

# JRA Hall of Fame - Jock McLeod

By Graham Cox

Major J. K (Jock) McLeod

1929 - 2014

When Blondie Hasler took *Jester* to Loch Ness in 1961, he found no sign of the fabled monster, but the expedition was more successful on a personal level, because at this time, he established a couple of relationships that endured for life. One of these was with a young, ex-army officer, Jock McLeod, who joined *Jester* for two weeks as voluntary crew and monster spotter.

Blondie is on record as saying he found it easy to connect with people from a military background – perhaps because of shared traditions, values and self-discipline – and by the end of the fortnight he and Jock had formed a close friendship. Jock re-joined the monster patrol after his return from Brazil aboard *Moonraker* in 1963, and he and Blondie soon formed a business partnership.

They initially worked on Blondie's self-steering gears, which Jock assembled

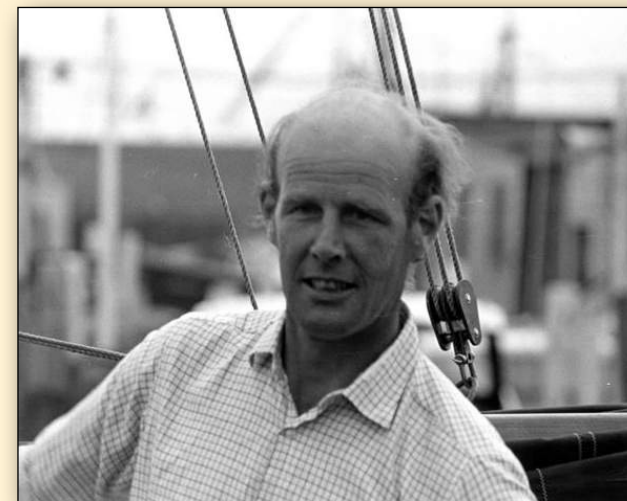
out of parts manufactured by Mike Gibb. They fitted and trialed them on their customers' yachts, owned by various luminaries in the voyaging fraternity - Eric and Susan Hiscock, Francis Chichester, Alec Rose, and Bill King, among others. Jock also worked with Blondie on other projects, including an ingenious floating breakwater. He was trained as a mechanical draughtsman and was adept at detailed technical work, a skill that later became very handy in their development of junk rig design.

In the mid-1960s, there was a surge of interest in junk-rigged yachts, partially as a result of the wide-spread publicity surrounding the OSTAR, and the media's interest in *Jester* in particular, which was not only among the smallest of entries, but was also highly unusual, with an air of alternative wisdom that reflected the *zeitgeist* of the era.

Blondie and Jock found themselves designing, rigging and consulting on a number of junk rig projects. Blondie's guiding precept was the desire to handle the vessel from a central control

position, without going on deck, which requires the rig to be automatic or self-tending, i.e. one that can be set, reefed and furled without touching the sails. This had been successfully achieved with *Jester*, but they were keen to improve the rig's windward performance, without compromising its self-tending qualities. This ruled out more traditional Chinese sail plans, with curved leeches, fully-fanned panels, and double or shifting sheets, which some believed to be more efficient.

To this end, they developed what became known as the standard Hasler/McLeod sail plan. It is similar to *Jester's*, but with more efficient head panels. It has four or five parallel panels, topped by two fanned panels, and a yard which is angled between 60 and 70°. The boom, battens and yard are all of equal lengths, and when the battens come down, due to the

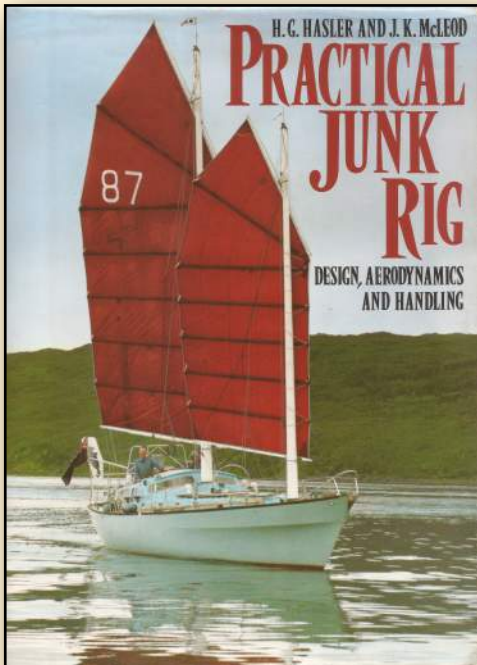


geometry of the rig, each has a small amount of positive stagger, allowing the sheetlets to hang clear of one another. They had also, by this stage, built up a solid body of empirical knowledge about mast and spar specifications.

