

# DREAM MACHINE

## Inspired by the 'Miami Vice' TV series, MBM's Nick Burnham hunts down one of the show's iconic Scarab 38KV in the US



Nick (Don Johnson) Burnham, on set

In the darkness of a deserted Miami dock, a drug deal is going down. Three men wait aboard a small high performance catamaran as the sleek lines of a Wellcraft Scarab KV38 burble menacingly into view. One man steps aboard the Scarab, his two machine-gun toting accomplices looking on. As silver briefcases of cocaine and cash are exchanged, the intense searchlight of a customs launch illuminates the scene. The Scarab driver fires the twin 440hp V8s and disappears into the night with the drugs, cash, and dealer, outrunning the chasing customs launch. But it's a set-up; the Scarab driver is an undercover detective and the dealer is dropped over the side with instructions to "take a cab". The Scarab, its unique

pastel colour scheme glinting in the darkness, backs out of its dock and as the rock music builds, the engines bellow once more, hurling the Scarab onto the plane, away from the floundering dealer and into the night. Cue distinctive theme music and opening credits of another thrilling episode of 'Miami Vice'.

For a period in the mid-1980s, this TV series was quite simply untouchable. Based on the premise of American police using confiscated property of convicted narcotics dealers in the war against drugs, Miami Vice roared onto our screens in a plethora of designer clothes, cars, guns, people and boats. Inspector Morse it was not.

Encapsulating the glamour, music, and excesses of the decade, it made instant stars of Don Johnson, who played Sonny Crockett, and Philip Michael Thomas, who played Sonny's partner, Rico Tubbs.

But they weren't the only stars.

“Don Johnson even commuted to work on one”

Sharing almost equal billing were the toys. There were cars, of course,

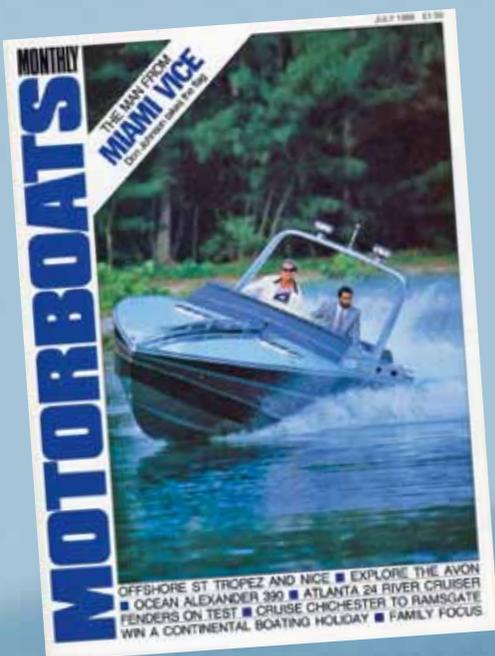
Sonny's stunning black Ferrari Daytona Spider (in fact a Corvette-based fake), but there were also boats and lots of them. Sonny lived on a yacht, and moored next to it in the marina was his "go fast boat", that Wellcraft Scarab 38KV.

Series one of 'Miami Vice' actually

featured a Chris Craft Stinger 39. Wellcraft looked on enviously at the marketing potential and approached Universal Studios with an offer they couldn't refuse: matching Scarab KV38s, painted any colour and design they liked, delivered on time, for free, to do with as they wished. Universal accepted and from season two onwards, Sonny Crockett ran a Scarab 38KV.

It was a huge success for Wellcraft and it supplied a further six boats over the next two series. Wellcraft sales across the board went up over 20 per cent, and they celebrated with a run of 100 replicas, dubbed the 'Scarab 38KV Miami Vice Edition' for general sale. Don Johnson (a keen powerboater) was given one, which he called My

PHOTOS KYLE HUNTER



On the cover, July 1988. But have the stars of the show aged as gracefully as the boat?



Vice and frequently commuted into work on.

