

# THE YACHT

---

The leading magazine for the design, construction,  
management, ownership & operation of luxury yachts

---

## report

Issue 86

July/August 2007



# Standing by to stand by

## A very special escort



Support vessels are becoming more and more common. Not only as toy carriers as detailed in the article on oceAnco's Amevi on page 54 of issue 82, but also in a support role for modern or classic racing yachts. The idea is, though, far from new. In fact when the yacht the 2007 *Bystander* will support or escort – the J Class *Velsheda* – was first built by Camper & Nicholson Gosport in 1933 for Mr Stephenson, Owner of Woolworth's, a steam-driven escort vessel was – as far as can be determined – simultaneously constructed. Sadly very little information remains about that vessel, indeed it's only assumed – rather than known – she was even built at C & N Gosport, the J Class association told me. That yard's records are presumed to have been largely destroyed when the facility was bombed in the second war; we did, however, manage to find a picture of the first *Bystander*. Considerably more information is available on her successor *Bystander*; this is the story of the latest of that line.

ALTHOUGH I CALL BYSTANDER A SUCCESSOR TO THE ORIGINAL IN FACT SHE IS THE SECOND MOTOR YACHT to fulfil that role for *Velsheda*’s current owner who completed restoration of the classic J in 1997 and races her extensively today. If you look for history on *Bystander* you can get sidetracked; there is another tender called *Bystander*, that one built in 1929 at Greenport Basin & Construction Company. The 42-ft vessel was the towboat, tender and crew launch for six America’s Cups: 1930 (*Enterprise*), 1934 (*Rainbow*), 1937 (*Ranger*), 1958 (*Vim*), 1962 (*Gretel*) and 1967 (*Dame Pattie*).

The previous intermediate *Bystander* was first built in Kaag at then van Lent (now Royal van Lent) yard for Henry Ford II. She was a classic canoe stern raised pilot house Feadship design. But today’s *Bystander* reverts stylistically to an even earlier era. She was designed by Dick Young Designs (now Rhoades Young). Dick says of her profile: “(It) suggests a rugged workboat ... of the 1930s”. Indeed she does, and looks more like a conversion of a craft of that era than a new build. Scratch the classic patina though and you find a thoroughly modern engineering package, underbody and appendages, rather like a Hoek design sailing yacht where wetted hull and keel belie a classic superstructure and profile.

The engineering and naval architecture package is by Vripack, a partnership builder JFA have had with that Dutch company over more than a few projects, including the current 27-m project, which is building kit supply.

I was invited by JFA to visit *Bystander* during technical sea trials at the end of January, an unusual privilege accorded me by Owner and yard. I flew north across France through a winter-shrouded countryside for a stopover in Lyon; the airport was at –6 degrees, yet arriving in Brittany the snow magically disappeared half an hour out and the temperature rose. Once in Concarneau it was near balmy despite ice underfoot on the Quai des Seychelles where JFA’s build halls are and *Bystander* awaited. That odd street address is nothing to do with Breton temperatures, rather it’s called for the fact that the hardy Breton *pêcheurs* of Concarneau often ply their trade off the Seychelles, quite a commute!



The light in winter there is low and orange, adding warmth to the already warm tones of the yacht’s exterior and spectacular interior. The weather both before and after were uniformly foul, the previous sea trial day hitting 50 knots. We were lucky with flat seas (albeit with 30 plus knots of breeze) and sun. The trials were for both LR and Vripack whose two technicians were aboard monitoring ship’s movement and performance into a laptop while collating other data. This they enter into a final commissioning and trial booklet (book in fact) that defines the performance of the vessel, (hopefully) validates theoretical calculations and naval architecture yet also adds to the firm’s body of knowledge and performance data all the better to design future projects.

In conversation with Albert Abma of Vripack I asked if this also validated the tank testing. He told me that there was no testing for this hull design and so this day was in fact a kind of one to one tank test. He told me although there was no tank testing performance was calculated. Still, Marin were involved in sea-keeping analysis and worked on making sure the hull had the correct roll period. That roll period was defined by the one of a design some 73 years old; in other words, it was designed to exactly match the roll period and characteristics of *Velsheda* herself.

