

Marion 'Joe' Carstairs

Becoming the Fastest

Joe Carstairs had long been fascinated by speed, and by fast boats in particular. She used her dowry and Grandmother's inheritance, as well as her own earnings, to commission her first powerboat from S.E. Saunders in Cowes. A young designer Fred Cooper was crucial to the creation of Carstairs's cutting-edge boat. They built Gwen (named after Joe's variety star lover Gwen Farrar) a 17ft hydroplane at the Saunders Yard in East Cowes. When it capsized on a trial run, Carstairs decided to rechristen it 'Newg', and promptly won a series of races in Southampton and Cannes. By 1925 she had reached a top speed of 32.16 knots, making her the fastest on the water.

Carstairs set her sights on then prestigious Harmsworth British International Trophy; a competition in which there was no restriction on engine size. Newg was rapidly followed by the powerful Estelle I and Estelle II, each powered with an 875 horsepower Napier Lion engine. Estelle II raced at the 1928 Harmsworth Cup, and in front of a crowd of 150,000 she took the lead. However Estelle II crashed throwing Joe and her mechanic into the water. Although they lost the race, Joe won widespread praise and support for her performance. She re-entered the following year but without success. In 1930 she set an American speed record but not claim the trophy.

