

Presto, designed and built by R. M. Munroe in 1885. Drawing only 30 inches, she was a wonderful sea boat, and fast.

The *Presto* Type of Centerboarder

The Designer of the Type and Chief Exponent of the Centerboarder Adds to the Discussion

By R. M. MUNROE



IN recent numbers of YACHTING some friends of mine appear in defence of light draft for seagoing sail craft, in answer to the articles of several keel advocates published earlier in the year. As none of the keel articles seem to be based on complete knowledge of the *Presto* type in question, it may be well to give the objectors its fundamentals. I do not claim originality in these; I suspect they were known before my time, and merely forgotten in the race for speed and other odd fancies of the ages.

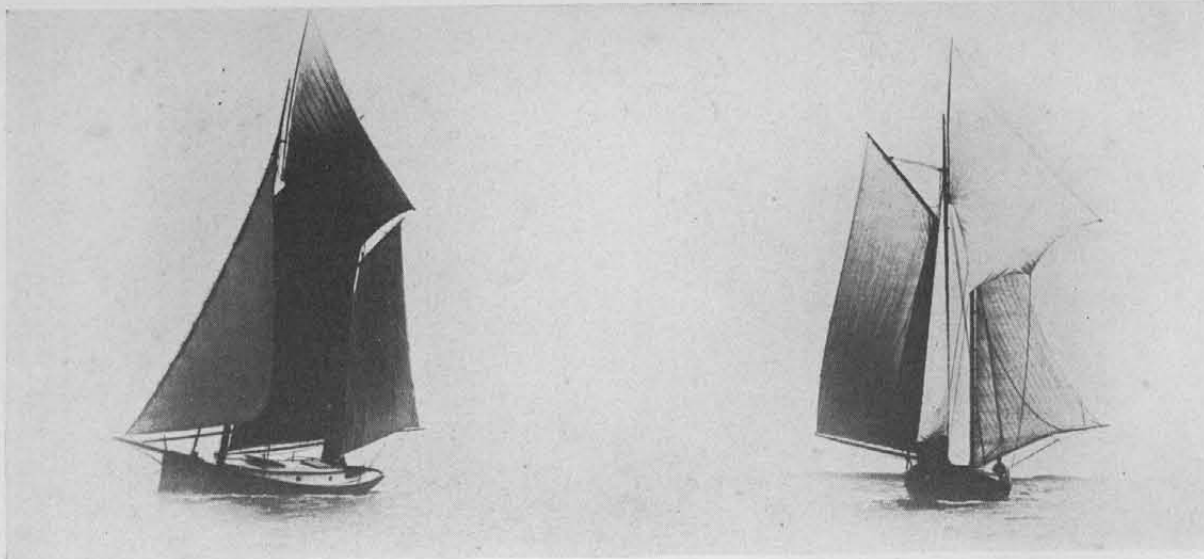
First, a word as to what yachtsmen actually want. Though we are discussing the ability of shoal draft *at sea*, it is not fair to forget that only one in a hundred of us wants to spend weeks or months out of sight of land. The heroics of the deep-sea man have been much overdone, and there is still a tendency to overrate the joys of long voyages. Here, however, let me offer tribute to *Jolie Brise* and her chronicler; he understands the game and tells the best story ever, and Commander Martin, boat and crew are all right, and greatly to be honored. But such trips will never be the pastime of many yachtsmen. Life is too short to miss the many more varied experiences, and the greater tests of skill among bars and breakers, or the comforts of landlocked harbors.

Now as to *Presto*. First and foremost, she is no "skimming dish." This derisive epithet has been applied indiscriminately to all light draft vessels without thought or reason. We admit she was the outcome of the sharpie type,

but this also is little understood and often condemned, whereas it gives today greatest accomplishment for least cost, relatively, of all existing types. This I suspected 45 years ago at Key West, in the first half-hour after launching a 30-foot sharpie from the deck of a Mallory liner. A few days later we had a decisive test in a hard norther up the Reef, when my chartered freight schooner gleefully offered me a tow line and I refused it. After 21 miles dead to windward we waited 75 minutes for the schooner to catch up, and I capitulated to the sharpie type with little reservation.

Six sharpies were eventually built for use on Biscayne Bay and in the Straits, by myself and friends. They followed conventional New Haven lines, but with about ten per cent additional depth to ensure greater buoyancy at extreme angles of heel. None of them was ever capsized to my knowledge. One of them, *Egret*, a double-ender, served me for several years without mishap as dispatch-boat between Biscayne Bay and Jupiter telegraph station, via the Gulf Stream, blow high or blow low, often making the trip comfortably when no other boat would attempt either the Stream or the surf in the shoal inlets.

