

Miss Velocity 1929 – 2005



The article in the Scarborough Evening News for Thursday 23rd July 1964, states Miss Velocity was brought to Scarborough in 1929 by Mr Norman Martin. The picture shows her in the south bay¹.

Norman was an RFC/RAF pilot in the 1st World War and also said to be responsible for introducing the sport of water skiing to this country. She was new then and was one of at least three nearly identical speedboats purchased at the same time for use in Scarborough. She was manufactured by the American firm of "Chris Craft" and known as a "runabout".

We don't know exactly what model she was. A description of the boat produced for, or by, a later owner (Mr Neville Darby), was:-

"A 27' Chris Craft triple cockpit speed boat with upswept deck and flat windscreen believed to date from 1929/1930. The hard chime hull is of carvel construction in mahogany. The original engine was a Chrysler Majestic "Silver Dome" 150bhp eight cylinder in line engine, serial number 306429 - 1."²

Chris Craft did a few visually similar models of 24', 26' and 27' length and she could easily have been one of those. However the windscreen using two pieces of glass with centre vertical is not typical of Chris Craft boats of the late 20's. It is seen in some photographs of speedboats from Gar Wood Industries. So she may have been a variant of models such as "Baby Gar" or "Baby Gar Jnr". Garfield Wood who owned Gar Wood Industries was a very successful racer of speedboats in his leisure time immediately after the 1st World War and it was Chris Smith of "Smith and Sons" – later to become "Chris Craft", - that designed and built his racing boats.

Garfield Wood was a partner in business with Chris Smith at one point building boats, but later they amicably split into separate companies. Chris Smith formed Chris Craft in the mid 20's. Both companies were located close to each other in Algonac, Michigan, USA. It's understood some Gar Wood boats were still made in the Chris Craft factory for a few years after the split, which is the

¹ Photo from Brian & Kathy Mulvana

² Information on the boat comes from a document prepared for (or by), Neville Darby

timescale Miss Velocity was probably built in. There would have been a manufacturers plate inside the engine compartment which would have had the model name and serial number. This would have cleared up the matter, but the plate was not saved or the details noted when she moved on. However Miss Velocity is a close and direct descendent of many race winners and speed record holders.

And the engine as described may not be the original one. The Chrysler history page on their web site suggests marine eight cylinder engines were not introduced until 1931. So it's possible the engine came slightly later? ³A picture of a restored Chrysler Majestic 8 cylinder engine certainly shows it was a magnificent piece of engineering.



⁴To give a comparison of engine power against other local ships of the time, we know the "Royal Lady" that operated from Scarborough from 1934 to 1937 had two Diesel engines of 125 HP each, giving 250 HP in total. She could do nearly 10 knots and carried hundreds of passengers per trip. Miss Velocity only carried 8 passengers so the 150HP Chrysler would have offered spectacular performance in a boat perhaps 27' long.

The same Scarborough Evening News article of July 1964 says the boats were always called Miss Velocity. General opinion is that there were originally three speedboats all with the same name. But there is a postcard taken from the East Pier with a posting date of 1933⁵, and could not be earlier than 1931, because the lighthouse seen on the



postcard was only rebuilt after being damaged in the 1st World War in that year. This picture shows two speedboats at their mooring at the end of the pier. The name of one of the boats can be read as "Richmont V1". The "V1" implies at least six boats⁶.

Elsewhere the name has been recorded as "Richmond", but this postcard is clear enough to read a "T" instead of a "D".



³ Chrysler Majestic picture from <http://www.dolphinmarineengineco.com> 2011

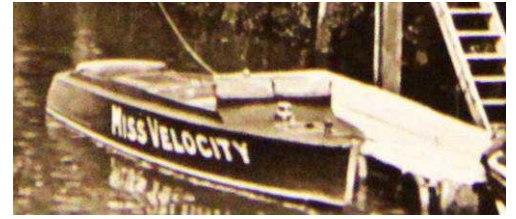
⁴ Information on Royal Lady from Tom Machin via <http://www.simplonpc.co.uk/Scarborough2.html> 2014

⁵ Picture from NYCC Scarborough Library postcard collection

⁶ Extract from the 1933 postcard in NYCC Scarborough Library postcard collection

The other boat in the postcard has most of its name obscured, but the ending appears to be “V”, - implying this was boat number five.