By doing so both would lie at anchor together – a very frequent occurrence – with minimal possibility of counter rolling against and damaging each other. The yacht has a typical Vripack feature: prop nozzles. To compensate for the restriction, this applies to prop walk and transverse close quarters, manoeuvring the design calls for BARKE® flap rudders by Van der Velden.



The style of the yacht externally warms as onemoves aft and down from the bridge; the pilothouse itself is raised half a deck above the bridge deck. On that level is an octagonal pilot cabin with fold-down pullman pilot cot as would have been seen on a ship of that era. Today that space’s main function is as a Comms, AV and IT room (page 79 top left). The raised pilothouse, as well as conferring very good – indeed ‘proper’ – visibility, creates a technical space in the void below. The ship’s boats are stored aft; both are substantial chase boat RIBs launched and recovered by (apparently) traditional davits (above).

They’re traditional in look but hardly in function; one pair is MCA approved for rescue boat operation and all four are capable of independent operation for craning purposes of items like provisions and of course sails. Here and forward of the Portuguese bridge are stored wooden





optimist sailing dinghies. These may be launched and recovered using masts and booms mounted fore and aft as derricks (previous page).

Although contributing strongly to the classic look of the yacht these are – as aforementioned – thoroughly practical. In keeping with authenticity these are made of Norway pine and their standing and running rigging and hardware are spliced, served and leather bound, in proper seamanlike manner, where appropriate.

A funnel would, of course, be found on a steam original but here it's a storage area and powerful design feature, reinforcing the style message. It also contains a smoke machine to produce the occasional puff of 'steam'. The whistle is a steam one, though here operated by compressed air. The monkey island has a handy crow's nest and though of necessarily modern materials and with modern kit like GPS compass domes *et al*, innocuously blends into the 30s' style (page 74, bottom).

The upper deck is the only one with full walk-round access, the bridge deck access to the boat deck being through doors from the bridge adjacent to the pilot cabin. This is a very private yacht and the owner

is naturally reluctant to allow much publicity about the interior, so many of the shots are of the fine interior details. The upper deck houses two of the most notable public areas of the yacht. Forward is a wonderful lounge with views over the fo'c'sle, making it the best place from which to view progress on a less than warm day as it was on our trip round the bay of Concarneau; the balminess disappeared along with the dock lines. The fo'c'sle has a house offering a separate access to (and emergency exit from) the crew area and adding bright work and authenticity. Here two substantial Staalart windlasses handle the traditional Hall type anchors. Here Dick Young may have run a little too far down the road of authenticity by omitting anchor pockets; the ease of use stowing these anchors without one was

proving quite a challenge while I was aboard and plans were afoot to find a way to make them turn on approaching the hawse and stow unaided.



Aft on the same deck is a sky lounge which shares a skylight feature with the forward lounge. Both have traditional peaked houses (shown above) with opening hatches with round ports and within both are louvered wooden slat blinds operated mechanically from a bronze wheel – an authentic and highly mechanically pleasing feature. The sky lounge in contrast to the

panoramic one forward is designed to open as fully as possible to the elements with all windows of a locking lowering type using leather strap as well as metal handles. The doors slide, opening the area out to the very substantial upper aft deck with Jacuzzi and exterior wooden loose and fixed furniture. This space is also externally clad adding to the ‘look’ and the hours needed to varnish the yacht; this space features a wide caulked teak planked floor that matches the exterior deck camber further connecting the spaces and leading out the large external dining table inset with *Velshedda*’s sail number in a bronze casting (page 74, top).

It was in this space that one of defining features of the yacht’s interior became evident: it’s distressed. This may be – on reflection it is – the first yacht I have seen where the interior is built new then intentionally damaged to make it old. This is, however, no crude procedure and was carried out by Oldenburger (Germany), the very craftsmen who built it. The detail of this extends to acid-washed switch plates (top) and custom cast then distressed metal items. There are even carefully crafted ‘worm holes’ in panels and certain furnitures. Dick Young also specified a careful balance between filled grain and open grain varnish to emphasise the antique feel. Inside the yacht that day – and by then not fully set up inside – there was a near hallucinatory sensation of being in an aged space yet knowing one was on a yacht so new that the Owner has yet to take delivery (right).

