won't ease anymore, so you might as well have held on to it. Could you say if the boom hit the water.

Mike: I couldn't say for certain but I don't think it did until it was already too late. I think the mainsail was well out without the boom hitting, it was actually flogging •••••••• kept going anyway but I couldn't swear to that. So a certain amount of doubt.

Bill Higgins, Stiletto: I'd like to ask Bill. We were coming up on you pretty quick and so was Pelican, and we figured the reason we were catching you was because you were luffing about every minute or so it looked like, so we figured the reason you capsized dead in front of us, was because you thought we were catching you, so you decided to just go ahead and push it. I just wondered why you'd been luffing?

Bill Howell: Well I'm not too sure. Duncan was at the helm, I didn't get the impression she was luffing all that much but I think on the occasions when you did see a luff Bill, I think this was probably when the trip mechanism gave. When the anti-flip mechanism gave and on two occasions beforehand, then Duncan luffed her up, well she did luff up, and I think that was when ••••• Actually that's when you started catching up on us, and that of course, as you know with multi-hulls they lose way very quickly and of course this is the reason why I told Emile to hang on to the mainsheet because every time the thing did flip out it meant that you were catching up on us in the race.

*.O.T Yacht Research: Who was the helmsman and what action did he take? Did he bear away or luff up?

Duncan Simonds: Well the helmsman, of course, naturally luffed up, being the instinctive reaction, but conditions were not very easy really, you haven't got very much control of the situation, you're concerned. You know, the angle becomes extremely difficult once you're sailing the boat. You haven't got the direct and immediate control that you have with a tiller or a wheel, with that large steering boom. It's not such an easy thing to steer with, it's a little difficult to describe this, I think you know what I mean. You're not so comfortable. You haven't got the direct feel of a tiller or a wheel and you're almost - when you get up to that dangerous angle – aware of your own situation, your personal situation becomes a matter of concern. And of course luffing up, when you're flying one hull, one rudder is out or almost completely out of water, the other has, what you might call, a very poor angle of attack, so steering almost seems to be a fruitless occupation because the boat didn't really respond very well.

Yacht Research: Well that is quite so. We had an experience in the trimaran Nimble Plus three years ago going from Poole to Cherbourg with the wind on the beam and a very heavy sea, and as we came up to the top of the sea we heeled over rather hard and on that occasion the helmsman luffed up and that made us heel over very much more for two reasons: one you get the force of the mast being swung out. I tell you it'll put you down; and secondly, as you luff up

with the wind on the beam you get a very much stronger wind. We found later on that by bearing away under similar conditions the boat flattened out straight away and immediately went very much faster and I feel possibly under the conditions in which this was happening, had one borne away hard, you'd have probably found the hull came straight back down.

Duncan Simonds: It's conceivable, I must agree with you, but one's sailing mind - my sailing mind, certainly with my very limited experience of catamarans, didn't work that fast - as a matter of fact it hasn't worked that fast for ten days until you've suggested it to me now. I certainly used the instinctive built-in reaction. I don't know whether any-body would like to comment on that. What about you Roland what do you think?

Roland Prout: I'm going to ask at what angle it heeled in more technical terms. The boat was going at a steady sailing pace
(This speaker is so far away from the mike that it is very hard to pick him up all the time so I will have to leave blanks).
quite frequently, so do you mean to say
before it capsized or as it was going along
must have some bearing on the stability of the boat generally?

Answer: I would say that at 20º you wouldn't really feel safe and as I say I can't really •••

Roland: You mention 20º was that at the point it capsized or was that normal?

Answer: No it had been going consistently over 20º because the inclinometer was set to trip at 22º •••

Roland: As far as the question of bearing away or luffing up is concerned; in the small racing cats where we continually and do deliberately sail on a hull it takes the bravest man to bear away sharply in a gust to bring the hull down and admittedly it does and can work but it can also go the other way and put things out of control for him altogether because there is one feature of capsizing which a lot of people don't know and that is even releasing the mainsheet could make things worse, if you're not sailing at the correct angle of attack on your sails and say a wave has thrown the boat off of it and brings you more broad, the sails are not drawing as hard as they would with the proper angle of attack and then you ease your sheet after the hull's lifted; for a moment your sail is going through a period where it's drawing even harder, This can take a boat further over. You have to be careful of that.

Bill Howell: I think this in fact did happen when the crew member got to the genoa sheet because I was right next to the genoa and he let if off four feet, but there was no question of the luff of the genoa even lifting the thing was just really taut and probably by letting off the four feet it probably made things a bit worse rather than better.

??: Yes, I think probably one of the most important things is when you're sailing in strong winds, where you're sailing up to the limit of your stability, as you obviously were, is to know that you're always sailing with the wind •••••• either by easing sheet or moving up into the wind and then you can bring the hull down quite quickly but if you're not •••••• the boat sails off and comes a little closer to the wind and you are at the danger point.

Bill Howell: Well one of the big surprises to me quite frankly was the fact that hitherto, as I said before, when we'd been in Southampton water, I tried to get her to the limit because I was going to take her single-handed and I wanted to feel what it was like, I know what it's like now - well and truly - but I was trying to do it experimentally and when we had the mainsheet going beforehand it had always resulted in her coming back and on this occasion when I realised the mainsheet had gone and she did come back, I thought she was back, you know she had always come back before, but on this occasion not. This is the reason why I – as I was saying to you earlier Roland – that you have to have some sort of quick release mechanism on the headsail sheet as well, because if we got the headsail sheet off or let it fly, things would have been OK, pretty obvious. But on all the experimental attempts we've made beforehand, letting the

mainsheet fly had always been sufficient, but on this occasion there may have been a bit of help from those little short choppy seas that were there at the time, they may have uppercut her as well, I don't know.

