High Speed Launch 102

Specifications

Type	100 Class High Speed Launch
Service	Royal Air Force / Royal Navy
Builder	British Power Boat Company, Hythe
Year Built	1937
No. Built	22 (RAF 100 – 121)
Length	64 ft
Beam	14 ft
Draught	3½ ft
Displacement	13½ tons
Hull	Mahogany
Engines	3 x 500hp Napier Sea Lions
Max Speed on trials	39 knots
Fuel Capacity	500 imperial gallons (400m@28kts)
Designed by	Fred Cooper

Commission and Specification

HSL 102, commissioned in 1936, is the only 100 class high speed launch to survive. Capable of a speed of up to 40 knots, 102 took part in the Battle of Britain and together with her fellow launches, rescued more than 13,000 airmen from the sea.

The inspiration behind these RAF rescue craft was Aircraftsman T E Shaw (better known as Lawrence of Arabia), who pressed for the development of a large craft for offshore rescue work following his success in producing a prototype seaplane tender, RAF 200.

The RAF 100 class High Speed Launches joined the RAF fleet in 1937 to increase the operational range duties of the 200 class seaplane tenders. Built by the The British Power Boat Company at Hythe, the 100 class HSLs were designed by Fred Cooper. The class were a stretched version of the 60ft MTB hull and the prototype was the format on which the RAF based their decision for a new type of high speed launch.

The prototype, HSL 100, was launched in May 1936 and on trials surpassed all the parameters set by both the builders and the RAF. The air ministry immediately placed further orders, with HSLs 101-114 ordered in stages in 1936 with deliveries commencing in 1937. Two further 100 class HSLs were ordered in 1938 with HSLs 117-132 ordered in 1939. In the event, production of this type ceased after HSL 121 when the remaining 11 craft scheduled for completion in 1941 were switched to the BPB Whaleback design.

The dimensions of the launch were 64 LOA with a beam of 14 ft 6 inches, and powered by a trio of Napier Sea Lion engines. The range was 500 miles at a speed of 39 knots. The two wing engines were inclined to drive directly to the outboard propeller shafts, whilst the centre engine faced the opposite direction and transmitted via a Vee-drive to the centre propeller. This arrangement allowed for “cruising” on the centre engine only, a range extending economy measure which retained a high degree of manoeuvrability. The accommodation included an Officer’s wardroom / sickbay for four and forecastle bunks for eight crew. With target towing in mind, an after well was incorporated above the tiller mechanism, but this feature was deleted from later craft.

Service History

1937	HSL 102 was ordered under contract CP8A/23424/36 and built by British Power Boat Company at Hythe as Yard No. 1038.
27th October 1937	Began her service career at Donibristle, Scotland where she was taken on charge.
July 1940	Returned to the builders at Hythe for modifications.
April 1941	Repairs completed she was allocated to operate from Blyth with No.15 Air Sea Rescue Unit (ASRU).
1941	HSL 102 rescued 38 aircrew from the North Sea; including the crews of two German Bombers.
From October 1941	HSL 102 was subsequently transferred to operate from the seaplane base at Felixstowe with No. 26 ASRU
From December 1941	Listed as under repair by 85 Maintenance Unit (MU) located at Felixstowe.
1942	The craft was based first at Newhaven with No. 28 ASRU and then returned to operate from Felixstowe once again.
1943	With the introduction of better craft towards the end of the war, some of the class were transferred to other duties. The RAF service of HSL 102 ended on the 4th March 1943 when she was transferred to the Admiralty to become Control and Target Towing Launch No. 12. With a strengthened stem she was employed towing gunnery targets. Post WWII the CT/12 (ex HSL 102) was surplus and like many other craft sold off in April 1946.

Restoration

Little is known about HSL 102 after her sale from the Admiralty until she was spotted as a house boat in Dartmouth in 1993. At that time she was known simply as Excervus and from all accounts had been at Mill Creek for over 10 years. When Excervus was up for sale, Phil Clabburn purchased her and had her towed to Plymouth where she was lifted out and taken by road to Fawley, Southampton, the base of National Power PLC who generously provided the space and facilities for her restoration.