There was also a radio-controlled model 'Miami Vice' Scarab, one of which was owned by 'Miami Vice' enthusiast and inveterate boys' toys collector, Jim Launder. When Jim sold his business a couple of years ago, he went after a full-sized version. Of course these boats are over 20 years old now, so finding a good one proved challenging. Jim saw several before his search took him to the Thousand Islands region and another disappointing example.

A mechanic mentioned in passing that he looked after another 38KV which might be for sale, not a MV Edition, but one of the original TV boats. Jim arranged to see it. When he got there he couldn't believe his eyes... the owner, Tom Jewsbury, had completely restored it over several years. It was immaculate.

Not everything was original, however. Under the aft deck the 440hp motors had been upgraded

to twin 9.1 litre, race-prepared GM blocks, upping the power stakes to a thoroughly brutish 1300hp. Jim bought it at the full asking price on the spot. This was the very first Scarab released to Universal Studios, and seen in a couple of early season two episodes before being used for close-up, on-board camera work once the other Scarabs came on stream. Two bolts still exist at the tip of the foredeck where a camera mount was once installed. All the Scarabs were intended to be identical but inevitably subtle differences crept in, spotlights on the radar arch and rails between the engine vents appeared and disappeared depending on which boat was used.

When Jim decided to put it back onto the market, we knew we had to cover it. A couple of emails and only days later, I'm on a plane, heading for a date with destiny.

Jim and two of his friends, fellow boater Mark Cherryholmes and



Drug barons beware: the 'Vice' boat is back on the water

photographer Kyle Hunter, collect me from my hotel in his massive black GMC 'Dually' six-wheel truck for the short run to Catawba Island on the shores of Lake Eire where the boat lives ashore on its custom-built, six-wheel trailer.

As we swing into the marina complex, Jim nods to the left. There she sits at the end of a line of boats parked on the grass. Even covered

by a close-fitting matching turquoise all-over cover, she looks breathtaking. Long, low and lithe, the gunwale arching powerfully back to the stern like a shark, lines unencumbered by so much as a bathing platform or a windscreen, a stubby venturi offering the only wind protection. The colour scheme is amazing in real life. Two tapering thick navy hull





stripes sweep back from the stem flanking a third centre stripe of an incredible rainbow of pastel shades, starting deep purple at the bow and flowing seamlessly through deep blue and back to turquoise toward the stern quarters. Attention to detail is everywhere; the white trailer features matching turquoise spare wheel and winch covers, and even the mooring warps are turquoise.

Launching is a practiced affair, nearly 40ft of Wellcraft slipping gently into the drink as easily as a 15ft Fletcher off the back of a family hatchback. Mark and Kyle hold her carefully away from the dock alongside the slip, scratching that

rainbow gelcoat doesn't bear even thinking about. Jim cranks her over and engine one catches with such a throaty roar that several on-lookers take an involuntary step backwards.

The first thing Jim did when he bought her was junk the mufflers and let the demonic thunder of 18.2 litres do their job.

We motor out of the small harbour into an area more inland sea than lake. A gentle breeze ruffles the surface, providing scant relief from

the oppressively hot, humid air. Jim checks the gauges again and turns to us. "Ready?" As the power is wound on the deep throb from the quartet of four inch exhausts melds

quickly into the full on roar of two dragsters having a tug of war in a tunnel. I've been in some quick boats,

but this is quite simply in a different league altogether.

At 55mph, and with clearly plenty left to go (she tops out on the right side of 80mph), Jim backs the throttles off to a high-speed cruise, ripping smoothly across the lake. The Scarab cleaves the water akin to an offshore racer, slicing with the first third of the hull rather than bouncing along on her hind quarters like a speedboat. Looking anywhere but straight ahead is risky though, as the near-60mph wind threatens to rip my authentic 'Miami Vice' tortoiseshell Ray-Bans off my face.

