

## FORMING THE FIRST ETHELLES FLEET

MEMORIES ARE THE BEDROCK OF TRADITIONS by Louis Piana U.S. Fleet 1 member

Traditions are the incentive that fortify our sailing sport and build emulation and competition for greater achievements. So ...I have an interesting story to tell...

In November 1967 I telephoned Sandy Waters and asked if he could collect my third place trophy for the past racing season in Ensigns at the annual dinner of the Long Island Sound Yacht Racing Association at the New York Yacht Club. Sandy finished in second place that year behind George Brazil.

Sandy and I chatted a bit and he told me that he was interested in a new class of racing boats. that a certain naval architect by the name of Skip Etchells was trying to organize. Although I had already sent a down payment to the Groves Shipyard in Marblehead for a new fibreglass 210 sloop, a popular racing class on Long Island Sound, I was intrigued by Sandy Waters' comments. After more questions he said that Skip Etchells and a few area skippers had agreed to meet in three days at the house of George Cane to discuss the new boat.

When I arrived, the living room of George Cane's home was already crowded with 16 men. I was handed a simple sheet with the outlines of the boat they were considering. I sat in a corner, studied the drawing, and it appeared that I was looking at a very elegant boat with a sophisticated, slim design, but with a relatively small sail plan. In Long Island Sound I was used to looking at the Shields, the IODs, and the 210s, which appeared more canvassed.

On the other hand I remembered reading in a sailing magazine a couple of articles about a boat designed and raced by Etchells in two regattas organized by the IYRU in Germany, which absolutely flattened all competitors by winning more than 82 percent of all races! Looking around that room I recognized only four skippers; everybody else was a stranger to me. That included Skip Etchells whom I had never met personally before, but whose exploits as a builder of fast Lightnings and Star boats were well known to me. I started racing in Lightnings, and the best in the Long Island Sound area were young skippers like Bizzy Monte-Sano and Frank Hibberd in Etchells-built boats. Also I remembered that Bill Cox had won the Lightning Worlds in a famous Etchells boat - Zig-Zag - and even a Russian skipper, Timir Pinegin, had won the 1960 Olympics in an Etchells-built Star boat. Furthermore, Skip himself had won the World Championship of the Star class with his wife, Mary, crewing - a feat that has never been equalled.

Although not known to me at that time, some of the participants at that historic meeting would achieve notoriety in racing circles. Jim Fulton had already twice won the Ensign national championship. George Cane was that season's 210 champion. George Brazil, already an Ensign national champion, was also to become the Shield national champion and the Commodore of the Larchmont Yacht Club. Jim Linville, then racing Ensigns, would become the world champion of the Tempest class with his brother Jack. David Gilman was the local champion of the Rainbow class. Absent from that meeting, but represented by Etchells himself, was Timmy (Schneider) Larr, then racing IODs and already twice the winner of the Adams Cup, emblematic of the Women's National Championship. (She would go on to win it a third time!)

The meeting was called to order by Jim Fulton who became for many years the guiding father in the direction and expansion of the new class with the energetic help of Timmy and David-Larr. A short discussion on the merits of the new boat was held by the few who had had a trial sail in the fibreglass prototype. A few others, including myself, questioned the apparent small sail area with suggestions to increase it. Skip Etchells would have none of it, but he indicated that the rules of the IYRU trials had limited the working sail area to only 300 square feet, which had forced him to design strictly triangular sails. For the production boats, however, he would consider adding some roach to the mainsail leech and to the jib foot, thus possibly increasing the sail area by about 10 square feet.

Finally Skip stated that, in order to induce him to start production on the boat and to form a class, he needed firm commitments of purchase by not less than 10 skippers at a price of \$5,925.00 per boat, with a required down payment of \$1,000 each. Apparently Etchells had already informally made known these figures to interested parties because a number of those present readily handed their checks to him. Etchells then counted the checks and he only had nine! He looked around the room and flatly stated that he needed one more commitment to start production.

Usually, I do not carry a chequebook with me. However, I must have had some kind of premonition when I left home, because I did indeed have my chequebook. So ... without ever having sailed this new boat or even seeing it, I wrote a check for \$1,000 and handed it to Skip Etchells. Hence he promptly announced that he had enough commitments to start production for tentative delivery the following spring.

