

Owners' Club

Living the dream on the world's best boats

Cameron McColl, the
BVI's-based owner of 36m
Jura II, surveys the seas



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ON
BOARD
WITH

Cameron McColl

This BVI-based entrepreneur tells *Olivia Michel* how he found and refitted his new home – the 36.58-metre classic motor yacht *Jura II*

“To be honest, I think that 99 per cent of modern boats are ugly,” says Cameron McColl, from on board his classic motor yacht *Jura II*. This is perhaps not a surprising statement from the BVIs-based businessman, who has just finished restoring a classic Aston Martin DB9 convertible and collects historic scientific instruments in his spare time.

Speaking from a Turkish bay, McColl describes his neighbours as “vanilla”, gesturing to the marina behind him. “I’ve got dozens of modern yachts around me and they are instantly forgettable. They’re also totally impractical,” he adds. “They’ve got huge engines that use vast amounts of fuel and yet are incapable of crossing an ocean. I just think they’re not much use.”

McColl’s love for rebuilding and collecting classics directly contrasts with his career background in electronics and technology. Born and raised in Scotland, McColl graduated from Edinburgh University with a BSc in electrical engineering. Fresh out of higher education, he emigrated to Australia where he helped develop the world’s first portable ultrasound scanner.

His subsequent career moves saw him work in engineering and marketing roles for companies including British Aerospace, National Semiconductor, Advanced Micro Devices and LSI Logic Corp. He then founded the UK’s first computer-networked call-centre and has been involved in the launching of at least three other multi-million-pound startups.

Pleasure for McColl might be associated with antiques, but his yachting portfolio has been diverse. After learning to sail around the west coast of Scotland on a “venerable” Moody 29, he purchased a 1997 Symbol 57 named *Skye*, which he used to skirt through the Bahamas for several years. He then graduated onto the Sparkman & Stephens Swan 65 sailing yacht *Nittan II*.

McColl bought the vintage vessel – which placed sixth in the 1981-82 Whitbread Round the World Race as *Xargo III* – and then sailed her back to Scotland from Sardinia to be refitted by Silvers Marine in Gare Loch. “I took *Nittan II* to one of the last remaining shipyards in Scotland and had them completely restore her. That was loads of fun actually,” he recounts.

Following the refit, “I completed my Yacht Master exams and took my 13-year-old son out of school and then the two of us went across the Atlantic. We cruised the Caribbean, Cuba and the US East Coast.

“I loved it, but it was a hassle to sail,” continues McColl, who has captained every yacht he has owned. “After the *Swan*, which needed a lot of crew, I decided to go with a motorboat.” McColl then discovered his first *Jura*, a Nordhavn 57 launched in 2001, which he “customised quite a bit”. On board *Jura*, which he mainly cruised solo, he sailed to Bermuda to watch the 2017 America’s Cup, as well as to the Azores, the UK and Turkey. “Then, during the pandemic, I spent a lot of time sailing around the Mediterranean from Turkey to Tangiers. And I thought, ‘I like living like this’.” McColl decided to sell his house on land and live permanently on the water, but for this, he decided “I needed a bigger boat”.

“We basically took the boat to bits and put it back together over 11 months”



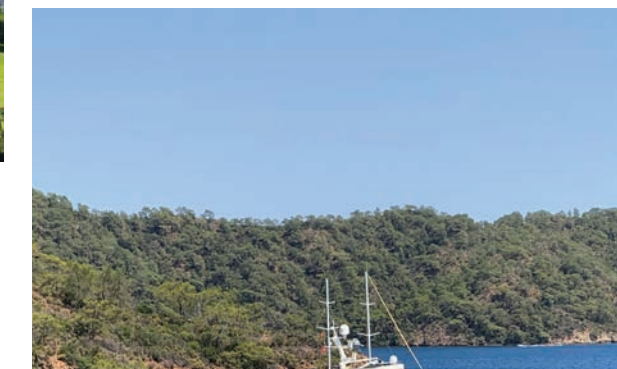
Left: *Jura II* was built in McColl’s native Scotland. Above: At the helm of *Nittan II*, McColl has captained every yacht he has owned



Then called *Xargo III*, *Nittan II* (above) competed in the 1981-82 Whitbread Round the World Race (below), finishing sixth. After McColl bought her, he sailed her from Sardinia to Scotland to be refitted at Silvers Marine



Above: McColl graduated from Edinburgh University with a BSc in electrical engineering. Right: He sailed *Jura II* from Genoa to Turkey for refit. Below: One of McColl’s remaining investments is Nanny Cay marina and resort off Tortola in the BVIs





As a result, the search began for his new floating home but it was not to be an easy task. “I was looking around for a nice, well-designed motor yacht and I just saw very few new ones that I thought were beautiful. I was always disappointed – they were either in really bad condition, or they wanted too much money for them,” he explains.

In the end – perhaps unsurprisingly – only a classic would do for McColl’s first superyacht. “Eventually I stumbled over a boat called *Walanka*. The broker who was selling it was very persuasive,” he recounts. “When I first visited her, she was battleship grey and clearly needed to be repainted. She didn’t look pretty on the outside, but when I came on board, I saw the quality of the construction and was won over.” Plus, the yacht had one more card up her sleeve: “She was built in Aberdeen, so I thought that was quite nice,” he adds.