There is a very similar view on another postcard dated 1936⁷, but now the name on the speedboat reads “Miss Velocity”. (This postcard also includes the “Royal lady” which was only at Scarborough between 1934 - 1937.) There is also a photograph showing the same name which is believed to date from 1932.



Yet another postcard⁸ which must date from after the lighthouse was rebuilt in 1931, - but before the concrete air raid shelter was built on the pier adjacent to the mooring and which is assumed to be about 1940, shows the name of “Miss Velocity 11” (“Two” in Roman Numerals.) This implies at least two boats existed at this time.



While it's impossible to be certain, it is most likely that there were three boats. One or more were originally named “Richmont”. This name must have been kept until at least 1931 as it appears in the postcard with the rebuilt lighthouse that only completed in that year. It (or they), were subsequently renamed “Miss Velocity I, II & III”. This renaming must have occurred between 1931 and 1936, as that later date is when the Royal lady postcard showing the name as “Miss Velocity” was posted.

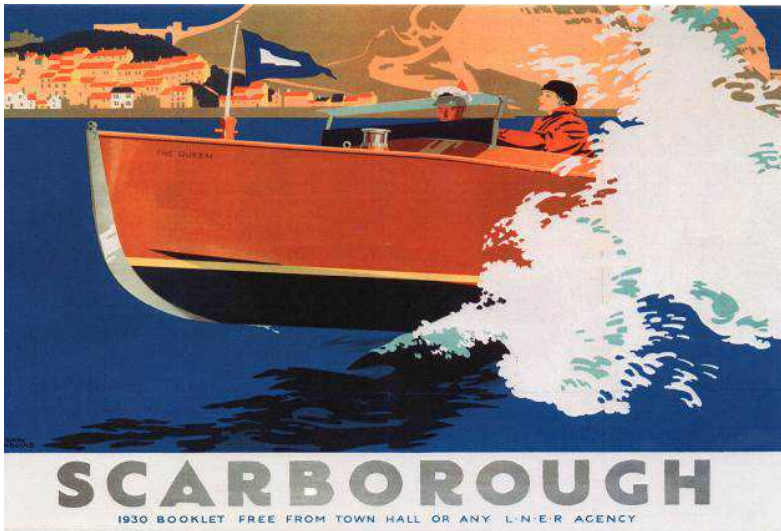


It's clear the boats inspired the iconic 1930 LNER publicity poster of the red speedboat advertising rail travel to Scarborough⁹. So they must have been running in Scarborough in or before that year. In the poster, the name on the boat is “Queen”. Perhaps this stood for “Queen of watering places”?

⁷ Picture from NYCC Scarborough Library postcard collection

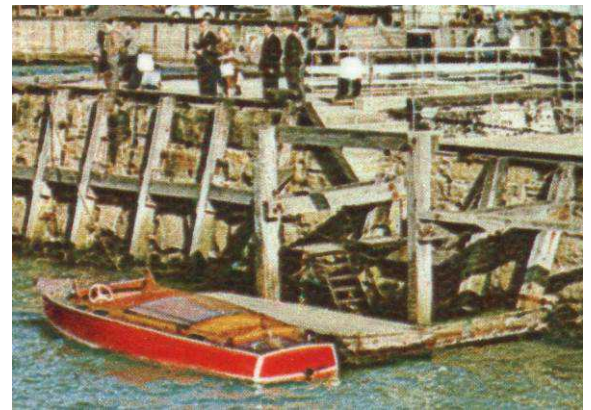
⁸ Postcard from Brian & Kathy Mulvana

⁹ Image No. 10174048 from NRM/Pictorial Collection/Science and picture library



The 1930's saw the Tunny fishing boom in Scarborough with plenty of affluent clientele in the town helping to keep the three speedboats running. The speedboat rides were popular perhaps because they gave a sense of speed. Something that the cars of that period perhaps could not supply.

