

STIFFENING A CLASSIC DRAGON

Richard Rycroft describes the now legal process of adding floors to elderly Dragons

Almost all the various proposals for stiffening elderly Dragons, such as bulkheads, partial bulkheads, tubular chain plates and aluminium compression tubes from the chain plate area forward to the bottom of the furling gear, can be applied to Dragons of any form of construction.

None of these, however, addressed a structural weakness in the garboard area of classic wooden Dragons. In his article *Rebuilding a Wooden Dragon*, available as a download from the Classics page on the BDA website, Don Street suggested a simple solution which he had used very successfully on his 1937 Johanssen-built *Gypsy*.

The very flat forward sections of the Dragon cause the boat to slam when driving to windward in a chop. Where the boat takes the worst of the pounding, the ribs of a wooden Dragon stop short of the keelson and only one rib in three is attached to the keelson by a floor. This puts an enormous strain on the garboard plank and the seam between it and the keelson.

Don's solution was to laminate additional floors extending for about five plank widths up each side of the boat alongside the unsupported ribs, which he describes as "hanging out in the breeze", and then to bolt the additional floors to the keelson. The method was inspired by the great American designer and boat builder Nathaniel Herreshoff, who always insisted that there be a floor at every frame and that the floor and frame be tied together and tied into the fore keel, stem, deadwood and horn timber.

STIFFEN A GOOD WOODEN DRAGON AND STUFF THE GLASS BOATS...

says Don Street

THAT A GOOD 'turbo-charged' wooden Dragon, given a good three-man crew, is competitive was proved at the Jubilee Regatta where two wooden boats made it into the Gold Division.

White Lady FIN 48 came 19th, *Troika* GBR 348 was 32nd beating hundreds of glassfibre Dragons. Both these Pedersen and Thuesen boats have been professionally re-done to the highest standards and have had buckets of money thrown at them.

In contrast the oldest boat in the competition was the historic *Falner*, a 1936 Johanssen-built winner of the first Gold Cup in 1937. She was purchased in a very run-down state in April 1997 for £500, and was re-done by Donald M Street III in time to sail in the 60th anniversary of

the first Gold Cup.

The job was done on the cheap, by himself (sometimes he would draft in his younger brothers) in a abandoned warehouse.

Jane contributed a spare mast, and Mick Cotter lent him sails. At the end of the regatta, Mick said "Hell he did such a magnificent job on reviving *Falner*, the sails are a gift".

In local racing she has been very competitive. In light and moderate conditions she is just as fast as modern Petticrows (if everything is trimmed right). In heavy weather one large Irishman weighs the same as two skinny Streets.

Let's get some youth in the class – find old wooden Dragons, help out by giving or selling cheaply spars, sails and gear to the young person who is restoring.

The additional floors stiffened up the forward end of *Gypsy* so much that when the Irish helmsman Tony O'Gorman was sailing with Don, and they were slamming into a head sea, he said, "my God Don, you've stiffened her up so much forward she sounds like a glassfibre boat rather than a wooden one, when pounding on these waves."

Shortly after Don's article appeared on the BDA website, the IDA declared the additional floors to be illegal as the official constructional drawing of the wooden Dragon show a floor at every third frame. The decision was reversed at the IDA Annual General Meeting on October 30 2004 as the class rules only stipulate a minimum number of floors and no maximum.

The extra stiffening will probably not make your classic Dragon any faster and may even make her a smidgen slower in a chop, on account of the extra weight in the ends of the boat. It will, however, reduce maintenance in a crucial area of the boat and keep the old girl looking beautiful, as her fore ends should remain as fair as befits a class which has earned the accolade of the 'sailing man's Bugatti'.

Technical Tips

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WHEN YOU ARE sailing on Starboard tack, you do so simply because you wish to go in that direction of the course. My advice, when a boat is coming on Port and cannot cross, is to wave him through and if necessary ease the sheet and dip.

If he tacks, he will go into the same "favoured" direction, and will slow you down; possibly forcing you to tack, in a direction you did not want to go.

You will be surprised how many sailors get carried away with their rights and make this mistake on the racecourse.

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