Constructed in a trawler style by Hall Russell, *Jura II* was launched in 1963 and McColl has been piecing together her “patchy” history. Like many classic owners, he has received dribs and drabs of information from interested passers-by. “One day, this lady walked past us and said, ‘I know that boat.’ She used to be the chef when the yacht was in Italy and told me that it was the ‘party boat’ for the Hotel Cipriani. It was famous for its parties with Italian movie stars, pop stars and politicians,” he recounts.

In 2014, the yacht became *Walanka* after a refit overseen by Pier Luigi Loro Piana. McColl understands that “Loro Piana was fully involved and developed and implemented the interior designs for this seven-figure refit. Certainly, the furniture, light fittings, wall and ceiling coverings



and a series of photos have been custom-designed for the boat.

“I’m still trying to track down the rest of the history but I’ve managed to find a smattering of records in different places,” says McColl.

The pandemic prevented McColl from seeing his new purchase for a couple of months, but eventually, he managed to step on board in early 2021. “I had one day out sailing with the previous captain, then the crew and myself figured out the rest and off we went,” he says. McColl cruised from Genoa to Rome and then non-stop to Turkey, where *Jura II* was put into an extensive refit at Bodrum’s Aganlar shipyard. “We basically took the whole boat to bits and put it back together again over 11 months,” he describes. The exception was the engines, which are still original and in fine condition despite being 60 years old.

There were some surprises along the way as work progressed. “The job was meant to be half as big as it turned out to be. But whenever you’re dealing with an older boat, there are going to be

“With an older boat, there are going to be issues. And you don’t find them until you really start looking”



Clockwise from top left: off to the next adventure; summer 2022 off the Greek island of Symi; Jura was home to McColl throughout the Covid-19 pandemic before he concluded he needed a bigger boat; his first Jura, a Nordhavn 57



Jura II was given an extensive refit at the Aganlar shipyard in Bodrum, Turkey. Below: the new interiors are stylish but geared towards comfortable family life on board

issues. And you don't find them until you really start looking," he says. The major problem that was discovered was severe steel corrosion in the hull. The solution involved cutting off the bow and essentially rebuilding a new one. "That wasn't part of the plan," laughs McColl, but he explains that "the best thing about it was that the guys at Aganlar were not fazed at all. I think they did that whole job in about two weeks."

As a hands-on owner and captain of *Jura II*, McColl was very involved in the refit. He has even used his woodworking skills - passed down from his carpenter father - to make new items for the yacht, like a cedar strip plank canoe. "I'm not as good as the guys who do it for a living," McColl admits humbly, "but I have the skills and I can make stuff. And I enjoy it."

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McColl, who describes himself as "60 per cent retired" should have plenty of time to enjoy the fruits of his labour. Having sold off most of his businesses, one of McColl's last remaining investments is Nanny Cay, a marina and resort off the island of Tortola in the BVIs, which McColl calls his "main base".

"When I bought Nanny Cay 20 years ago it was run down and broken. I'd never run a



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Jura II's name is a nod to McColl's Scottish roots. A number of his yachts have been named after his favourite islands in Scotland, including a Symbol 57 called Skye and his first Jura, the Nordhavn 57. At the moment, the Scotsman hasn't found anything to top

the rugged Hebridean isle of Jura, which is famous for its whirlpools and single malt whiskies. McColl explains: "It's sort of unimaginative, but when I was looking at the map for other islands of Scotland, I just couldn't think of one that I liked better than Jura!"





marina, but I sort of figured it could work. So, we just pumped money into it and eventually it started improving.” Today, Nanny Cay boasts 320 slips, a 52-bedroom hotel, 32 townhouses and 40 associated on-site businesses.

“I’m still involved quite heavily with Nanny Cay and with the BVI community generally,” McColl explains. “We run courses where we teach kids about the boating industry and the relevant skills they need. We also do swimming lessons for the local kids in our pool, and we run various regatta events too.”

Now that *Jura II* has been relaunched, McColl is ready to explore beyond the bounds of the BVIs. He has developed a “tentative plan” to

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winter in Spain’s Galicia and then cruise around the UK next summer. “We’ll be starting off in St Katherine Docks in London, and then going north. I’m planning to take the boat through the Caledonian Canal – I think she’ll fit with about a metre and a half at either end. I’ll have to get a few more fenders probably,” he muses. McColl then plans to cruise *Jura II* through the Suez Canal and across to the Maldives before heading to the South Pacific. He expects that his youngest son, who has just finished sailing solo around the world, will be joining him again.

Although *Jura II* is now ready for such an adventure, McColl feels there’s still more to be done to make her the perfect representation of his appreciation for old and beautiful things. “I still want to work more on the engine room of *Jura II*. Everything’s completely functional, but it’s not as beautiful as I want it to be,” he considers. “Somehow, I think everything should be beautiful. If possible, then why not?” ■

At the shipyard, unexpected severe steel corrosion was found in *Jura II*’s hull, so the bow was cut off and a new one added. The whole process took the Aganlar team just two extra weeks

