

# 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