Michael Henderson: I suppose you could describe me as an amateur designer who has toyed with cats. I'm a pump man professionally. My only contribution to multi-hulls I think is in the field of self righting and both my own boats have had ballasted keels and masthead floats to solve this very problem. I haven't any questions to ask because I've been there before. I would like to make a few comments if I may be allowed to. Bill has described an absolutely classical multi-hull capsize at sea; there's nothing puzzling about it, the mechanism is well understood. I personally, and I think a lot of other people in the catamaran world, are glad that it's happened, although we're naturally enough sympathetic and sorry for Bill that it happened to him. But it had to happen sooner or later because it seems to me that a lot of people in the cat world have, in some way pushed behind them, because they don't want to think about it, the fact that these beasts can be capsized and particularly they can be capsized under racing conditions because you are then driving the boat to the limit of its stability and the multi-hull, an unballasted boat, any unballasted boat, whether it has one or five or two or three hulls, is going to be sailing near the limit of its stability when it is being driven hard. Therefore, I think that it's a good thing that this capsize happened when it did, where it, did and how it did, because it happened in reasonably benign conditions, it could have been late at night with a howling gale blowing and poor visibility. It happened in a way where nobody got hurt and, with respect, to people who could well afford the damage. It could have happened to someone who'd put all his money into a boat. *(laughter)*

Duncan Simonds: Will you make a note he doesn't get another beer.

Michael Henderson: I'm drinking Whisky sir thank you. *(laughter)*
I think it's a perfectly valid comment. I don't make it as a joke. I hope it has focused attention on the fact that these beasts are sailing on a knife-edge when they're being driven hard. Passage making in multi-hulls has gone on for years very successfully for thousands and thousands of miles but it has been passage making across oceans with limited crews. Racing, really racing, is a very different matter and this is not to say that people shouldn't do it in multi-hulls but it should be clearly realised, in my submission, that off- shore racing in cruising or racing multi-hull boats is more akin to mountain climbing and motor racing or bull-fighting than it is to conventional ocean racing. You cannot strap the boat down in a hard blow and leave her to look after herself, you've got to fly it and it's like flying a very unstable aircraft. This is going to call for a completely different technique to that which is used today in conventional ocean racing. There are many other points that have come up in this discussion but I won't waste people's time now because we are talking about the capsize itself.

Duncan Simonds: Thank you very much for those comments. I think it's because of that kind of comment being made that we rather decided to hold this meeting and we had in our minds particularly what was said in the press, what David Pelly said, already there is speculation as to what effect it will have on the sport. Some say we'll kick it back five years and so on. Well we wanted to have all this out in the open. I would say incidentally, that there are far more dangerous things than capsizing a cat in my experience.
Last Saturday week I was thrown from what had been the weather hull, clean into the sea which was 18 feet below and surfaced just in time to see the boat coming over on top of me and be submerged for a second time, and survived absolutely unscathed. The next Saturday - last Saturday - I played in the Father's match against my youngest child at his prep school at cricket and I broke my finger, so I'll still go in for cat sailing. Cricket's far more dangerous against twelve year olds.

Michael Henderson: Yes, crossing the road outside here is ten – a hundred times more dangerous, but there are risks involved in it which are not apparent until you've been there and one of the difficulties is that they are so obviously comfortable and safe until the split second when they cease to be so and it's a very narrow margin. I once designed a 35 foot waterline unballasted cat which unfortunately didn't get built and one of the items in the specification was a notice that was printed in large letters and fixed to the bulkhead in front of the helmsman and it

said “This boat is approaching a point of capsize if sailed consistently at an angle of heel exceeding 20°. You have been warned”, so I think that should be graven on to the heart of anybody who is foolish enough to go to sea in an unballasted boat in future.

Bill Howell: Well it is graven on my heart .

Burrow: I would like to ask a question whether you were going any faster on this excessive heel above 20° or 22°? Did you get any greater speed from her by getting an extra heel?

Duncan Simonds: No I think not. Of course the extra heel wasn't much and we didn't encourage it, I mean it just happened. No, one can't say that speed seemed to be going up. No we were doing as Bill said and as the others can probably verify, 14 – 16 knots.

Bill Howell: The other buggers weren't reducing sail either.

RYA: I've got one on rather another theme, so may I introduce myself in this as Chairman of the RYA’s Committee to advise on the morals of sponsorship. You said this sponsorship brought out moral irresponsibility.

Duncan Simonds: Yes, I think that's probably what I said, though I said it a little bit strongly.

RYA: Do you really think that?

Duncan Simonds; They were rather strong words, but we're talking amongst ourselves now. I think you know what I was trying to convey. Added to the normal feeling that exists on any boat, that you and six or seven or eight crew are determined to win, I think that each of us, certainly those connected with the firm, had the feeling that there were a lot of people outside to whom we were kind of responsible, morally responsible and I think that this is a matter of fact really, and I think it's *induce*. But really this isn't for quotation because it could go so badly wrong, but I think it probably introduced in all of us, severally and collectively a kind of moral irresponsibility.

??: I don't believe it's morally irresponsible to want to win a race, is it?

Duncan Simonds: No its not, but it is, yes, if it'll push you beyond the point of no return. *(Rather a lot of people talking at once here)* And I do know we certainly delayed the moment of decision longer than we should have done because I think that nobody on board wanted actually to let the side down, and this great big side, you know, with the Golden Cockerel on it. In point of fact I think it's worth stating that this capsize happened literally seconds, a few seconds before - I think you'd just about got the last hank on the small jib - and literally seconds, maybe ten seconds more would have saved us at that moment from disaster.

??: I think for instance racing techniques are different. I mean as far as I'm concerned now, I've never won a catamaran race. If I'm changing down sails I’ll always take the headsail off and then put the other one on, if I'm changing up sail then I'll hank the second one on. I’ve been ocean racing and you always hank the other one on beforehand. As far as I'm concerned I think this is a dangerous technique in a catamaran.

