

Nigella – The First Fast Nelson

In 1959 at the London Boat Show, Peter Thornycroft was showing a pretty little 23 foot Cruiser called 'Mouna'. She was the centre of much attention and one of the people impressed by her workmanlike looks was Leopold de Rothschild. After a brief chat at the show he and Peter agreed to meet and discuss the project. At that meeting Leo explained his need for a fast handy launch to act as a tender to his Dragon (a class racing yacht sailed in the Solent). It should include a wheel shelter, a large dry cabin for goods and guests with a good size cockpit. She had to be capable of making Exbury to the Squadron in 30 minutes in all but the worst weather. To meet these requirements Peter sketched his thoughts on some scrap paper, here can be seen pretty well all the features that became hallmarks of the Nelson Marque: - The fine entry, the flat floors running all the way aft, the deep skeg, wide side decks and of course the teak badging.

Peter at this time favoured putting engines right forward. Leo, however requested a more conventional layout. In the end they decided on a two engine layout right aft using Vee-Drives. And so was born Nigella - the first of the fast Nelsons. Nigella was delivered in August 1959 and immediately took up her duties at which she proved exemplary. Built of Mahogany on rock elm frames she was light and strong. Her two Perkins engines gave her a handy 18 knots and she handled the Solent chop to perfection. The only time Nigella was not on the Solent was one season in Scotland on the Clyde where Leo raced his Dragon. There she was seen by Sir James Horlick who needed a Ferry for his island of Gia. His boat was built in 1964 and was later known as Jezeka. Leo has decided to hang up his oil skins and put the old lady out to grass and it is hoped she will end up in the Maritime Museum.

After 42 years of continuous service she still looks a picture and is a credit to Leo and his team.