These new rigs did improve windward performance, although their flat-cut sails were still a handicap when sailing to windward in light winds, particularly at sea. Nonetheless, until people began experimenting with

various ways of inducing camber – something Blondie ruminated upon – their design was the most successful self-tending junk rig – perhaps the only one – and remains – the foundation of all unstayed junk rigs built today.

They began to advise interested parties on how to build, set up, and even design their own rigs. To this end, they developed a set of portfolios which people could buy. Jock played a large role in developing these, both with his organisational skills and his ability to produce clearly understood illustrations. From this work



eventually came their seminal work, *Practical Junk Rig*, which remains a topical reference work.

It was always Jock's intention, when he had the means, to build himself an ocean voyaging yacht. Having sailed on *Jester* and *Galway Blazer*, and no doubt compared those experiences with his Atlantic voyage aboard the gaff-rigged *Moonraker*, with her long, wet bowsprit and the requirement for precarious deck work in heavy weather, he decided to adopt junk rig for his own vessel.

His focus was on comfortable, long-distance cruising, not racing, and to this purpose he had Angus Primrose design him a cold-moulded vessel, named *Ron Glas*, whose vital statistics were LOA: 47' (14.3m), LWL: 36' (10.97m), beam: 12' 6" (3.8m), draught: 6' 6" (1.98m). She was rigged as a junk schooner, carrying a total of 810 sq ft (75 sq m) of sail, 540 sq ft (50 sq m) of which was in the main and 270 sq ft (25 sq m) in the foresail, on hollow timber spars. The construction was very similar to that of *Galway Blazer*, but with more displacement, although she was still considered a light-displacement vessel at the time she was built. Down below, she has deep, comfortable bunks fitted with

permanent leeboards, spacious saloon seating and a practical sea-going galley.

At the time, she was the largest yacht ever to be fitted with junk rig, and also the only one that could be entirely handled from below decks. Even *Jester* required the watchman to stand up in the circular central hatch when reefing and furling sails, but *Ron Glas* has a short cockpit with a sliding roof. When the roof is closed, you can handle the sails without even getting your head wet. The sliding hatch is fitted with a standard *Jester* pramhood, allowing one to view the sails, get some fresh air and commune with the ocean when desired. Jock became famous for saying that he never wore oilskins once, while crossing the Atlantic in the 1972 OSTAR, and that he spent a great deal of time in his slippers. The press dubbed him Pyjama Jock.

The boat was launched in 1971 and Jock immediately took her on a cruise to Norway, to get to know the vessel,



Arriving Port o'call 25th July 1972 - the picture shows the sliding roof over the cockpit

shake out any bugs and qualify for the 1972 OSTAR, making a singlehanded passage from Harwich to Oslo. He considered the OSTAR as more of a cruise in company than a race, and entered to see if he might enjoy singlehanded voyaging, and that being so, he completed the race with *Ron Glas* in full cruising trim, including his grounding legs, anchors and chain, solid dinghy, and enough bonded stores to see him home again after the race. Given that Jock loved a good party, and gave a great many of them when in port, that was not an inconsiderable cargo.



*Start of the OSTAR - 17th June 1972*

*Ron Glas* also carried a 6-man liferaft, which Jock jokingly said was called a 6-man raft because it required 6 people to lift it! Besides the required emergency beacon and a portable radio telephone, he also had a 6 sq ft collision mat made up, because a few months earlier, *Galway Blazer*, of similar construction, had been holed when south of Australia, in a collision with an unknown object.

Although Jock's motivation for joining the race was largely to give some structure to his Atlantic crossing, providing him with a departure date and fellow passage-makers, there was the added bonus of being able to compare the performance of *Ron Glas* against other vessels. One of these, a

standard Contessa 32 called *Binkie II*, was sailed by a fellow RCC member, Mike McMullen, and the two of them later wrote an interesting, joint article for the RCC Journal. One of Mike's first comments was that he was in and out of his oilskins throughout the race and was frequently wet and cold.

Jock made a bad start in Plymouth and trailed the fleet out into the Channel. Combined with strong winds requiring two panels to be reefed, and fog that obscured navigation marks, it made for depressing sailing, but by Sunday the weather was clearing and easing, boosting both the speed to seven knots, and the skipper's morale.