The name of the new class was discussed next. Skip had named the first trial boats Shillalah I and II which was not deemed an appropriate name for a class. In Germany Skip's mainsails only showed the number 22 in reference to the IYRU limitation of the waterline length in feet. One of the prominent skippers present was against having the name of the designer used, so the matter was tabled. In the following months Skip decided on E22 which was a compromise I always felt would limit the class expansion by giving the wrong impression of a boat only 22 feet long overall. The present name change to Etchells Class is much more appropriate and perhaps in the future we may also get rid of the symbol 22 on the mainsail, or perhaps change it to 31.

Next we came to an agreement on the numbers assigned to each skipper. No. 1 would be 'the original wood boat built by Etchells for the first set of trials, and which was going to be the master male plug for all the fibreglass moulds. No. 2 was assigned to the first boat in fibreglass built by Etchells for the second set of the IYRU trials. This boat was kept by Skip for his personal use and, although it was sold in later years, it is now still being raced very competitively by Ann & Bob Carroll of the Larchmont Yacht Club. The other first 10 numbers were assigned as follows:

No.3 - William Jenkins	No.4 - Paul Kean
No.5 - Sandy Waters	No.6 - Jonathan Tobey
No.7 - George Cane	No.8 - Victor Solow
No.9 - Louis Piana	No.10- Timmy & David Larr
No.11- James Fulton	No.12- David Gilman

These are the 10 skippers who in November 1967 took the gamble of forming the embryonic nucleus of what would become the International E22 Class.

By May 1968, Skip was promising the completed boats by mid-June provided the aluminium masts arrived in time from Proctor in England. By mid-June Skip told me that all the hulls were built and ready, but that no masts had arrived yet and he did not know their whereabouts. Since I was involved in international sales of heavy equipment, I put my best freight forwarder to work and - to & behold - all the masts arrived at Kennedy Airport in three days!

Skip told the 10 "founding" skippers that we could pick up our finished boats the last week in June, just in time to participate in the Larchmont Yacht Club Fourth of July Regatta. It was a thrill for my family and me to sail the 20 miles from Etchells' Old Greenwich Shipyard to Larchmont in our brand-new E22 No. 9. Many were the skippers who came alongside in their boats to inquire about this new beautiful fast craft.

At that time the races in Western Long Island Sound were on the old, large triangle courses and the five minutes starting sequence was: International One Designs, S Boats, 210s, Atlantics, Shields, Solings, Tempests, Stars, Ensigns, Rhodes 19s, etc. Since there was no previous evaluation of performance for the E22, we were grouped with the Atlantics, a venerable fast 30-foot sloop with decreasing ownership.

By then the saying was going around other "knowledgeable" skippers circles that the new E22, with their small sail area ratios, would be a flop in the light airs prevailing on Long Island Sound. And sure enough we were going to be put to the test for that Saturday of the 4th of July Regatta was a typical Long Island Sound summer day. The sea was calm with the wind from the SW at about 4-6 knots. There were seven E22s on the starting line with four Atlantics on a course of about 8.5 miles.

By the time we reached the black bell of the windward mark about 1.7 miles away, the E22s had passed the Atlantics and the 210s. At the finish line, four E22s were first to finish on top of all other classes, with the remaining three E22s close behind among the front-running IODs. That performance quickly put to rest any misconception about the E22 speed in any wind!

In subsequent years we got the first slot at the starting line and the Etchells have never been challenged as the fastest one-design sloop. However, a lot of prestige was attached to the IOD Fleet, which has been the breeding ground for most of the early 12 Meter America's Cup skippers, immortal names like Mosbacher, Knapp, Cunningham, Shields, Bavier, Cox and others. Therefore, the IOD Fleet put up a good fight and it was not easy to have them accept a starting slot second to the E22. But that is another story...

Now, of the original 10 skippers, I am the only remaining active racing member. This year, celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the class, I am sure that the other nine "founding" skippers and Skip Etchells himself would join me in being justifiably proud and eminently satisfied in having had the splendid opportunity of creating the International Etchells Class, which is attracting world renown skippers such as Dennis Conner, Peter Gilmour, Chris Law, John Bertrand, Iain Murray, Sir James Hardy, Buddy Melges, John Savage, Larry Klein, and Peter Isler.

Indeed, the Etchells is the class of sailboat racing!

(circa 1992)