

# The Yankee Dolphin

*A whole pod of Dolphins continues to delight*

by Dyke Williams

IT WAS THE MID-1950s. ENTER BILL Shaw, the man who later designed a great many of Pearson Yachts' finest and was at that firm's helm as it became one of the top boatbuilders in the country (see article on the Pearson 28-2 on Page 33). But in his formative years Bill was designing for Sparkman & Stephens. One task was working with Olin Stephens on converting the CCA Rule (on which the Sparkman & Stephens firm was arguably the leading expert) to a new Midget Ocean Racing Club (MORC) Rule for smaller offshore boats up to 24 feet (this was later raised to 30 feet).

As an after-hours project, Bill designed a 24-footer to see if factors affecting safety and comfort, such as proper pitching and righting moments, encouraged by the CCA Rule, translated well into smaller boats designed for MORC. Those sketches were to become the Shaw 24 and then modified to become the 24-foot Dolphin, a boat that has been built in wood and fiberglass by many yards and is known by several names: Yankee Dolphin, O'Day Dolphin, Pacific Dolphin, Dolphin 24, and Shaw 24.

The Sparkman & Stephens-designed Dolphin was built from 1959 through the 1970s by at least five firms. The Yankee Dolphin built by Yankee Yachts was perhaps the best of the breed, but

they're all basically the same hull shape and rig design. Thus, while describing the Yankee Dolphin, all the Dolphins are included here in one way or another. It's not clear how many Dolphins were built. There are at least 270 and perhaps as many as 300 or more. The 24-foot Dolphin is a medium-displacement masthead sloop with a hollow bow, cutaway forefoot, keel/centerboard, and attached rudder. Her classic appearance comes from a traditional profile, transom, and counter. Her overhangs are short, the waterline long, the wetted surface low. The boat has always been, and is yet today, quite fast.

## The start of the story

In the 1950s, the CCA Rule was the reigning big boat, offshore handicap rule. It encouraged and rewarded designs that were seaworthy, seakindly, and comfortable. CCA rigs had shorter hoists and longer booms — a lower-aspect ratio that kept the center of effort and heeling moment down. By measuring mizzen sail area at only one-half or not at all, the CCA Rule encouraged yawl rigs because they could comfortably and safely weather almost any blow by setting just headsail and mizzen (jib 'n jigger). Creature comforts

below were rewarded. Stripped-out hulls were penalized. It was a great rule. By contrast, CCA's successor, the IOR (International Offshore Rule) of the 1970s, resulted in high masts, short booms, empty hulls, oddly humped stern sections, and some wholly inadequate rudders.

Of his 24-foot MORC design, Bill Shaw later said, "I did a half-size prototype of *Finisterre*, just to test the principles." For those who don't recognize the pedigree, *Finisterre* is known as the first of the light, wide, keel/centerboard breakthrough yawls by Sparkman & Stephens. She was raced illustriously all over the world by Carleton Mitchell.

The initial Shaw numbers on paper looked good. Willard (Bill) Scranton heard about this design and commissioned a boat to be built by Jensen in Denmark — double-planked mahogany and cedar over oak, keel/centerboard, complete accommodations for four, and a yawl rig. The result was the first Shaw 24, *Trina*, the first MORC boat built. Her intended function was to be fast, safe, and comfortable. She won 27 consecutive races in three years following her launching in 1957 under four different handicap rules, including MORC. She excelled in all weather and was a light air flyer. Naval architect Gary Mull said of the Shaw 24 yawl: "That boat — with a jib and a jigger — could sail through anything."

## Legends from afar

Her sister ships (24 built in wood, some as sloops) created apocryphal legends of heavy-air survival in places as far afield as the Aegean. (Truth in writing is called for here. Your author is the owner of the restored *Trina*. I am looking for a new "curator" to take this historic craft safely well into the new century. If serious, contact me at <yawlbear@aol.com>.)

Olympic medalist and boatbuilder George O'Day heard about *Trina* and approached Olin Stephens. The story I have from Bill Shaw is that George



wanted to build a 24-footer. Olin said Sparkman & Stephens would never do a boat that small (watch out later for dozens of them) and called Bill Shaw into his office. Bill got out his Shaw 24 plans, and they conferred. Olin suggested two changes: a sweet Sparkman & Stephens sheerline to replace the Shaw 24's slight reverse sheer and broader aft sections to help carry masthead spinnakers in a blow. Thus, in April of 1959 the first Dolphin 24 was finalized on paper as Sparkman & Stephens design #1497.

