



# Scream if you want to go faster

**MBM joined Honda powerboat champion, Shelley Jory, in the cockpit of her 225 raceboat for the ride of a lifetime** REPORT BY CLAIRE FREW

**O**n any other day at this time, I would be getting the tube to my air-conditioned office. Right now, I'm hurtling through the Solent at 65mph, wingwoman to Shelley Jory, Honda's 2005 Powerboat Champion – and all my carefully rehearsed questions are a complete blur. Minutes earlier, a green-overalled yet glamorous Shelley made an

impressive arrival at Hamble Point Marina, Southampton, aboard her Honda 225 *Team Raymarine* raceboat, accompanied by trainer, Jacqui Missen. "Claire hates waves!" shouted Jacqui over my shoulder, as I clambered into the tiny cockpit next to a beaming Shelley. My whole body felt tense with a mix of fear and excitement. Shelley strapped me in and attached a kill cord.

"This is just in case you fall out," she reassured me. "If you don't like the speed, tell me and I'll slow down." Shelley immediately had the boat straight up on the plane – no messing. I was gobsmacked. The 225 felt incredible and sitting next to her while she simulated race mode was something special. Face forward, watching the wave patterns, constantly adjusting the trim and steering; I was almost

fearful of breaking her concentration with my questions. This was my first ride in a Honda 225, and there were no jerky throttle movements as I'd expected. Instead, the acceleration and turns were clearly well-practised, controlled and smoothed to perfection. The more I grinned, the faster and harder Shelley pushed the boat. *Team Raymarine* competes in the competitive 225 class, part of the Honda Formula Four Stroke Powerboat Series. This consists of five Grand Prix weekends a year, at various UK locations. All participating crew have day jobs, and just happen to race powerboats for fun. Built by Cougar, the svelte 225 raceboat has a twin-stepped, deep V-hull and is powered by a Honda BF 225 four-stroke outboard. The championship is strictly one-design, so all competing engines and boats are identical, and modifications are strictly forbidden.

Until this year, Shelley and Libby Keir were the only all-girl duo in the Honda 225 circuit and dominated the scene throughout 2005. Now, *Team Raymarine* faces competition from another all-girl team in the form of *Delmar Group*, driven by the stuntwoman and fitness expert, Sarah Donahue. Before climbing into the boat, Jacqui had reassured me that 'Shelley hasn't tipped this one over yet!' However, once in position, I felt very safe, and was immediately aware of the crucial role played by her navigator. As Shelley's eyes, Libby keeps watch for other boats, shouts the distances, checks the course on the chartplotter in front of her and calls out tactical manoeuvres. Meanwhile, Shelley is focused, foot to the throttle, flicking the trim up and down, her eyes fixed on the racetrack and

engine rev counter mounted on the dash. As you'd expect, there's an immense trust between the two girls as, ultimately, they are responsible for each other's lives. Glancing around the cockpit, there were signs of the great camaraderie between them. Three switches on the dash had been re-labelled with 'Gucci Darling', 'New Shoes' and the third...well, it's not suitable for a family magazine! A common quirk in all Honda 225 raceboats is a rotation of the engine rev dial through 90° left. Consequently, Shelley knows that when the needle is vertical, she should have a top speed of 70mph. That breakneck pace of just over 60 knots is achieved at 6100rpm.

I was surprised at the good level of visibility from the cockpit at speed, as it had seemed a long way down when I'd climbed into my seat. I'm a similar height to Shelley and could see right across the shiny nose to the bow. Surprisingly, the boat felt level at all times; there was no 'bow-up' as I'd experienced in previous powerboats. Each time Shelley accelerated, I could feel the entire craft rise out of the water; the joy of an air-stepped hull. It simply buffeted along effortlessly, just warbling or chine-riding on the occasional larger rogue waves. A couple of years ago, I'd had some race-theory instruction with Shelley's first trainer and mentor, Neil Holmes. His mantra, 'Don't back off,' suddenly came into my head. It can be extremely unnerving travelling at such high speeds and I was only too aware that even in

“The more I grinned, the faster and harder Shelley pushed the boat”

**The season so far...**  
As we went to press, *Team Raymarine* holds third place in the 2007 Honda 225 series

slight seas, with very few boats about, something could easily go wrong. But I reassured myself that a day like today was a walk in the park for Shelley; a far cry from her usual testosterone-fuelled, 17-boat start line. Large wakes of passing craft are the biggest danger to raceboats, as Shelley learned the hard way in her V-24 days. Also known as a 'bat-boat', the V-24 is a powerful 75mph, enclosed canopy/cockpit raceboat. Just 500m from the finish line and lying in





I feel the need for speed: Powerboat champion Shelley Jory shows MBM's Claire Frew what fast really is!

pole position, a passing wake from a 'gin palace' caused her V-24 to 'trip and stuff'.