The sharpie hull came into general use on the east coast of Florida for freighting. Several of them hailed from Lake Worth and ran regularly to Jacksonville in the days before the railroad. The *Bessie B.*, for example, will be remembered by all early visitors to Palm Beach — a schooner-rigged sharpie of about 50 feet, belonging to the Brelsford brothers. She ran for many years, usually over-



Presto, close hauled and before the wind, showing the topsail evolved by the designer.

loaded, and rode out several hurricanes in the Gulf Stream, reaching port with cargo intact. Her repeated triumphs over what were unquestionably the extreme of severe conditions finally convinced me that a very shoal, flat-bottomed boat could be very able.

But the slap and pound of sharpies in a head sea, or at anchor, was an annoyance, and the V-bottom was well and favorably known. So after a close study of the causes for so much extreme stability and such perfect handling in the sharpies, and in the belief that designers had overlooked some of the basic points, I was led to make a try for greater stability. Throwing aside the old axioms that with light draft one must have more beam, I did the opposite, lessening the beam at deck, and still more at waterline, but adding a little dead-rise and increasing the depth of hull and bilges to give ample displacement and righting moment. Thus, with slightly rounded bilges and clean entrance and clearance, we arrived at *Presto*.

She was launched (1885) with spars in place but no ballast. Her builder stepped on her rail amidships and, his 200-lb. weight heeling her almost to the plank sheer, he at once condemned her. Next day I ballasted her nearly to her designed waterline, rigged her, and went to see a Cup race off Sandy Hook, where in a fresh breeze she handled perfectly and showed no sign of tenderness. She carried $4\frac{1}{2}$ tons of iron inside, and was tried out with cockpit temporarily decked over; but she never heeled enough to take water over the cockpit rail in the six years that I sailed her from Cape Cod to the Gulf of Mexico, in all kinds of sea and weather.

She was 41' o.a., 35'6" waterline, 10' 6" beam on deck, 9' 1" at waterline, 4' 3" depth amidships, 1" to 1' dead-rise amidships, 30" draft (greatest amidships) with 8" at forefoot. Her keel was 12" wide through length of centerboard, and 1½" deep below garboard, rockered from forefoot to bottom of transom, 1' 6" above w. l., with no deadwood aft. She was steered with the ordinary sharpie drop-rudder, balanced, 4' 6" x 1' 9", rounded at ends, with a 3' 6" iron tiller, and handled well, though if the helmsman were careless she could be swung so quickly as to make standing on deck, fore or aft, rather precarious. We later found a better base for docking desirable, and bolted on a skeg running from nothing at after end of centerboard case to within a foot of the rudder, with its lower corner well rounded up. The centerboard was 11' x 4', 10' 9" from face of stem.

She was ketch rigged, mainmast 36' high from deck, 8" diameter at deck; mizzenmast 29' 6" high, 5½" diam.; bowsprit outboard 9'. There were no standing shrouds,

but backstay runners, with purchases when needed. The topsail yard measured 20', sprit 19'. Sail area: jib, 200.65 sq. ft., mainsail 412.47, mizzen 266.25, topsail 274 sq. ft. Total S. A. 1159.94 effective before the wind; 1054.12 by the wind.

Not long after her trial trip I invited several friends to see another international race. The day came in with a rainy southeaster and, none of my guests appearing, I started in *Presto* under full sail, with a small boy for crew, and worked out across the bar to Gedney's Channel sea buoy, with wind and sea increasing all the time. We had seen the yacht fleet lying in the Horsehoe with no sign of getting under way, and I was about squaring off for home when a large tug with the N. Y. Y. C. burgee came out by the Hook and headed our way. We hove to and waited, still under full sail and quite comfortable, while the tug was laboring hard, completely disappearing in clouds of spray every few seconds. As she approached I drew away the jib, and passed close aboard. There was no one on deck, but abreast of us a pilot-house window was dropped a bit and someone waved a handkerchief. She soon turned and ran for the Hook, and we followed.

Next morning I had a note from my old friend Louis Bayard, then secretary of the Seawanhaka Corinthian Y. C., saying: "I waved to you from the *Britannia* yesterday outside the bar. You were apparently enjoying a pleasant sail; it was quite the contrary aboard the tug. A. Cary Smith, Phil Ellsworth, and others on board, were much interested in the performance of *Presto*, and Smith laid a wager that I was mistaken in the 30" draft and other dimensions I gave him, saying no such craft could possibly carry her sail and make such good weather of it. When can you lay her on the beach and let us measure her?" I made the appointment, they all came, and after a pleasant discussion the bet was paid to Bayard.