### The design

The Dolphin was designed to be good at everything she does without also trying to meet special constraints: price points, ultra-light trailerability, headroom, massive interior. Her classic sheer, overhangs, ample cockpit, and elegant transom were the norm then and are echoed today by new boats reviving that traditional look. In the Dolphin size range, check out the Bridges Point 24 and the Quickstep 24. Going bigger, look at Joel White's Center Harbor 31. And there are hints of classic lines in the new J/100 and J/124. Even bigger are the new "daysailers": the Morris 36 and the Hinckley DS 42.

The Dolphins that resulted from the Shaw 24 have a quick hull and powerful rig, moving the boat well in light air and easily reefable for heavy air. The masthead foretriangle is quite large for its day. Many designers (Ted Hood is a staunch proponent) believe it's

*Trina*, the wooden beauty who started it all, captures the wind, on facing page. *Marionette*, Ron Breault's O'Day Dolphin, is decorated for a Sparkman & Stephens rendezvous, at top. These early Dolphins had a fiberglass hull with a wooden deck and cabin. In center, *Iceland*, a Yankee Dolphin owned by Bill Watson, shows her stuff under sail, and Jim Huxford's Yankee Dolphin on stands shows her Sparkman & Stephens heritage. Jim ran an active Yankee Dolphin website and was refitting his boat until he lost a battle with cancer. He is sorely missed. At bottom, Jim Sutro's Yankee Dolphin, *Duckling*, in Clipper Cove, San Francisco Bay.



the genoa that provides a boat's serious drive. It should be noted, though, that Shaw 24 yawl owners think the Dolphin owners are "missin' a mizzen." Since waterline largely determines top speed, you might think boats with shorter waterlines would be slow. However, as soon as they heel a bit, as the wind gets up to where top speed is possible, the bow and stern overhangs enter the water, effectively lengthening the waterline. In light air, the less drag, the better.

Many sailors prize the proper feel and behavior of a boat while under way over having vast spaces inside. After all, we spend way more sailing time *on* a boat than *in* it. Romaine Corbin of Pacific Dolphin, Inc., noted, "Standing headroom is a dockside extra — one

sits down or lies down as soon as possible when moving about at sea." Chris Vandersteen, the owner of a J. J. Taylor Dolphin on Lake Ontario, wrote, "I spotted the boat the summer before I actually purchased it and remember thinking that, though she was smallish, I really liked the shape of her. She looked sturdy and safe for my first boat, and I fell in love with the transom. She has proven to be very reliable, despite her age [45 years]."

Small *is* beautiful. Many sailors are really just dinghy sailors at heart. One of the Herreshoffs observed that the amount of use a boat receives is inversely proportional to its length. This certainly seems true — there is nothing like a boat you can arrive at and be under way in less than five

minutes. I've always felt that if you can't pull or work something with one hand, it's too big. On the other hand, if you are looking for a good old boat one size up from the Dolphin, look at the Tartan 27. This is the Dolphin enlarged by Sparkman & Stephens.

### The O'Day Dolphins

Beginning in 1959, the O'Day Dolphins came from Marscot Plastics, a division of the O'Day Corporation in Massachusetts. A few were classic transition boats. By that I mean they had glass hulls and wooden everything else, in part because a factory fire burned the deck/cabin/cockpit mold. The all-glass O'Day's hulls and decks were solid... no cores. Some had wooden masts, and some of those have since been replaced with aluminum. The O'Day interior layout mirrored *Trina's*: double V-berth, two quarter berths, head under the starboard seat, and a seat and galley to port (see illustrations on facing page). Power was provided by a gas Palmer Huskie inboard. Some boats were bought as kits — a completed glass hull and boxes of parts to be added by the owner. O'Day built 60 to 100 Dolphins.

I was a young whippersnapper racing International 14s in the Northeast when a friend and competitor, Sandy Van Zandt, announced one day that he'd be sailing 14s less because he'd be sailing a new Dolphin more. "What? A keelboat?" we cried. "How could you?"