??: I don’t think it's unholy to want to win. I really don't think your quotes are very good quotes.

??: When you were talking, before we left Cowes, Roland, who was the owner of Pelican said:
I think that the most important thing is to get this catamaran to Plymouth intact rather than winning the race, because I'm starting my holiday in Plymouth and I want a boat this season to sail in and I paid £10,000 or so for this and I really do want a holiday this year. Well I can assure you that that didn't motivate me into saying, well let’s take the genoa down and put the foresail up, because of Dr. Chew's holiday, when we were racing, was far from all our minds. But the fact was that to bust something is not going to get us there as fast anyway, so there's the reason for

taking sail down, but you sailed to the limit and there's no substitute to knowing your boat and knowing what she'll take - this only comes from many years of experience - and none of us have got it yet, even those with the most experience haven't got it and it'll take five years of cat racing to learn.

Duncan Simonds: •••• that he came here a couple of months back to say that •••• I don't think he claimed to have the experience.

??: The point I wanted to make was really that we'll all have to sail our cats to the limit if we're going to sail in these off-shore races, when conditions come up like that, and it'll take us five years of cat racing for there to emerge a helmsman and a crew that has sufficient experience to be able to say exactly; "right this boat has got to be reduced sail now •••• *(interrupted)*

[Tony] Beachmore: I've had a dedicated desire to win myself over many years. I don't think that any amount of sponsorship can really create a bigger desire to win than private individuals already have in sailing in personal races, and certainly those who represent their country in the Olympic Games or indeed in the Americas Cup and things like that, so I think you've very much overplayed this; it might well be that a few of your crew haven't got this dedicated desire to win, but for those who have it's an awful bug and I'm afraid that nothing could increase this, not even Courage.
May I ask were the crew wearing any form of personal buoyancy on this boat?

Duncan Simonds: This is a point which I think will come up very much when we deal with the safety aspects of this. Four of the crew, I think, had personal buoyancy on, from my own point of view I can tell you that I'm extremely relieved that I didn't. The reason is that if you are underneath a boat of that size and comes down on top of you and you've got personal buoyancy round your neck it's going to be a dammed difficult thing to duck under and come out again. I think, I don't want to overstate the case, but I could say that I owe my life about 60% to 70% to the I fact that I had no personal buoyancy on. If I had I don't know how, in fact, I could have performed, at my age and lack of training, the feat of swimming under and coming up again. This is a matter which I wanted to bring out when we come to the safety aspect of this question of personal buoyancy when you find yourself under the water with a catamaran on top of you.

Bill Howell: I was wearing one of those Henry Lloyd things with the gas thing in there and it was deflated, it never seemed to be really properly deflated if you understand what I mean, they're never really flat there's always a bit of air in them and I really think it did not help. I tried to dive under and I was having a great deal of difficulty in getting under, in fact I ended up crawling through. Talking about these buoyancy things though they're always deflated but there always seem to be a bit of air in them they never seem absolutely flat and air holding up a little bit and when you are below the water, like I was with Golden Cockerel on top of me, what I was trying to do was get out and dive under and I was finding it very difficult to get down because of the buoyancy. Well there was some air in it.

??: There needn't be air in it, but those Henry Lloyd suits will trap air inside them anyway.

Duncan Simonds: Bill had the forward trampoline over his head and I had the aft trampoline over mine and it's undoubtedly a difficult thing to escape from underneath, and the more buoyancy you've got round your neck the more difficult it's going to be.

??: I would have said that the best possible thing, in the circumstances, for most of the people on board would have been a completely deflated life-jacket.

??: Yes, undoubtedly.

RYA: Would it affect your sponsorship in any way at all?

Duncan Simonds: No. Does that satisfy you?

RYA: No. That wasn't my point at all, that was your point, attacking sponsorship for being morally bad for sport.

Duncan Simonds: Oh no, heavens I never said that. Fortunately this will all be played back to you, but I never for one moment said it.

RYA: You spoke of an unholy desire to win for the firm, that I would say an attack on sponsorship for the sport.

Bill Howell: I think probably the bloke who had the more unholy desire to win because he's the sales director of the firm, was him. As far as far as I'm concerned sort of being in charge, you know, I was thinking more in terms of just winning.

??: You wanted to win, but not necessarily because •••••••• *(interrupted - lots of people talking at once)*

RYA: You were feeling that there might be a responsibility on the sponsorship coming from the firm that made that situation, which at that moment, was extremely unpleasant one both for you and your son, possible. Therefore in your own mind you were reacting against the sponsorship of something that could create such a situation.

Duncan Simonds: No I'm not sure that I expressed myself right on this. I'm not reacting against the sponsorship at all. You won't get, in these days, first class efforts in athletics, the arts, sport of any kind, it is very very well covered ground, unless you are going to get industrial sponsorship. It's so widespread in every form. I'm not implying and I would not wish to be taken to imply the least form of attack on this. I'm summing up in an entirely objective manner the kind of psychological pressures which were on the crew and the owner, both before and during the race. I think I've been entirely objective about this and I'm saying that the fact of sponsorship - sponsorship by an industrial firm may, indeed, be no different to sponsorship by a firm that's built the boat - did produce a feeling that we've just got to push on and if the other fellow seems to be coming up on us we're not going to be chicken. I very much hope that I managed to put that idea across. I'm certainly not attacking sponsorship - sponsorship is absolutely inevitable.

RYA: Would one of the members of the crew like to comment on that one?

Bill Howell: Well as far as I'm concerned, I reckon the thing that was driving me on more than anything, after the Morgan Cup Race and after the Round the Island Race, and I think the same thing was happening with everybody else a bit. Was, thank Christ we got some wind this time. Here we are on a reach - or a close reach - this was the catamaran's best point of sailing. Those other fellows out there in front, they're doing well and those other blokes pounding behind us, they're doing well, you know and you know we're going to win the race or lose the race on this reaching leg. As far as I'm concerned, I think it was the fact that the previous races had been so disappointing, and at last we got some wind. This was the real motivation, the drive •• *(interrupted)*

??: It was a purely sporting desire to win.