From 1930 to about 1970, the boats operated from the end of the Vincent Pier near the lighthouse. There was a set of steps inset into the pier down towards the normal high tide mark. From there a wooden gangway and metal steps/ladder (with a single handrail), led down to a floating pontoon that could rise and fall with the tides. An extract from a post-war postcard shows the best detail now available of the pontoon and steps¹⁰.



When times were busy, fares were taken from a kiosk sited close to the Lighthouse. There are two photographs from 1968, which show the kiosk and its siting¹¹.



At some date two enamelled aluminium signs were produced and added to buildings along the pier to promote and advertise the speedboats. One of the signs is believed to have been on the Gents toilets at the base of the pier and the second may have been on the small building near the Sidney

¹⁰ Extract from a post-war postcard in NYCC Scarborough Library postcard collection

¹¹ Supplied by Elizabeth Farrar, who appears in both photos

Smith bridge. (That building was also the Diesel fuelling point.) These signs were recovered in 1970 when the pier refurbishments were carried out. One of the signs still exists and is currently owned by Graham Bird. A photo is enclosed¹².



Norman Martin operated the three boats from 1930 up until the 2nd World War when all were requisitioned by the Navy. One of the boats is known to have caught fire and burned out while in the Navy's charge, so only two survived and returned to Scarborough at the end of the war. Norman became a special constable in 1938, reaching the rank of inspector. During the 2nd World War he joined the Royal Observer Core and served in a civilian capacity at the RAF initial training wing in Scarborough.

¹³The boats were returned and started running again in 1946. A new driver/mechanic taken on was Arthur Edmondson. Arthur's father lived close to Norman Martin in the Cornelian Drive area. Arthur was a trained mechanic which was a qualification Norman was looking for and through word of mouth he got the job. He moved to Scarborough from Leeds in that year. There is a photo which is believed to date from 1948, which shows Miss Velocity 3 with a cabin. This may well have been provided by the navy during wartime and retained at least till the photo was taken.



The Tunny fishing scene was dying down after the war and the speedboat rides were never as popular again. Cars and motorbikes on the roads provided enough sense of speed for the general public. But having two boats available meant they could both run when it was busy and in quieter periods one was available to cover break downs.

¹² Sign owned by Graham Bird (son of Alwyn Bird)

¹³ Picture from Woodend "Scarborough Collections"

¹⁴A really spectacular photograph of the boat at speed exists. It was probably taken in the late 50's or early 60's and shows Bert Holiday driving.



A photograph exists of Norman Martin with three other crew/drivers¹⁵. The best guess for a date is the late 50's. Also in the photograph is an earlier fares kiosk.

The routine at the close of the operating season in autumn was to recover the boat from the harbour and lift it to a garage where it could be maintained. The original garage was in what is now part of the council car park between St Thomas Street and Queen Street, at the North end somewhere near the present Walkers shop. When the area was redeveloped around 1960 the new garage used was in Durham Place, (Off North Marine Road).