We failed to comprehend. Sandy, you must understand, was the sailor who didn't like the sail shapes then made for 14s, so at first he built his own on his kitchen table and eventually became the sailmaker from whom we bought our sails. Trend leader? You bet. Did we "dinghy youngsters" understand the attraction of fast keelboats? Not then... but most of us do now. It must have been one of those first O'Day Dolphins that lured Sandy into leading the next trend.


### The Yankee Dolphin

The late 1960s (through 1972) saw the Dolphin become the Yankee Dolphin as construction shifted to Yankee Yachts in Inglewood, California. Yankee Dolphin decks, cabins, and cockpits became a one-piece fiberglass unit. The company did use considerable teak exterior trim (toerails, coamings, eyebrows, handrails, hatches,

## In their own words

- **Romaine Corbin, Pacific Dolphin, Inc.:** "*Trina*, a wooden 24-foot scaled-down *Finisterre*, beats everything in sight and proves that small yachts can handle blue water as swiftly and safely as their big brothers... (her) powerful ends and long keel will give her the feel of a much larger vessel."
- **Jim Sutro (#84):** "The Yankee Dolphin was exactly the boat my wife and I wanted. The Yankee model has lots of exterior teak and interior mahogany. It has the look of a very classy yacht but isn't so big that it's impossible to maintain. It has an adequate cabin for long weekends, is trailerable, and is a solid, seakindly vessel as well. San Francisco Bay can be a washing machine on summer afternoons, and the stability was important to us. She sails upright when reefed and maintains speed without becoming uncomfortable. She makes surprisingly good progress without a lot of fuss and spray and responds to the waves without becoming twitchy or abrupt. She has been a very forgiving platform upon which to learn to sail."

Sutro continued, "Several years ago a Pacific Dolphin [Doug Graham sailing *Big Dot* in 1996] competed in the Singlehanded TransPac Race. The boat arrived dead last and most of the entrants were home before it finished, but it corrected out as the winner in its class." (To top that performance, Doug singlehanded her back.)

- **Brent Adams (#78):** "She's a 'big little boat.' That is, she sails truer than some boats her size (full keel and centerboard). People are always surprised at how much room there is aboard and how much weather she can take under sail."
- **Ron Breault (O'Day glass/wood Dolphin #12):** *Marionette* has won her class in Spring Off Soundings three times, the latest in 2004. "Great performer to her rating. In light air, our motto is, 'As you cross the finish line look over your shoulder. If you can see us, you lose.' Boats need crew weight to windward in a breeze in order to carry sail. Otherwise, you have to reef and go to a smaller jib and don't have the power to punch through the troughs... I cannot think of any serious faults in this well-designed boat. She is the quintessential good old boat. Yes, I would do it again and we are... in my son's boat. *Passage* (hull #10) is currently undergoing restoration. At the end of the day there are few better feelings than sitting in the cockpit of my Dolphin and watching a 40-foot goldplater motor by and hear them say, 'Pretty boat.' This all results from an Olin Stephens design philosophy paraphrased as, 'Good-looking boats sail better.'" 

and so on) and a mostly mahogany interior, so the Yankee Dolphins have the "air" of classic wooden boats without any of the complications. The Yankee Dolphin brochure boasts of the boat's hull molding, thickness, woven roving content, and "longer-lived" isophthalic resin. "The Dolphin is a sound investment in racing and family fun," it states. "Truly a maximum boat with minimum maintenance — a real value." Base price in 1969 was \$5,195.

Sparkman & Stephens designed an improved high-lift centerboard (lead-ballasted fiberglass), a cockpit-operated board hoist, and an updated rudder. Keel ballast is 1,650 pounds of lead. The self-bailing motor well accommodates outboards up to a 9-hp standard shaft, though today's four-strokes have a hard time fitting. The spars are aluminum; the mast hinges and steps on deck and is more than adequate in size and strength. The mainsheet acquired a traveler with cam controls.

Yankee offered a new interior plan that made very efficient use of space with a complete glass headliner and hull liner. The double V-berth remained, but aft of that was a fully enclosed head compartment with a head to starboard and a hanging locker and shelves to port. The wooden sliding door disappears into the main bulkhead and thus takes up no swinging room at all. Several lockers and drawers provide storage, and the galley includes a sink, pump, water tank, stove, and icebox. A dinette to starboard converts into a double berth, and to port are a small seat, galley, and icebox. Cockpit lockers without quarter berths are thus capacious.

