

# Surgery pro

John Taylor didn't let his heart condition stop him setting a powerboat record

**John Heywood Taylor, doctor, Coastguard supporter, powerboat enthusiast. Died aged 80.**

Many people who knew him have chosen to sum up John Taylor as a man who "lived life to the full".

It was a trait well demonstrated in 1994 when Taylor, aged 65 and with three crew members of similar lengthy experience, set an Around New Zealand powerboat speed record.

*Ocean Runner*, his Genesis 3200 boat which was pushed by two 225 horsepower outboards, averaged around 20 knots and finished the journey in four days, 16 hours 49 minutes and 22 seconds.

Arriving back in Auckland in triumph, Taylor observed the exhilaration of finishing well inside the seven-day target helped soothe their bruised and tired bodies.

There was however a great deal more behind this tale, as his wife Marie and four children were well aware.

John Taylor was a former Auckland Grammar head boy and athletics champion and a successful and respected obstetrician and gynaecologist. Unfortunately, it was discovered at the age of 49 he had a heart in such a condition that, according to his son Richard, he was unable to stand to shower himself.

That was in 1977 when he had the first of two coronary bypass operations involving multiple bypasses. Those days were pioneering times for such procedures. Medical experts told him he would be lucky to live 10 years.

"Had they been correct he would

not have met, let alone enjoyed, any of his 11 grandchildren," said Richard.

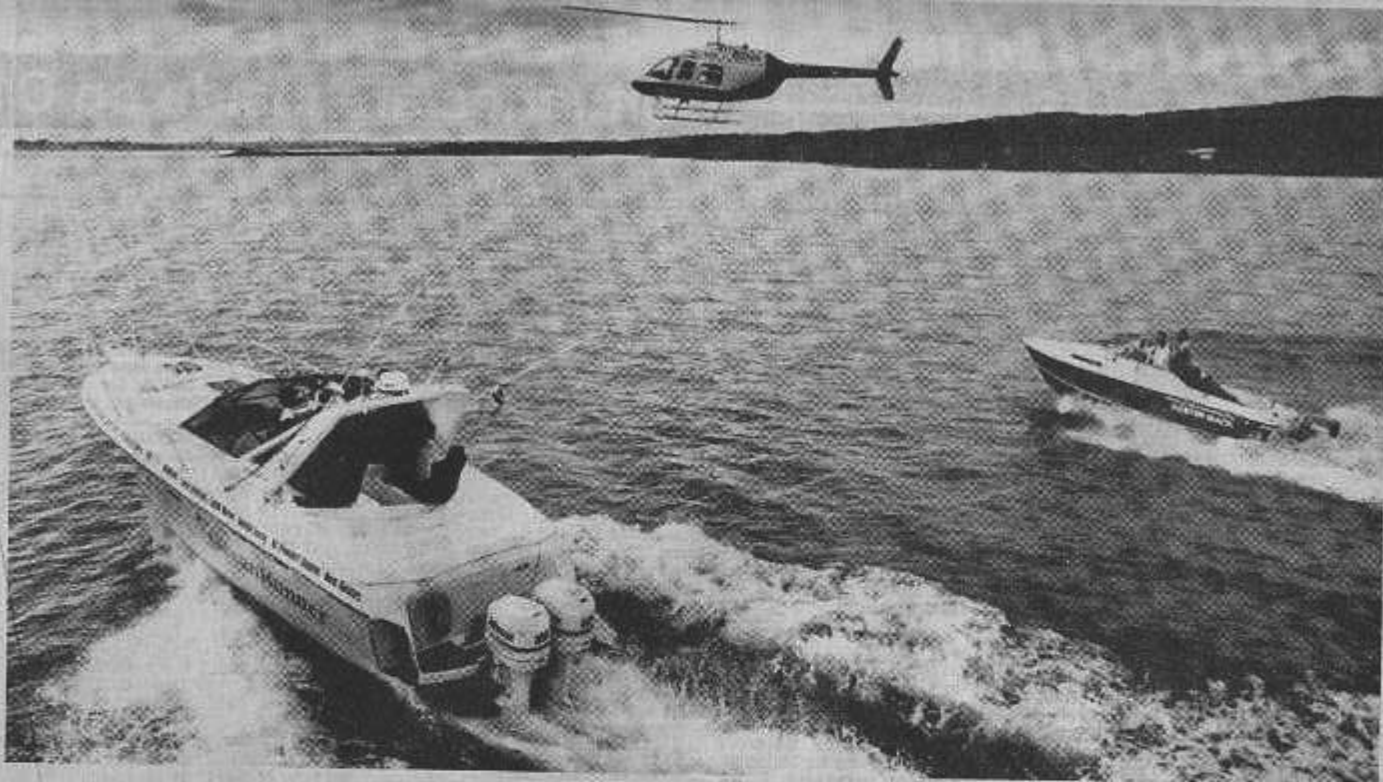
Taylor's immediate reaction to his condition was determination and a change of lifestyle. Richard said from that day forward his father gave up obstetrics, changed his diet and henceforth "lived every day as if it was his last".

