

# Demons of the

Powerboating may conjure up images of testosterone-fuelled males all competing to be the best. PAULA THOMPSON meets two women who are playing the men at their own game

ONE MINUTE SHE IS ADVISING brides-to-be on all things floaty and feminine, the next she has ditched the frills and tiaras of the family bridal business and immersed herself in the testosterone-driven world of championship powerboating.

Shelley Jory is equally at home in her Southampton bridal shop as she is among the roaring engines, grease and determination of the Honda 225 race course.

Along with her race partner, Libby Kier, Shelley has become one of the UK's leading powerboat racers and the top female in her sport.

The memory of winning the British Honda 225 Championships – against 14 teams of men – still brings a smile to her face.

But don't get the wrong impression, Shelley is a girly-girl through and through.

She may beat the boys at their own game but that doesn't mean she has to do it with bad hair and make up.

"I like to be treated like a lady, I like men to open doors for me," says Shelley, 37, the driving force behind Team Raymarine, who – until this season – were the only all girl team in the championships.

The speedy duo are proof that women don't need to sacrifice their femininity to succeed in a man's world.



"I have had to learn so much – like how to change a propeller and the workings of the engine," says Shelley honestly.

"These are things lots of girls wouldn't know. But at the same time I like high heels and getting dressed up. At the races we make a point of having skirts on and Libby always carries lip-gloss in the boat. We enjoy it."

The men do have an attitude. They appear to open their arms to you but when you start winning, the attitude changes.

And sure enough, after taking me for an exhilarating spin in her powerboat Spirit of Southampton, Shelley produces a tube of lip-gloss and hairbrush and order is restored.

But gentlemen beware. When Shelley from Sarisbury Green gets on the racing line she becomes, in the words of her male rivals, "a demon".

Convincing dozens of sportsmen and race officials that two women – attractive blonde women at that – are serious contenders has not been plain sailing.

"It's taken me four years to gain the men's respect," says Shelley who was recently made an ambassador for Southampton in recognition of her achievements.

"The men do have an attitude. They appear to open their arms to you but when you start winning, the attitude changes.

"And I find we're often scrutinised more strongly because we're girls in a man's sport.

"I make sure I'm extra squeaky clean because I know we will be picked on to have stuff checked.

"They think that because we're girls and we're winning we must be cheating. Or they scrutinise us more because they don't want to be accused of favouritism."

Dirty tricks also play a part.

Last year the girls were deliberately wedged against a race marker by

two other boats, causing them to lose their race position.

But being women, says Shelley, can be an advantage.

"My trainer Neil Holmes says he can teach the girls the aggression but he can never teach the men finesse.

"We've won races because we have the sense to pull back. Men get this red mist of aggression but we have a self-preservation for life."

Shelley, who was introduced to racing by a former boyfriend, knows all too well how risky the sport can be.

In 2003 she was rescued from her boat after it hit a wash and plunged nose first into the water, trapping her inside for three minutes.

"Adrenaline took over," she recalls. "It felt like an eternity. If I hadn't found the boat's built in air supply I would be dead."

But she managed to rebuild the mangled boat in just a month, completed the season and went on to win a gruelling three-hour endurance race on Lake Windermere.

Today she not only races for Team Raymarine, she manages them too, combining a hefty administrative workload with intensive training sessions and



PAULA THOMPSON experienced first-hand the thrill of powerboat racing when Shelley took her out for a spin



I FEEL AS IF MY FACE IS coming off!" I shout as the wind whips my skin, literally yanking it back with eye-watering force.

I can hardly make my voice heard over the combined roar of the wind, sea spray and engines as I hurtle through the water at breakneck speed.

Taking a trip in Shelley Jory's powerboat is not for the fainthearted.

The sleek, startlingly turquoise boat slices through the water at 65 miles an hour – although it feels more like 100 – leaving a stream of foaming white water in its impressive wake.

Under Shelley's expertise the boat deftly cuts across the undulating wash of other craft, launching itself into the air in protest before slamming back down with a bone-rattling

smack.

"Those corners are a bit scary!" I yell as Southampton Water rushes up to meet me on a particularly severe tilt.

But the championship winning driver's grin only widens as she expertly negotiates another turn, causing the boat to lift clean off the surface of the water.

"That's why I'm doing it!" Shelley giggles cheekily, sheer

delight written on her beaming face. "And it's worse on your side!

"Once I went round the corner so fast, Libby's head ended up in the water," she confesses.

I laugh nervously.

But despite the breath-taking speed – water takes on the properties of concrete when you're travelling this fast – and the perilous tilts and bumps,