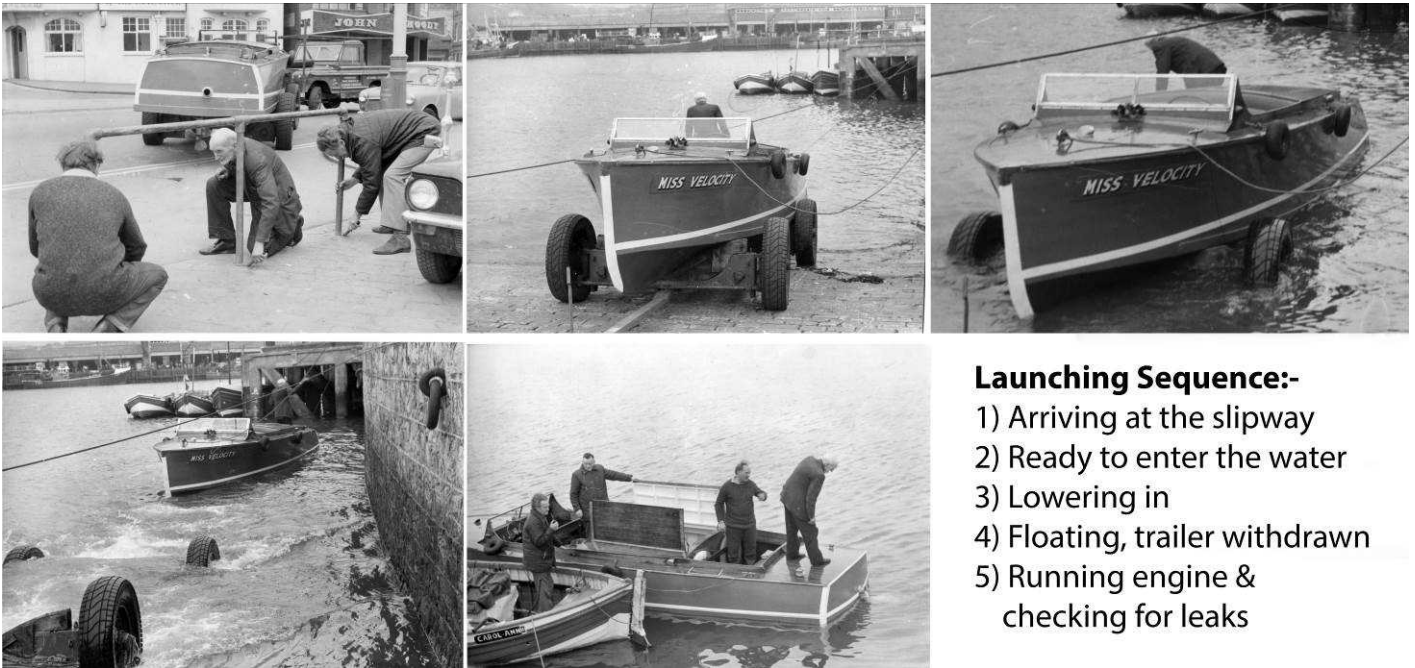


Arthur Edmondson was a trained mechanic and during the winter the boats were refurbished. This included stripping down the engines to examine and replace any worn parts. Any necessary repairs to the hulls were carried out and the boats were completely repainted each winter and made ready to return to the harbour in spring. A series of

¹⁴ Photo from Woodend "Scarborough Collections"

¹⁵ Photo from Brian & Kathy Mulvana

photographs from sometime in the late 60's or early 70's shows a launching sequence one spring at the Golden Ball slipway¹⁶.



Launching Sequence:-

- 1) Arriving at the slipway
- 2) Ready to enter the water
- 3) Lowering in
- 4) Floating, trailer withdrawn
- 5) Running engine & checking for leaks

In 1964, Norman Martin retired and sold the business to his driver/mechanic Mr Arthur Edmondson. About this time, one of the two boats remaining was aging badly. It would no longer take the pounding it was getting at sea without major re-building. It was sold off to a buyer from the Leeds area “for use on rivers only”. We don't know what subsequently happened to it.

Norman Martin died in June 1968. He is commemorated by a seat complete with plaque on the lighthouse pier¹⁷. It is sited close to where the boats operated from. (The green bin in the background stands on the site of the ticket kiosk.)

From talking to Mr Edmondson before he died, the boat had several different engines during its lifetime. At one point he said it had a petrol engine installed, which could well have been the Chrysler engine noted previously. Certainly an old engine, which may well have been the early 8 cylinder Chrysler engine described

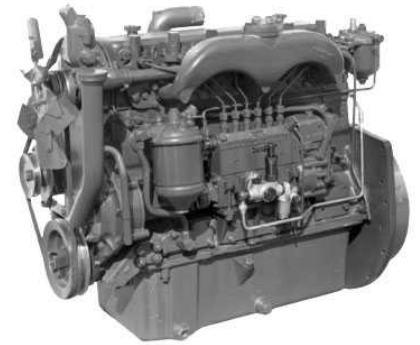
earlier, survived and was stored at some point in a shed in Arthur Edmondson's back garden. There it remained until he died. It was discovered when clearing out the shed and could only be removed by demolishing the shed wall and lifting it away in the bucket of a JCB.