??: Perfectly understandable and thoroughly justified

??: Is it justified in an ocean going multi-hull? You have the safety thing. You have your stability curve that comes up like that, reaching a peak, and when you get down the other side, it goes down very quickly indeed. I ask one question: did you go any faster when you started going over? I don't believe you do.

Duncan Simonds: I'm sure the answer to that is no.

??: The other point I have, if I might come in, is on the mast.

Was there, under this very heavy pressure, any tendency for your international mast to bend at all? I ask the question because in my own little boat "Tao", if I have my large genoa up too long, the mast takes on a great big bend and I say now this is the time to take it off. The boat won't capsize until the top of the bottom mast is gone.

Bill Howell; I would say the mast was straight enough. Well with the big genoa up, when you're sort of reaching, there's a little bit of bending at the top there, which I haven't been able to eliminate completely mainly because my back-stays are too slack. I've taken up everything I can on the back stays and on the checks, but I think this happens normally on a lot of boats, you never eliminate a little wiggle at the top do you, when you're carrying a big masthead genoa. We had, as I've been told too, tensioned the rigging much harder with a multi-hull, so I had the rigging really wound up and I didn't think there was any question of the mast bending. I just didn't have that impression at all, I was looking up at the genoa and the mast looked perfectly straight. The mast survived and the rigging survived the capsize and in fact they took the mast out. They broke the mast taking it out into the Dutch coaster, and they just snipped all the rigging, they didn't bother undoing the screws they just snipped it. And also the mizzen-mast was broken by them, and the mizzen sail didn't even have a tear in it; they took it down and they broke it trying to get the thing on board.

Duncan Simonds: Gentlemen time's getting on and ••• oh yes certainly ••

Ken Pearce: May I just ask one question Mr. Chairman. Would you say the fact that Pelican was pressing you and overhauling you from the stern contributed in any way to your capsize?

Emile: I would say definitely yes to that question.

Bill Howell: If you were carrying a masthead genoa or masthead jib ••••
Actually we made the first move, we went forward to change our headsail before you did. The reason we did it first I think was because being ahead, we were coming out of the lee of the Isle of Wight, so we were getting the extra wind a little bit before you, but the fact that you were pounding up and not changing sail, this made us over competitive, it's as simple as that. Commander Bruce is one of the best known ocean racing blokes in the world, he would have done the same thing time and time again no doubt.

Ken Pearce: I noticed that there was somebody up forward, standing by the mast. I didn't really know what they were doing at the time. The thing is, we had decided to take our big genny off, we were anxious to catch you. We had lost out on the run down owing to having a very small spinnaker and we were anxious to get alongside you, which we almost succeeded in doing, but we knew we were carrying too much sail and we also had folks standing by ready to release the main. We went forward then and took our genny down. We actually had our genny down before you flipped. We were putting our working sail up and it was only the mere fact that the pressure was off then the helm, but funny enough I was watching you, you know and saw every incident that happened.

Bill Howell: Did you drop your genny first Ken?

Ken Pearce: Yes.

Bill Howell: Yes you see, this is where we were making our mistakes, we were trying to hank on the second sail first •• *(interrupted)*

Ken Pearce: No, no I'm sorry I've got to come in there, we didn't drop our genny first, we were in the process of hanking on the working jib *(interruptions)* and we dropped our genny immediately afterwards.

Duncan Simonds: Could we hear what Emile has to say?

Emile: We were definitely waiting to see what you were going to do, because we questioned Bill about what type of sail you had up and I remember distinctly Bill saying that you had a mast-head genny up and I looked and confirmed this and you stuck to your sail and Duncan was at the helm and things were going fairly alright at that stage and Duncan said 'I think we'll hold it for a while'.

Bill Howell: Duncan asked the questions. Duncan said 'What's that bloody Pelican carrying!"

Emile: Anyway if had you dropped your sail we certainly would have.

Ken Pearce; We were hanking the other one on •••

Duncan Simonds: In answer to your primary question, its most certainly 'yes'.

Bill Howell: Well I think that applies to you as well.

Bill Higgins: We had, because we were catching you, and we were neck and neck with Roland Prout all the way from the Nab Tower which was thirty-five miles back, and I was at the helm all the way from the start and I didn't think at all about changing down, I thought the sail combination was completely safe. We had a fore triangle jib and •••
The other four or five were sitting on the weather side of the cabin facing back towards the helm, just sort of sitting there wondering. And I was driving and the other guy was down below resting, and that was it, we were just screaming along and there wasn't anything to worry us. I had no problems, just like sailing a dinghy.

Bill Howell: You were lifting a hull *(interrupted)*

Bill Higgins: No we weren't lifting Bill.

Bill Howell: We saw it come out of the water a little.

Bill Higgins: O.K. but this is a matter of coming off a wave too.

Bill Howell: It might've been just coming out on the wave I don't know all I said was, it was in the air, you know.

Bill Higgins: Lifting the main hull?

Bill Howell: No, no, lifting one of these ••••

Mr. Palmer: I wonder if I could just move the area of discussion a little away from the actual mechanics of what happened to what you did. Can you tell me first where you sat when you were upside down? Did you sit on the wooden part of your hull which joins the two floats or on one of the trampolines?

Bill Howell: We stood on the wooden part actually. When she floats upside down, as we've now discovered, she floats more or less at deck level and the foredeck is just awash. This may not happen with other cats because these Choy design cats have collision bulkheads forward and so the complete forward third of both hulls was completely water tight so this tends to give a lot of buoyancy forward which I think saved me, at the time of the capsize because when I got trapped if she had started sinking by the head a bit I would have been trapped under that trampoline, as it was she kept on lifting up and I was getting air and I managed to get out. So the fact that she had this reserve buoyancy forward as far as I'm concerned probably save my life. We found after about an hour and a half when the other yachts were standing by us - we thought that she did get water in through the stern. She probably sank about six inches by the stern in about an hour and a half. She was perfectly vertical with the forward and astern safety nets just awash. After about an hour and a half I would say that the after cross beam was probably about 6 inches under the water.