### The Pacific Dolphin

In 1976, Pacific Dolphin, Inc., of Anaheim, California, became the last major manufacturer of the design. As a supplier to Yankee Yachts, the owners of this company had inherited the molds when Yankee folded. Base price had risen to \$9,750 by then. Construction began with a close replica of the Yankee version, complete with teak exterior trim and a teak interior. Later versions eliminated almost all exterior wood. Options introduced wheel steering, a slide-out galley that disappears aft toward the port locker (providing a fifth berth), jiffy reefing, and Vire or Yanmar inboards.

### Other Dolphins

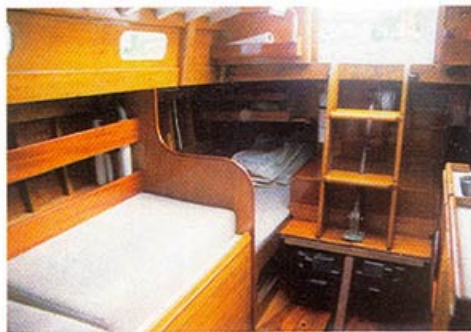
Other firms made a few Dolphins each. J. J. Taylor in Toronto offered some — about 10 to 12 — which were probably O'Day hulls finished in Canada. They had a galvanized rudder, the removal of which for replating became a problem. Lunn Laminates of Long Island built copies of the O'Day boat complete with Palmer inboards after O'Day ceased production. There may well be more builders. One caveat: the 23-foot Olympic Dolphin is something else entirely — a 2,000-pound trailersailer designed by Derek Angus in 1970.

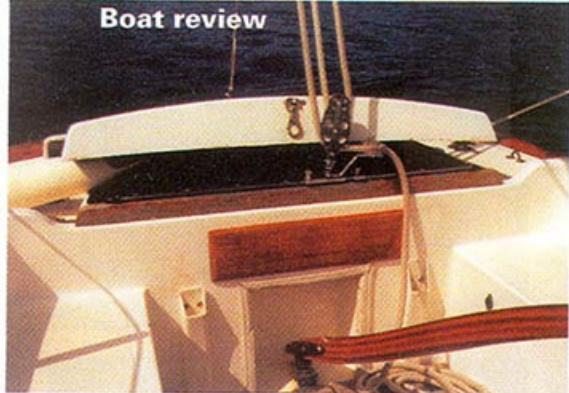
### Trailing

In the words of Dolphin sailors, the experts themselves:

- **Jim Sutro (Yankee Dolphin #84):** "My trailer is fairly substantial — GVW 7,000 pounds — and hauls *Duckling* handily. The roof of my E-250 (3/4 ton) stretch van supports a sawhorse, which makes a tolerable workplace for rigging the mast, whether for sea or for the road. The mast is supported by a tabernacle, and the boom is rigged as a gin-pole for erecting the mast. I can do it alone. The trailer has a caster wheel and rolls into the water on a chain."
- **Ron Breault (O'Day Dolphin #12):** "I don't really trailer this boat, except to and from her home in our barn in the spring and fall. I step the mast at my yacht club where we have a hoist. Stepping/unstepping on a trailer or at a dock can be done, but it's a heavy mast and a bit exciting for two people, never mind one. I think this boat is at the heavy end of what one would call "trailerable." I thought about trailering her back from Maine, but in the end it was easier, less hassle, and more fun to sail her back."
- **Duane Post (Yankee Dolphin #184):** "At best it would take three of us four hours to launch, rig, tune, and prepare for the cruise. And that was working really fast."

*Trina's* interior, top three photos above, is similar to the interior in the O'Day Dolphins with two quarter berths and an open V-berth, which can be lengthened with filler cushions. A marine head is under the settee on the starboard side. A flip-up table extends the counter space by the galley sink and adds an eating surface for informal dining. A cover converts the sink into an additional countertop. The Yankee Dolphin was introduced with an updated interior plan. *Trina's* cockpit, lower two photos.





Note the difference in the arrangement of the tiller on *Icelander*, Bill Watson's *Yankee Dolphin*, at left, compared with *Trina*, bottom photo on Page 11. Bill Shaw aboard *Trina*, at right.