Actually Taylor's style had always been enthusiastic and positive. He was also a man inclined to the logical and orderly. The family remember, for instance, his philosophy that you did not have to be brilliant to be a good doctor — you simply had to pay "meticulous attention to detail".

And he believed every child should be a wanted child, who deserved to be nurtured and treasured in a loving family environment. To this end he remained a lifelong supporter of planned parenthood and the Family Planning Association.

A truly significant contribution came through Taylor's boating. In the mid-1960s, already enamoured with fast powerboats, he attended one of the coastguard's safe boating courses.

It was held in a cold tin shed at Mechanics Bay on the Auckland waterfront and after the course the lecturer announced that unless someone did something the organisation would have to close. It was recalled at Taylor's funeral that on one occasion a meeting of six members was called as the coastguard no longer had funds to pay the bills. This group included three obstetricians and gynaecologists who pulled out their cheque books so it could survive.



**John Taylor**

**POWERFUL:** John Taylor's Ocean Runner speeds towards the finish line for an Around New Zealand record.

Taylor served as coastguard president from 1968 to 1974. The restructured organisation (today called Coastguard Northern Region) grew and moved to a higher profile headquarters in Okahu Bay in 1969. He used his presidency to spearhead an appeal for funds to provide an income-earning base that would support the voluntary organisation.

Retiring as president in 1974, he handed over a membership which had gone from about 30 to nearly 3000. A coastguard history notes that "without the persuasive manner of John Taylor

it is difficult to imagine how this service could have survived".

Taylor was also a rostered member of the coastguard cutter group, undertaking many rescues.

In April 1969 he and his crew rushed an incubator in appalling conditions to Hooks Bay at the eastern end of Waiheke Island where a premature baby weighing only 2.5 pounds (1.1kg) had been delivered. From his small 7.3m Waimarie boat — and with only minutes of air left in the incubator — he passed the baby and mother over to a waiting ambulance in Auckland.

In 1986 he was official doctor for the World Offshore Powerboat Race in Auckland. Racing at the bottom end of Waiheke, Barry Thompson's boat nosedived and its driver was thrown from the boat, receiving serious head injuries and a broken neck. Brought ashore unconscious, there seemed little hope for Thompson but Taylor performed a tracheotomy on the beach, thereby saving his life.

Thompson was at Taylor's funeral in Remuera — one of an estimated 500 people who knew him from his many interests, not least his golfing friends.

Taylor was a member of the Auckland Golf Club from the 1950s and a president of the Auckland District Golf Association. He also established a fully-funded residential academy for junior golfers.

Perhaps Taylor's most valued asset was a great belief in a close-knit family. He used to tell them: "The most successful person in life has to be the one who has achieved the greatest happiness". He is survived by Marie, his wife of 54 years, and children Richard, Susan, Jennifer and Alison.

*Arnold Pickmere*