¹⁶ All photos from Brian & Kathy Mulvana

¹⁷ Photo from Brian & Kathy Mulvana

But certainly from shortly after Arthur Edmondson took over, Miss Velocity used Perkins diesel engines¹⁸. The first engine fitted by Arthur after he took over was almost certainly a Perkins P6. This was a 6 cylinder engine of 5 Litres capacity giving 86 BHP at 2600 RPM. This engine was first produced for trucks in the lead up to the 2nd world war. At that time it was extremely powerful for its size and weight. It proved very successful for Perkins. A marine version was produced for the military market during the war and sales began to the civilian market afterwards. The transmission was hydraulic incorporating forward and reverse gears.



Perkins P6 Diesel

The engine was very reliable. Perhaps the weakest point was the exhaust manifold. This was where cold seawater met hot metal. There were a number of occasions over the years with the P6 that the manifold cracked and needed repair or replacement. If this happened during the season, it meant a quick car journey over the Pennines to Shaw, (near Oldham), where there was a dealer who could repair or replace it on the spot.

The only other item significantly affecting reliability was the propeller. Although it was made of bronze it turned at high speed. If and when it encountered any floating object, it did occasionally break. When this occurred it was usual to drive to a supplier who had one in stock rather than wait for a replacement to be sent by post/courier, thereby minimising Miss Velocity's time out of service.

When a new type engine was installed, (such as when the Perkins P6 was installed), it was necessary to match the propeller pitch and diameter to the new engine and gearbox characteristics. While there would be a good guess of what diameter and pitch was required, there was always an element of trial and error. Several slightly different props would be tried during the running in period to see which gave the best overall performance taking into account engine revs, speed, fuel consumption and vibration at normal cruising speed.

When the old engine was recovered in Arthurs shed, a propeller was found near it. So it's likely the propeller was the one kept with and "matched" to the old engine. The propeller survives with us and is 17" diameter and about 186" pitch¹⁹.



A photograph of the kiosk taken in 1968 shows the tickets were 4 Shillings & 6 pence for adults and 2 shillings & 6 pence for children. For this price the standard round trip lasted 7 minutes. It was either south as far as Cornelian Bay or round the Castle headland into the North bay. The route taken depended on sea conditions. If any large vessel was anchored off Scarborough, the route would usually include a close pass to view it.

In Arthur Edmondson's time as owner, Miss Velocity ran on Diesel. The fuelling point was in the outer harbour alongside the Vincent pier. Commercial (Red) Diesel was



¹⁸ Information on engine types from Graham Bird, (son of Alwyn Bird), with <http://www.perkins.lv> in 2014

¹⁹ Propeller is with Brian & Kathy Mulvana

dispensed from the small building (still existing in 2014), sited close to the Sydney Smith Bridge on the Vincent pier²⁰.

Very occasionally Miss Velocity undertook rescues. If it was perhaps a small boat in trouble and she was available and manned, then word would be passed down and she would be away and offering assistance at the scene before the lifeboat crew could assemble at the lifeboat house. One known case involved a small boat with a failed engine off Hayburn Wyke. Miss Velocity arrived just in time to tow it clear of the rocks. For this rescue Arthur Edmondson received a letter of commendation and an award of seven shillings and sixpence.

In 1970, major works were carried out on the lighthouse pier. A new facing of steel piles was added to the pier²¹. This removed the steps that led down to the speedboats and the supports necessary for the pontoon. The work made the site unusable for Miss Velocity.



The new site for running was the Golden Ball slipway inside the harbour²². It had pro's and con's. The harbour can only be traversed at very slow speed and as a result the round trip time went up from 7 to 10 minutes. This meant extra running costs and less trips each hour.