### Value and hazards

What should you do if a certain 24-foot hull in the boatyard turns your head? First, realize that this may be an emotional reaction and that owning a *Dolphin* is not *like* a relationship, it *is* a relationship. You may not be thinking clearly. If corporate hiring people make up their minds in the first 30 seconds and spend the rest of the interview rationalizing that decision, watch yourself. In your saner moments, however, you do have pedigree working for you. It should give you some measure of confidence that Sparkman & Stephens and Bill Shaw have each designed volumes of well-known and well-regarded boats. That fact will for sure matter to many potential buyers when you come to sell.

Moreover, licenses from Sparkman & Stephens to build *Dolphins* required each builder to adhere to very strict layup and construction standards. For example, hand-laid combinations of fiberglass cloth, mat, and roving are multiplied to create thicknesses of  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch in the keel wall,  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch at the keel/hull curve,  $\frac{7}{16}$  inch at the waterline, and  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch at the sheer. And the hull/deck bond requires 153 alternating stainless-steel screws and bolts every 4 inches all the way around with epoxy resin between. Furthermore, the keel cavity is filled with a mixture of lead shot and epoxy resin whereby the keel and 3 inches of the hull become one solid mass. These are covered with heavy mat, roving layers, and resin to 18 inches up the side of the hull. In the words of Romaine Corbin of Pacific *Dolphin*, Inc., "No one is ever going to worry about dropping a keel or holing below the waterline."

### Resources

#### Dolphin discussion list

<dolphin@list.sailnet.net>

Register with SailNet to join this group.

### Outboards vs. inboards

*Dolphins* may come with outboards or inboards or both. The outboard wells work nicely, except that the new four-strokes take more room than two-strokes and may not fit or rotate as well. Owner Ron Breault reports that his 4-hp two-stroke moves his boat at 4.5 knots in a calm. It stores under the cockpit in a heavy-wall plastic tube. He loses 0.3 knots to drag while sailing with the prop in the water. But outboards leave more storage space below and are easy to afford, reach, service, and remove. It's also easy to install a loaner while yours is being fixed. Inboards are more expensive, have more moving parts, and are harder to reach, service, and remove. A new inboard could well be of greater dollar value than the rest of the boat. On the other hand, inboards put the prop directly in front of the rudder for improved slow-speed maneuvering, and they start and shift with readily accessible buttons and levers. The older I get, the more I value that.

### What to look out for

Many *Dolphin* owners contributed to the following list of what to look at, watch out for, and have a surveyor render an opinion on (note that this list applies almost verbatim to virtually any similar-sized boat):

- Moisture-meter the hull and especially the cored decks. O'Days have wood in the hull-to-deck joint that is often "gone." Check near stanchions, fittings, and genoa tracks.
- Check shroud chainplates, their through-deck passages, the bulkheads to which they are bolted, and the bulkhead-to-hull bond. Water damage here may be the most common *Dolphin* problem.
- Check for compression or corrosion on the prop under the on-deck mast step.
- Check the topsides and bottom for gelcoat cracks or crazing from the


extra-heavy gelcoating of the era. It is easy to live with these; one can redo the surfaces as time and funds allow.

- Check whether the trailer size and condition are up to the distances you plan. Do you have access to a big enough vehicle?
- Check the hull-to-deck juncture, ports, hatches, and so on for signs of leaks from caulking failure or tired fasteners.
- Check the rudder movement for bearing wear and the fittings for electrolysis.
- Wooden spars with original resorcinol glue may begin to separate. These can be cleaned up and epoxied back together.

### Renew or restore

You *can* buy a used boat and just sail away. As for me, *I hate* surprises. I want a boat that's trustworthy. If I had a new old *Dolphin*, I would at least renew it by checking and replacing every last thing that was remotely suspicious or could stop the boat from getting me home. If possible, I'd budget an extra \$2,000 to \$3,000 (more if a yard does the work) to get a substantially new boat (and my own peace of mind).

Will it be worth it? Some think you need a masochistic streak to renew or restore a boat. My rule is: "Always try to buy from a distressed owner; do not buy a distressed boat." But there is considerable satisfaction in preserving something worth saving and making it work well and safely again. *Dolphins* are selling for anywhere from \$3,000 to \$10,000 today, more for Mr. Fuss-budget's boat. You probably won't get your refit investment back in cash, but you're a sailor so you know what you get back in purely subjective ways.

As Romaine Corbin said of *Dolphins*, "Boats that will get them there and bring them back — swiftly, safely, comfortably." In my book, that's the highest praise any boat could receive. 