There is a larger dining area and salon on the main deck and here there are even some original lamps, although throughout most of the interior fit-out items like rotary Bakelite lamp switches are custom made and ‘dealt with’ to look authentic. The bridge itself is equipped with an engine telegraph – original; inside are Caterpillar electronic engine controls – 21st century. (bottom). These two elements are brought into connection and intentional harmony by a system of belts and pulleys by JFA, which allows Master Lars Loftus to control the modern engines in way formerly used only to notify chiefly of the fact that the ‘old man’ wanted something.

The yacht has substantial volume and is of 560 gt, large for 43-m, and so far into the excess that extra regulation for MCA and class are unavoidable. She is the largest so far for JFA yet they seem to have dealt with the technical complexities and finish level required, by careful choice of sub-contract partners including Vripack, Barillec, Heinen & Hopman, Van Capellen, Aca and ADM. The electrical installation was particularly impressive and the detailing behind switch panels was of a level normally solely (if erroneously) associated with Dutch yards.

The hull volume allows massive technical spaces, a generous engine room and a large lazarette, which will undoubtedly fill with sails and the other accoutrement required when racing a classic J. The lazarette opens up to a swim platform formed by the main deck and bulwark. This is a complicated hydraulic sequence. Around half of the aft deck beam is an articulated hatch to the port side of which is an ingenious stern anchor deployed from the yacht. This first folds up like a ship’s hydraulic hatch cover, then along at the aft bulwark folds right down to form the swim platform. The now absent bulwark opens up the view from the main saloon. Access to the swim platform from the lazarette is through a combination of manually folding steps and a hydraulically lowered but manually dogged watertight hatch.

For’d of the lazarette is the ER and included in that technical space is the MCR in the commercial style with no window, relying rather on screen data from the AM & C system by Barillec. The yacht’s beam is close to constant all the way from midships to the transom and since the technical and lazarette spaces occupy nearly half of the LOA it is evident these are of large volume thus useful spaces. The HVAC and other systems needing cooling water (but not the main engines), use a sweet water system cooled by sea



water in a plate cooling system. The ER's air requirements are handled by an automated system from Heinen and Hopman, which determines air volume requirement based on ambient and ER temperature plus ME rpm; then automatically provides it. Including davits, Quantum zero speed stabiliser, after swim platform and more, the yacht has significant hydraulic requirements handled by clutched PTOs on gensets and MEs on a ring main system. There is an additional swim/boarding platform to Sbd that can be used alone or in combination with a traditional Med side boarding ladder.

Asking if yard, Owner and designer succeeded in creating a authentic companion for an iconic classic is by now redundant, as the resounding 'yes!' is apparent from the story above. This is a work of passion as well as 30 months. The passion to produce an authentic modern classic comes from the Owner but cannot be realised without skill and commitment from designer, yard subcontractors, Owners rep, workers and many more. The quality I observed on this build was much higher than I anticipated; that's not inherent criticism of French or smaller family-run yards (of which JFA is both), rather simply that thus far this detail commitment to near obsessive quality I've rarely seen outside NW Europe, is rarely even there to this extent.

The 'why' of that may be answered by a story Frederic Jaouen told me about meeting the Owner and pitching for this build contract. The Owner asked him what is surely an unusual, yet wholly appropriate question for a yard wanting to win a project of this nature: "Why do you want to build the yacht?" "I am a sailor," Frederic told me, and "I am a boatbuilder, my father was a captain – so, to be given the chance to build the mothership of *Velsheda*? How could anyone like that not want to build the yacht?" He added, "I think maybe the Owner saw that that in my eyes." Whether that's correct or not there is no doubt that *Bystander* stands tall amongst the few yachts that have impressed me most in the last years. *Bystander* too is one that will stand as a testament to the heights to which JFA can soar. Fred also commented, "We now realise we gained good know-how in building a modern classic (*Atao*, a recent S/Y delivery, is of a similar style – see this issue's Fleet Activity News, page 66, for more details on her), and we would like to get another contract in the spirit of *Bystander*. In fact I'm in contact with a client for a large yacht with a similar design philosophy".

Tork Buckley



Photos: Tork Buckley, Bill Munke and B. Stichelbaut/JFA

To contact the author or comment on this article, email [issue86@synfo.com](mailto:issue86@synfo.com) with subject: Bystander