Palmer: She would have remained floating as long as about ••• ?

Duncan Simonds; Oh yes for days, days.

Bill Howell: At the same time I think it's damn uncomfortable, because - say what you like, because it's very slippery on there, but then as soon as you've made a move like to get the life raft out, you're slipping all over the place.

Palmer: Do you mean she was getting swept through by the sea?

Bill Howell: No. She was initially lying broadside on and so the hull in the air to weather was protecting her from the waves. She wasn't lying head to wind, which made it comparatively comfortable. I mean if I were ever stuck in the same position again what I would tend to do was inflate the life raft, leave the life raft attached to the boat and then get in the life raft because you can lie there and you aren't so exposed and everything with a canopy and such like. Then wait until you've got a dead calm and then dive under and get into the cabin and rescue what you could. I think she would float more or less indefinitely but I wouldn't like to be there. I think that if you had to stop there for twelve or twenty-four hours I think you'd probably end up slipping off or the exposure would kill you, but if you had a life raft, like we had, just leave that attached to it and then crawl into that. You could rest indefinitely, waiting for a break in the weather and a dead calm. But the only thing that worries me about dead calms, thinking about it later, every time I've been in a dead calm, particularly in the middle of the ocean, sharks have come around. So I don't know whether I'd be diving around with all those bloody sharks, because the most peculiar thing about - I know whether anybody's ever got becalmed in the middle of the Atlantic ocean or the middle of the Pacific Ocean? You never see sharks, but as soon as you're becalmed the buggers come around. I think you need a bit of shark repellent as well.

Chairman: We are getting on to the safety aspect of it and I think it's worthwhile, we've got to have some lunch now and this room has to be used later. But perhaps we could concentrate on that because part of this exercise, I think this must be made useful for the future if we can. I don't want to pontificate on this, but it's going to happen again isn't it?
(Chorus of yeses)

Bill Howell: Not with me aboard fellows.

Duncan Simonds: It may not happen in what Mike has called "benign conditions" again, and it's perfectly obvious after – and should have been perfectly obvious before – but of course, none of your safety kit is of bugger-all use. You see, you can't get at it.
(Cries of here here)
And as Bill has already said: two points he made: one is that although it's a very nice raft, it's a jolly slippery raft. It's a hell of a job to maintain a foothold and in fact we only did maintain footholds by casting what bits of rope we had, that my son brought up with him, around the dagger plates which were still pointing up and had the buoyancy to stick upwards. I don't think being swept off would have been much harm because one would have got trapped in the trampoline and sort of clambered back again. The second point he's made is that; it was extremely difficult to release the safety raft and in fact if anybody had been swept away unconscious or anything like that we wouldn't have got the safety raft floated down to them in time, because we took a good five or six minutes and a great deal of slashing away with knives and trouble to get the damn thing from underneath the boat to up on top. Now that's a point which I don't think we need find an answer to, but I hope that it gets into the records, that the safety raft becomes for a matter of minutes completely useless in its present location. Furthermore we had, we didn't need it fortunately, but we had no access to flares, torches or any of the other essential tools of rescue and survival, because they were underneath. As Bill said, my son - he's never in nineteen years revealed the slightest presence of mind so far - but he did reveal quite remarkable presence of mind to bring the flares out from inside the cabin and the other six of us I'm afraid let them go.

??: And more to the point sir, he had the presence of mind, and all praise to him, to go and shut the seacock, because if he hadn't shut the seacock you 'would have lost all the air in the hull and you'd have been even in deeper water.
[Here, here]

Bill Howell: He showed amazing presence of mind. The last fellow on board we'd have expected to show this.

??: Presumably he was only in one hull?

Duncan Simonds; He was initially in the cabin actually.

Bill Howell: He said he dived into a hull because stuff was flying around inside.

??; How was it you could speak to him?

Bill Howell: He could hear us, just through the hull.

??; Through the wood? Incredible!

Duncan Simonds: Oh no trouble at all.
Now I don't know whether people have any suggestions to make about how rescue and survival gear can be more accessible in the event of this happening again.

??: I think in fact, there's something in the Safety Rules which either recommends, or did in the original draft at any rate, that the life raft and a survival pack, including distress signals, should be in a locker accessible to both sides, both from the deck and from the underside of the bridge.

Duncan Simonds: There were thirteen starters, did any of them •••• ?

??: No, of course they didn't. It's perfectly easy to arrange that you have in your cockpit or in the hull somewhere, a locker with doors both sides and watertight seal underneath and you can have access to it from under the bridge. The other point that has come out, which is very valuable to everybody who sails, is that life harnesses should have a quick release snap shackle at both ends of the line so you can release it from your own belt as well as from the rail.

Chairman: It's quite possible they could otherwise be a death harness.

Bill Higgins: I quite agree. But I think your comments on life preservers are ludicrous, it's the same analogy you can make to seat belts in a car, saying well if you get caught in a burning car you're going to die if you're unconscious, but that only happens in less than three per cent of the cases.

Bill Howell; This might be OK you know in a conventional boat which might sink very rapidly, but once this cat upturned she will accept to float indefinitely.

Bill Higgins: Chances of falling overboard are going to have to be taken as a greater chance than turning over.

Bill Howell: If you're knocked unconscious or something *(interruptions).*

??: I'd never thought of it until you made this point.

??: All mine have got snaps at both ends - have done for the past three years.