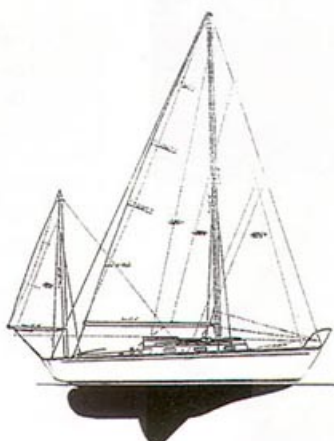
# Dolphins galore

## A designer's view of Trina and her offspring

by Ted Brewer



Yankee Dolphin



Trina



Morgan 24



O'Day 25

**B**ILL SHAW'S SWEET LITTLE TRINA HAS LONG BEEN ONE OF MY favorite small yacht designs. From her yawl rig to her keel/centerboard hull with its medium displacement and triangular-shaped centerboard, *Trina* appears to be a miniature version of renowned cruiser/racer, *Finisterre*.

Bill Shaw worked for Sparkman & Stephens at the time, and *Trina* was given a careful review in 1959 when George O'Day commissioned S&S to design a new midget ocean racer. I'd always thought that the fiberglass Dolphin was a duplicate of the wooden *Trina* except for her sheerline and construction. Comparing the two, however, I discovered significant differences. Still, it's obvious that the designers at S&S had *Trina* in mind when they began work on the Dolphin design two years later.

Looking at the numbers, we can see where S&S made slight increases in the beam, waterline length, and ballast to give the Dolphin a lower displacement-to-length ratio, along with a touch more stability. A bigger change is the Dolphin's higher-aspect-ratio centerboard, which reduces wetted area and should improve efficiency. All these differences add up to slight performance increases while, to many eyes, the more conventional S&S sheer improves her aesthetic appeal as well.

### Better rating

The Dolphin's sloop rig adds a few square feet of sail area, of course, but *Trina's* yawl rig

would probably rate better under the Midget Ocean Racing Club rule of that era.

The newer Morgan 24 and O'Day 25 designs have lower displacement/LWL ratios due to their considerably longer waterlines, despite considerably heavier displacement. They also have lower beam/LWL ratios and, undoubtedly, a finer entrance. This should reduce resistance while their deeper, higher-aspect-ratio centerboards will improve weatherliness. The Morgan would give both the Dolphin and *Trina* stiff all-around competition. Due to her smaller sail area, the O'Day will be harder pressed to keep up with the fleet in light air but should shine when it breezes up.

The four little yachts are similar in their comfort ratios. In any case, such small craft can hardly be considered comfortable in heavy weather regardless of the numbers. Bear in mind that shoal-draft, keel/centerboard boats will recover slowly, if at all, in the event of a capsize beyond 90 degrees. These small yachts cannot be recommended for serious ocean passaging.

Still, given good condition and gear, any one of them would make a fine little singlehander or a cruiser for a cozy couple. A slight exception here for a sister to *Trina*: any wooden yacht that'll sport more than 40 candles on her next birthday cake had best be checked by an expert before she's taken very far from the pier. 

	Yankee Dolphin	Trina	Morgan 24	O'Day 25
LOA	24' 2"	23' 11"	24' 11"	24' 10"
LWL	19' 0"	18' 6"	21' 6"	21' 0"
Beam	7' 8"	7' 5"	8' 0"	8' 0"
Draft, up/down	2' 10"/5' 2"	2' 9"/5' 3"	2' 9"/6' 6"	2' 6"/6' 0"
Displacement	4,250 lb	4,300 lb	5,000 lb	4,800 lb
Ballast	1,650 lb	1,500 lb	1,900 lb	1,600 lb**
LOA/LWL ratio	1.272	1.293	1.159	1.182
Beam/LWL ratio	0.403	0.401	0.372	0.381
Displ./LWL ratio	276.6	303.2	224.6	231.4
Sail area	296 sq ft	289 sq ft*	310 sq ft	270 sq ft
SA/Displ. ratio	18.1	17.5	17.0	15.2
Capsize screening	1.89	1.83	1.87	1.90
Comfort ratio	21.05	22.73	21.35	20.85
Year	1959	1956	1965	1975
Designer	S&S	Bill Shaw	Charley Morgan	Ray Hunt

\*Yawl rig. \*\*Estimated, based on similar O'Day/Hunt small cruising yachts.