

The "Thirties" practically never reefed in a race, no matter how hard it might blow

E. Lavick

CLASS WILL TELL

The New York Yacht Club "Thirties" Celebrate Another Anniversary

By SAM C. SLAUGHTER



THIRTY-FIVE years ago this month, that is, on November 16th, 1904, three well-known yachting enthusiasts leaned back in their chairs in the New York Yacht Club and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. After weeks of meetings and negotiations, they had just signed a contract with the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company for the construction of a new one-design racing class to be known as the New York Yacht Club Thirty-Foot Class.

For some time, race-minded members of the New York Yacht Club had been groping for an acceptable one-design boat smaller than the big sloops, such as *Mineola*, *Virginia*, *Yankee* and *Rainbow* — over 100 feet long. They visualized a class not restricted to a small number by reason of great cost and excessive operating expense.

Newbury Lawton, Addison G. Hanan and William Butler Duncan, Jr., were named to a committee to select and purchase a minimum of eight "wholesome, seaworthy craft, free from freak features . . . about 30 foot water line, short overhangs, moderate beam and draft . . . cabin house . . . complete but simple outfit for cruising . . . sail area about 1000 square feet."

Five prominent N.Y.Y.C. members had signed up and the committee guaranteed three more buyers. Enthusiasm grew, however, and by February, 1905, eighteen "Thirties" had been ordered and were commissioned that spring. The ownership list included names to conjure with, men then famous in yachting, finance and society: A. H. and J. W. Alker, C. O'Donnell Iselin, Cord Meyer, W. D. Guthrie, August Belmont, W. Butler Duncan, Jr., Henry F. Lippitt, Oliver Harriman, Philip H. and George A. Ade, Amos Tuck

French, Lyman Delano, George M. Pynchon, Howard Willets, Stuyvesant Wainwright, Newbury D. Lawton, A. G. and H. W. Hanan, Henry L. Maxwell, and John Murray Mitchell.

Little did these men know what vital history this class would write nor, indeed, could they more than hope for a satisfactory craft. Specifications were meager, lines a mystery and models non-existent. The magazine *Outing*, for August, 1901, stated, ". . . with the advent of Mr. Herreshoff into the designing field, began a system of secrecy which has since made it impossible to get all the measurements of competing yachts."

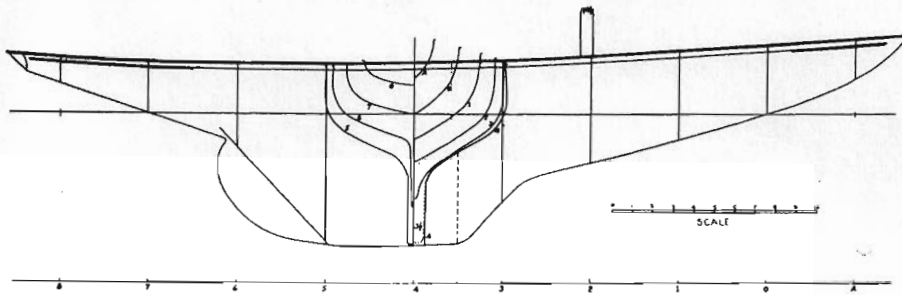
Every man of this group had bought a boat on faith, a cabin or cruising racer of

"Length over all,	43' 6";
Water line, not less than	30' 0";
Beam,	8' 10";
Draft,	6' 3".

"Framing, best white oak; fastenings, bronze and copper; planking, yellow pine, to be double below the turn of the bilge to sheerstrake, the inner thickness to be of cypress. Deck, selected white pine, canvas covered. Mahogany raised cabin house; outside lead ballast; sloop rigged."

Those brief specifications were all. How different from today when owners pore over blue prints, caress models, gloat over proposed rigs and, indeed, even argue with their architects about important phases of design.

"Nat" Herreshoff was then, however, the Stradivarius of yachting and with no less caution hid the secret of his design, his materials and his method of blending them into a perfect thing. His was the master's hand and one's right to question was confined entirely to results, to performance.



