

SALCOMBE YAWL 19 HERON

Built 1951. Fully rebuilt 2007/8 by Stones Boatyard,
East Portlemouth, Salcombe

Owned by John Smithers and Pete Hughes

In 2003 our plan was simple...the two of us would buy a Yawl, refurbish it to full racing spec and sail it in the Blue fleet. John had always been a keen racer and wanted a reliable competitive boat, and Pete an avid spectator in recent times wanted a good looking Yawl (particularly the decks!) Five years on we are both happy!

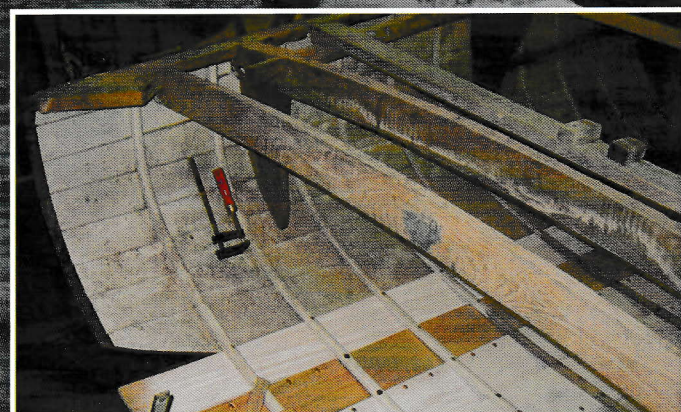
Our search started with older boats in the fleet needing some TLC. Only one really caught our eye but another purchaser was quicker off the mark. A call from Scratch Hitchen led us to Jim Stone who, having moved to Canada, had decided to sell his long term project. Jim had built John's previous Y 143 so we wandered what we would find when we arrived at the lock up garage in East Prawle in late 2004.

What we saw was very different to those seen before, to say the least. Y19 had last seen the water in 1972: all that remained was the clinker hull completely stripped of paint and varnish; there were no decks, no centreboard box, no shoe, no rig and no fittings! Well we had agreed we wanted a refurbishment project but this was going well beyond what we had imagined. Needless to say a sale was agreed and on 1st January 2005 we trailed it back to Chichester so as to give us time to think what we were going to do with it.

Through Jim we got talking to his son Tristan at Stones Boatyard, and to their shipwright John McShea. All three were super enthusiastic about the project. A price could be worked out for the decks, paintwork, fittings and rig but understandably we would have to take the risk on the refurbishment of the hull. The Yawl was trailed down to Stones Boatyard in summer 2006, breaking several planks and ribs on the way. This hull was seriously brittle...would it ever sail again we wondered.

Work began and the extent of the job quickly became evident. The keel was rotten, the transom was of very poor timber, many planks were split and a lot of the ribs were broken or undersized. Despite their poor condition each element of the hull crucially provided the template for its replacement. Each piece was taken out one at a time, reworked in new timber and then replaced. By this process the shape remained identical which was clearly paramount. Every piece of timber that could be saved was, but in the end four planks to each side and about half the ribs were all that could structurally be retained.

With the base hull refurbished, the internal woodwork and decking began. The hull has an extra ordinary degree of both rocker and sheer, and John at Stones developed a unique layout of flowing curves between the centreboard box, centre thwart and side seats. Two substantial bulkheads were installed to ensure the hull would be rigid and able to take the loads of a new racing rig. As we were essentially building from scratch, the position of the mast and centreboard pivot was debated endlessly. Their standard position in new boats was not a reliable indicator as the hull shape was so different from new designs, and the position of the centreboard slot in the old keel plank had no regard to the set up of a modern rig. Whilst Tristan and Jim were very decisive where they should be positioned, we were having nightmares that if the positions were wrong the Yawl would not perform properly





despite the quality of the rebuild. To appease us, the mast step was made a long slot so that the mast position could be changed if necessary.

The decks were detailed with a traditional rounded coaming which compliments the age and shape of the boat very well.

With the woodwork finished the huge job of painting and varnishing began. Awlgrip two pack spray paint was chosen for the top sides to give a very durable high gloss finish, T Speed for below the waterline, and Epithanes traditional varnish for the deck. Inside the hull was painted broken white so as to look traditional, but it also had the effect of providing a blank background which shows off John's fantastic woodwork beautifully. Floorboards were colour coded to the topsides in order to utilise the residue of the Awlgrip paint.

Every Yawl is different in its fittings layout but we wanted to keep the systems fully effective, very simple and out of view if possible. Most controls are lead beneath the floor back to the centre thwart and all work well with the aid of current day roping options and Harken fittings.

The rig comprises a Collar mast utilising Canadian spruce imported by Stones Boatyard and the sails are by Pinnell and Bax, the set up having been developed previously by the yard. The combination of the exaggerated sheer line and the use of roller reefing are going to require a minor recut of the jib at the end of the season but otherwise the rig performs well.

The name of the Yawl was clearly important. 'Heron' has been independently verified by three people who have known its past so we are happy we have this right.

Finally in May 2008 Heron was ready to sail. Our families were there to see its first sail and over the time before the August regattas most issues got sorted. Heron's performance in the regattas has been far beyond our expectations and in the town regatta we gained our maiden win. The balance on the helm was perfect from the outset and the extreme rocker gives good windward performance and downwind speed in light to medium winds. The straighter, flatter Yawls have the performance edge in stronger winds but we are working on it!

We have since established that since it was built in 1951, Heron had only been sailed for five seasons. Y19 is absent from recollections of early Yawl sailing so if anyone uncovers any history or photos of Heron do please let us know.

Pete and I take this opportunity of thanking Tristan, Jim and John at Stones Boatyard for their enthusiasm, their design and technical ideas, their perfect workmanship and their friendly service.

John Smithers and Pete Hughes