Barely 10 minutes later we're sweeping down on Put-In-Bay Island, dropping off the plane and grumbling moodily into the harbour to tie up on one of the long wooden docks.

It's midweek and the small port is already beginning to fill with boats, Jim tells me it'll be packed come the weekend. Put-In-Bay is a beautiful classic mid-western town, leafy trees, immaculate park lawns and quiet, wide roads. The proliferation of bars though, gives the game away. The Guinness Book of World Records-certified longest bar in the world lives here, and 'Playboy'

magazine once listed it as one of the Top Ten Pick Up Spots in the World.

However, we are here for a more serious reason. We walk through the quiet streets to the Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial. A small, dignified, single-storey museum and tall monument flanked by three flagpoles bearing the Stars and Stripes, Union Flag and Canadian Maple Leaf commemorate the horrors of the 1813 Battle of Lake

“She corners with the precision of a laser-guided, surgical scalpel”

## GMC 3500 Sierra 'Dually'

Fitted with the optional 8.1 litre V8 petrol engine and dual rear wheels (hence the term 'Dually'), Jim's truck will tow up to 7 tonnes, so makes light work of slipping and recovering 4 tonnes of Scarab. Pulling away, the truck barely notices the load, just try not to think about the fuel consumption as the MPG drops into single figures whilst towing. Braking however is a different matter, Jim says that a high speed emergency stop feels a little like it might just halt the rotation of the earth!



Erie between The United States and Great Britain. This resulted in a peace treaty between the two countries that continues today.

After exploring the museum and pausing in sombre reflection at Perry's Monument, we walk 10 minutes back to the busy harbour, where the Scarab draws a small crowd, casting off and rumbling back out to sea. Once off the coast, Jim slips her into neutral and asks me if I'd like to drive. Do bears, etc, etc? Yes please!

So this is it. I'm snuggled into the drop bolster that once held Don Johnson himself in place, looking down that arched turquoise foredeck, a view familiar from a thousand episodes of 'Miami Vice'. My eyes sweep the period Gaffrig gauges, orange needles against black dials. My left hand grips the wheel and my right finds a fistful of Gaffrig ratchet levers and drops the shorter pair forward into gear. Then I take a deep breath and reach for the longer pair, snicking them gently forward together, to the swell of rolling thunder aft.

There's so much power that there is no need to tab down or trim in, a surfeit of pure energy pushing the 38ft hull onto the plane like a toy. The speed builds and I settle back into the bolster, savouring the moment and acquainting myself with the feel of the boat. Under power, she's very stable, completely losing the tail drag of all that weight aft and running totally balanced fore and aft and side to side. I ease on more throttle, watching those orange needles sweep around as speed and revs build in unison.

At 55mph, she feels like nothing could wrong-foot or slow her as she cuts through the gentle swell. I try a few turns and she banks elegantly, cornering with the precision of a laser-guided surgical scalpel. If this boat were brand new it would be an impressive display, at 25-years old it's incredible, testimony to the tremendous care and effort that Tom Jewsbury put into her restoration. I find myself grinning inanely, if it had handled like a box of frogs it would still have been mind-blowing to get behind the



Nikon D7000 is a poor substitute for a Smith & Wesson



Americans take speed seriously. Quad-engined race cat on the lake



Sonny Crockett, living the dream. Sunglasses (just about) on



The smile of a man who knows it doesn't get better than this

wheel of my childhood dream.

There are no excuses needed here though, she feels like a 21st century raceboat

After what feels simultaneously like hours and mere seconds, we're bearing down on Kelleys Island and I'm handing the helm back to Jim. He asks me what I think and I just look him in the eye and shake him warmly by the hand. There simply aren't the words; he can see the answer in my face.

We moor at The Casino, a waterside bar, restaurant, and boat dock. It's a popular haunt of the 'go-fast boat' set and regular host of local Poker Runs. Today we have the place to ourselves, save for a centre console Fountain fitted with a pair of 250hp Mercury outboards.