Herreshoff never gave out the lines of the "Thirties." These were taken off "Phryne" by John Hyslop when he was the measurer of the Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club

Today, naval architecture is more a matter of calculation than of inspiration. Now, too, yachting periodicals and semi-technical books provide an easy education for those interested enough to read. Plans and specifications of new craft are widely publicized. Blind faith has bowed to intelligent consultation.

The famous Nat wrote at this time: "... and I am well pleased with it (the design) as I have not had the restraint of getting the biggest boat possible for the W.L. length." On January 5th, 1905, the first "Thirty" had her trial spin and Nat again wrote: "... from the feeling of this boat today, I am quite sure the boats will prove to be good sailers, in light airs at least."

April 14th saw the last "Thirty" finished and, on April 30th, Nat once more wrote: "We have six of the boats afloat and four completely rigged. Three will sail away tomorrow."

Thus was a new class born.

The 1905 racing season soon began and 51 races were sailed by the class before the boats were laid up for the winter. Never were all 18 "Thirties" starters in the same race but records do show 15 competitors. *Adelaide*, *Alera*, *Dahinda*, *Nautilus* and *Phryne* were constant opponents and each was in turn successful. Rivalry was keen and interest in the class was intense as the fame of the new boats spread.

The N.Y.Y.C. held nine regattas on the Sound that season, five of them exclusively for the benefit of the "Thirties." Some of the new boats went on the annual cruise and returned with honors. *Dahinda* won the Glen Cove to Morris Cove Commodore's Cup against 22 sloops of all classes; *Cara Mia*, the New London to Newport Commodore's Cup against 21 sloops; and *Nautilus*, the Rear Commodore's Cup. (There were two Commodore's Cups that year.) *Cara Mia* also won the Navy Challenge Cup against 18 sloops, as well as the season's Sound championship. Today, as *Old Timer*, No. 14, owned by H. A. Calahan, she can be seen each weekend sailing the western Sound with all the speed and grace of a youngster.

The first season brought out but one fault in the design — a severe weather helm — and during the winter of 1905-6 bowsprits were lengthened from 21 to 39 inches and larger jibs provided. Throughout the years, this rig remains unchanged and N.Y. "Thirties" today are essentially the same as they were in 1906.

In the ten years following, many classes flashed into prominence and faded from the picture while the "Thirties" continued their successful racing career. The Q Class, the larger sloop classes, Sound Schooners, etc., had their innings but none could maintain the interest necessary for successful class competition. With 1917, racing interest bowed to a World War and not until five years later did Sound racing again become active and with it the "Thirties" once more claimed high honors in regattas, in series and on cruises, against more modern craft.

Seven years after the class was so successfully launched,

a group of N.Y.Y.C. members met to discuss plans for a larger one-design class that was to be a compromise between the big sloops, such as *Istalena*, and the comparatively small N.Y. "Thirties." As a result, nine N.Y.Y.C. "Fifties" were designed and built by Herreshoff and launched in 1913. These beautiful yachts, too, were most successful, but gradually rigs were changed and racing interest waned until, in 1926, thirteen years later, they ceased to exist as a separate racing class. Until recently, some "Fifties" were still racing on Long Island Sound with the M Class.

Thirteen Herreshoff N.Y. "Forties," built three years after the "Fifties," had an even shorter racing career and eleven years later faded from class competition on the Sound.

Even the advent of these newer large yachts could not dim the luster of the old New York Thirty-Foot Class and, strangely enough, 1927 proved to be one of its most interesting and successful seasons. It is significant that, after 22 years of racing, a class should still inspire such widespread interest and keen competition.

That season, Gherardi Davis' *Alice*, brilliantly sailed by Sherman Hoyt, won the Rear Commodore's Cup for sloops on the run from Vineyard Haven to Newport and the Vice Commodore's Cup for sloops on the run from Huntington to New London in a fresh breeze. The season series was won by *Minz*, owned and sailed by W. C. Atwater.

