

Squadron Quarterly March 2004
The *Jedda*–*Straats Singapore* collision
Peter Last

It was over thirty years ago, and I hope that my recollection is accurate. If not, no doubt somebody will correct me.

David Judell commissioned the Black Soo *Jedda* in 1961, and several years later sold her in order to move up to *Samantha*, a Duncanson 28, the predecessor of the more popular Duncanson 29. As mentioned in the article on the wreck of MV *Yandra*, *Jedda* was propelled under power by a Seagull long-shaft outboard motor. When not in use it was heaved up on to the backstay by its lanyard and held with a rolling hitch. David showed the new owner how he did this after the sails were hoisted, because there was a trick involved. If by then *Jedda* was making reasonable speed, the outboard was forced firmly back on its bracket, and it could be impossible to lift it without first killing the way. This problem led to what was almost a tragedy.

It was a lovely Sunday, ideal for gentle sailing before the sea breeze freshened. The new owner took *Jedda* out for a sail. He had on board his son and his girl-friend, who went below to put on her bikini. Black Soos do not have head-room, so she was kneeling in an awkward way when the crisis occurred.

It was dead low water. *Jedda* was more or less in the centre of the fairway, and the two men on deck were completely preoccupied with struggling to lift the outboard, no doubt with uncontrolled flapping sails and a swinging boom. The northern breakwater partially obscured their view of a freighter entering the River, although the pilot on the bridge could clearly see the yacht. He sounded a long blast on the siren, and then a series of urgent short blasts, which caught the attention of those working on our boats on the Squadron slip. One was Captain Preston Manthorpe, who said at once, ‘This is something very serious!’

Too late the owner of *Jedda* saw the *Straats Singapore* bearing down on him. I do not know whether he tried to start the outboard engine or he was slow to gather way by hauling on his sheets, but he could not escape. The bow of the ship impaled *Jedda* just abaft the starboard chain-plates and pressed her on to her side before she filled with water and sank. The young woman was having difficulty with the top half of the bikini and she paused to make herself decent before she struggled out of the cabin against the water pouring in. Her strong sense of modesty almost cost her life.

Henry Rymill took several of us (including Preston) out in *Nyroca*, and we were able to collect the three wet and chastened sailors to return them to the Squadron. The *Straats Singapore* carried her way to somewhere opposite Pelican Point. I was told that she ran aground there on the right bank of the River, but if so she soon got off with a rising tide. *Jedda* was on the bottom, so the Port was closed to all traffic, using a signal consisting of two coloured baskets on the hoist at the signal tower. Preston pointed this out to us, but nobody else had ever heard of it and would probably not have noticed it otherwise. I wonder how many boat owners know of it.

Surprisingly quickly *Jedda* was got on to a cradle and hauled out. The starboard side looked as though it had been gnawed by the Kraken, with a gaping space about eighteen inches wide and as deep. David Binks (who built her) restored her so well that you couldn’t tell the damaged side from the other. I heard there were problems with insurance, and I don’t know what eventually happened to *Jedda*.

The moral is obvious. In a confined space like the Port River, maintain a proper look-out at all times. If those aboard *Jedda* had done so, they would have seen the approaching freighter over the top of the breakwater, with ample time to get clear.

Somebody said to David, ‘How lucky you were that you sold *Jedda* when you did and you weren’t on board when the ship sank her.’

David's reply cannot be printed as he said it, but it strongly conveyed the obvious rejoinder, that if he had been there the collision would not have occurred.

The *Jedda* incident left a strong impression on me, and consequently I have tried always to maintain a good watch whenever I have been aboard a yacht in the Port River. Next time it may not end so well.