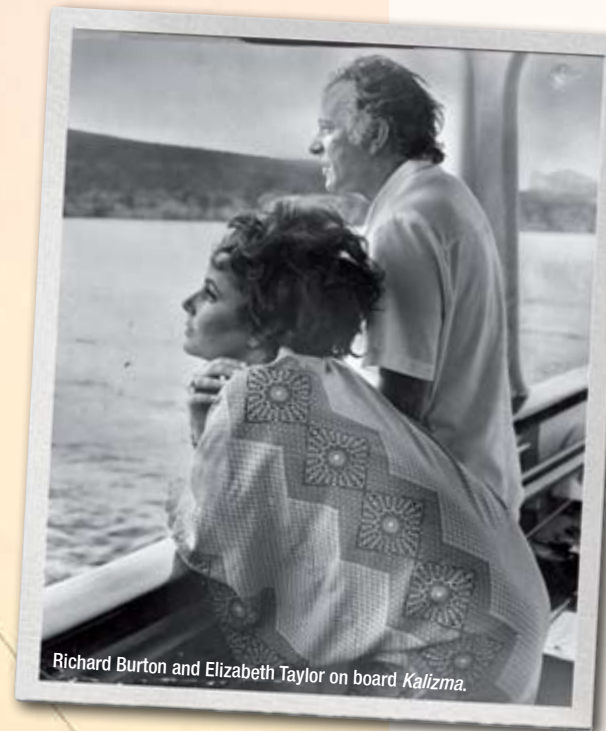


WAR & PEACE

The odyssey of the classic motor yacht *Kalizma*.

words: John Julian
photos: Courtesy of M.Y. Kalizma
and G.L. Watson & Co.Ltd.



Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor on board *Kalizma*.

“One early summer’s evening in Monte Carlo during 1967... Elizabeth Taylor told Richard Burton that she wanted a yacht too and, coincidentally, *Odyssea* happened to be for sale.”

She always attracted exceptional men. Some were truly eccentric, like the organist who loved to play Bach in foul weather and wanted a yacht large enough to accommodate an organ so that he could do so at sea. Who knows what the crew of *Minona* (as she was then named) thought of this practice, but they must have dreaded gale warnings!

Some excelled in other artistic endeavours. Richard Burton bought her (ostensibly for his wife, Elizabeth Taylor) in 1967 and was moved to say of the yacht “I can’t stop touching it and staring at it, as if it were a beautiful baby or a puppy-dog: something you can’t believe is your very own.”

Kalizma, as she had become, served the couple until 1974 and they enjoyed the refuge she provided from the incessant media coverage that fame, films, fortune and their sometimes stormy relationship provoked.

But none were larger than life in the style of her present owner, the billionaire businessman, politician and philanthropist, Dr Vijay Mallya, described in the Voice of India as ‘The King of Good Times.’ The flamboyant Indian tycoon is chairman of the United Breweries Group and Kingfisher Airlines and owner of the Force India Grand Prix motor racing team and Royal Challengers of Bangalore (an Indian Premier League cricket team). He was a Rajya Sabha MP until February 2008 and remains a committed benefactor, having funded school and hospital projects as well as the recent purchase of some of Mahatma Gandhi’s personal effects at an auction in New York, which he felt should be returned to India. His equestrian interests include United Racing and Bloodstock Breeders and he also maintains a stable of classic cars and another yacht, the 95-metre *Indian Empress*. He did have a fleet of three, including *Kalizma*, but sold the 55-metre *Indian Princess* in December 2007.

Kalizma was already almost 90 years old when she caught Dr Mallya’s eye and exactly 100 when he treated her to the most comprehensive refit of her life. Her pedigree was excellent: G. L. Watson was one of the most celebrated designers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries with some of the most beautiful sailing and steam yachts to his credit (*Britannia*, the most successful racing yacht of all time, and *Nablin* to name but two, although the latter was drawn by his associate, J. R. Barnett after Watson’s death). Ramage & Ferguson of Leith, near Edinburgh also enjoyed a good reputation having built some famous yachts including the King of Siam’s *Maha Chakri* and Sir Joseph Laycock’s *Valhalla*. *Minona*, completed during 1906, would also be steam-powered, which was normal for a vessel of her size (some 50 metres LOA), but she also had electric lighting, which was not.

Minona went to war with the Royal Navy in October 1914, equipped with two six-pounder guns, and served as an Auxiliary Patrol yacht. From modest beginnings, this force grew until, at the time of Armistice, there were about 5,000 yachts, gunboats, motor-launches, trawlers, drifters, whalers, paddle or screw minesweepers and boom defence vessels in service. More than 400 of these would be lost, mainly to mines, and over 2,000 men perished as a result.