As the boats got older and continued hard driving began to take its inevitable toll, all the active racing "Thirties" were strengthened by the lengthening of mast steps, by heavier partners, tie rods forward of mast from deck to mast step, bronze straps under the forefoot and steel reinforcement on frames under the mast step. Some were refastened a few years ago and many added jigs to jib sheets and backstays. Recently, a "Thirty" was rebuilt below into quite a modern snug little cruiser, with four comfortable bunks, hanging locker, storage lockers and adequate toilet and galley facilities.

Modernization of rig became a moot question among "Thirty" owners and, in 1927, J. P. Morgan's *Phryne* was equipped with a Marconi rig. While this was, in a measure, an experimental job using an extra spar from Mr. Morgan's "Q" boat *Grayling*, still, it gave promise of better performance and obviously improved the boat's appearance. Not eligible for class competition, *Phryne* was withdrawn from the racing.

Obviously, a Marconi main and cut down jib, a reduction in sail area to about 900 square feet, with inboard boom and permanent backstay, bowsprit removed, hollow spars and a properly designed Genoa would make a "Thirty" a pretty smart looking modern craft. However, the expense involved (estimated at \$2500) was out of line with the market value of these boats.

In 1914, Frank B. Draper rigged *Dahinda*, No. 6, as a yawl. Later sold to Bobby Teller and renamed *Playmate*, she proved her speed in many long distance races, winning the

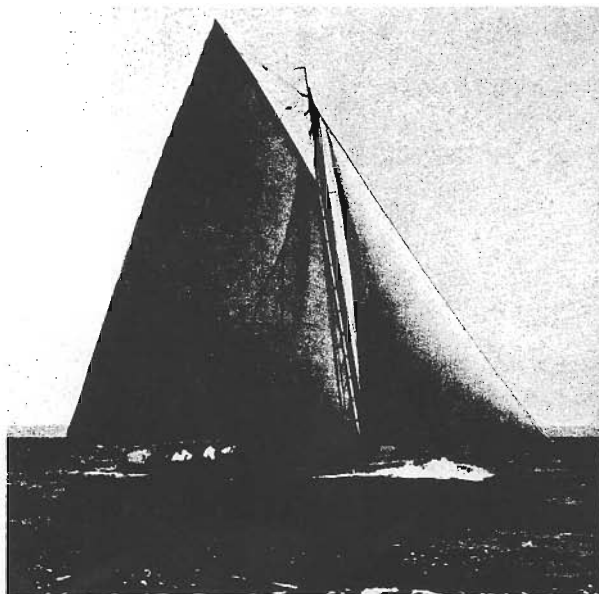
N.Y.A.C. Block Island Race in 1930 and beating *Dorado* by seconds. *Playmate* also won the Bayside Block Island Race and the City Island Cornfield Race against strong competition. Another rig alteration of note was that of the *Minx*, No. 12, then owned by A. Freeman Gray, who writes:

"In reply to yours of March 22nd, I would advise that in 1933-4, when I owned the *Minx*, I was in need of a new mainsail. I determined to remove the bowsprit and reduce the mainsail area to correspond, with special emphasis on reducing the main boom overhang. I took the problem up with a prominent sailmaker and he figured out the center of effort of the mainsail and reduced the sail 4 feet on the boom, 1 foot on the gaff and 1½ feet on the hoist. The reduced mainsail area is 670 square feet and the reduced jib area is 227 square feet, a total of 897 square feet against the full rig of approximately 1100 square feet. With the reduced rig, my 'Thirty' handled better than she ever did with the full rig. . . . As the wind velocity increased, the *Minx* was not only equal to but had the edge on the full rig."

Three "Thirties" have had auxiliaries successfully installed although they were thereby eliminated from the class racing. *Playmate*, No. 6; *Minx*, No. 12; *Atair*, No. 3; all have off-center installations. "Thirties" drive easily and even a small two-cylinder "kicker" gives about five knots.

Although not essentially cruising boats, the "Thirties" have earned a reputation of being good "weather" boats. In spite of excessive canvas and relatively narrow beam, the "Thirties," with 8800 pounds of lead on the keel, have earned the reputation: "They never reef." Indeed, many of the more recent mainsails lack any provision for reefing. They have repeatedly sailed around Cape Cod. *Lena* sailed from the Canal to Isleboro on the 1924 cruise and three "Thirties" raced from Vineyard Haven to Marblehead in 1928.

