



When two worlds collide

There's a significant synergy between the detailed techniques used to construct classic Bentleys and classic boats, as Dave Cockwell explains to **Jilly Easterby**. Images: Courtesy of Greg Dennis, Andrew Wright and The Really Good Media Company



Dave Cockwell is no stranger to restoring old and beautiful things. From his eponymous boatyard in Cornwall, utilising the time-honoured

skills of the artisan shipwright he has honed over decades, the BDC Member has overseen the restoration of a fleet of classic vessels – most recently, the

courageous Dunkirk Little Ship, *Fleury II*.

However, his love of breathing new life into old bones has recently taken a different turn with his purchase of an R





The 'fail-able' parts in the R Type's engine, such as the coil condenser and points, are doubled up – a technique Dave uses in boat building

Type Saloon, which he plans to transform into a Touring Special that will catch eyes and turn heads – not unlike the customised motor launches and ultra-luxurious superyacht tenders that he designs and builds for customers across the globe.

"I like things that are well-made by people – designed by people – without computers," explained Dave. "Even though we work with computers in the marine industry, the best design always comes down to a couple of humans figuring out how things should work.

"As someone who is passionate about boats, I am generally unimpressed by cars – but Bentleys are the exception.

"I had been looking for an R Type that was beyond economic restoration in terms of its bodywork but sound in relation to its basic mechanics for a few years and one popped up at the right sort of price. I bought it unseen from Ghost Motors in Sevenoaks (the car was previously owned by BDC Member Peter Rumley) and before heading off to collect it, the dealer stopped me in my tracks and suggested that I drive her home."

It's a long and winding road from Kent to Cornwall, and the

possibility that his purchase was up to such a journey had not even occurred to Dave. In the knowledge that the car had been MOT'd, he decided to trust the dealer's word and caught the train.

"How wrong was I to doubt such a car?" he exclaimed. "When I first set eyes on her, it was clear that she was in good condition – a lovely original that was unrestored and untouched. With the dealer's advice 'to drive her at 60mph and she'll last forever' ringing in my ears, I figured out how she worked, got the hang of her mirrors and within half an hour, it felt as if I had been driving her forever.

"I love anything with a big engine and plenty of power. She just kept pulling for over 400 miles. What a car – she didn't miss a beat! If you're not careful, the speed keeps creeping up. The car wants to go a whole lot faster! Everything worked properly, exactly as it should – the heater, the wipers, the hinges, the light switches, the detail on all the fittings. She was comfortable, held the road well and didn't even lose a drop of oil during what was a pretty epic, cross-country trip."

The R Type, produced between 1952 and 1955, was



Dave is impressed with the quality of the R Type's build, including the sunroof which still operates like new

“All the fail-able parts in the R Type's engine are doubled up – a technique we deploy on the boats we build”

renowned for its elegant luxury. As a popular model during the post-war years, Dave recognised that whilst his 1953 version was not especially rare, its thoughtful design incorporated all the attributes of a long-serving model and surpassed that of many a modern car.

"It's all in the detail," he insisted. "The chrome vents for the windscreen demister move to direct the flow of air. She has retained her trafficators but also has indicators, which aren't on the column but still work automatically. There's a lever to pull that raises a screen at the back to block out the glare of headlights. There are fitted suitcases in the boot. A fully functioning toolkit nestles beneath the driver's seat. The sunroof works perfectly."

As Dave continued to reel



Cockwells' Duchy Motor Launch was awarded a Motor Boat of the Year Award accolade



The R Type still boasts the classic trafficators

off the R Type's most distinctive design features, he was also quick to draw comparisons between this model and his boats. "All the fail-able parts in her engine, such as the coil condenser and points, are doubled up – a technique we deploy on the boats we build. She has a manual gearbox that works brilliantly. The mechanical engineering is superb. All I need to replace are her wipers and her clock, both of which can be easily sourced. Everything about her oozes quality."

With the perfect foundation on which to build, Dave is currently drawing up the design of his Touring Special that will not only enhance the original but also be one of a kind.

"My R Type is a nice car," he declared. "When people build Specials, they tend to create 1930s racing cars. I want to create something that people look at and go 'Wow! That's amazing', but can't tell how old she is. I want her to look like an old car that exudes craftsmanship but replace the chrome trim with accents of modern materials.

"I am not going to reveal all my secrets, but I have in mind



The chrome vents for the R Type's windscreen demister move to direct the flow of air



Among the R Type's thoughtful detailing is a screen at the back to block out glare

a mould body of carbon fibre, veneered in wood – strong, stiff and extremely elegant, like the Titian Tender I designed that won a Concours d'Elégance award at the Cannes Yachting Festival. My Special will possess all the flair and glamour of 1930s Art Deco and utilise as many of the car's original features as possible. I will use up-to-the-minute materials and technologies to enhance her performance and make her as good as she can possibly be.

"That said, I am going to enjoy her as she is for now. Her bodywork is not the best, some of her chrome has gone and her paintwork is a little shabby – but I can fix that. She is just so well made.

"I can drive her anywhere, and people wave and smile. She makes me smile too, and I am not sure if I can bring myself to break her up. She is a bit too good. I might just have to find a donor car in worse condition to realise my dream and from which to create my Art Deco Special!" 

PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

Cockwells Modern & Classic Boatbuilding is renowned for delivering the highest levels of craftsmanship, whether designing a luxurious tender for a superyacht, customising a stylish Duchy Motor Launch, or restoring a classic yacht with copper nails and oak ribs.

From its creekside HQ in Cornwall, the company offers a bespoke service to meet its clients' requirements and is driven by a quest for perfection.

"I like things that are built to last, like the boats we create – hand-built with pride and a strong sense of ownership," explained Dave Cockwell, Founder and Managing Director.

"I look for what is really good in traditional boats and in the modern world, tech-wise, and try to bring these traits together.

"Today, things are deliberately made so that we can't keep them. This is the complete opposite of what I hold dear – to create beautiful things that last a long time."

Drawing parallels with his Bentley, Dave said: "My R Type is almost 70 years old and drives exactly as she was designed to do. Cockwells' boats mirror that feel of tradition, quality and style but possess all the advantages and creature comforts that modern technology can provide.

"My driving force is to preserve the artisan skills of the shipwright and I hope that people will be talking about the boats I build in 70 years' time and beyond."



Dave wants his rebuilt R Type to resemble his Titian Tender – strong, stiff and extremely elegant