She witnessed the renaissance of grand yachting during the years between the World Wars, saw the emergence of Big Class competition at home in the United Kingdom and the return to racing for the America’s Cup, contested by the mighty ‘J’ Class cutters on the eastern seaboard of the United States and she weathered the uncertainty of the Great Depression and felt the growing unease around Europe, which preceded the Second World War.

Hired once again by the Royal Navy in November 1939, *Minona* was used as an examination vessel hunting contraband on board neutral ships until September 1941, when the Navy bought her. She then served as an accommodation ship for deep-sea rescue tug crews in Campbeltown in the Western Isles of Scotland for the remainder of the war. These brave men, along with others engaged elsewhere, were sent to salvage the casualties of U-Boat attacks and were responsible for saving some 750 British and Commonwealth, 140 American and 245 Allied and neutral merchant ships during the course of the conflict, along with thousands of lives and millions of tonnes of supplies and equipment. Her duties discharged, *Minona* was laid up in January 1946.

She would not be at leisure for long, however, and having been re-christened for the first time in 40 years, a question was asked in the British Parliament about the disposal of the yacht now known as *Cortynia*.

Mr Peter Freeman asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty why the yacht *Cortynia* had been sold to a Greek firm; and what was the amount received by the Government Disposals Board.

Mr Dugdale replied as follows: “This yacht was requisitioned in 1939, and was subsequently acquired by His Majesty’s Government. When no longer required, she was offered to her original owner in this country,



The salon.



The quarterdeck.



The steam yacht *Minona* before the First World War.

Dining al fresco.



who did not, however, wish to re-purchase her. After other yacht owners whose yachts had been lost on war service had been given an opportunity to acquire her, she was eventually sold as and where she lay to a gentleman, understood to be a Greek subject, at a price which was considered by the Government selling agency to be satisfactory in the light of her age and condition. I regret that it would be contrary to accepted policy to disclose the contract price, but I may say that it exceeded that suggested by a recognised professional yacht valuer who had been asked to advise on the price."

It was almost as if, after four decades of war and peace, *Cortynia* (soon to be re-named *Odyseia*), was seeking a quieter life in the sun for, although her steam engine was replaced with a diesel when a London firm bought her in 1954, little more was heard of her until she reached the age of 61.

One early summer's evening in Monte Carlo during 1967, having dined with Loel and Gloria Guinness on board *Sarina*, Elizabeth Taylor told Richard Burton that she wanted a yacht too and, coincidentally, *Odyseia* happened to be for sale. While her husband succumbed to the old vessel's enduring character and charm, Ms Taylor saw the yacht's potential and set about spending some US\$2,000,000 over and above the purchase price of US\$192,000 on a six-month programme of refit and refurbishment. She then installed some of her favourite paintings, including works by Degas, Monet, Picasso and Van Gogh. Thus rejuvenated, *Kalizma* (named for the couple's daughters Kate Burton, Liza Todd and Maria Burton) became

a seagoing sanctuary for two of the world's most widely-recognised, extensively photographed and well-remunerated movie stars.

Richard Burton, still practical in some respects, had sought to justify the purchase as first-time owners of large yachts are inclined to do.

"We are going to buy this M.Y. (motor yacht)," he wrote. "She will do 14 knots. There are seven bedrooms, two of them with large double beds, and she will sleep 14 passengers. There are eight crew, though that includes a cook, maid and waiter. The boat itself needs only four – at the most five – to run it efficiently. I estimate it will cost \$25-30,000 a year to run. Not too bad when one considers our last house (rented) cost \$10,000 a month plus approximately \$1,000 a week for food and staff etc! If we can use it as much as possible instead of hotels we could actually save money."

His first estimate of the running costs was optimistic, to say the least: the actual figure was around \$100,000 even then. But saving money was never easy for he had a generous nature and enjoyed extravagant gestures and it was on board *Kalizma* that he presented his wife with the \$1,050,000, 69.4 carat Cartier diamond. It was early in November 1969 and, again, they were in Monte Carlo.

The Taylor-Burton diamond, as it became known, was flown from New York to Nice escorted by two men from Cartier who then took a helicopter to the Hotel de Paris in Monte Carlo. Surrounded by armed guards, they walked the shortest route to the harbour where a Monegasque police boat picked them up and took them out into the twilight towards *Kalizma*. Once safely on board, the two Cartier men made for the salon with the black suede box containing the gigantic gem and its accompanying necklace where they found Ms Taylor ready to put it on, wearing a pale blue caftan with a low-cut neckline, the better to emphasise its matchless qualities. She wore it for the first time in public on 12th November at Princess Grace's 40th birthday party!