However the new site inside the harbour always had smooth water for loading and unloading passengers. (Traversing the pontoon in any sort of swell needed either an extremely good sense of balance or a helping hand from one of the crew. Boarding from the pontoon would probably have been prohibited under today's health and safety rules.)

The paint scheme during her lifetime was a bright scarlet hull with white lining. The only main difference during her career was the size of her name.



The photograph dated 1932, (adjacent), and the postcard dated 1936 show large lettering, but at some point – probably before the 60's, - the size of the lettering was reduced to that seen in the photographs of the launching sequence.

In her final days under Barry Smith, larger lettering and extra decoration were restored with the intention of making her look more attractive.

In 1973, Arthur Edmondson retired. Miss Velocity was sold to Mr Alwyn Bird. A photo of Alwyn is adjacent.²³ By trade



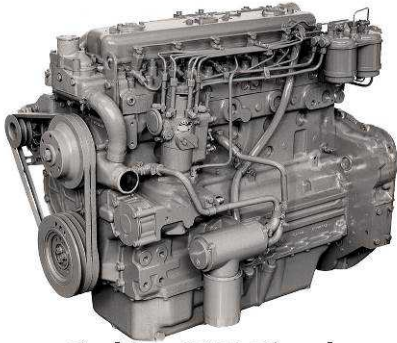
²⁰ Picture from Brian & Kathy Mulvana

²¹ Photo from Brian & Kathy Mulvana

²² Photo from Brian & Kathy Mulvana

²³ Photo of Alwyn and information on him from Graham Bird

Alwyn was an electrician but during the 2nd World War he served in the merchant navy and he had friends who were well connected with boats. After the war his electrical and small engineering business allowed him to become part owner of a keelboat called the North Star, which he used for pleasure and fishing. (At one point he also owned a cobble called “Nellie”.) He lived in the same area of Scarborough as Arthur and through contact on the pier and at home they became acquainted. At some point he made it clear to Arthur Edmondson that when he retired, he wanted “the first chance” of taking over Miss Velocity. And that is what he did.



Perkins 6354 Diesel

Under Alwyn, The P6 engine was replaced by an updated model, the Perkins 6354²⁴. While still 6 cylinders, this was a slightly larger engine of 6 Litres capacity giving 112 BHP at 2800 RPM. Perkins did produce other engine models between the P6 and the 6354, but it's suggested in the Perkins history that the 6354 was the next really successful engine after the P6. It was even more reliable than the P6. A factor in this may have been that since it was a more powerful engine, it didn't have to work quite as hard.

Alwyn sold the boat to Barry Smith. Due to Barry's domestic situation it was not possible to get much information or even a photo of him. It is known that for what turned out to be her final season the Perkins was replaced with a “Ford-Sabre” turbo diesel of 180hp. (Sabre is a firm that marine-ised the Ford “Dorset” engine.) This was still a 4 cylinder 6 Litre engine but with lots more power because of the turbo charger. Barry did say “She was hardly ever run at near full throttle for fear of springing a plank.”

In 1988 Miss Velocity was needing major refurbishment. She was sold to a speedboat enthusiast, a Mr Neville Darby who intended to restore her. However things did not go as he planned. A survey he had carried out indicated the costs to restore her were prohibitive. In spite of being offered to other enthusiasts, no one was found prepared to take her on.



Her last days were believed spent at a farm near Westhall in Suffolk. She is believed to have been scrapped around 2005. The last known photograph of her is enclosed²⁵.

Her job at Scarborough is carried on by younger boats. They are faster, they give a more exciting ride and will be cheaper to run, - but perhaps they can't do the job with the same style?

Brian & Kathy Mulvana,
November 2014.

²⁴ Information on engine types from Graham Bird, (son of Alwyn Bird), with additional detail and pictures from <http://www.perkins.lv> in 2014

²⁵ Photo from Neville Darby

Intimate with Miss Velocity

As a young person I did not use of all the paid attractions that Scarborough had to offer. There were plenty of free attractions and I was always short of pocket money. I was about twenty years old before I became intimately acquainted with Miss Velocity.