Jim smiles as he recounts the odd issue they've had with some of the big boys at The Casino. It seems they occasionally take exception to people walking straight past their brand new \$500,000, 50ft phallic extensions to take photos of a 25-year old, 38ft Wellcraft instead, and try to decry the authenticity of Jim's boat, >>

## Battle of Lake Erie

Also known as the Battle of Put-In-Bay and fought in 1813 under the command of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, nine US Navy vessels defeated six Royal Navy vessels, cutting off supplies to the British camp in Detroit. As a result, the British were forced to abandon it and the Americans regained control. It was one of the biggest battles of the war and secured control of Lake Erie for the Americans. As a direct result of their increased negotiating powers, America was able to draw up peace treaties with both Canada and Great Britain which are in force to this day. Perry's Monument stands 352ft tall at Put-In-Bay, flanked by the US, Canadian, and British flags.





Four-inch exhausts – no silencers. Awesome



Don Johnson was here



Even the interior is immaculately restored

claiming it's just an MV Edition. Thing is, Wellcraft subtly altered the stripes of the publicly available MV Edition, the lower one arcing back to the transom, whereas TV boats had the stripe dip to the waterline level with the screen. Not a lot of people know that, clearly.

The gang have promised me a night out and they certainly deliver it, with a riotous evening spent at the Catawba Inn. It's known locally as 'Food Beer', due to the huge sign bearing that legend out front. It's a good ol' country bar with neon logos, wooden floor, pool table, pounding jukebox and huge pitchers of beer. Welcome to America.

### Poker Runs

A Poker Run is an organised event using high-performance powerboats to visit up to seven checkpoints where participants are given a playing card. At the end of the run each participant 'plays' his card to determine who's won. Such events are not a race, since the time taken doesn't affect what is clearly just a game of chance there is no requirement to go fast. In theory anyway...

By mid-morning on day two, it's 35°C and we're back at Harbor Park Marina. The layout is different to UK marinas.

A plethora of straight cuts like aquatic cul-de-sacs are lined with docks for the boats, behind those are trailers (static mobile homes), condos and houses. Boating is huge here and there are about 10,000 vessels on Catawba Island alone. It's not just the preserve of the wealthy elite, but Jim says there is no escaping the politics of class. House- owners look down on the condos, the condos look down on the trailers, and the trailers look down on boatowners.

"We're the lowest of the low" Jim laughs.

In humorous response Jim and his mates formed the DTYC, Dock Trash Yacht Club, complete with burgees and T-shirts. We head over Mark's boat, *Aficionado*, a gorgeous 1974 Laguna 11.5 built by American Marine of

Singapore, who also built the Grand Banks range of trawler yachts. She's a proper old-school sportsfisher with a solid teak interior. He proudly shows me the twin

Caterpillar V8 diesels that will push her up to 25 knots.

After lunch we run the Scarab back to the slip where Jim recovers it. Watching it being hauled ashore is a bittersweet moment. I've fulfilled a lifetime ambition that I never believed possible: I've actually driven the 'Miami Vice' Scarab.

“I've fulfilled a lifetime ambition”



On the other hand, I can't help thinking I may have had my 'Concorde moment', my boating career having briefly gone supersonic for the one and only time. Meanwhile the boat goes up for sale at the Mecum Antique and Classic Boat Auction at Geneva Lake, Wisconsin. If only...

That evening Jim and Mark's wives, Tammy and Gayle, join us along with boating buddies Bill and Kathy, and we share a relaxed evening meal outside a Mexican restaurant.

I came for the Scarab, but what has struck me most about the trip is the laid-back camaraderie that surrounds the mid-west boating way of life. The craft are secondary to the friendship and fun, a tool of

transportation between bar, restaurant and social gathering, something to play with, somewhere to stay once the beer has run out.

As the sun sets and the drinks flow, I can't help feeling that these guys really do have boating sussed.

The Scarab has now been sold.

