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Fiona, Countess of Arran,

was the first person in the world to go more than 100 miles an hour in an offshore boat. She did this when she was already in her sixties. This year, at the age of 66, she intends to go for another record in her new power-boat. Her family motto (she was born a Colquhoun) is 'If I can'; in her person, the motto has been transformed to 'I will'. And she takes great pride that her nine-year-old grand-daughter Laura likes to ride in her power-boat with her, shouting excitedly 'Faster, Granny, faster!'

Lady Arran is the widow of one of Fleet Street's most colourful characters, 'Boofy', Earl of Arran, whose column in the now-defunct London *Evening News* once caused London underground trains to ripple with laughter in the evening rush hour and threatened the circulation figures of the *Standard*. His particular brand of irreverent wit, poking fun at himself, his family and the upper classes, was well-matched by his wife's bold – almost brazen – pursuit of speed. The two made a lightning pair as they sped up and down motorways at 100 mph, Boofy writing his newspaper columns and Fiona trying to overtake some Young Turk who had dared to pass her.

'Boofy always wrote his articles in the car. If he couldn't think of something to say, he used to say, "Oh, take me for a drive," and I used to drive up the M1 and come down again, and by the time we got home he'd finished his article. And when he did his exams at Oxford, long before I knew him, he told me that he always used to take the train up to Glasgow, and by the time he got back his work was finished. He could only really work while he was travelling. He liked movement while he was thinking – put it that way. He didn't mind how fast I drove. I love the sensation of speed in a car, driving 90 miles an hour at least. Occasionally I find some young man in a sports car who tries to outdrive me, coming down from Scotland or somewhere, and I find that the time flies by while I'm trying to outdrive him. We don't know each other, we just find that we're kindred spirits of the road, and we try and dodge each other, and try and pass each other. I did that the other day, and a young man passed me in a very fast car, and I thought it was

charming – he let down the window and waved his hand and did the thumbs-up sign and passed on. He knew I'd been trying to drive against him. My car is a little Mazda. Sorry to say it's the best car I've ever owned; nothing's gone wrong. It only cost me £4,000. It only goes 110 mph. I drive very fast automatically; I don't even know I'm doing it. The police know all about me.'

Fortunately, on the water there are no police to worry about. There, it is flat out, and the only thing that need concern a driver is the likelihood of getting killed – which Lady Arran doesn't find remotely off-putting.

'It's very exciting doing record-breaking. You really do have the butterflies in your tummy. And you really do need a big swallow of whisky. It just helps you to put your foot down and keep it down, because you sort of say, "Oh the hell with whatever happens, it doesn't really matter." I really do feel that. I mean, from my point of view, when you get to my age, and your husband has died, and everybody else of your age group is dying, you don't really mind dying either. And I couldn't care less whether I live or die. And I think that helps you to drive better, too. You take slightly more risks than you would otherwise. I've got nothing to lose, but I think maybe that's a Scottish feeling: Scots are rather like that, they're very fatalistic. I am, very much. I mean, what's going to happen is going to happen. The only thing that worries me is that I shall have to take my navigator with me, who's a young man, and it would obviously matter to him very much whether he lived or died – which is a drawback. It just stops you from going quite as fast as you might. When I did the record over the hundred for the first time, I had a young man who was married with a baby. I had to say to his wife, "Look, we might get killed". And she said, "Well, I can't stop him from going anyhow, so don't worry." And so that was all right. It gave one freedom to go as fast as one could. Otherwise, one does hold back a bit, if one's got a young married man with his first baby and all the rest of it – if one's got any decent feelings at all.'

Lady Arran's home is a large manor-house in Hertfordshire called Pimlico House, where she has lived since her marriage in 1937. There are fine works of art wherever one turns. 'We have quite a number of Reynoldses, a Hoppner, quite a lot of Gainsborough drawings, one or two Turners – little oil paintings; we sold quite a lot of Turners to America.' In her small retiring

room she keeps a particularly splendid Reynolds of one of the Dukes of Rutland. 'We offered it to my cousin [the present Duke], but he didn't want it. He said, "I've got enough of the Dukes. I don't want any more, thank you very much."'