??: Mr. Chairman there's just one thing that has occurred to me as far as the life raft is concerned and that is; where the aft beam comes across the back of the boat, because we did

observe that it took some time for you to get the life raft out, it just seemed to me that if there were two bearers slightly up at an angle like this astern and the life raft was carried there, if the boat turned upside down it would be immediately accessible from either underneath or on top, if you were in collision or anything. The mere fact it's trapped underneath, and should it have become inflated underneath you would have had it.

Bill Howell: Tomahawk carries one. I never noticed it before, but as she went past, I thought, Christ that's a much more sensible idea than any I've seen.

??: On her engine, she has her's mounted on her engine.

Bill Howell: You know it looked much easier to get at, than the trouble we were having, and of course the other thing, when they give you these life rafts they supply these fibre glass chocks, to mount them on deck and thank God I wasn't tempted to stick the thing on deck, because we would never have got it out. I threw those away and put it on the trampoline aft.

??; With great respect to you fellows and everybody else concerned I think that one must say one or two things on the safety aspect. I don't think you read your R.Y.A. Safety Rules or racing instructions terribly well. One of the things it said was that you are advised, and it was emphasised that these things can happen and you should make sure;

That your safety gear is working, accessible and that the crew know how to use them and that the crew are able and experienced, and I think you must admit that you didn't follow that one entirely to the letter by your own admission.

Secondly I'd like to bring up the business of your crew list which caused a lot of trouble ashore. You gave a list of eight people who were racing in your boat and I think you went to sea with seven, without altering the list. This led us to a lot of trouble at headquarters finding the eighth man. Also nobody from your crew, when they got ashore, took the trouble to inform the Island Sailing Club that you were in fact ashore and safe. Now this is vitally important because it very nearly caused a full scale sea search for you and the eighth man. The eighth man thing happened afterwards of course when we knew that seven of you were ashore. We nearly - I didn't but the Secretary of the Club did - nearly had to start a full scale sea search for the seven until by bludgeoning the people at Thorny Island he discovered that you were sitting in Seaview, or some of you were, quite a long time after it happened. So I think one must emphasise - I don't think one's trying to blame you in any way - but it must be emphasised for the benefit of other people that when you do get rescued for heaven's sake ring up the headquarters of the club organising the race and tell them that you've been rescued - otherwise a lot of money can be spent.

Bill Howell:
Well at this stage of the game, you've got a thing floating upside down in the channel all you're thinking about is recovering it. I believe that they knew by three o'clock in any case.

??; Probably read it in the Evening Standard.

Bill Howell: I personally, didn't get ashore from the minesweeper until six o'clock.

??: A lot of the crew were ashore in Seaview long before that

Bill Howell: And I was trying to arrange salvage. What happened you need to see was Dave Thomas was supposed to be coming along beforehand, because they send you the crew list about a week before, you make out the crew list and of course about a day or two before Dave discovered he couldn't come along and I didn't, it was my fault, but I didn't think of saying when I went along and saw Collins of the Island Sailing Club, you think oh well there's an extra bloke coming. You know you put the crew list in a week before then somebody drops out. I agree I should have done it, just didn't strike me •••

??: Yes well let's hope you use this advice •••

Duncan Simonds: Bill is so accustomed you see to being a crew of one and if one isn't on board the boat just doesn't go.

??: Mr Chairman I think you could say that many other competitors would have been in the same state in the same circumstances. We're not blaming the crew of Golden Cockerel for this, because we were all in a similar or worse condition I would say.

??: It rather lights up the point that elaborate safety rules which are compulsory are really a waste of paper and time. Take your own dangers to sea with you and you must make your own provisions to cope with them, the safety rule in my view, this is very much a personal view and it's against nearly everybody else's. Safety rules should define the dangers and offer suggestions as to how they should be overcome and no more. There's too much sort of spoon feeding for people these days; people tend to think I've got all the safety equipment therefore I'm safe and anyway a helicopter will come if I get into trouble, it's a bad thing. And I've thought very hard, I'm going to say this - I've fought very hard in R.Y.A. Committee to have our Safety Rules drafted on the lines of recommendations only, no compulsory equipment at all, but I lost I'm afraid, but my view is very much that they should be. Look at the safety equipment on most ships, quite useless.

Duncan Simonds: Yes I think only point to make here is, in this one unfortunate experience, it's something that should've occurred to all of us but didn't occur and I think that they probably didn't occur to a great many other people both participating and not likely to participate •••

??: They don't occur to anybody until they've actually been through it. *(interruptions).*

Duncan Simonds: Yes, but one does hope that this sort of thing can be done on a sort of a larger experience and can be built on ••••• boats under extreme pressure. *(All talking at once.)*

Duncan Simonds: Yes, but he didn't do it for anybody's benefit.

??: Bill what are you going to do to Golden Cockerel to make her more seaworthy before you go across the Atlantic on your own? Because if you can capsize off the Nab Tower with seven people on board I don't think you're going to go across the way she is, at least I hope not.

Duncan Simonds: He's a very much more experienced crew.

Bill Howell: Quite frankly I don't think this capsize would have occurred if I'd have been on my own, there's no question of that, I would have had her sail off well before and as far as the capsize was concerned, oddly enough I feel much more confident for the single-handed race, having done the capsize because now I know all the symptoms. Just like when I first started trying to diagnose an aching tooth, you know I diagnose them like mad now because I just happen to know the bloody patient screams in the air and all this sort of stuff and now I've done the same sort of thing as far as catamarans are concerned, it's like an aching tooth, I've been through the whole range of the symptoms that lead up to a capsize. I've got the warning signs, but beforehand I'd never have recognised them.

??: You're a member of a very exclusive club Bill.

Bill Howell: Yes sure, a club of one in England I think

Duncan Simonds: Leslie B* wants to say something.

Leslie B*: I was going to say, apparently when the dinghy inflated it was upside down and all the flares fell out?