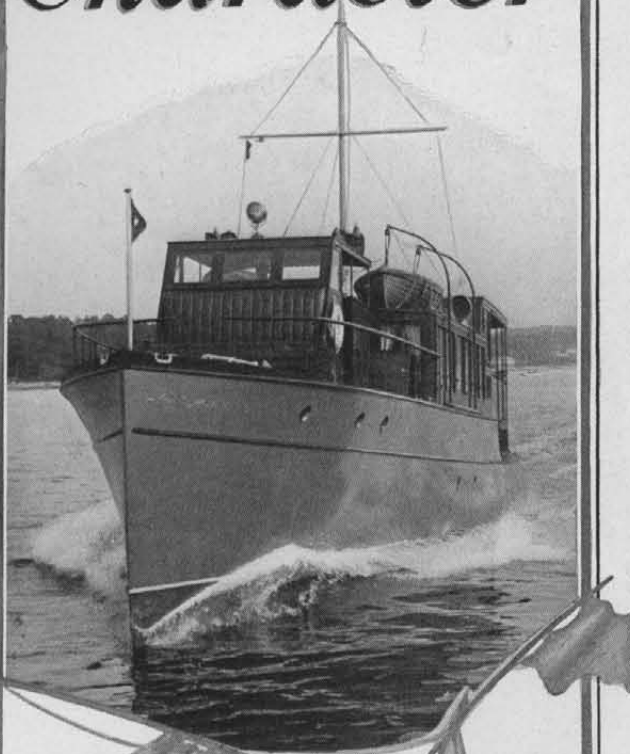
She had many adventures in my hands in the next six years, and was one of the most wholesome and satisfactory boats I ever owned. Eventually she was sold into the Southern Y. C., at New Orleans, and for many years was a favorite there. I used to get frequent affectionate letters from her new owner, singing her praises and thanking me for designing her!

From my experiences in sharpies and my preliminary figures on *Presto*, I had no expectation of racing windward speed. I knew it could not be embodied in my ideal cruiser, so just dismissed the point. All the remaining good qualities, most essential from the standpoint of practical experience, *Presto* had. So one alteration only suggested

(Continued on page 86)



Character



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The Presto Type of Centerboarder

(Continued from page 40)

itself for her successor — a little more beam, to give, if possible, better footing close-hauled; this it did to a remarkable degree in *Micco*, *Wabun* and *Carib*.

Increase of beam, I knew, had to be treated gingerly, for the ratio between beam, ballast and sail-area had to be kept, or the result would be a failure — and I am glad to say that this never happened in my experience. Some critic will exclaim: "But, if your boats have the stability you claim, they must roll out!" — a dreadful caper, from the racing man's point of view. They certainly do, I admit, to some extent, then wiggle the wind partly out of their sails, right with no apparent effort, and go on. If deck openings are closed, nothing happens, and we are thankful to be able to spill the wind and water in that simple manner.

They never cut up these shines, however, except under the most adverse circumstances: Personally, I've never seen one of my craft doing these stunts except when carrying sail out of all reason, with other craft snugged down to the last rag. You will ask why they should ever be so ill-treated. Well, with plenty of room and a willing crew, we do sometimes just want to see what will happen! One such occasion was on the Atlantic Y. C. cruise in the Sound in 1892, as told by Mr. Gilpin in August YACHTING. There was fun in this carrying on, and not much danger to a boat that had just made a record run, not yet beaten, from Cape Florida to Sandy Hook, of 6 days 12 hours, and that against a northerly gale from Barnegat to the Hook. This trip was described in the Rudder, in 1896.

Micco first distinguished herself on the way south, in a run before a fierce norther from Cape Canaveral to Jupiter, 105 nautical miles, in ten hours. Four hours of this was under reefed trysail against a current of $1\frac{1}{2}$ knots or more, as we had to keep well off in the Stream on account of no visibility and the difficulty of getting soundings, and we were ten miles out at Jupiter. There was no trouble whatever steering, though a new hand at change of watch let one sea board us over the quarter. At 6 A.M. we passed a Mallory liner hove to, and Captain Evans told me afterward he had been in that position all night. When I told him that I had had over two hours of sound sleep, his language was dreadful.

Wabun followed, smaller, broader, shoaler and faster to windward; less of a sea-boat on paper, and not intended for deep-water cruises, yet she has knocked about the Straits and the coast to Cape Cod, with many trips to the Bahamas and Cuba, for 34 years, and never played a trick yet. Little *Utilis* was spoken of in August; I will only add that I crossed the Stream once in her in a north-easter, under whole sail, wing-and-wing, without a jibe, in less than five hours, and behind Cape Florida found the new steamer *Miami*, bound for Nassau, waiting for weather.