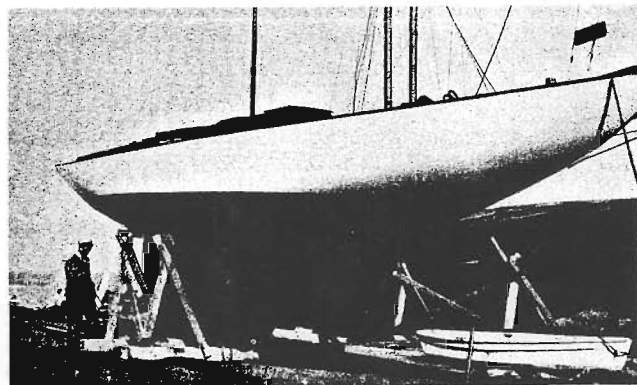
Perhaps the outstanding speed record was made by Sam Pirie's *Oriole* in 1924 when she sailed from Mattapoisett to Hempstead Harbor, a run of 158 miles, in 22½ hours. She carried a north and northeast wind, enabling her to sail the entire stretch on the starboard tack. She made just about the maximum theoretical speed, *i.e.*, the square root of the water line times 1.35, possible only under best conditions.



E. Levick



They were grand sea boats and kept going in a slop. Below, one of them hauled out recently. Her sheer line shows no sign of unfairness after all these years. Lower left, built in the days of the gaff rig, the New York "Thirties" carried more than 1100 square feet of sail



More than any other class, the "Thirties" have been the training ships of Long Island Sound. Many of today's outstanding skippers got their schooling in one of these grand old boats. It was good experience, too, since a "Thirty," while small enough to be a "personal" craft, is, because of her big spread of canvas, a boat that calls for efficient "crewing" if one hopes to make any showing against her sisters. Photo-finishes have been commonplace; seconds always counted in a "Thirty" race. The boats were so nearly alike that the helmsman and the crew were nearly always the margin of victory.

Most remarkable, perhaps, is the fact that, in 1937, 32 years after they were launched, in the American Yacht Club run from Scotch Caps to Port Jefferson, *The New York Times* reported: ". . . None of the bigger boats in that class

(Continued on page 107)



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ring bolt. With the halliard on the anchor windlass, we pumped away. It came up slowly at first but, once started, we had the bow above the surface in a jiffy. We shoved the sand out of the bow, hooked the main throat halliard on the stern of the lighter, hove her up, shoved and bailed her out and, tying her astern, we called it a day.

Monday morning, we finished loading ballast, taking care not to overload the lighter this time. By mid-afternoon we had our papers and at six we were winging out of the harbor for home with a strong breeze on our beam. We had the devil's own time all the way to Barbados. It blew hard enough to make us douse the foresail but, as soon as we got to leeward of Guadeloupe, the wind lightened, so that to make headway it was necessary to set it again. Once out of the island's lee, the wind swooped down

with redoubled fury so off again came the foresail. Dominica's mountains drained us of wind once more, so up went the foresail, only to go down again at the southern tip. This became rather a monotonous procedure after several islands had been passed. But, sailing light as we were, Lew did not want to take her out into the full breast of it to windward of the islands so there was no rest for the weary crew. By the time we rounded Martinique and slanted up for Barbados, I was ready to drop from exhaustion.

At eight o'clock Wednesday night, we sighted the light on the northern tip of Barbados. We slipped quietly into Carlisle Bay at 1:00 a.m. and dropped anchor inshore of the steamer *Aquiltania*, a huge, thousand-eyed monster, ablaze with life and music, a symbol of the life to which I was returning with so heavy a heart.

Class Will Tell

(Continued from page 45)

could save her time over two old Thirty-footers, Sam Pirie's *Oriole* and Fred Woodworth's *Variant*. . . . *Oriole* finally slipping across the line less than a minute ahead of *Variant*. Eleven boats made up the class."