Asked about her relations, Lady Arran says: 'The other day I read *Margot* because Margot Asquith was my great-aunt. I didn't like her at all. She did very cruel things. She knew I couldn't play the piano very well, and my mother had a party up in Scotland and Margot said, "Oh, Fiona, do come and play the piano for us." And I thought that awfully cruel, because she knew I wasn't very good. She was always doing that rather thoughtless kind of thing. That was my mother's side of the family, the Tennants. The Duke of Rutland is my first cousin. The Duke of Argyll is only related by marriage. There's another Duke who's related, but I can't think who he is. God, my memory!'

Her cousins 'stretch far and wide'. Her first cousin Anne was married at one time to Lord Rothermere, and then to Ian Fleming. It was Fleming who first suggested to Boofy that he become a journalist. Lady Arran says: 'It had never entered his head that he could write, really, until Ian Fleming read one or two of his bits and said, "Look here, this is very good, you should become a journalist." That must have been just after the war, when Esmond Rothermere was married to my cousin Anne. And Ian Fleming was her lover; she became his wife later.' What was Fleming like? 'He wasn't dashing at all. I never thought James Bond was him, ever. The two were completely different. I don't think he could ever have written James Bond as himself. He was rather nice, and quite a placid character, the bit of him that I knew. He didn't want social life at all, and that was what Anne was giving him, utterly a social life. And he once said to me, "When I come home, all I have is a lot of social people, and I have to fix the White Ladies and the cocktails and things. All I really want is to come home and put my feet up by the fire.'

In contrast to Ian Fleming, Boofy Arran forbade entry to his house to anyone but family. All the Arrans' entertaining was done in restaurants and clubs, and during Boofy's lifetime few of their closest friends crossed the threshold of Pimlico House. It was, however, the home of many animals. When Boofy did not sleep curled up foetus-fashion in front of the fire, he and Fiona shared their bed with three dogs and a fox. Today there are

wallabies hopping about the garden among alpacas and mink-jak deer. But the liveliest time was when Lady Arran indulged her passion for badgers by keeping them as pets. One friend who shared a car journey with Lady Arran and a badger describes how the badger sneaked up behind her and curled round her neck. 'Careful, Moyra, don't move,' said Lady Arran nonchalantly, 'or it will bite you. They don't like sudden movement.' 'They used to bite my son,' says Lady Arran. 'He watched telly in his gumboots in case they waddled around and bit his legs. They're very, very one-person creatures. They'd never bite me or do anything to me at all. We've had two of them at a time in the house. They were wonderful with the dogs and went for walks with them, all without leads and collars. Rosie the badger knew how to open the fridge. One mighty swipe of her forepaw and the fridge door was open. Often she's pinched the leg of lamb for lunch. But I've let them go back into the wild now, and they live down in the wood, a lot of them.' It was Lady Arran who was originally responsible for getting the Badger Protection Bill put before Parliament, where it passed into law. Her husband, sitting in the House of Lords, had piloted the famous bill which made homosexuality legal. Lady Arran says: 'I didn't like the homosexual bill very much, so I said you've got to do something for me; you'd better do a badger-protection bill, so he did. It didn't make him work too hard, and he quite enjoyed doing it.'