In 1901 came an opportunity to build a yacht, unrestricted by fishing or draft requirements, for A. S. Haigh of the Royal Thames Y. C., for use in Bahaman and Caribbean waters. This was the original *Carib*, and her lines were a trifle finer, but draft only $3\frac{1}{2}'$, with o.a. length of 50'. She, too, was mentioned in August, and I add that she cruised as intended, and lost her mainmast in a violent squall, at night, off Jamaica, set up a jury rig and made Santiago, where they got a yellow pine spar. This, the only mishap in 25 years, served at least to show that she had stability. Her owner was so impressed with her that he made preparations for a voyage to Europe, which circumstances finally prevented. During her subsequent summers at moorings off Ocean Grove, as described, she spent the early springs off Hatteras, catching the first run of school fish. Is any further evidence needed as to seaworthiness?



*“As idle as a painted ship
upon a painted ocean”*

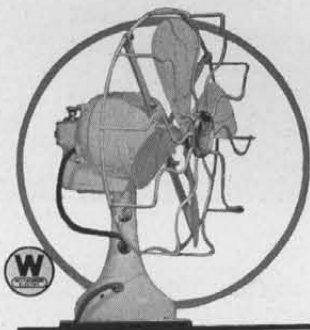
THE ancient mariner whistled for a breeze—he depended on sails alone for propulsion. Caught in the doldrums under a tropical sun was no fun above decks or below.

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I will mention one more, and then rest the case. *Kona*, built for one of the best-known rod fishermen in the country, F. G. Griswold, of New York, was a ketch, 71' o.a., 4' draft. She was sailed by Captain Thomas Dahlberg, a deep-water sailor who took command of her with many doubts of her draft, but came to have implicit confidence in her. She weathered Cape Sable, N.S., eight times, and Cape Sable, Fla., many more; she rounded Cape San Antonio, Cuba, 14 times, and voyaged from New York to Key West 11 times. She covered 38,917 sea miles, with but two minor mishaps, each time parting a shroud and then either losing or springing a spar. Was *Kona* unstable all these eight years of open sea? We guess not.

Thirty-five years ago on a steamer bound for New York a gray haired sailor-like man was a fellow-passenger with me. His face attracted me greatly, and I found he was an old British salt, on his way home to England. “Yes,” said he, “until a few years ago, when I was run out of the trade by steam, I had been in sail from cabin boy up, carrying fruit to British ports. And it was nothing but drive, drive, and more drive, to make a living. Did I hear you say something about Yankee, or centerboard, boats in the fruit trade?”

“Why, yes,” I answered, “I’ve known a number of them. What do you think of them?” Naturally expecting an unfavorable blast.

“Bless your soul, I made a number of voyages in one of those packets, and never before enjoyed so much comfort in a fruiter, though off Hatteras, in early spring, it was no joke. But when we had to heave-to, which was a rare thing, we got rest and comfort aplenty, for she was as dry and easy as possible.”

“Why was that, superior model?”

“Well, yes, in a way. She was a light-draft centerboarder, and with that board hauled ’most up she made the most beautiful slick to windward, hove to, you ever saw. Yet her sail-carrying power was fully equal, I think, to our deep British craft, and she was quicker and more buoyant in dodging the bad ’uns. Anyway, I’m for those Yankee ships, and if I was younger I would own one.”

Mention of sail-carrying brings up one more point. It is often said that the deep craft is safer because of her ability to carry sail longer and claw out to windward. In my experience the *Presto* boats will keep on going to windward as long as anything afloat of their size. But, of course, there comes a point as the wind grows when both types, if embayed, will be blown ashore; and then what? The Atlantic coast is nine-tenths sand beach. In a *Presto* boat on the sand no one need be greatly alarmed, for with sail enough on her as she grounds to ensure heeling in-shore, the chances are that you will lose neither life nor property. If it is high water, turn in and get some sleep; otherwise it will be disagreeable for a time, but with little danger. The slight projection of keel is small hindrance to working broadside up the beach, or across a shoal into deep water. The rudder, if properly designed, will rarely be damaged, and if so, it is a minor matter.

A former commodore of one of our yacht clubs was driven ashore once on what is now Miami Beach. The yacht in this case was an ordinary craft of some four feet draft, without any of the refinements mentioned as conducive to luxurious wrecking, but he was lucky in striking at high-water, and in heeling shoreward. For the next fortnight, until another run of high tides, he made himself and his friends very comfortable, with extra awnings, and good fishing close at hand.

In deep water, excessive keel, or grip of any sort, is often a large factor in the ordinary capsizes. It is still more deadly in the confused cross seas of a shifting gale. In fine, while the deep, heavily ballasted keel is the obvious and easy way to get stability, I believe that it involves grave weaknesses, almost all of which are avoided by proper design in a shoaler, lighter, centerboard craft.