Repeated attempts of N.Y.Y.C. members to find a replacement craft for New York "Thirties" had met with scant success in 1913. Obviously, the "Fifty" of that year was a great deal more boat and really not in any sense a logical successor. Further, a fleet of but nine boats permits few withdrawals if it is to continue as a ranking racing class. The thirteen New York "Forties" built three years later were also considerably bigger and not enough of an improvement on the "Thirties," carrying, as they did, the same gaff rig. Their excessive beam, only one inch less than that of the "Fifties," made them wonderfully comfortable, able craft but they had difficulty in saving their time against the "Thirties."

It was not until 1935, when most of the "Thirties" had either been shipped to other waters or become the property of skippers not members of the N.Y.Y.C., that a successful move was made to build a new one-design class that, in both size and general design — modernized, of course — would take their place.

After negotiations, Sparkman & Stephens were selected to design the N.Y.Y.C. "Thirty-Twos" and Nevins was given a contract for twenty boats. Many of the most famous names in yachting were original purchasers and, in the spring of 1936, the fleet started to write a new page in history. It may prove as brilliant as the "Thirty" history but can it be as sustained?

Whether a strict one-design or

restricted class does the most for the sport is, and probably always will be, a debatable question. Both have their vehement proponents and supporters. The one-design unquestionably develops sailormen as it puts a premium on skillful handling. Obviously, however, it discourages development by prohibiting innovations in hull design or sail plan. On the other hand, it assures an owner against rapid obsolescence of his craft by the construction of newer and faster boats of the same rating. The whole argument really becomes a question of which is the more important, a contest of skill between sailors or a contest of skill between designers.

A marvelous record, considering the countless hours of relentless competition, cruising and hard driving offshore over a period of thirty years, lies in the fact that I can find no single instance of any major disaster in connection with a N.Y. "Thirty." Many a mast has gone overboard under some non-compromising skipper; many a keel bears the marks of chance-taking navigators; a "Thirty" was once struck by lightning; but never, in the memory of the older owners, has an accident in the class resulted in serious consequences.

Strange things have taken place, too, in the ownership and naming of "Thirties" in a score and a half years of racing. Number 13, originally *Minx*, discarded the name in favor of *Phantom*, while No. 12, originally *Neola II*, became *Minx*. J. Rogers Maxwell sold *Phryne* to C. N. Wetmore, bought her back and later resold her to Wetmore. He, in turn, sold her to Commodore J. P. Morgan who raced her successfully for years, sold her to George Nichols and then repurchased her

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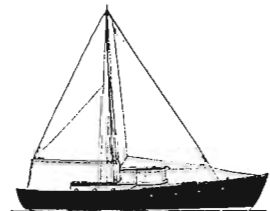
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from M.V.B. Wilcoxson. Mr. Morgan later sold her to Dr. Teusler, of Tokio. Only four "Thirties" have retained their original names through the years: *Alera*, No. 1; *Linnet*, No. 10; *Oriole*, No. 11; *Banzai*, No. 15.

The "Thirties" are no longer considered fast as modern boats go although in light airs they frequently beat the "Thirty-twos" and other larger craft. And with their narrow beam and insufficient headroom, they are not to be compared with modern racing-cruisers. However, thanks to their builder and to watchful owners, they are still seaworthy and able to go out under full sail and "take it." Some of them are today seemingly as staunch and tight as the day they were launched. This is a tribute, indeed, to scrupulous care and intelligent ownership.

The death of Sam Pirie, last summer, robbed the class of its staunchest supporter. Pirie died on the pier at Newport after a day at the helm of his *Oriole* in the N.Y.C. cruise. For 15 years, he had been an indomitable competitor and his *Oriole* had won the class honors consistently during the past few seasons.

The 1939 season, however, saw renewed interest and increased activity in the class. Edmund Lang's *Banzai* won the season championship against *Variant*, *Alera* and *Phantom* as regular starters, with *Old Timer*, *Oriole* and *Lena* occasionally adding to the fleet. Ten "Thirties," including *Atair*, *Nautilus* and *Interlude*, were in commission on the western Sound and some took part in racing distance races. There were four "Thirties" in the Seawanhaka-Corinthian Stratford Shoals over-night race.