Bill Howell: I don't know whether the flares fell out, we were not looking for flares that day.

Emile Hartner: They did fly out and hit a wave and washed away.

Bill Howell: Did they?

Emile: Quite right, I noticed it.

??: Bill to come back to where I was; I mean for instance are you going to put a mast float on her, or are you considering making her beamier ?

Bill Howell: Well making her beamier, I don't think. The mast head float, I've been tinkering with the idea, if not a mast head float something like Tomahawk's got, something that inflates at the top. I think if we get a float that size, a masthead float is going to have an awful effect on performance. I'm going to have to have a talk to Mike Henderson about the mast head point.

Emile: In Honolulu the top triangle of the mainsail was double and they had a rubber triangle inside of that.

??: There's not nearly enough buoyancy in that.

Bill Howell: But I think one of the things that you must have, which I definitely will have is certainly some quick release gear on the headsail as well. That's the big thing. And also in case the thing didn't work. I think that single-handed I would have, just in case the quick release mechanism didn't work, the sheets leading into the cabin next to where I was sleeping or something so I could just grab them and pull them out so that the head sheet and the mainsail sheet would both fly at the same time.

Mike Henderson; The most important is to have the sheets, the pulls of the sheets, properly pegged down inside a barrel or something, as the whalers did so you don't get a snarl up. I've only sailed your boat for ten or twenty minutes in the Solent, so I can't really claim to be an expert on her but she did give me the impression of a boat that would be a fairly willing capsizer. I think this is largely due to the rather narrow V shaped of the hulls; as she heels, she heels a lot, she digs the lee hull in a lot and lifts the weather hull a lot obviously to keep the displacement constant as she rolls and she did strike me as being a boat I reckon we could have capsized in the Solent that day if I'd tried hard.

Bill Higgins: This was Choy's second capsize •••

Duncan Simonds: I didn't hear what you said, Bill.

Bill Higgins: It's the second boat that Choy's designed that's capsized this year.

Duncan Simonds; Just to close this it might be worth having a very small word about salvage. As Bill explained to us; the boat was salvaged eventually by passing a rope round it. There were a couple of fellows from this Dutch coaster - in the evening when it was much calmer of course and conditions much easier - swam underneath and passed the rope a couple of times round. Then they put a derrick out over the top and hauled her over. Perhaps Bill would like to have a word about the effect of that on the hulls because obviously what happened was that the hulls, which were presumably designed to stress outwards, were forced inwards, and could you take on from there. This is something that must be avoided, perhaps, in future.

Bill Howell: Yes well as far as the salvage is concerned and putting the ropes around like that, they sort of squashed her in and sprung the floors. Reg Freeman from Lymington came over and had a look at the damage, and when you had a good look at it this way, beside the fact that they didn't muffle the ropes or anything in that fashion, besides the crushing at the edges, this pushing inwards sprung the floors down and away from the furniture inside which tends to hold her together, and which is designed of course for stresses which come up. She has to be gutted inside and all the furniture re-fixed to the floors which makes a bigger job, just looking at it you wouldn't think that. You see once the thing has capsized like this, the first thing you realise when you're standing on her bottom, is that if there's any sort of sea, it's almost impossible to put her

upright again without doing a lot of damage. My idea was to either get a salvage vessel or to get the minesweeper to tow us slowly upside down to the lee of the Isle of Wight, where it was nice and calm, then undo one of the forestays and bring the forestay out with something to pull her and just pull her up this way, you see we've got two forestays. Failing that what you could do was even put something like a shackle on it, if you didn't have two forestays, put a shackle on the forestay and drop it with a weight to the end of the mast and pull it sideways that way, this is the way we were thinking in terms, but of course •••

M. Henderson: One could have taken salvage bags down, or cans, you know drums, down to the mast head, made them fast and then inflate them. With enough buoyancy, you see, it would bring the mast head to the water surface again, and then you could parbuckle quite easily by just putting a line onto the boat and steaming away from her. It's interesting that she was in fact righted by the means that was proposed by the American cat designer in his book "Modern Sailing Catamarans" •••••• no, no, Bob Harris, he seriously suggested it and I laughed like a drain when I read it at the time some years ago, he suggested that capsize was a problem and perhaps one could call upon a passing freighter to use its derricks to right you, and he suggested that one should have a little hand radio telephone on board in order to do this and I thought it was a joke, but you've done it Bill, well done.

Bill Howell: They did an awful lot of damage doing it. But if there's any sea at all, that is bound to happen.

M. Henderson. You see they've never done it before.

Bill Howell: It's got to be in a flat calm. We realised straight away there's no question of getting down there and trying to get sails off.

??: Would it be possible in a flat calm under perfect conditions for you to right her using your raft and your crew?

Bill Howell: One of the suggestions put to me by Rudi Choy which we were laughing about at the time when we were sailing, he says well if you're sailing in extreme conditions and this happens, you bore a hole in one of the hulls and allow it to fill up with water which sort of brings her round that way and then you slide your rubber dinghy along the mast and then that'll tip her up this way.

??: That's not so silly if it's been done with the Miracleman. One hull is flooded until it just sinks and that brings the boat on its side, and then you go from there.

Bill Howell: We weren't too-keen to try that at that stage of the game.

Mike Henderson: I said to you when we were setting the spinnaker up or getting it down in the Solent, do that at night in the middle of the Atlantic by yourself •••• it's not on.

Bill Howell: Of course not.

Duncan Simonds: Well I think probably we've explored this now and anything more you want to say we can say informally over lunch I think, so shall we break up the - well it hasn't been formal proceedings anyway - but - yes sure, one more, yes.

??: Do you feel that the other boats that stood by you •••
(Gap - continued on next tape)

Duncan Simonds: We didn't much like that freighter.

??: Well the thing is you see, that in our mind we couldn't make up our mind when we should go. Aboard our boat there were several people among us who thought that once assistance, other assistance, had arrived the time was ripe to leave you.