Because the wind was WNW, Jock initially steered towards the Azores on the starboard tack. He was still unsure whether to take this route or to sail the more direct Rhumb Line or Great Circle course (he never seriously considered the northern route), and decided to let the weather make the choice. He thought the wind would

soon swing to the SW, allowing him to tack back north, but when it didn't, he was committed to the Azores route.

Monday saw him strolling around the decks in bright sunshine, while Hamish, the Hasler self-steering gear, did all the work, as it continued to do for the entire crossing. After a brief SW change, during which he put the vessel onto port tack and dropped one panel in the sails, the wind went back into the NW and eased. Jock shook out the reefs, put *Ron Glas* back onto starboard, and romped away towards the Azores. Apart from a short squall off the Azores, he never had to reef the sails again, until approaching the Nantucket Light Vessel at the end of the race.

At one point, he saw Francis Chichester on *Gypsy Moth V*, sailing the same course, and was heartened to be in the company of such a seasoned voyager. He was not to know, of course, that Chichester was barely coping due to ill

health, and would shortly have to retire from the race in tragic circumstances, passing away some six weeks later.

Jock, meanwhile, took the opportunity to organise his gear and tidy the ship, which was a bit chaotic after the last hectic days of preparation. At the start of a passage he usually felt a bit queasy, and waited until he had a spell of fine weather, with steady winds and an easy sea, before spending much time below. Until then, he spent most of his time on watch in his covered control position, only venturing below for short sleeps. Never an enthusiastic cook at the best of times, he mostly snacked on cold roast lamb provided by Admiral R. L. Fisher and his wife



*Jock emerging from the cabin aboard Ron Glas*



*Average conditions while crossing the Atlantic*

(the parents of Bridget Hasler), which lasted for 10 days.

By the end of the first week, *Ron Glas* had made good 699 miles, with 836 on the log. Jock was fairly satisfied with his progress but would have benefited from steadier winds. Nonetheless, he'd gained his sea-legs, had settled down to a more or less routine life aboard, and was enjoying himself. The weather

remained fine, although there were some periods of rain.

After *Gypsy Moth V*, he saw no other OSTAR yachts, other than a distant sighting during his third week, when becalmed. He did sight two ships, one of which, a French cruise liner, scared him by sneaking up astern unobserved, while Jock was sunbathing naked, and blasting its horn when only two cables off. Later, Jock had another disturbing encounter, when a trawler came up very close one night and cut across his bows. They then hailed him in broken English, asking if he was all right, before sheering off.

Jock had hoped to pass north of the Azores but the wind remained light and veered more westerly, forcing *Ron Glas* to sail between São Miguel and Santa Maria, the southernmost islands of the group. *Ron Glas* was sailing in bright sunshine, but the islands were mostly shrouded in mist. He did briefly sight São Miguel and later the top of Pico, which, at 7,713 feet, stood well above the clouds.

At this stage he was hoping to get a SW change that would allow him to tack WNW, but instead picked up northerly winds. Without touching Hamish, the self-steering gear, *Ron Glas* went off to the NW, and later even had a brief period of sailing free in NE winds, at times reaching 7-8 knots in smooth seas and hot sunshine, before the wind eased. Nevertheless, at times sailing goose-winged, *Ron Glas* set a new personal record of 147 miles noon to noon. (This record was bettered on the return passage to Scotland.)

The log for this second week read 900 miles for a distance made good of 873, which was almost double the distance sailed by Mike McMullen on *Binkie II* during the same period. *Binkie II* would normally be a more weatherly vessel than *Ron Glas*, given identical conditions, but ran into the Azores High, while *Ron Glas* just skirted it. This shows how much luck, in the days before lightning-fast boats and weather routing, was involved in long-distance ocean racing.

This element of luck went against *Ron Glas* in the third week. The wind initially went south and Jock stood off to the west on the port tack. Later, the wind veered to SW and soon *Ron Glas* was back up to 39°N, which was the limit he'd set himself for this stage of

the passage, so he tacked back south. He believed, reasonably enough, that he was emerging from the Azores High, but in fact was actually tacking back into it. If he had continued to stand north he would most likely have experienced better winds.

Around this time he tried, and failed, to communicate with a passing ship, using flag signals. He then switched on his emergency radio to 2182 Khz and heard the ship calling him. He concluded that the era of flag signals was passing - ship to ship communications now relied on radio transmissions.