It was a Saturday evening in Scarborough during the summer of 1973. I had been going out with a new girl for about two months. I could only see her on Saturdays as I worked in York during the week. The standard arrangement was that I met her off the bus from Osgodby at the bus station on Somerset terrace in the early evening of Saturday. I remember this one was a beautiful evening, warm and sunny with no wind. My initial idea for the two of us that evening was a walk along the sea front followed by joining up with a larger group of friends for a drink.

When my girl stepped off the bus, I was surprised to see she was a bit more “poshed up” than usual. (Full regalia, smart mini skirt, best coat and high heels.) But being a bloke – I did not bother to ask why. The first thing she said to me after the usual greeting was “Could we have a walk on the front?”, - so of course I agreed. We made our way hand in hand through the crescent gardens to the spa bridge and down the zig-zag path to the beach. My girl asked “Can we walk along to the harbour?” and again I agreed. It was a quiet evening and as we walked across the front we heard the engine of the speedboat coming from somewhere inside the harbour. A few seconds later we saw it emerge from the harbour mouth on one its trips across the south bay.

We walked past the West Pier and North Wharf and were alongside the Golden Ball slipway when my girl asked “Can we have a ride on the speedboat?” I first looked at the prices and felt in my pocket to check I had enough money for the whole of the evening, - then agreed. We moved down the slipway to await the boat returning. We both grew up in Scarborough and could both cope with slippery slipways, but I marvelled how her high heels bit through the seaweed to give good grip, - she was more stable than me.

The speedboat appeared in the harbour mouth and pointed towards us. I could see the driver, - a grizzled chap with a captains cap on. The boat cruised across the harbour and as it closed with the slipway he suddenly stood up and threw a line at me. I reached out to catch it but an arm suddenly appeared in front of me, caught the line and before I could respond or say anything had tied it to a mooring post. The captain then used his rudder and engine to swing the boat parallel alongside the slipway. Then another line came shooting at me. The same arm appeared in front of me again and caught this one. This was a bit galling as I can manage a clove hitch if necessary!

The boat emptied of its passengers and we were the first of the new queue. I had our fares ready in my left hand. My girl then suggested we should sit in the front seat alongside the captain. I had intended sitting in the back, but went with her lead we boarded and sat in the front. The other passengers got on behind us and as they boarded the captain took their fares, - but he did not ask me for ours.

The next thing I knew was the captain saying “We could do with untying”. Before I could move, my girl was up and away in her high heels. In about ten seconds she had jumped off, undone the two ropes, coiled them and jumped back on and was sitting back down beside me. We set off. The boat was not allowed to travel fast across the harbour because of the wake it would cause. Because the throttle was stiff, the captain moved the throttle small increments by hitting it with the heel of his

hand. So we potted across the harbour to the mouth. I still had the fares in my left hand and the captain was smiling at me all the way across. I wondered if he had let us off the fares due to managing the ropes? - or perhaps he had forgotten to ask for them! - So I just smiled back and kept my hand well down at my side where he could not see it.

As we were reached the end of the West Pier, the captain deployed the heel of this hand again and the throttle went up another notch. The engine note increased and the boat began to convert from a slow moving tub to the speedboat that she really was. Another thump on the throttle as we cleared the West Pier and quite suddenly the vibration from the big engine behind us smoothed out. The boats nose came up and she began to plane. She was sliding over the top of the water now instead of pushing it out of the way. Her speed increased rapidly and the piers disappeared behind as we set out into the North Sea. It was then that my girl sat up straight in her seat, pulled her mini-skirt down and smoothed it out, put her shoulders back and announced "OH, - By the way Brian, - I don't think you have met my Dad have you?"

That was my heart stopping introduction to her dad, Mr Arthur Edmondson and Miss Velocity. You will wonder what happened to that girl? The answer is that in spite of the terrible shock I married Kathy and at the time of writing this in 2015, we are still going very strong.

Brian (and Kathy) Mulvana
Scarborough 2015