In layman's terms, the boat became airborne and the engine prop caught on a wave, causing the entire craft to somersault. The

nose cone smashed off as it dived underwater, leaving Shelley and her co-pilot confined inside a rapidly flooding, enclosed cockpit.

Her co-pilot managed to escape before the boat completely submerged, but Shelley was trapped.

"I was underwater for about three minutes," she recalled. "I managed to get my air supply, unbuckled my harness and found my door. The adrenaline just took over, and it was actually a textbook escape. My

biggest fear in that situation was breathing in water and choking."

Powerboat drivers and crew

prepare for such inevitable emergencies by taking part in a routine escape test procedure called the 'dunk test'. Much like

navy or fighter pilot training, the crew is placed in an enclosed glass cockpit, which is submerged at different angles in a swimming pool. It slowly floods and the drivers have to wait for the water to fill up all

The girls have cheekily relabelled three cockpit switches!

“The nose cone smashed off as it dived underwater”

around them before they can make their escape.

Amazingly, Shelley had walked away unscathed after her ordeal, but the boat wasn't so lucky. The deck was completely smashed up and the engine and electronics suffered severe water damage. Yet only one month later, the craft had been totally re-built and Shelley was racing again. As a result, she admits to being very nervous and quiet on the start line, with a steely determination to win.

### Girl power

Back on dry land, I asked Shelley how, as one of the few UK female powerboat drivers – and a very successful one at that – she deals with being involved in such a male dominated sport, especially since she is clearly no 'ladette'.

"I'm an adrenaline junkie, but very much a girly-girl achieving in a traditionally male sport," said Shelley. "Libby and I actually make a point of wearing skirts and high heels when we're not racing, and Libby always carries her lip gloss in the boat," she added, with a wry smile.

With her celebrity status, it's easy to forget that powerboat racing is still a hobby for Shelley. On weekdays, in between her race training and gruelling fitness schedule, she works in her

family-owned bridal shop and gives after-dinner speeches at charity functions. A reminder of this dual lifestyle came when her mobile phone rang – with its appropriate Honda Racing ring tune.

"Sorry, do you mind if I take this? It's the shop," Shelley asked. Clearly, the business is a major part of her life and keeps her grounded and financially secure, but her first love is her boat. "It's like a child to me," she said. Shelley admits to driving her car like the boat, and confessed to having a few speeding tickets!

Each season, she has to raise £25,000 in sponsorship to race. This includes training, fuel, events, entry fees, travelling and has to cover any damages. To give you an idea, a new engine costs approximately £9000.

Next year, Shelley wants to take a break from driving to manage another powerboat racing team and she is also planning to enter an all-new racing class in 2009.

After lunch, Shelley's hectic schedule continued with prop testing, in preparation for the first Honda 225 series race weekend of the season in Torquay.

As for me, despite heavy traffic on the M3, I was grinning all the way home.



Two's company: The small cockpit aboard the Spirit of Southampton



### Honda 225 Specifications

<b>Length (LOA)</b>	26ft 9in (8.15m)
<b>Moulded Beam</b>	6ft (1.83m)
<b>Weight</b>	2420lb (1100kg)
<b>Ballast capacity</b>	68lt
<b>Construction</b>	Kevlar composite cored structure
<b>Design</b>	Cougar twin-stepped, deep-V monohull
<b>Hull Type</b>	Twin-stepped 24° deep V
<b>Water Ballast</b>	68lt
<b>Fuel Capacity</b>	159lt
<b>Engine</b>	Honda BF225 3471cc V6 VTEC SOHC four-stroke fuel injection
<b>Cost</b>	packages from £48,762