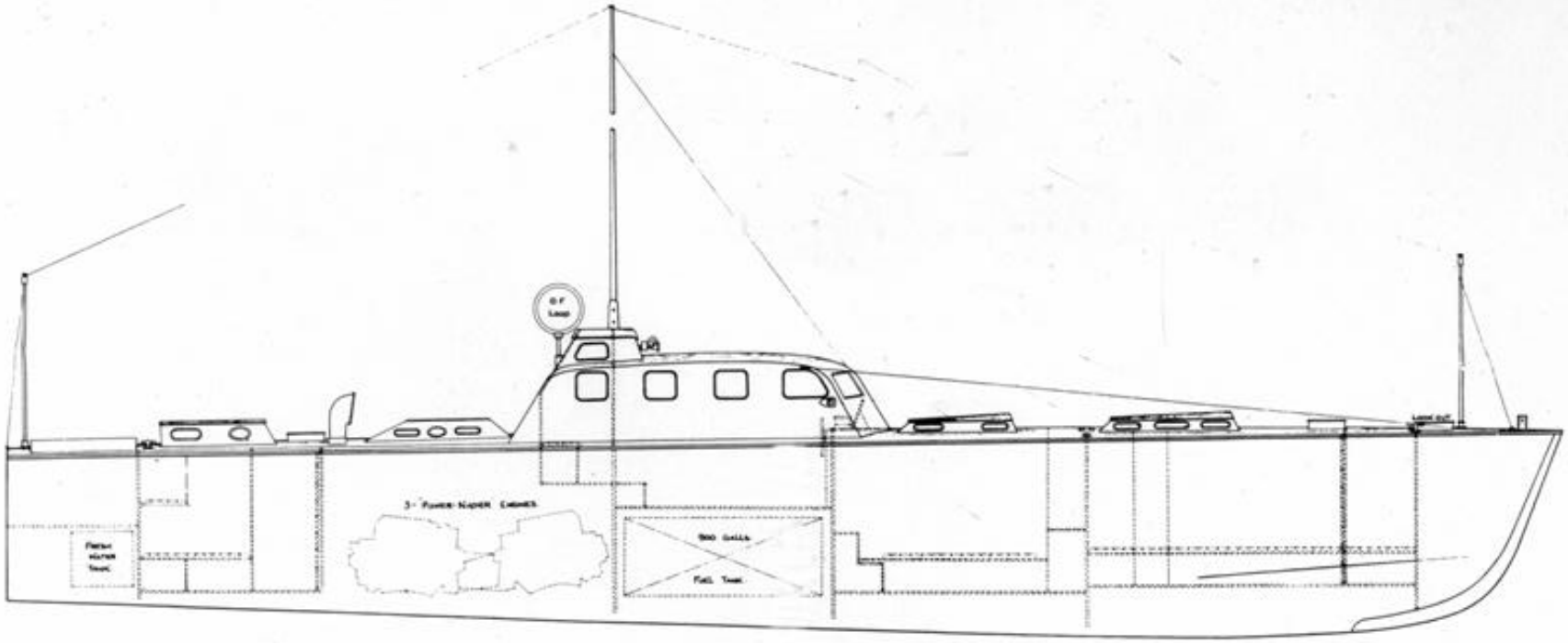
With the old house boat superstructure removed, by July 1994 her hull was being repaired. Over the following months areas of her double diagonal planking were renewed as were her bulkheads, frames and chine. New floor beams were laid and new bearers constructed. 60,000 screws were removed from the hull which, was then re-fastened. A completely new deck was added and a new wheelhouse was built from the original drawings. Once rebuilt, the hull was completely sheathed in GRP, and to allow this to continue an "all-weather" Space Station Cover was erected over the whole craft. By April 1996 she emerged almost complete with her new looks which once again resembled her former HSL appearance. She was re-launched by HRH the Queen Mother in July 1996.

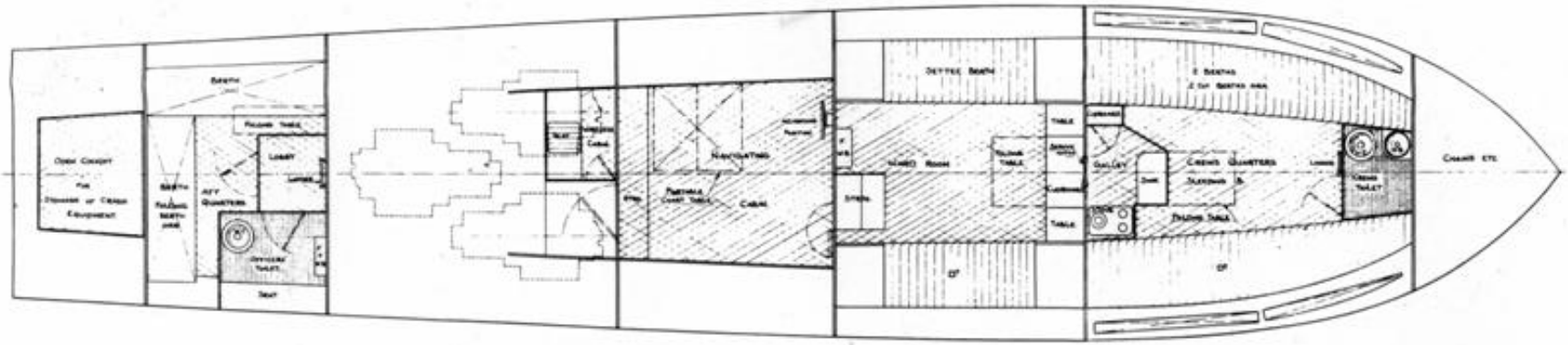
In June 2004, HSL 102 accompanied by Phil Clabburn's other restored boats, MGB 81 and ST 206 visited Caen, Normandy for three days to commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day, the Allied landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944.

In 2004 and 2005, HSL 102 was slipped at Berthon Boat at Lymington and visited Alderney on several occasions.

On 28 October 2009, MGB 81 and HSL 102 were purchased by the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust with the aid of a grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund. HSL 102 is to be restored to her wartime condition and preserved for the benefit of future generations.

HSL 102





64 FT. HIGH SPEED R.A.F. LAUNCH

AIR MINISTRY (E.6)

DRG. Nº E.6/192.

SCALE ½" - 1 FOOT.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