Kalizma was really a family yacht and was enjoyed by the girls along with Chris and Michael Jr., Elizabeth's children with her second husband Michael Wilding. She also served as a floating home when they were filming too, most notably in London during the making of *Anne of the Thousand Days* in 1969 and also in Yugoslavian waters for *The Battle of Sutjeska*, two years later. And there were parties, of course: some on the scale one would expect from the Burtons and others that were more



M.Y. *Kalizma* in her 104th year.

spontaneous but no less generous in nature.

Graham Jenkins wrote a book (*Richard Burton My Brother*, Michael Joseph Ltd 1988) in which he tells the story of Gladys Williams, an old school friend of Richard's from Wales, who encountered *Kalizma* in Portofino, not long after the Burtons had finished restoring her. Gladys was leading a coach tour of the Ligurian region of Italy and her passengers, sensing that Richard was on board, pressed her to re-introduce herself.

"By now the coach was on the jetty, just a few yards from the *Kalizma*. Gladys had no choice. She edged along the gangplank and spoke to the bearded Sicilian who stood on deck barring her way. That Rich and Elizabeth were not keen on uninvited guests was made plain by the sight of a gun slung over his shoulder.

"Can I speak to Mr Burton, please?"

"Who wants him?"

She said her name but the guard did not seem inclined to move. Then an unmistakable voice boomed out from the lower deck.

"Is that Gladys then?"

Rich appeared and threw his arms around his visitor. It was a great reunion, performed under the appreciative gaze of all the coach passengers who crowded against the nearside windows.

"Stay to lunch," commanded Rich.

"I can't do that," said Gladys. "I've got all this lot to look after."

Rich surveyed the crowd scene.

"Everybody stays for lunch," he decided.

"It was an afternoon to remember – four hours of champagne and caviar. Thereafter, fifty-three holidaymakers associated the *Kalizma* with three stars – Rich, Elizabeth and Gladys."

To say that a significant chapter in the life of the old yacht closed when Elizabeth Taylor sold her, following her first divorce from Richard Burton, would be an understatement but, in spite of her 68 years there was still some adventure in prospect for *Kalizma*. She went to Newport, Rhode Island for the 1983 America's Cup as the flagship of the Royal Burnham Yacht Club's Victory Challenge, led by Peter de Savary, and saw the New York Yacht Club lose the 'Auld Mug', for the first time in 132 years, to Alan Bond's *Australia II*.

Back in the Mediterranean in the early 1990's you might have seen *Kalizma* in any port or anchorage from Marseilles to Marmaris, her sweet Edwardian lines in marked contrast to those of most other yachts in view. Like many old ladies, she had undergone a certain amount of cosmetic surgery during her life and, having acquired some more superstructure, she

"As soon as you saw the character in that strong Scottish hull, you knew why she had survived when so many others hadn't and time was on her side once again, for the great yachting renaissance of the 1990's was about to begin."

Spa bath at sunset.



looked somewhat less svelte than on the day of her launching, indeed a little bit bulky during the middle of the 20th century when her woodbine funnel was replaced with a rather squat stack (the tall, slender chimney has since been restored). But she had been to war and back twice, and was not just the cosseted plaything of very rich people, although she had done that too.

As soon as you saw the character in that strong Scottish hull, you knew why she had survived when so many others hadn't and time was on her side once again, for the great yachting renaissance of the 1990's was about to begin.

And then she met Dr Mallya and underwent a series of procedures including the massive refit of 2006/7, which saw her largely rebuilt under the supervision of Commodore S. K. Mongia and Captain Avnish Dhall. The

authentic restoration of an Edwardian yacht while incorporating all the modern systems required in the 21st century is challenging, to say the least, but the results are spectacular and *Kalizma* continues to explore new cruising grounds in her 104th year, including the Gulf, India and her adjacent islands, and the waters of the Far East.

Vijay Mallya's parties are legendary, wherever they take place, so *Kalizma* continues to be a happy ship. And because her owner's many commitments mean that his time on board is limited, you can charter her. She will accommodate 10 guests in the five cabins she now has, each with its own bathroom, and there are 10 crewmembers to take care of you. The old yacht is full of history and not a little romance as well... somewhere in the salon there is a small brass plaque that marks the place where a famous Welsh actor gave his wife, herself a celebrated actress, one of the biggest cut diamonds in the world. Why don't you see if you can find it? ○

For details of charter rates and itineraries, visit www.mykalizma.com