With light winds veering between W and SW, and a lumpy sea, *Ron Glas* struggled to make progress. Then the wind fell away altogether and the log hung vertically below the boat. This was the start of five days of calm. Jock was amazed to discover that *Ron Glas* continued to creep along at about one tenth of a knot through the water, because, he thought, the sails swished back and forth, creating a fanning effect. Luckily they were in a favourable eddy of the Gulf Stream, which allowed them to gain 38 miles to the west one day, before a slight increase in wind gave them one and a half knots of hull speed.

It was very hot aboard, and Jock was glad he had fitted his galley inside a cupboard, an innovation picked up from *Moonraker*, which allowed the heat and cooking smells from the stove to go out through a porthole. He gave up wearing clothes and took many showers with a portable shower that used only 3 pints of water. Jock was a bit frustrated with the calms, but on the other hand he was very comfortable aboard and had plenty of provisions and refreshments. His run for the third week was only 521 miles.

*Binkie II* had a much better week, as far as racing goes, covering 870 miles, but at times was beset by fog and the threat of icebergs, and Mike spent many cold, wet hours on the foredeck changing headsails. One miserable night, when *Binkie II* was rushing along through fog in near-freezing temperatures, Mike was convinced he could smell ice, and eventually, when his nerves failed him, hove-to for several hours. Jock, meanwhile, was close-reaching in balmy weather. Reflecting on their relative positions later, Jock said he had no desire to swap!

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, the day the first two competitors crossed the finishing line, *Ron Glas* was just halfway across the Atlantic. Light winds continued for several more days, but then the wind

came in from the NW and Jock put *Ron Glas* on the starboard tack, as the port tack would have meant losing longitude. He kept hoping the wind would come in from the SW and allow him to lay a direct course for Newport, but it remained stubbornly north of west. He passed *Ocean Station Echo*, talking to them briefly on the radio, and began to worry about fetching Bermuda instead of Newport!

Fortunately, the wind finally went E of N, allowing him to reach directly towards Newport at 6 knots. At the end of the fourth week, *Ron Glas* had made good 581 miles, with 1000 to go. The sailing was very pleasant, though the winds were not what had been expected and it seemed unlikely that Jock would reach his target of concluding the passage in five weeks.

*Binkie II* at this stage had only 300 miles to go, showing clearly the advantages of slugging it out on the shorter, Rhumb Line route, despite its predominant headwinds, although it must be noted that she was a close-winded, stripped-out cruiser/racer, and probably benefited more than *Ron Glas* might have done.

The fifth week gave *Ron Glas* a total of 744 miles, the second best of the passage, but there were periods of calm

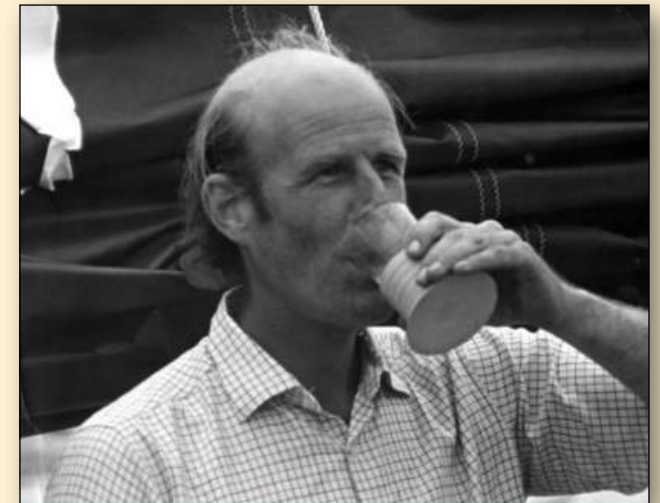
interspersed with the fair winds, which often lasted up to 6 hours, when the ship lurched violently in the left-over swell. If he left the sails up to ease the motion, Jock was unhappy with the spars crashing around, snatching at their blocks and jerking the masts, but when he took them down, *Ron Glas* rolled heavily, as the frequency of the swell exactly matched her roll period. If he had been cruising, he noted, he would have started his engine and gently motored into or away from the swell to ease the strain on the gear.

There were times, however, when the wind was perfect and *Ron Glas* rushed along goose-winged. When the weather was like this he felt very content, only wishing there was someone else on board to share the pleasure with. There was now only 300 miles left to go and he was beginning to feel excited about finishing.

The wind now backed to the west and *Ron Glas* began to beat against a rising sea, occasionally slamming heavily. The wind was gusty and Jock

was kept busy putting in and shaking out reefs, glad to be able to do so from the security and comfort of his enclosed cockpit. The weather was also getting colder, with long periods of overcast. As *Ron Glas* approached the Nantucket Light Vessel, she ran into heavy fog. Jock was able to locate the Light Vessel by using his RDF, but did not hear its signal until past it.