Lady Arran has always been an animal-lover. She grew up in the old Colquhoun family house, beside their ancient ruined castle, surrounded on three sides by Loch Lomond. The Colquhouns have lived there since about 1100. 'When I was a girl there wasn't a pet I didn't have, I think. Even a mongoose, which was rather smelly and not very tame. But the greatest pet we had, really, was a little fallow deer, a hind. It used to knock the old post-lady off her bicycle, playing with her. My sisters used to catch wild rabbits and teach them circus tricks, which they performed very nicely – like jumping from chair to chair. Then we would let them loose and they would go back to the wild able to do circus tricks! One did such a lot of that sort of thing before television arrived. There used to be four lovely little animal shops in a row underneath the castle in Edinburgh. I remember one day I bought a grass snake, and I was having tea in the restaurant car on the train going home, and there was a yell from a very old lady sitting next

GRANDMOTHER'S FOOTSTEPS

Fiona, Countess of Arran, will attempt the world record in Class Two Offshore Power-boat Racing at Windermere this October in her new boat, *The Granny Arran*.
ROBERT TEMPLE tries to keep up with her



Lady Arran has a passion for animals as well as speed. At Pimlico house, Hertfordshire, she keeps rare white wallabies and alpacas

★ PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN TIMBERS

to me. My grass snake had curled itself round the teacup she had just picked up. The poor old lady nearly died of a heart attack.' She got her first taste of real speed through her future husband. 'Having been brought up in Scotland, where my father was twice Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Boofy was the kind of intellectual, slightly eccentric figure that I had never come across before. And really, there's never been another like him. Also, he had an enormous Bentley that attracted me. It was the first very fast car I'd ever driven in my life, and it just went to my head. I used to drive it up and down the drives at home – one of them is two miles long. I used to take it as fast as I could, but we didn't manage more than 100 mph because there were some corners. Boofy was also a very fast driver, as a young man. It was in one of his cars that we did over 100 down Oxford Street, just after the war. It was a lovely two-seater Mercedes with huge tubes coming out of the engine – you know, that sort of terrific sports

car we had. It was after a party. He and I were in the two seats, and we had about four friends sitting on the roof, which was down, and it was about midnight. I don't think there were as many lights then as there are now. I don't think one could do it now. Life's changed.' But not changed sufficiently for Lady Arran to slow down, except on Oxford Street. She has painted her new boat in her own colours at Poole in Dorset. 'I've called the new boat *The Granny Arran*. Everybody thinks it's a very funny name. I don't hold any record at the moment. I shall always have been the first person – not woman, I'd like to point out – to have got over the 100 mph in an offshore boat. The press picked it up and turned me into the first woman, which was nonsense. That was three years ago. And I got the Seagrave Trophy for doing that, which is the biggest thing you can get in this country. Since then, offshore boats have just been going faster and faster. I hope this year I can get the Class Two offshore record.

[Currently held by Robert Cook and Mike Mansell: 107.83 mph.] I was in the 1984 Round Britain Race in a little cruiser that only cost about £19,000. I was ninth overall, the first woman driver in, and third in my class. None of us went round Cape Wrath; we went through the Caledonian Canal and skipped the north of Scotland, because it's too rough up there for racing boats. It took fourteen days altogether to go round Britain. That boat was called the *Laura Lucy*, after my two granddaughters.' But why is Lady Arran so obsessed with going faster and faster? She says: 'It's awfully difficult to know, really, why one's fascinated by speed. But there's something in my make-up that has to be allowed out now and again. And I think if I didn't go power-boating, I might set about robbing a bank. I love to do something that has a lot of excitement, and that's difficult, and takes all one's energy, mental and physical, for some hours a week. If I don't release this energy somehow or other, it boils

up and I get very bad-tempered, and I don't know what might happen. I mean, if anybody really did walk up the drive and say "Give up boat racing and we'll organise a few bank robberies", I might very easily follow them and do it. I was born with a craving for excitement and danger. As a girl I was always trying myself out at something. If I couldn't think of anything else, I used to jump off a cliff into a river just to see what happened. 'There's something in human nature that has to be released now and again. The thing to do is to release it into the proper paths.' However, Lady Arran does foresee a time when she will have to stop her dangerous exploits. 'I think I may end my days in Scotland – when I've finished the power-boat racing.' And she has plans for later on, as well. 'I'm a 100 per cent believer that there must be something waiting for us; let's hope it's a something better. I believe that when I die I shall meet all my happy friends again. There must be Somewhere Else.'