A record of present ownership follows:

Alera, No. 1, built for A. H. and J. W. Alker. Now owned by S. C. Slaughter, Larchmont Yacht Club. Present name *Alera*.

Ibis, No. 2, built for C. O'Donnell Iselin. Now owned by Lyman H. Smith, Orienta Yacht Club. Present name *Ione*.

Atair, No. 3, built for Cord Meyer (George C. and J. Edward Meyer). Now owned by H. C. Welti, Riverside Yacht Club. Present name *Atair*.

Maid of Meudon, No. 4, built for W. D. Guthrie. Now owned by A. S. Ruben, Stuyvesant Yacht Club. Present name *Interlude*.

Pintail, No. 5, built for August Belmont (August Belmont, Jr.). Now owned by Harry O. Ravis, New Rochelle Yacht Club. Present name *Lena*.

Dahinda, No. 6, built for W. Butler Duncan, Jr. Now owned by Ephraim E. Sanders, Portland, Me. Present name *Playmate*.

Tabasco, No. 7, built for Henry F. Lippitt. Now owned by Gherardi Davis, New York Yacht Club. Present name *Alice*.

Carlita, No. 8, built for Oliver Harriman. Now owned by J. W. Robson, Scituate Yacht Club. Present name *Variant*.

Adelaide II, No. 9, built for Philip

H. and George A. Adee. Now owned by J. M. Odenback, Rochester Yacht Club. Present name *Amorita*.

Linnet, No. 10, built for Amos French. Now owned by Mrs. C. Talcott and moored at the Ch Yacht Club, Chester, Nova Sc. Present name *Linnet*.

Oriole, No. 11, built for Ly Delano. Now owned by H. M. O City Island Yacht Club. Present name *Oriole*.

Neola II, No. 12, built for G. M. Pynchon. Now owned by Wunsch, Bay View Yacht Club Detroit. Present name *Minz*.

Minz, No. 13, built for Ho Willets. Now owned by Dr. G. St. City Island Yacht Club. Present name *Phantom*.

Cara Mia, No. 14, built for Stuart Wainwright. Now owned by H. A. Calahan, New York Yacht Club. Present name *Old Timer*.

Banzai, No. 15, built for New D. Lawton. Now owned by Ed Lang, New York Yacht Club. Present name *Banzai*.

Nautilus, No. 16, built for and H. W. Hanan. Now owned by A. R. Crawford, Douglaston, Present name *Nautilus*.

Phryne, No. 17, built for Hen Maxwell. Now owned by Dr. Te of Tokio, Japan. Present name *Phryne*.

Anemone II, No. 18, built for Murray Mitchell. Now owned by J. A. Williamson of the Young Yacht Club and shipped to Ontario in 1932. Present name *Moon*. Mr. Williamson wrote recently:

"We have had a wealth of fun good sailing on Lake Ontario; had the pleasure of six years of coping a number of sailors and a *Blue Moon*, with old canvas and generally inexperienced crews (of the writer and one other), I pete favorably with Eight-M 'Ps,' Ten-Metres, N. Y. '50s,' and in many cases defeating her own or saving time on boats."

No original buyer still owned "Thirty" and only two, Ed Lang and Gherardi Davis, are war owners. Some are no longer living, others have ceased yachting activities while others, newer and more modern craft, I however, will deny his affection and deep respect for the class.

Obviously, much of the success the Thirty-Foot Class was due to the superb character of the boat whose intense interest and maintenance unquestionably benefited both the fleet's racing and its physical life.

Certainly, *Class Will Tell*, this grand old class of 30-footers told an entire yachting world a wonderful tale of inspired choice materials, faultless craftsmanship and outstanding ownership. It would take such a combination to write the marvelous record which distinguishes the "Thirties."

NOTE: The writer is indebted to Gherardi Davis for many of the facts contained in this article.