There was now only 100 miles to go but they had to endure another debilitating calm that night, when the sails slatted, the gear chafed, and it felt like he could roll the masts out of the boat. By this stage he was tired and sea-weary, and the calm nearly drove him out of his mind. The last day, however, dawned



Celebratory drink - Jock in Newport 1972



August 11th, 1976

with a clearing sky and light winds. As *Ron Glas* sailed slowly towards the finish, Jock cleaned ship and spruced himself up, so that they crossed the line in good shape after 38 days and 9 hours, to an emotional welcome from friends and fellow competitors. Out of 55 starters, *Ron Glas* was 24<sup>th</sup> to finish, taking 11<sup>th</sup> place on handicap.

*Binkie II* had made the crossing in 31 days and 18 hours, sailing 3072 miles to *Ron Glas's* 3718. *Ron Glas* suffered no gear failures, but *Binkie II* nearly lost her mast on two occasions when the forestay U-bolt sheared. Mike had been wet, cold, exhausted and scared on numerous occasions, while Jock had occasionally been frustrated by calms but otherwise worked up a nice tan

and stayed dry and well-fed. *Ron Glas* had more than fulfilled her design criteria and Jock was pleased with his result.

*Ron Glas* returned to Scotland without incident. In 1974, with the addition to the crew of

Julian van Hasselt, she completed the Round Britain Race. There were a number of notable incidents. The first leg was a tactical disaster, when they stood inshore and were beset by lighter winds than those boats that went further south. To make matters worse, the main had to be lowered at one stage because the slatting of the sail was driving the skipper mad and stopping him from sleeping! As Jock noted himself, he was not a very competitive person.

The next leg to Barra began with a beat to windward, during which they almost collided with another competitor at night. Neither was showing lights. Finally, they managed to round the westernmost headland,

from where a strong SW wind sent them barrelling on their way. They had to reef the mainsail to ease the rolling and snatching of the battens, but the ship flew along. Later, a developing low brought a F6 easterly, but they had anticipated it and made good time into port.

Leaving Barra, they experienced a strong, fair wind and ran fast under foresail alone. This westerly wind got up to F9-10 in the early hours of 20th July, later backing SW, and they ran on at 12 knots with only a deeply-reefed foresail. At 0635 hours they collided with a trawler, which Jock mistakenly had thought was crossing their bows, when in fact it was hove-to and drifting. Jock altered course to avoid it just as the weather forecast began and he took his eye off the trawler for a moment too long. Luckily, damage was minimal and they were able to continue.

After rounding Muckle Flugga, they turned south for Lerwick. They slogged their way through a wild night, during which they felt harassed by fishing boats, squalls and overfalls. They had to heave-to and repair the sails in the early hours of the morning, because several battens had poked through the closed batten pockets at the leech (these days most people build

their sails with open batten pockets), then got underway again at 0300 hrs.

From Lerwick to Lowestoft, after an initial fast run for 48 hours, they ran into light winds, anchoring to save their tide at one point. They tried using the yuloh but decided it was best saved for ornamental purposes!

The last leg saw them beating painfully against a cold SW wind, with Julian dreaming of a snug cottage and roaring fire in the countryside! They fouled some lobster pots south of Dover and had to don oilskins and go on deck to try and free the ship. Eventually the line chafed through and they shot off. The wind began to moderate and they drank some Dynamo, a health beverage, to give them strength to repair more batten pockets. They then pressed on, but were soon forced to anchor once more to save going backwards.

After a day drinking beer in hot sunshine, and a scare when a submarine surfaced close behind, they drifted across the finish line, completing the course in a time of just under 30 days, the 27<sup>th</sup> boat to finish out of 61 starters, and placing 15<sup>th</sup> on handicap. Jock later found that *Ron Glas* had sustained underwater damage, tearing off the sheathing on

the starboard bow and cracking the hull. This was not the result of colliding with the trawler and must have been caused by hitting some unknown object, a tree perhaps.

In 1976, Jock and *Ron Glas* again lined up for the OSTAR, in the company of several other junk rigged vessels. There was *Jester*, as always, plus *Galway Blazer*, *One Hand Clapping* and *El Souki*. The start was in light winds and the junk-rigged boats were at a distinct disadvantage, huddled together like sheep at one end of the line, going nowhere fast. According to Mike Richey, they were possibly feeling a bit sheepish too, while other competitors slipped past under light-air canvas.