Duncan Simonds: Neither the freighter nor the minesweeper appeared to have a boat which they were willing to put down, I don't know why not. But at any moment anyone of the seven of us could have been swept off into the sea and there was no possibility of getting them back but the best possibility of getting them back would have been by one of you.

??: We felt we could have picked you up more or less at any time and we felt that we had a better chance of picking you up than either of the steamer or the minesweeper. We didn't particularly want you aboard as passengers in the race. We'd just like to know your opinion.

Duncan Simonds: Without a doubt I think we were very happy that you were around.

??: Mr Chairman I think on behalf of all of us we should thank you very much indeed for opening this enquiry and making these questions possible, it's so much better than having a lot of mutterings going on saying how awful and everybody pretending it didn't happen.
Cries of; “Here here”.
This has been extremely brave of you and I think most helpful to the Catamaran corps and we should thank Courage for being the host for this enquiry.

Duncan Simonds: Thank you very much indeed. Mr. Fisk you wanted to say something.

Mr Fisk: Just one question. How difficult was it for the people inside the boat to get out. We've heard they did, but was it extremely difficult?

Duncan Simonds: There were only two people inside the boat one of whom was Mike Priestly here who was by the cabin door, the other my son Raymond. How, difficult was it to get out Mike?

Mike Priestly: It wasn't particularly difficult but let's say I was rather surprised at the problems involved. You have a schoolboy idea of these things going over and the air bubble left inside - I'm sure that's what Raymond thought, well – we’ve being reading the wrong magazine - because quite a lot of things went through my mind as she started to go. I wasn't really convinced that it had happened until the mast actually hit the water and at that point we realised that it was time to get outside the cabin anyway - and Raymond said 'Get out Mike' and I was assuming he was coming too. I was closer to the door and I had my feet on the side of the door as it was horizontal and I leaped out into the water right beside the boat and I thought - I had an idea of getting on to the boom or the sail and assuming I had time to - say maybe a minute - to get clear before it did go right over. In fact it seemed to me that it came over almost instantly.
It can't have been more than a few seconds and I can't have taken more than one or two strokes in the water before this great shadow appeared above me and I realised it was the rest of the boat coming down on top.

Mr Fisk: Did it fall on you and crash?

Mike Priestly; Not quite that quickly, let's say like, very very quickly but steadily and I probably would not have got a broken head if it had come down on me but I would've been pushed under rather smartly. So I dived back into the cockpit which was self draining, unfortunately in the wrong way and was filling up with water beautifully. The thing that occurred to me at that time was, you know, first of all there's an air bubble inside and presumably it's safe, but you don't know, you can't automatically think well; ‘all the stop cocks are shut off and it's going to stay afloat’ and you don't want to be hundred feet down with the air bubble. My only thought at the time was to take the breath of air that was available and to get out as best I could, so I went back under the opposite hull. It seemed to be a hell of a struggle in clothing and sea boots to get out through the rigging, it's bad enough on deck when it's the right way up.
You're always walking around and you get quite used to it, but I found I had to fight my way through quite a bit of the gear. I suppose in the end it wasn't all that difficult but let's say it wasn't nearly as easy as I expected it to be.

Mr Fisk: Are the guard rails in the way?

Mike Priestly; Not the guard rails, because at that point in the stern of the boat they tail off to allow the boom and tillers to clear. I know I grabbed hold of the tiller and heaved on that and dragged myself out through the rigging. I don't suppose I was anymore than - from the time I jumped out of the cabin it can't have been more than a minute, in which time I got another breath or two of air. Even so I was quite surprised in how difficult it was and how exhausted I was by the time I got out.

Mr Fisk: How about the other chap?

Duncan Simonds: That was my son Raymond who was actually inside the cabin when we capsized. I think I've already stated that he was fine and he was merely walking around inside the upturned hull.

Mike Priestly; Under different conditions at night it would have been a much more serious problem. I could at least see what was happening to the boat, which way it was coming down, I could even see some of the rigging under the water, but at night - quite a problem.

??: But no water went into the cabin in which your son was presumably walking along the roof?

Mike Priestly: Oh yes he was up to his neck in water. A lot of the air had got out through the doorway and it was in the cabin itself. I suppose - with the wash of the sea - it probably had between six inches and two feet of air in it. The hulls themselves were probably half full of air.

Duncan Simonds: When he made up his mind to swim out he appeared to experience not the slightest difficulty and appeared at the after end of the boat.

??: But was he fully dressed in oil skins and so forth?

Duncan Simonds: No he wasn't. But he was wearing his sea boots, those short ones. Seems he hadn't bothered to take them off when below. He certainly came out without any signs of distress •••• *(all-talking at once)*

Henderson: On the other side of the bridge if you'd had had adequate hand holds or non skid surface and a shelter that you could erect and a supply of fresh water and flares and food and if you like a life line or something like that and a radio transmitter, would you'd have been happy to stay there for three days?

Duncan Simonds: Yes I think so.

Henderson: Then if you could have an outboard motor that you could get at? (*Laughter all round)* I am not joking, this is not a joke, if you had an outboard motor you could get at ••••• *(interrupted)*

Duncan Simonds: The only other thing you'd need would have been some beer actually! Shall we break off now?

Henderson: No ••••••

Duncan Simonds: Thank you all very much.

Transcribed from the original typed notes, by Raymond Simonds. August 2010.

Golden Cockerel, June 1967
Crew training in the Solent off Hamble
Duncan & Raymond in the cockpit

When Golden Cockerel was retired from her ocean adventures, Bill renamed her ‘Tahiti Bill’ in recognition of his time cruising in the Pacific Islands in 1955-56. In the same way, he named his last boat, a nimble trimaran, ‘Tahiti Belle’ which he kept at Attrill’s yard in Bembridge Harbour right up to his death in 1998.