The first few days remained slow going. The only highlight of this period was meeting two other competitors south of the Lizard, and even chatting with one of them. When the wind did come back, it was from the south, and *Ron Glas* made good time to the west, though Jock would have liked to make more southing.

This became more of an issue as time passed, unlike in 1972, and he failed to get to his waypoint north of the Azores. Later, a tremendous swell from the NW gave an inkling of the severe weather further north that decimated the fleet

and brought the race's first fatalities, including Jock's old sparring partner and fellow RCC member, Mike McMullen, who disappeared at sea, sailing his Newick trimaran, *Three Cheers*.

Jock suffered regular periods of calm in the middle of the Atlantic, as he had in 1972, but this time, they were more extensive, and accompanied by high swells that forced him to hand his sails for periods of up to 12 hours, to stop the vicious slatting of the sails as *Ron Glas* rolled. Although he always made some westing each day, his daily average fell below 100 miles. He finally got a good wind to reach into the finish, but this was marred – for him – by needing to put on his oilskins and go on deck to free up a snarled main halyard. Being forced to go on deck was a rare occurrence on *Ron Glas*, but Jock always saw it as a lowering of his standards!

Although he sailed fewer miles on this race, he took several hours longer to complete the course than in 1972, and did not enjoy himself as much. It was the toughest OSTAR on record. Out of 125 starters, there were only 74 finishers, with two fatalities. *Ron Glas* was the 45<sup>th</sup> yacht to cross the line, with a handicap position of 38<sup>th</sup>.

In 1978, with David Cowper as crew, *Ron Glas* again finished the Round Britain Race in 30 days. After a windy start and the usual moderate gale around Muckle Flugga, where the wind against tide can cause serious overfalls, they completed the course without incident, as did the rest of the fleet. The second half of the race was sailed in consistently light winds. This was to be Jock's last competitive event.

1980 saw *Ron Glas* cruising across the Atlantic to Maine, with Roddy McKenzie, a young man who had just left school, as crew to attend the

Cruising Club of America's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Muster. Little is known about the passage, other than that Jock enjoyed it much more than his solo races. He and Roddy even held a Regimental Dinner aboard in mid-Atlantic, to coincide with the annual event in London, complete with three course meal, drinks, speeches and a march around, amid much hilarity.

After that, Jock spent almost three decades cruising northern European waters in the summer months, often with friends on board, and wintering at Inverness in Scotland. *Ron Glas* mostly



The Webmaster's guess: Roddy Mackenzie with Jock

sailed on the west coast of Scotland, but made a number of longer passages to the Northern Isles, the Faeroes and Norway, getting as far north as Lofoten. He was awarded the RCC *Founder's Cup* in 1990 for his cruise to the Faeroes.

After owning her for more than 40 years, Jock reluctantly sold *Ron Glas* in 2009, to fellow JRA members, Tony and Sally Summers (who now live aboard and cruise the Mediterranean), because his health no longer allowed him to use the boat. He passed away in 2014.

After Blondie's death in 1987, Jock became the President of the Junk Rig Association, an honorary position he held for life. With his passing, the position has been abolished, and with it passes our last link with an earlier era, when sailors seemed bolder and their voyages more daring than is the case today, what with satellite communications and safety regulations (even though the sea is still up to 3 miles deep!).

Jock will always be remembered as Blondie Hasler's business partner and co-author of *Practical Junk Rig*, but his legacy also includes his pioneering voyages that put so many of those ideas to the practical test. It is notable that *Ron Glas* suffered no major failures

in all her thousands of miles of ocean voyaging. Besides all this, he is fondly remembered as someone of uncommon decency and kindness, as well as for his good humour and legendary enjoyment of a good party.

*Editor's note:*

*We are indebted to Jock's heirs for the generous donation of his archives which included many of the photos used in this article, together with plans, design folios and his sailing logs. These are - at the time of going to press - being catalogued and digitised in order that JRA members may access them online.*



Arne Kverneland



Ron Glas photographed in Shetland with Jock on board

Penny Bennet



Ron Glas today

HG Hasler  
JK McLeod

## PRACTICAL JUNK RIG

Design, Aerodynamics and Handling

Arne Kverneland -  
A chance meeting at Lerwick, Shetland Islands, where  
this was bought - gives me the chance to wish you  
fair winds and good sailing in your future boat  
with Junk Rig -  
Best wishes,  
Jock McLeod.

The dedication written in Arne's newly purchased PJR  
by Jock when they met in Lerwick, Shetland